

UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN CROATIA

Integrated Qualitative and Quantitative
Research Report

April 2025

Co-funded
by the European Union



Co-funded and implemented
by the Council of Europe



Qualitative and quantitative research report prepared in the framework of the Joint EU-Council of Europe Project « Implementing the Barnahus model in Croatia »

The project is co-funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument, and co-funded and implemented by the Council of Europe, in cooperation with the European Commission, the Reform and Investment Task Force (SG REFORM).

This report was produced with the financial support of the European Union and the Council of Europe. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the authors. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of either the European Union or the Council of Europe.

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BACKGROUND

Background 1/2

The European Union-Council of Europe Joint Project “Implementing the Barnahus Model in Croatia” is co-funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument, and co-funded and implemented by the Council of Europe’s Children’s Rights Division in close co-operation with the Croatian Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation, and the European Commission, Reform and Investment Task Force (SG REFORM) from 1 September 2023 to 28 February 2026.

The general objective of the project is to support Croatia in its efforts to design, develop and implement reforms in the field of child-friendly justice and protection of children’s rights. More specifically, the project aims to improve the access and quality of the justice system for child victims and witnesses of violence in Croatia, to ensure that undue delays in the treatment of such cases are diminished, and that all children who are victims and witnesses of sexual violence benefit from a child-friendly access to justice. This will be achieved through the implementation of the Barnahus Model which is the leading European model for a child-friendly multidisciplinary and interagency response to child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Background 2/2

The project has three main expected outputs:

1. A legal, policy and institutional framework is established for the sustainable operation of the Barnahus model in Croatia.
2. Knowledge and capacities of professionals working with and for children to respond to child sexual abuse is enhanced.
3. Awareness of professionals and the wider public about child sexual abuse in Croatia is enhanced.

This survey is one of the outputs aligning with outcome 3 mentioned above.

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TOPICS OF INTEREST

Topics of interest 1/2

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The aim of the qualitative research was to illuminate the following subjects:

Awareness and understanding of sexual violence

Potential reactions and the context of reactions when a child discloses sexual violence

Perception of Barnahus and expectations within the Croatian context

Opinions on the communication materials about Barnahus

Identification of specifics and determination of concrete, context-specific suggestions for the implementation of Barnahus in Croatia

Topics of interest 2/2

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

The aim of the quantitative research was to illuminate the following subjects:

Perception of child sexual abuse

Education and information on child abuse

Services and information available

Personal experience

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

RESEARCH APPROACH

Qualitative research design

Focus group discussions

4 face-to-face focus groups
8 participants in each

Groups with children 12-17 years old and groups with parents

Focus groups structure:

FG 1 – Girls 12-17 years old, Split

FG 2 – Parents, Split

FG 3 – Boys 12-17, Zagreb

FG 4 – Parents, Zagreb

Groups took place in Zagreb and Split, in Ipsos facilities

Groups were held on 12 and 14 February 2025

01

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key takeaways 1/2

General awareness and knowledge

The general awareness of the presence and issues regarding sexual violence against children and adolescents is considered moderately high in Croatian society, both parents and children agree. Over the past few years, the level of knowledge about this issue has increased.

The topic is present in the public space, and parents are interested in the needs and well-being of their children in the context of appropriate response and preventing sexual violence. Children are better informed about their rights, and they are more articulate and vocal in demanding protection.

However, there are still gaps in specific knowledge about the available resources, how to provide help to someone, and how to effectively protect oneself and others from sexual violence.

Lack of systematic support

Support and assistance within the system exist and are generally recognized by participants, but the steps for providing help are not always clear and unambiguous.

Individuals do not have unconditional trust that the system will side with the child victim and protect them in an adequate manner. There is a prevailing impression that the treatment by the system depends on each specific case,

on whom the child turns to for help, and everyone involved in that case, from school psychologists onward. There is a sense that there is room for improvement and standardization of the approach towards all child victims within the system.

Different forms of sexual violence are present

The online world introduces new dimensions of potential sexual violence that parents say are not always easy or accessible for them to recognise.

On the other hand, children feel that violence within the family may be harder to notice because it happens behind closed doors. Peer sexual violence and adult sexual violence against children and adolescents are considered equally prevalent.

Participants, both parents and children, agree that victims and offenders can be anyone, but younger women tend to be victims more often, and older men more frequently appear as offenders.

Response to disclosure differ between parents and children

Both parents and children would respond to a child confiding about sexual violence by first offering immediate emotional support, which includes providing comfort,

listening without judgment, and validating the child's feelings.

Peer response afterwards would go into direction of encouraging the victim to reach out to trusted adults, such as parents, teachers, or counsellors, who can offer further support and take appropriate actions. They generally do not report the incident without the victim's consent but encourage the victim to disclose the information. If trusted adults are unavailable or the situation involves a peer, children might consider seeking help from authorities like the police or helplines. Some boys also express a preference for informal justice due to mistrust in formal systems.

After providing emotional help, parents would then report the abuse to appropriate authorities, such as the police or social services, prioritizing the child's safety without necessarily seeking the child's permission. They would share the situation with child's parents. However, they wouldn't involve child's parents if that is not in the child's best interests, especially if the abuser is a parent or if there's a lack of trust in the parental response.

Key takeaways 2/2

Barnahus is welcomed and praised

The model is viewed positively by both parents and children as a significant improvement over current processes for handling child sexual abuse cases. It is seen as child-centred, minimizing trauma through a single interview and a friendly environment.

Need for broader systemic support

While Barnahus is considered essential, it is not sufficient on its own. Participants emphasize the need for strengthened support systems both before children reach Barnahus (to encourage reporting) and after their involvement (to ensure protection and follow-up). Although protection and follow-up are integral to the Barnahus team's work (social and psychological support services), it is crucial to highlight these as explicit demands from participants.

There's a lack of trust in some existing systems, particularly school services, as noted by some participants, both parents and children. Individuals fear that not all necessary actions will be taken effectively to comprehensively protect the child.

Emphasis on child well-being

The child-friendly approach is paramount. The single

interview, expert guidance, and safe, non-intimidating environment are all highlighted as crucial.

Holistic support but not a shelter

Barnahus is perceived as more than just an interview site. It should provide comprehensive support before, during, and after testimony, including therapeutic services. It should not be confused with a shelter for victims of sexual violence, which participants tend to spontaneously expect.

Expanding Barnahus' scope - enabling victims to directly approach Barnahus

A key improvement would be to allow victims (or victims accompanied by a trusted adult) to come directly to Barnahus, making it the first point of contact after experiencing sexual violence. This aims to prevent further re-traumatization and to provide the highest quality support to those who have experienced sexual violence.

Islandic model of Barnahus as a referent point

The Icelandic Barnahus model can serve as an example and referential model for Croatia, offering a child-friendly environment, integrating services like interviews and therapy under the same roof, and

promoting multidisciplinary cooperation.

Barnahus in Croatia can be developed by incorporating all these elements to provide comprehensive and all-encompassing support and to encourage systematic change for child victims of sexual violence.

Barnahus educational materials should be optimized to reach to its target audience

Educational materials about Barnahus should be age-appropriate and engaging.

The video 'Tell Someone You Trust' is suitable for children aged 6 to 10 years and generally communicates well about the importance of responding and the help available. 'Kiko and the Hand' is appropriate for younger children, such as preschoolers, because it uses cartoon-like images to teach them about the underwear rule. The leaflet is perceived as text-heavy and unattractive to the general population, intended for professionals dealing with the issue.

Video materials aimed at engaging adolescents should be more realistic and speak their language at places where they are – social media.

Suggestions from discussions within the focus groups 1/2

- ✓ Ensure the implementation of the Barnahus model in Croatia by using the Icelandic model as a benchmark. Adopt their approach, quality standards, and proven practices. This direction is recognized and endorsed as the right course of action by both parents and children. Involve local experts who are familiar with the system and can significantly contribute to the successful implementation of Barnahus in our country.
- ✓ Consider expanding the scope of Barnahus to bring it closer to children who have experienced sexual violence by enabling them to directly come and report their traumatic experiences. Having one referential point like this might encourage them to feel empowered to report violence more decisively and frequently.
- ✓ Emphasize Barnahus's key benefits to engage diverse audiences and raise awareness about sexual violence. Highlight that it prioritizes the well-being of children and adolescents, minimizing trauma through a child-friendly environment and integrated services through holistic and comprehensive support, and coordinates a multidisciplinary response involving law enforcement and health professionals under one roof.
- ✓ Clarify Barnahus's role by highlighting its child-centred approach during testimony, distinguishing it from a shelter where a child might stay temporarily. Make it clear that Barnahus is a children's centre, not a shelter, and emphasize its connection with other available shelters when needed.

Suggestions from discussions within the focus groups 2/2

- ✓ Connect with renowned local experts who contribute to raising awareness and increasing knowledge on the topic of sexual violence. Together, initiate additional educational programs and campaigns aimed at enhancing awareness and understanding of sexual violence.
- ✓ Enhance awareness and education about both sexual violence and Barnahus by launching campaigns focused on sexual violence, online safety, and bystander intervention. Target various age groups through multiple channels such as schools, public forums, and social media to ensure comprehensive understanding and support.
- ✓ Empower children and adolescents by teaching them about their rights, how to recognize abusive situations, and how to seek help. Initiate workshops or other types of education about empathy skills and the importance of mental health. The 'underwear rule' is considered a good starting point, but it should be supplemented with broader education about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.
- ✓ Develop visually engaging, age-appropriate educational content using social media and other appropriate channels for children and adolescents. The video about the Barnahus model in Iceland effectively presents the idea and concept of the Barnahus model. 'Kiko and the Hand' potentially conveys the message well to preschool children, while 'Tell Someone You Trust' reaches children aged 6 to 10 years effectively. For adolescents, it is necessary to develop content that is more realistic and presented in a way that engages them.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

RESEARCH FINDINGS

CONTEXT OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Understanding of children's rights

Parents and children agree on these basic children's rights:

- Right to education
- Right to shelter / housing
- Right to food
- Right to safe environment
- Right to healthcare
- Right to socialization
- Right to have and express their own opinion

Parents emphasise protection and basic needs

Parents tend to prioritize rights related to children's safety, well-being, and basic needs like food, shelter, education, and healthcare. This stems from their role as caregivers and their responsibility to ensure their children's survival and development in material, physical, and psychological terms sense.

Children focus on autonomy and freedom more

Children tend to emphasize their rights, such as the right to express their own views, participate in decisions affecting them, and have their opinions taken into account. They perceive these rights as important for their well-being and satisfactory development.



*Rights are like positive things, and if a person does not feel like they have rights, then they feel bad. If there is no right to have an opinion, a person will not feel happy, as if someone else is telling you what you need to do. **Girls***



*The right to safety, a roof over one's head, food, clean water, protection from all possible forms of abuse. **Parents***

Violence against children

It is a well-known phrase, but not everything about it is self-evident

The issue of violence against children is obvious at first glance - everyone knows what it is.

However, some forms of violence are neither simple nor easy to recognize due to the hidden environment where the violence takes place (e.g., cyberbullying), as well as the concealment by the victim (for various reasons).

Parents see online violence as more difficult to notice



Parents demonstrated a broader understanding of the various forms that violence against children can take, including neglect, emotional abuse, and online exploitation.

Adults are often less familiar with the online world than their children, leading to a lack of awareness about what happens online. This lack of insight makes them feel powerless and perceive that this aspect of their children's lives is mostly out of their control, where various forms of violence can occur.

While children think that family violence is harder to recognize



Children primarily associate violence with physical abuse and bullying, as these forms are overt and immediately noticeable.

Children and adolescents believe that domestic violence is harder to recognize than peer violence because it occurs privately in their own homes and victims often hide it from their friends. They perceive this space of family life as being most hidden from people outside that circle.

Awareness and knowledge of providing support in cases of sexual violence

Level of awareness

There is a shared consensus among parents and children that awareness and knowledge about the existence and concerns of sexual violence against children and adolescents has grown in recent years. Still, there is room for improvement.

Lack of formal education and systematic support

Various workshops and initiatives highlight this issue, and many are integrated into the school system. However, it seems that in some cases of violence, there is a lack of concrete actions from that system, or the actions are inadequate.

This is especially evident in the roles of some professional school services, which in some cases of peer violence strive to protect all students and provide general care, but do not fully or adequately protect the victim and prevent the recurrence and perpetuation of violence. This was mentioned by several participants in the groups.

Lack of skills in providing support and solutions

There is a perceived deficiency in recognizing sexual violence and knowing how to seek help among some participants. Both parents and children mention a lack of skills to recognize and respond to certain situations because they have never been taught. This further underscores the insufficient focus on teaching soft skills and understanding solutions in situations of violence and abuse.



*I think we should learn more about how to respond when someone comes to you and says that something like this has happened to them. It's nice when you know that someone trusts you enough to tell you something like that. I believe there should be more discussion about how to respond when someone tells you this, so you know how to communicate effectively with them. You can't help them literally, but in that sense, how to talk about the topic, a bit more about that. **Girls***

Sexual violence

It is any form of unwanted sexual behaviour

Sexual violence is considered any form of violence that involves the exploitation of a child or young person in a sexual manner, whether it is physical, online, involves blackmail, threats, and similar actions.

Increased openness towards the topic of sexual violence, but still a taboo

While the topic is still uncomfortable and both parents and youth tend to avoid it in joint conversations, there is a general agreement that discussions surrounding child sexual abuse are becoming more open, likely due to increased media coverage and societal awareness.

It is still uncomfortable because it involves a lot of unknowns and the fear

of saying something too much or inadequate, both among parents and children.

Lack of knowledge

Despite increased presence in public space, a knowledge gap exists regarding what constitutes child sexual abuse, how to recognize it, and how to respond. This gap is prevalent across different age groups, both parents and youth. Many feel that they should know more, but they lack practical guidelines and/or do not have the right credible role models to discuss this topic.

Some participants lack the vocabulary or feel uncomfortable to talk about different forms of sexual violence (e.g., recognizing coercion, online abuse).

Insufficient support from the system

Participants, parents especially,

emphasize the lack of comprehensive support from the system, which negatively impacts the frequency of reporting violence and the overall level of awareness about the issue.

Online world brings new challenges

The digital age brings both advantages and disadvantages. It has increased awareness but also created new pathways for experiencing violence (manipulation via the internet, sharing explicit content), which is harder to recognize, reduce, and respond to adequately.

Participants feel that current educational efforts often fail to keep pace with technological advancements. This applies to formal education in schools and initiatives in public spaces.



*The responsibility for sanctioning violence also lies with the system. The system will act to a certain extent, but everyone protects their position in school, especially if a parent holds a certain position. It is well-known how things work in society; they will not expose themselves. **Parents***

Victims and offenders

Victims can be anyone, but they are most often women

A victim can become anyone, from both genders and various age groups. No child or young person is immune to the possibility of becoming a victim of sexual violence.

However, there is a consensus that victims are most often younger women.

Girls vs. boys as victims

Girls and boys face specific challenges when/if they become victims of sexual violence.

It is considered that girls are more likely to openly talk about what happened to them and seek help, while young men are thought to be

more inclined to keep secrets to themselves due to a strong sense of shame and feelings of helplessness in the given situation. This is particularly articulated by girls.

Someone perceived to be vulnerable

Young men emphasize that the victim is more likely to be someone perceived as weaker, either physically or in some other way. This opinion predominates among boys, while it does not appear among girls.

Offenders are most often men

While offenders can be of various genders and ages, the universal opinion across groups is that they are most often men, older men.

This opinions align with broader

societal stereotypes but highlights the need for nuanced understanding and awareness to prevent and address abuse comprehensively.

Not just anyone becomes an offender

Offenders can belong to various sociodemographic groups, but certain violent characteristics set them apart from non-violent individuals, participants agree.

They are usually people who either feel superior and above others or compensate for their powerlessness by abusing others. All groups agree on this point.



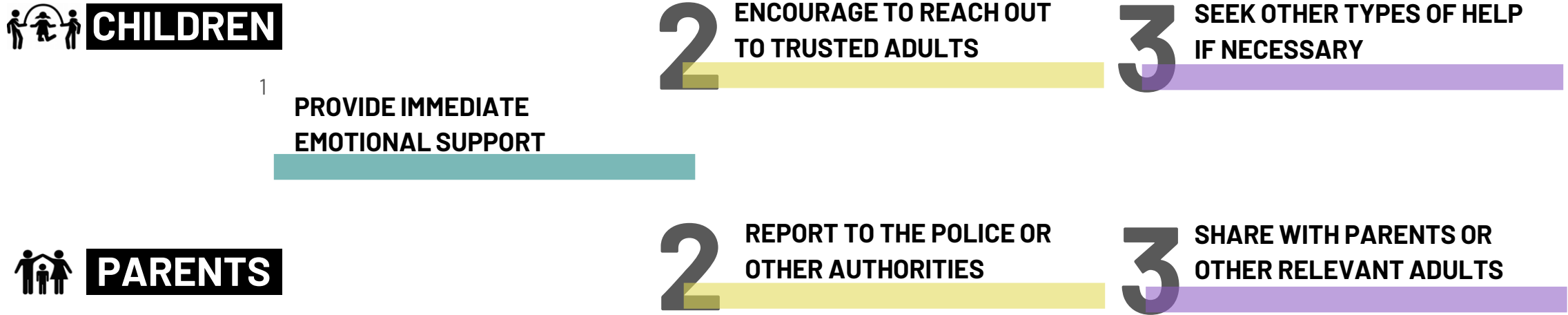
*I think that girls would more often confide in someone because it's a traumatic experience for them, while men might not tell anyone because it would be embarrassing for them, as everyone would talk about how he couldn't defend himself, how he's not a man but a child, so they keep it to themselves. **Girls***



*Well, victims are often those whom offenders perceive as weaker than themselves or someone who has any kind of psychological or physical weakness that the offender then exploits. **Boys***

How to respond if a child confides about sexual violence?

In the groups, we discussed how children and parents would react if a child they know (parents) or their peer (children) confided in them about experiencing sexual violence or abuse. This is a summary of the participants' answers, presented in a step-by-step approach:



**CHILDREN****PARENTS**

Reactions of participants step by step

1 PROVIDE IMMEDIATE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Providing emotional support is the first thing

Both parents and children agree that it is crucial to first provide emotional support to someone who has experienced sexual violence and show that we trust them and that they are not alone – show that we are here to help.

To show they are not alone

Providing emotional support is crucial because it validates their feelings, reduces isolation, and encourages them to seek help.

Being there for children who have experienced sexual violence, and the surrounding trauma is participants' intrinsic drive and instinctive reaction.

Importance of validation and belief

Children and adolescents emphasize the importance of showing the person that they are believed, not blamed, and that it is safe to disclose what happened.

This is linked to the feelings of fear and shame that are believed to be inextricably tied to the victim's motivation to trust someone to take them seriously.

Provides sense of safety

Parents emphasize that at the beginning, after a child has confided in them, it is important to ensure that the child feels safe, that they are now in a good place, and that help will be provided. The adult whom the child confides in must be a safe harbour and refuge to justify the trust the child has placed in them.

Empathy skills

Some parents and children express a

desire to better understand how to communicate in these situations to provide more effective support to those in need.

This highlights the lack of systemic education on mental health and support in cases of violence. Individuals are left to manage on their own and do their best to be supportive, but these skills aren't typically taught through upbringing and education. Skills like communication and empathy are often assumed to be universally known.



*I would first try to calm myself in order to console the child. What I think is most important when a child confides in you is to provide support, listen, and be there for the child unconditionally. **Parents***

Reactions of participants step by step

2 ENCOURAGE TO REACH OUT TO TRUSTED ADULTS



*I would be moral support for that person and advise them to tell someone. **Girls***



*I would say it also depends on how old the rapist is. If they are our age, as already mentioned, we would come with the group and show them not to do it anymore in the way that is necessary. But if it's an older, physical person, then it would be harder, so we would have to go to the police. **Boys***

Adults should take further actions

The next step for children and adolescents would be to try to encourage the person to report the incident to a trusted adult who could then take all necessary actions to properly protect the child who experienced sexual violence.

This trusted adult could be a parent, schoolteacher, or psychologist, depending on the specific situation (such as who the offender is) and expectations on how that adult might respond (supportively or not).

Children and adults expect trustworthy adults to report the violence to the authorities.

Trust and support as top priorities


Children and adolescents emphasize that the trust they have gained from someone who has experienced sexual violence is extremely important to them, and they would never betray it.

Therefore, all further actions would depend on what the victim needs and wants. They would not take actions on their own but would

encourage the person to report further if they wish. This does not mean they wouldn't be supportive all the time and help in any way, but they wouldn't take other actions without the victim's consent. Maintaining a loyal friendship that deserves great trust is of utmost importance to them. For example, if the person does not want to tell an adult what happened to them, they would encourage them but would not do it on their behalf.

Reactions of participants step by step

3 SEEK OTHER TYPES OF HELP IF NECESSARY

 *If I found out where he lives, I think I would call the Panthers and that would be it. They would find him and publicly shame him. **Boys***

Institutions in case of emergency

In situations perceived as particularly difficult, where there are not enough trustworthy parents or the perpetrator is a parent, children and adolescents would report the case to the police, call a helpline such as Hrabri telefon or go directly to the emergency.

Hrabri telefon

Hrabri telefon is considered a resource to call if someone confides in them, primarily to receive advice on what to do, but not for immediate help when someone reveals they have experienced sexual violence.

They are generally aware of Hrabri telefon, it's common knowledge, but none of the participants have ever called the number for any reason.

Some boys would take on the role of protector

Some young men would try to protect the victim by directly standing up without reaching out to the system, for the person who has had a traumatic experience.

They claim they might seek help from informal organizations like Panther, which take justice into their own hands and find ways to publicly expose abusers (e.g., on social media).

Low level of trust in the system

This indicates that some young men have a low level of trust in the system to take all necessary measures to protect individuals who have experienced violence or abuse.

In societies where the system does not provide adequate protection, individuals may feel that they must protect themselves because they do not trust the formal.



PARENTS

Reactions of participants step by step

2 REPORT TO THE POLICE OR OTHER AUTHORITIES



*I have to say that I have confidence as I know that we have psychologists who will help the victim, and I also have trust in the judiciary and the police. Personally, I believe that the sentences will be too short, not adequate to the crime, but I have confidence that the abuser will be convicted. **Parents***



*If she didn't have the courage to tell her parent but told me, then the whole weight of that story is on me. I certainly won't encourage her to report it, no. She came here, and that's it, I will bear that burden, whatever it may be. There's no backing out of the story, because if you try to back out, what's the point of the child confiding in you? **Parents***

Adults immediately take on the role of protector

After providing emotional support, parents immediately feel a strong need to protect the child as effectively as possible and to ensure that something similar does not happen again. They consider it their intrinsic need and responsibility.

Reporting to the relevant authorities is their responsibility

They do not think it is appropriate to check with the child whether they can further report the violence to the

relevant authorities; rather, they see it as their responsibility to make the report, as adults, and believe that the child expects this from them, which is why the child confided in them.

Parents are inclined to report what happened to the relevant authorities both for the child who confided in them and for the protection of other children, to prevent further abuse.

Different authorities for different situations

They would report to the police, the professional service in the

educational institution, or social services as needed, taking into account the specific situation.

If the violence occurred in school and/or the perpetrator is a peer from school, it is more likely that they will turn to the school's professional service, psychologist, pedagogue, or homeroom teacher. If the offender is an adult, they are more likely to go to the police immediately. In an urgent situation that requires it, they would go to emergency assistance without delay.



PARENTS

Reactions of participants step by step

3 SHARE WITH PARENTS OR OTHER RELEVANT ADULTS



We should inform the parents, if they are not involved. However, we should not allow the parents to handle further actions on their own because the child confided in us first, and we have the responsibility to be there for them.

Parents

Parents should be informed

Parents may choose to inform a child's parents about sexual abuse in situations when they feel that the parents can provide additional support and protection to the child.

... But not always

Parents might choose not to inform a child's parents if they fear it could lead to further harm or distress for the child, if there is a lack of trust in the parents' response, or if they believe it might interfere with an ongoing investigation or

legal process.

The entrusted confidence is meant for safeguarding

The trust that the child has shown them is extremely important, and they will assess to whom it is best to report the case of violence. If the perpetrator is one of the parents, they will protect the child and not report to the parents.

These decisions who, where and when to report are often complex and require careful consideration of the child's

best interests and the specific circumstances surrounding the abuse.

Why don't everyone seek for help?

Embarrassment and shame

Feelings of embarrassment or shame can deter children from seeking help due to fears of social stigma, negative self-perception, exposure, cultural norms, and past negative experiences.

They may feel shame that something like this happened to them and guilt, questioning whether they are to blame and if they somehow provoked the violent behaviour.

Shame can be a particularly strong barrier to confiding in others, especially if individuals already feel isolated in other situations and lack a network of close people with whom they can share difficult situations and

emotions.

Fear of judgement and that they won't be believed

Some children and adolescents keep their experiences of violence to themselves due to the fear that they won't be believed or that they will be judged.

This concern is particularly prevalent among young girls who perceive that if the offender is an influential person, the system may side with the perpetrator instead of protecting the victim and believing in her innocence. They sometimes witness this in public spaces.

Lack of awareness and understanding

Some may not recognize that

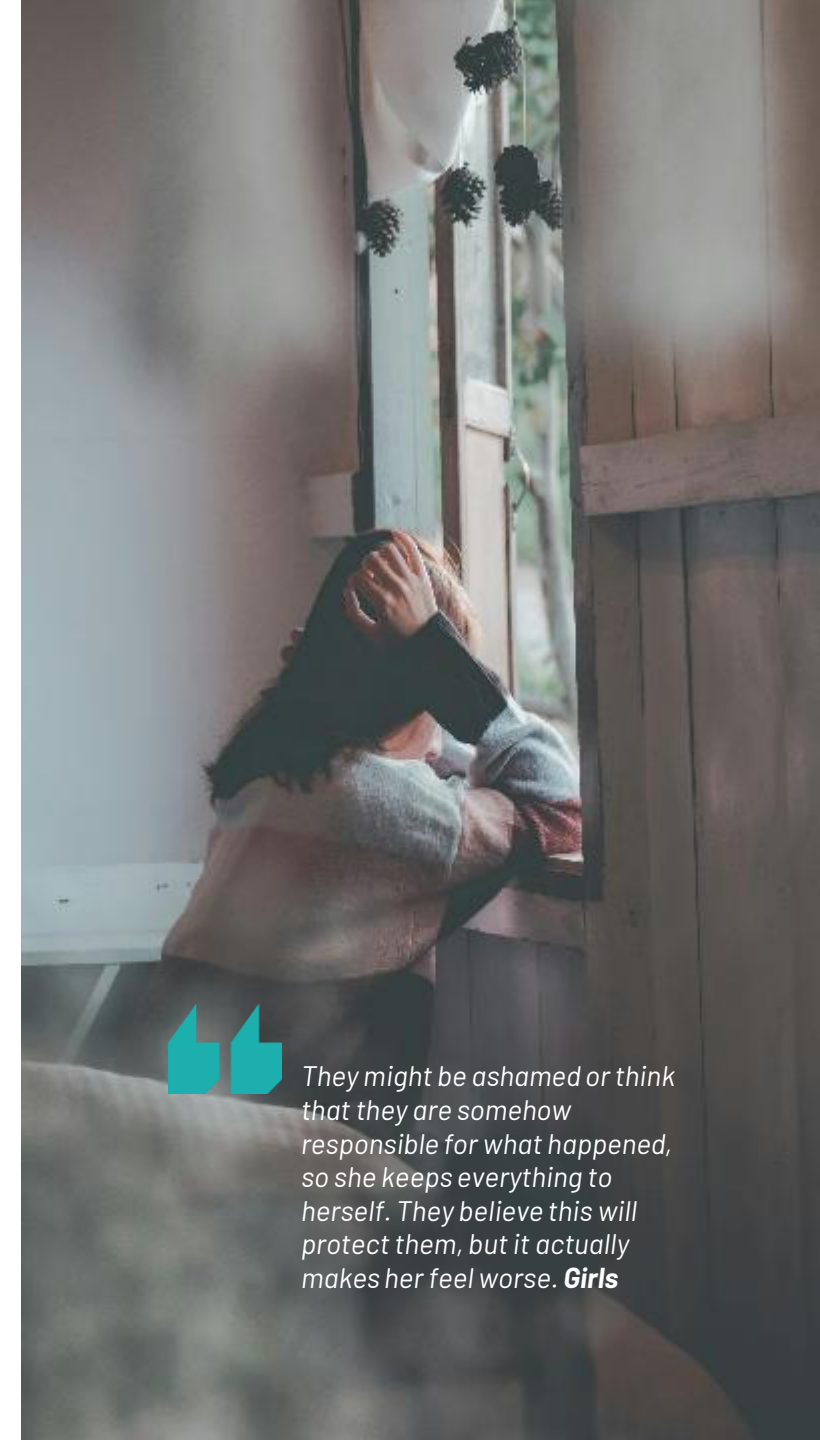
what happened to them constitutes violence, that the behaviour they experienced isn't something others typically go through, and that the person responsible should face consequences.


This might be the case with children who have not received adequate care and attention from their families and have been neglected in that regard.

It also highlights the importance of education in educational institutions to provide systematic education on what constitutes non-violent behaviour and where sexual violence, and abuse begin.



*They might be ashamed or think that they are somehow responsible for what happened, so she keeps everything to herself. They believe this will protect them, but it actually makes her feel worse. **Girls***





What could help make the process of confiding easier for children and adolescents who have had traumatic experiences?



*A service should be established that deals exclusively with this issue, providing psychological help for abused children. Something like Hrabri telefon but specifically for sexual abuse. It could be a comprehensive service that covers everything, from an expedited legal process to ensure the offender is sanctioned, while simultaneously providing children with psychological assistance. Additionally, children should not have to recount the same thing five times, as this is inhumane for them. It's important to educate the victim that they are not at fault, to reduce feelings of fear and shame. A comprehensive team is needed to handle the process holistically from start to finish. **Parents***

PERCEPTION OF BARNAHUS

General perception of the Barnahus project

Necessary, important, and praiseworthy initiative

The concept of the Barnahus children's house is an admirable project that will significantly ease the process for children testifying in cases of sexual violence. Some parents spontaneously mentioned the need for an independent body that would ease the difficult process of testimony for children, which speaks to the evident need for such a service.

Approach that is fully tailored to children and focuses on the well-being of child victims of sexual violence

The most important benefit highlighted is that the approach is entirely child-friendly, designed with the child's well-being at the forefront, and structured so that the child only needs to recount the traumatic event once to one person.

Although participants in group discussions do not have personal experience with testifying in cases of sexual violence, they perceive that the current process is not as victim-friendly as it could be, takes too long, and requires children to recount their experiences multiple times across different institutions to provide all the necessary information. This further retraumatizes the child and increases the likelihood that the child will abandon the process, as well as demotivates other children from reporting sexual violence. So, the Barnahus project receives approval from both parents and children and is perceived as a necessary and important initiative.



*The most important thing is that the child only recounts the event once, not having to repeat it five times at different places to different people. **Girls***



*This all sounds great, it's what we just talked about as necessary - one central place for the child. **Parents***

However, it is crucial to increase support within the system and expand the scope of Barnahus to truly facilitate and ease the reporting of sexual violence

Barnahus is great, but on its own, it is not enough

Parents and children agree that while Barnahus is an excellent initiative, it is essential to ensure other prerequisites are in place for this children's house to fully fulfil its mission. Barnahus is a necessary step, but it is crucial to work on a system that encourages reporting violence before arriving at Barnahus and ensures adequate protection after leaving this children's house.

Some respondents have quite low confidence in the system, particularly in school professional services, to adequately handle a victim's disclosure. They feel that the

necessary actions will not be taken to fully protect the victim, and that the victim will have to manage the traumatic experience on their own again.

Making Barnahus a place where victims can directly come would represent a significant improvement

Expanding the scope of the Barnahus house to allow victims, or victims accompanied by an adult, to directly come and confide their traumatic experiences has been mentioned as a highly desirable enhancement in all groups. This would significantly ease the reporting process for victims and prevent the possibility of further re-traumatization.

Enhancing awareness and support systems

Initiating other activities to raise awareness about the issue of sexual violence against children and young people and educating different generations on the importance of recognizing and reporting violence, as well as the available support within the system, would allow Barnahus to fully thrive. These could include educational projects within kindergartens and schools, public forums, workshops, media releases, and similar initiatives that would increase awareness of the importance of this topic and create space for dialogue and disclosure.



*This house is great, no doubt in that, but it's a point at the end of the journey, and you need to reach it. **Parents***

How should the Barnahus children's house be organized and designed?

Since the focus group participants **have not personally experienced testifying or participating in the prosecution of sexual violence**, they only have an **impression of how the current process looks and general expectations** of how it should look within the Barnahus children's house.

They believe and expect that the various **experts responsible for implementing the Barnahus model in Croatia** possess the professional knowledge and competencies to **organize and design the children's house appropriately**.

What is important to them, as parents and children, is that the **process is designed with the child constantly in focus and protected, guided by experts, and that the space is arranged accordingly**.

The video showcasing the Barnahus house in Iceland vividly and in detail illustrates how a similar house could look in Croatia. Participants expect that the main elements of the house and the quality standards established there should be replicated here as well.



*I imagine first entering a space where you wait, and where everything is communicated about what will happen. Then, a single professional takes over. You go into a special room for conversation where there are cameras and everything is communicated. Experts who need to see the testimony observe from the side. They don't have to be in the same place; it can all be virtual. It doesn't have to be a real house, but the concept involves multiple experts. **Parents***

Specific elements of how it should be organized and designed



Approach

From the moment a child enters until they leave the children's house, the focus should be entirely on the child. Here, the child should feel protected and safe.

Testimonies and any additional examinations (e.g., medical) should not be rushed; instead, the time should be adapted to the child's ability and readiness to share their experience and cooperate at their own pace and in their own way.

If possible, the child should testify only once, and this conversation should be conducted by a highly skilled professional who listens attentively and is sensitive to the child's needs at every moment.



Experts

Participants imagine that the experts working in the children's house are compassionate, empathetic, trustworthy, and that they tailor their approach to each individual child, taking into account their specific situation, circumstances and fears.

A very important aspect they must ensure is trust, both in what victims disclose and in doing everything possible to protect them during the testimony process.

Ideally, the child should be guided by one person with whom they develop a trusting relationship.

The Barnahus video portrayal of professionals inspires confidence that these key aspects will be respected and implemented.



Environment

The environment should be child-friendly, with bright and comforting decor and casual furniture resembling a real house.

It should not appear like a courtroom or a doctor's office but rather be informal and relaxed—not as a space where the child is interrogated, but as a place where they ensure the child has everything needed to feel as comfortable as possible.

The interior shown in the Barnahus video looks excellent, and both parents and children agree that this should be replicated in the children's house in Croatia.







Other activities

Participants spontaneously expect this could be a place where children with similar experiences can hang out, play board games, engage in sports, and similar activities.

This seems important because sharing with peers who have similar experiences reduces feelings of isolation and increases a sense of community.

Building connections with peers without judgment is believed to help victims cope better with their situation. While joint activities may not be part of this house, they can potentially be initiated in other ways if feasible.

In the focus groups, we presented educational materials that represent the idea of the Barnahus children's house.
This is what the participants had the opportunity to see:

Video on the Icelandic Barnahus model	Video Tell someone you trust	Video Kiko and the hand	Leaflet Protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse
<p>https://vimeo.com/986263140?share=copied</p> 	<p>Tell Someone You Trust - Croatian - Long on Vimeo</p> 	<p>https://vimeo.com/316751097</p> 	

The evaluation of Barnahus educational materials

Video on the Icelandic Barnahus model	Video Tell someone you trust	Video Kiko and the hand	Leaflet Protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse
<p>The video is excellent, agree both parents and children. It clearly and vividly shows what the house looks like and highlights the main features of the approach towards children.</p> <p>It educates the audience about the house's possibilities and specificities and instils confidence that it is a safe place for children who have had traumatic experiences of sexual violence.</p>	<p>The video educates about sexual violence and encourages victims and those they confide in to take action, as help is available and approachable.</p> <p>It communicates that abuse can happen to anyone, and the victim is not at fault, emphasizing that the feelings they have are normal and the blame lies with the adult who should not have acted in such a way.</p> <p>During the viewing, a discussion arose about the lack of representation of other types of violence in the video, highlighting the need for additional content to educate the audience more thoroughly on what constitutes sexual violence and how to protect oneself.</p> <p>Participants agree that this video is suitable for children aged 6 to 10 years. For adolescents, the video should be more realistic, possibly featuring real testimonies and scenarios from their world that they can relate to.</p>	<p>Perceived as a video for preschool children, it educates them in a vivid and age-appropriate manner about what could constitute sexual violence, introducing them to the underwear rule.</p> <p>The underwear rule is seen as useful and well-suited for educating young children. None of the participants had previously heard of this rule, but they believe it is important to use it to teach children not to allow older individuals to touch them in an abusive way. However, some add that this rule doesn't cover other forms of sexual violence, as there are other types of contact and methods through which children can be abused, suggesting that the rule is insufficient and needs to be generally enhanced.</p> <p>Some adolescents find the main message of the video unclear because the cartoon-like depiction isn't entirely explicit.</p>	<p>The leaflet was not enthusiastically received across all groups. Everyone agrees that it contains too much text, is overly detailed, and is unlikely to be read by anyone except professionals whose job it is to do so. Its language, narrative, and design are not suitable for either parents or, to the same extent, children and adolescents.</p> <p>For the general audience, it should be shorter, more visually appealing, and clearly communicate the main elements and benefits of the Barnahus model.</p> <p>Children and adolescents emphasize that communication aimed at them should be conducted through social media (Instagram and TikTok) and that the presentation style should be adapted to them. Additionally, they could receive more detailed and official information at school during class meetings or via the notice board.</p>



Key messages about Barnahus that should be emphasized in communication

This is a place where children and adolescents are the primary focus

Barnahus places the well-being of the child at the centre of its operations, ensuring that the child's rights and needs are prioritized throughout the process.

Minimizing trauma

The model aims to reduce the trauma experienced by children during investigations by avoiding repeated interviews and providing a child-friendly environment.

The child is cared for by trained professionals who pay attention to every aspect of the child's well-being, with the child communicating with a primary expert who guides them through the entire process.

Integrated services

It provides a coordinated and multidisciplinary

response to child abuse, bringing together law enforcement, social services, medical professionals, and mental health experts under one roof.

Barnahus is not a shelter

The term 'children's house' in Croatian implies a place for accommodation or a shelter for children, which is not the case with Barnahus.

It is important to emphasize that this is a centre that integrates related services but does not have accommodation facilities. This should be highlighted not only through the description but also in the name, suggesting it be called a 'children's centre' or something similar.

Holistic support

Although it is not a shelter, Barnahus provides comprehensive help and support during, before, and after testimony. Beyond immediate response, Barnahus offers therapeutic services

to aid in the child's recovery and long-term well-being.

Barnahus has open doors so that victims can come directly to report violence (if applicable)

The possibility of personally coming in to report violence is clearly emphasized in all groups. This way, Barnahus could become the first point of contact for a child with the system, further minimizing the possibility of re-traumatization and potentially increasing the inclination to report violence.

If this could be implemented in Croatia, it is crucial to clearly highlight this benefit.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

RESEARCH APPROACH

Research design

Quantitative research (KnowledgePanel®)

Computer-Assisted Web Intervju (CAWI) using KnowledgePanel®

A representative sample of residents of the Republic of Croatia.

KnowledgePanel is a random probability panel designed specifically to offer precise estimates and be a reliable source of nationally representative data.

N=851 interviews

Length of the interview= 10 min for the general population and 15 min for victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse

Fieldwork was conducted between 7 and 24 March 2025

Sample details

		N	%
Whole sample		851	100%
Gender	Male	404	48%
	Female	447	52%
Age	Up to 30 years	140	16%
	31 to 44 years	202	24%
	45 to 60 years	216	25%
	More than 60 years	293	34%
Education	Elementary school	166	20%
	High school	470	55%
	University	215	25%
Type of settlement	Rural	532	63%
	Urban	319	37%
Region	Zagreb and surrounding	237	28%
	North Croatia	140	16%
	Slavonia	133	16%
	Banovina, Kordun, Lika	67	8%
	Istria and Primorje	103	12%
	Dalmatia	171	20%

		N	%
Whole sample		851	100%
Do you have any children?	Yes	623	73%
	No	216	25%
	I don't know / Refusal	12	1%
How many people under the age of 18 are living in your household?	1 person	172	20%
	2 people	109	13%
	3 people	24	3%
	4 persons or more	14	2%
	None	529	62%
	I don't know / Refusal	3	0%

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key takeaways 1/3

Perception of sexual abuse of children

Citizens of Croatia recognize sexual abuse of children as a serious problem. Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ consider it a serious or very serious problem. Women emphasize the seriousness of the problem of sexual abuse to a greater extent, as do people with lower and secondary education and people from rural parts of Croatia. Emotional and physical abuse as well as neglect are also perceived by citizens as serious problems.

According to citizens, sexual abuse of children is related to inappropriate behaviour of adult toward children, like touching or grouping and sexual intercourse (rape).

Nine out of ten citizens believe that children cannot be guilty or responsible for sexual abuse against them. Beside general statement that children cannot be guilty the more detail explanations are that children have not enough knowledge and that they do not understand. Only 3% of citizens believe that children can be guilty of sexual abuse against them. The reason given is provocation and "free" behaviours.

While sexual abuse is perceived as a serious problem,

personal awareness is not at an enviable level, with only a third of citizens rating their knowledge and awareness of sexual abuse with higher grades (from 8 to 10). Women, as well as people who stated that they had suffered some form of sexual abuse in childhood, are more likely to rate their awareness with higher grades.

One in five citizens believes that child sexual abuse always involves force, although it is recognized that intentional exposure of children to sexual activities or pornographic materials is also a form of child sexual abuse.

The prevailing opinion is that men are more likely to sexually abuse children (62%), while a quarter of citizens believe that both men and women can sexually abuse children.

Education and information on child sexual abuse

Only a small number of citizens (5%) believe that schools provide enough information on how to prevent and protect children from sexual abuse, the majority (77%) believe that they do not. Also, one of five citizens

say they do not know if schools provide enough information.

The vast majority of citizens (86%) believe that education about sexual abuse is necessary for the prevention of child sexual abuse and that it should be an integral part of the curriculum (84%). While the majority (59%) disagree that child abuse prevention education can expose children to too much information about sex, a significant portion of citizens, 22%, believe that it can. A significant portion (38%) of citizens also express the opinion that it is uncomfortable to talk about topics related to sex. This is more often stated by people who are not parents themselves, while for a third of parents this topic is also uncomfortable.

Key takeaways 2/3

Education and information on child sexual abuse

The majority of respondents who are parents and have children in the household have not (yet) talked to their children (59%), while 40% of them have done so.

For half of citizens (47%) the ideal age for educating children is between 11 and 14 years old, while 38% believe that it should be earlier, between 6 and 10 years old. Younger age categories are more often cited by people who stated that they were sexually abused in childhood.

Only a small portion of citizens believe that a child who has received education about sexual abuse also has a greater chance of being a victim of it.

Services and information available

Only a third of citizens believe that they can recognize a person's behaviour towards a child that could indicate possible sexual abuse, while 19% openly say that they cannot, and another 46% say that they are not sure.

In a situation where they suspect child sexual abuse, more than half citizens say that they would contact the police. Slightly less than half would contact parents/guardians. In terms of frequency of responses, contacting a social welfare centre and a helpline are next. They would react in a similar way if a child confided to them that they had been sexually abused, they would contact the police and talk to the parents.

A third of citizens believe that appropriate services/help for child victims of sexual abuse are available in Croatia, a quarter of them believe that there are none, and the relative majority does not know whether such services exist or not.

The organizations and institutions that citizens can contact for information about child sexual abuse are relatively well-known, only a small portion of them could not name single out any of them. The Brave Phone and the Blue Phone are the most recognizable.

The awareness of advertising campaigns

There is relatively little knowledge of campaigns that focused on child victims of sexual abuse, but given that there was no recent campaign, this is not surprising. Citizens are not able to recollect of specific campaigns which have focus on prevention or protection of children against sexual abuse. They remember the "Say No!" campaign the most.

Attitudes about the functioning of our service system

A small number of citizens had direct or indirect experience with investigation processes. Citizens show their greatest scepticism regarding the fact that the investigation is conducted quickly and without unnecessary delays.

Key takeaways 3/3

Personal experience

The sexual abuse in a childhood was defined by any of the following forms: sexual harassment (online or offline), inappropriate touching, exposing genitals to child, someone made child pose naked in front of any person or in photographs, videos, attempted to have sexual intercourse, someone forced the child to have sexual intercourse and sexually exploitation through child prostitution.

Every third respondent reported experiencing some of the following forms of sexual abuse. Most of them experienced 1 or two forms of abuse, but 1 in 10 victims experienced 5 or 6 forms of sexual abuse in childhood. The most common were inappropriate touching (25.5%), sexual harassment (24.2%) and exposure of offender genitals to them (18.1%). Attempted to force them to have sexual intercourse was claimed by 7% of citizens and forced to have sexual intercourse was claimed by 4.2% of respondents. The victims were more often women and people from the Zagreb area and its surroundings.

In most cases, the abuse occurred when the victim was between 10 and 15 years old. 30% were between 13 and 15 years old, and 22% were between 10 and 12

years old. On the other hand, the offenders do not have a dominant age group, i.e. the offenders belong equally to all age groups except the oldest.

Abuse occurred in many different places and under different circumstances, but somewhat more often when socializing with friends and at home.

In most cases, the abuse was committed by one person (81%), in 10% of cases, the abuse was committed by multiple offenders. In 9 out of 10 cases, it was a male person. Most often, it was known person with whom the person was not close (acquaintance, neighbour or family friend).

In most cases, it was a situation that did not repeat itself, while in 1 out of 10 cases, the abuse lasted for more than one year.

In a large number of cases (76%), the victim is no longer in contact with the offender.

Less than half of the victims told someone about the abuse (42%), and slightly more of them did not tell anyone (47%). The main reasons they disclose the abuse was that they need to reveal inappropriate behaviour, need to share with someone, obligation to report and fear of repeating. On the other hand, the

main reasons why victims did not report the incident were a sense of shame and not knowing how to talk about it.

Those who confided, in 2/3 of the cases, said it in a period of less than a year, while 12% said it to someone only after 20 years or more. Most often they confided to friends (42%) or parents (29%). The most common reaction of the person was to ask specific questions about the event itself. Beside the first disclosure of sexual abuse, another half opened up and talked to someone else about the event, usually a friend. Only in 6.5% of cases was the event officially reported. No one received medical or psychological support.

At the end the respondents were asked if they would know who to turn today in the case of sexual abuse. Most victims said they would know who to turn to, but most do not currently need to.

Conclusions and suggestions

- ✓ While there is awareness and knowledge about the problem of child sexual abuse among Croatian citizens, it is necessary to further inform and educate citizens about what child sexual abuse encompasses and especially what to do in the event of child abuse.
- ✓ Certain prejudices or ignorance regarding what sexual abuse is are still present to a lesser extent, e.g. that sexual abuse always involves the use of force or that abused children are more often from lower-income families.
- ✓ A significant number of citizens have no information or perception of who the most common offenders are or at what age children are most often victims. So, in future campaigns these aspects should be addressed.
- ✓ Parallel to the more specifically targeted education programs aimed at children, parents, and educators should be continued or developed to increase awareness and understanding of child sexual abuse.
- ✓ It is particularly worrying that the majority of citizens say that they do not know or cannot recognize behaviour that indicates sexual abuse, so this is an extremely important aspect on which the general public needs to be additionally informed. Also, regarding what to do in the event of child sexual abuse, i.e. to who and how to report.
- ✓ Less than half of victims have ever told anyone about the abuse, and among those who have told someone about the abuse, an extremely small number of cases have been officially reported. The reasons for this lie in the fact that the victims are ashamed of the act itself, that they did not know who to turn to, and that they rationalize events themselves as not serious and that there is no need to waste time. It follows that it is necessary to make citizens aware of what sexual abuse involves and that even though an act may seem less serious, regardless of such perception, it is necessary to tell someone about the incident so that the victim can receive timely support and assistance, whether in legal, medical and/or psychological form.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

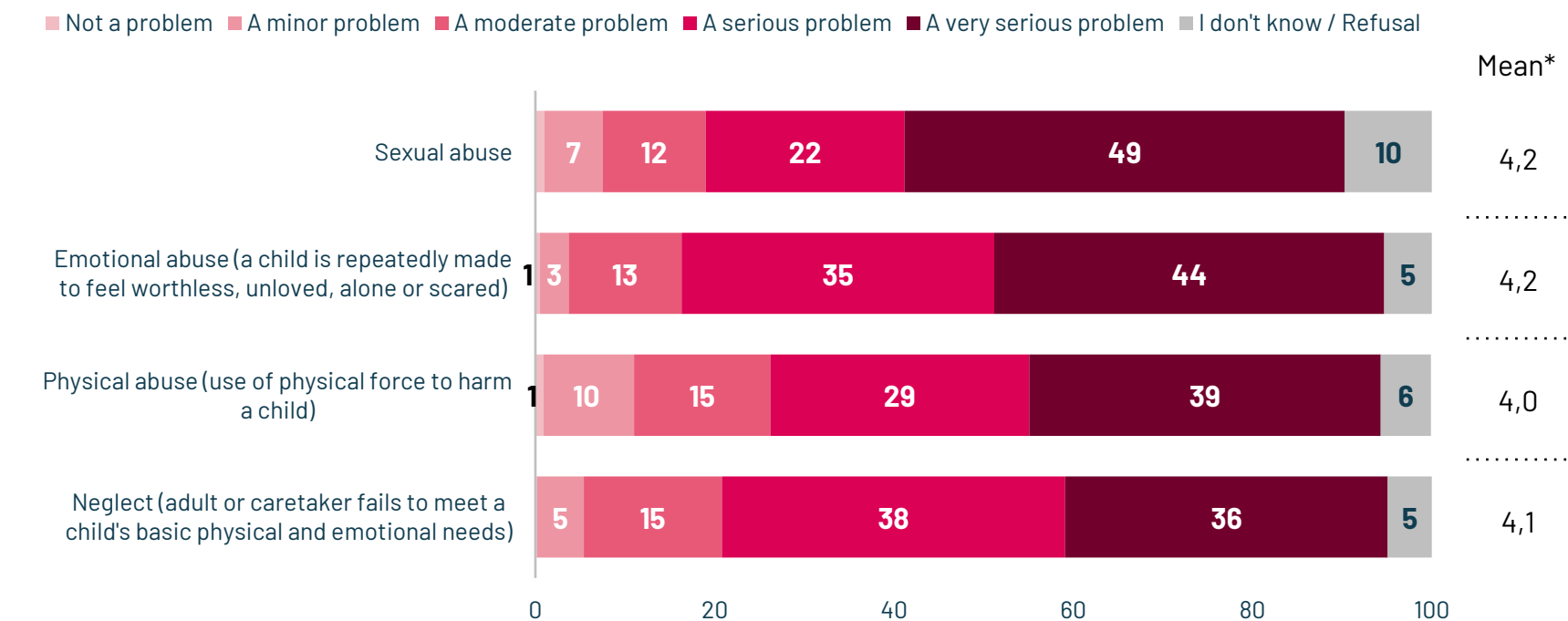
RESEARCH FINDINGS

PERCEPTION OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN



The severity of sexual abuse

First, we ask respondents how serious are some types of child abuse in Croatia. Child sexual abuse is serious or very serious problem for 71% Croatian citizens. Citizens perceive all the forms of abuse as serious. Women emphasize the seriousness of these forms of abuse to a greater extent than men. There is no difference in these attitudes whether the person had personal experience with sexual abuse as child or not.



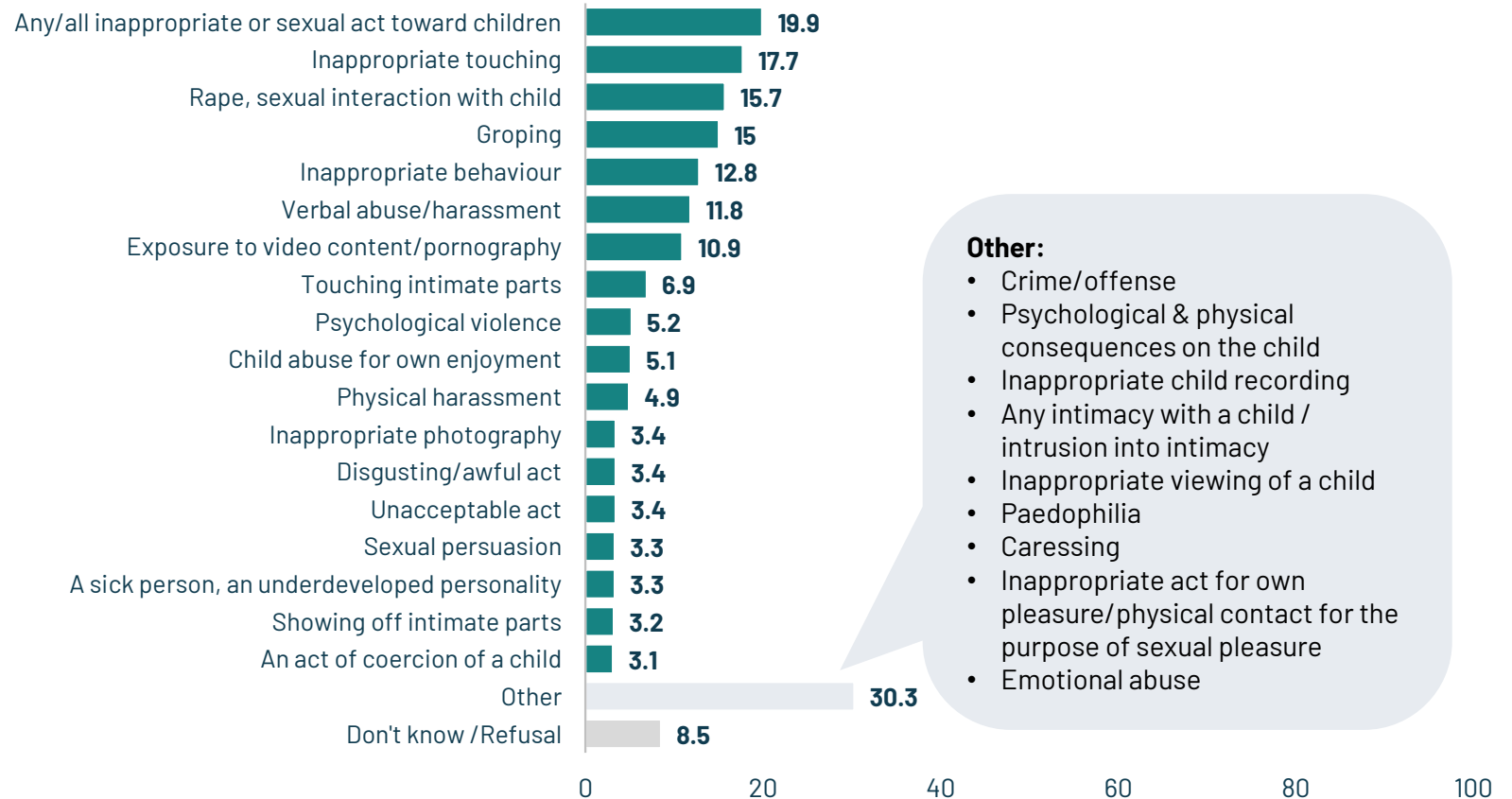
*Mean: Average score on a scale of 1(Not a problem) to 5(A very serious problem)





What is child sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse of children is described through general explanations and different individual segments of it, such as inappropriate touching, groping, sexual intercourse with children (rape).

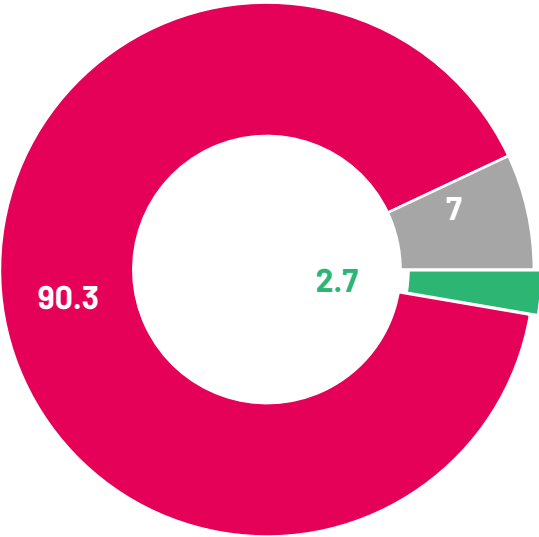


Perception of the victim of sexual abuse

A very small proportion of citizens believe that a child victim can be guilty or responsible for the sexual abuse of them, while the vast majority believe that a child victim cannot be at fault or responsible for the sexual abuse.

IS CHILD RESPONSIBLE FOR BEING A VICTIM OF SEXUAL ABUSE?

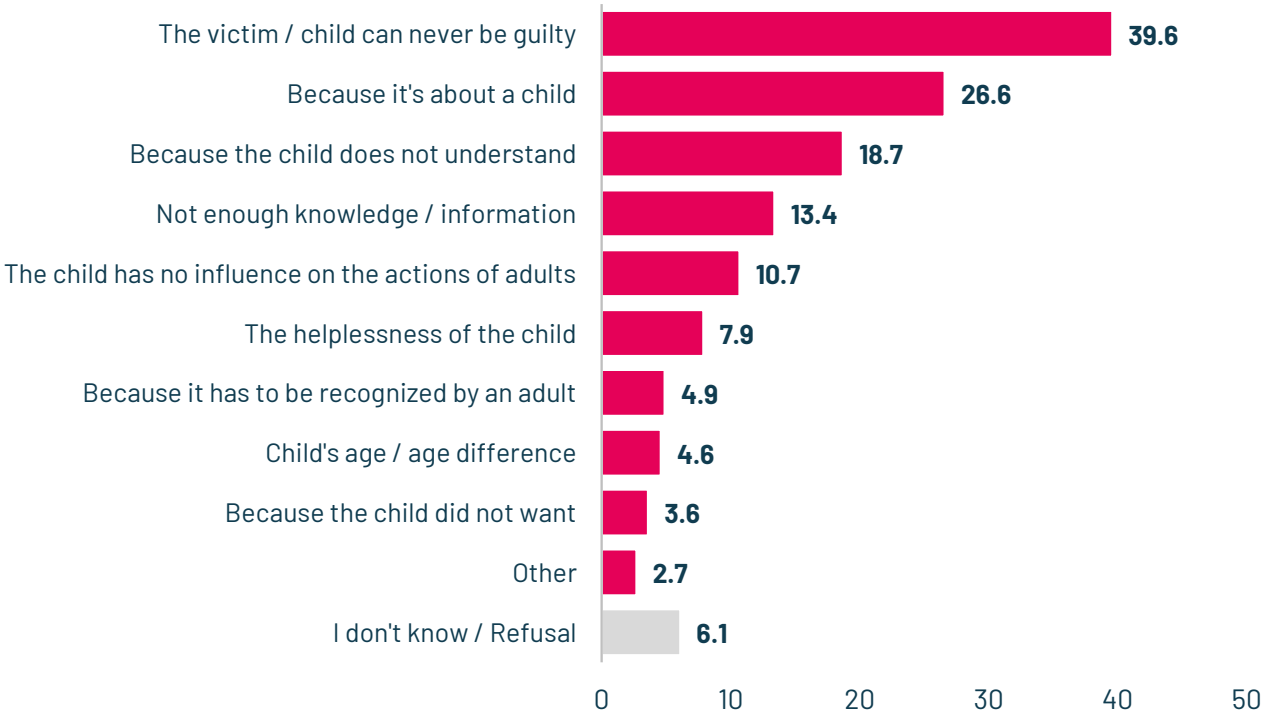
■ Yes ■ No ■ I don't know / Refusal



WHY YES? N=23:

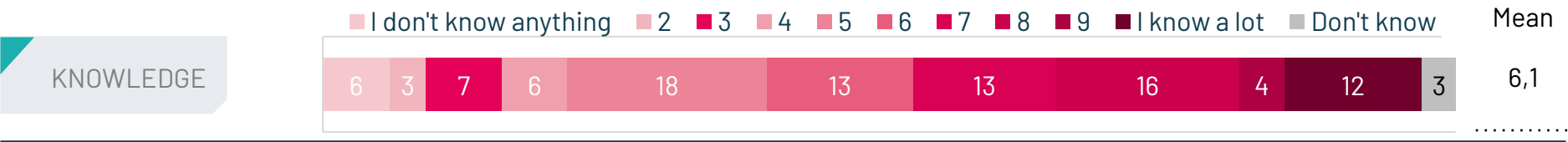
- Children provoke (N=9)
- Because of their free behaviour (N= 7)
- Because of the way they dress (N= 6)
- Children are not under parental control (N= 4)
- Some children manipulate adults so they can sue them later (N= 2)

WHY NOT? (N=769)

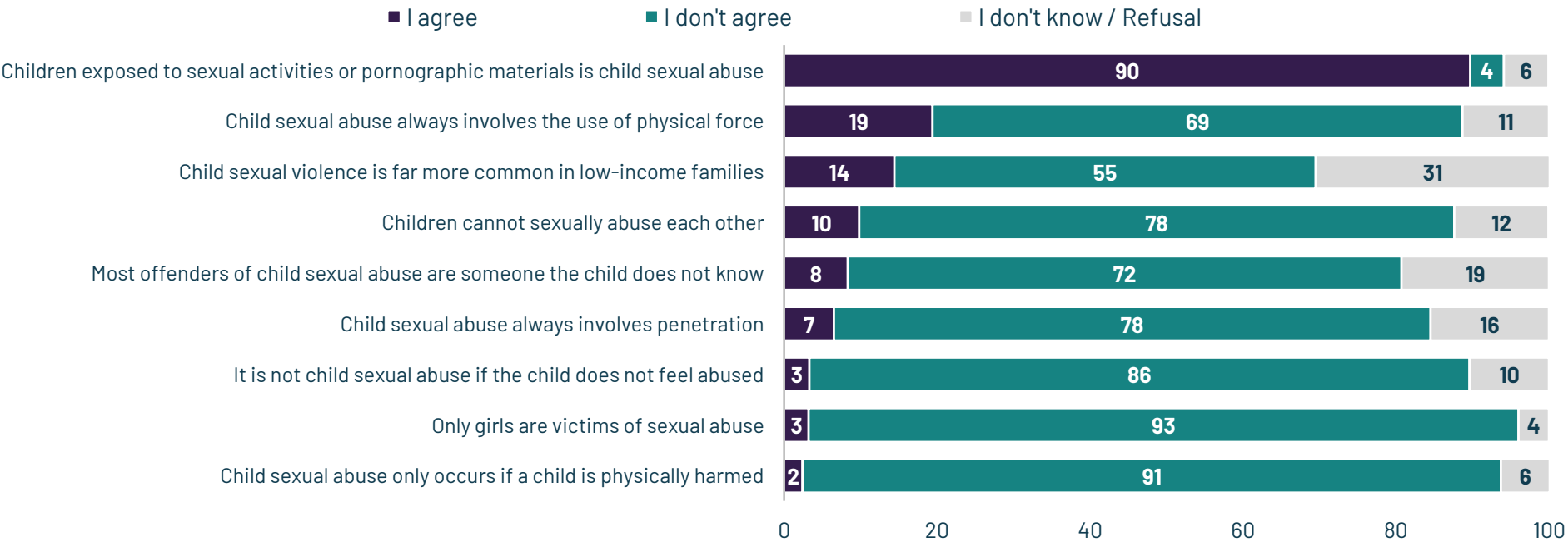


Awareness of sexual abuse of children

Citizens are moderately aware of what child sexual abuse is. The average score on 10-point scale is 6.1. Slightly more than half of citizens assessed their knowledge with scores above 5, and 39% of them with a score of 5 or lower. Almost one of five Croatian citizens believe that sexual abuse always involves the use of physical force.



PERCEPTION OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

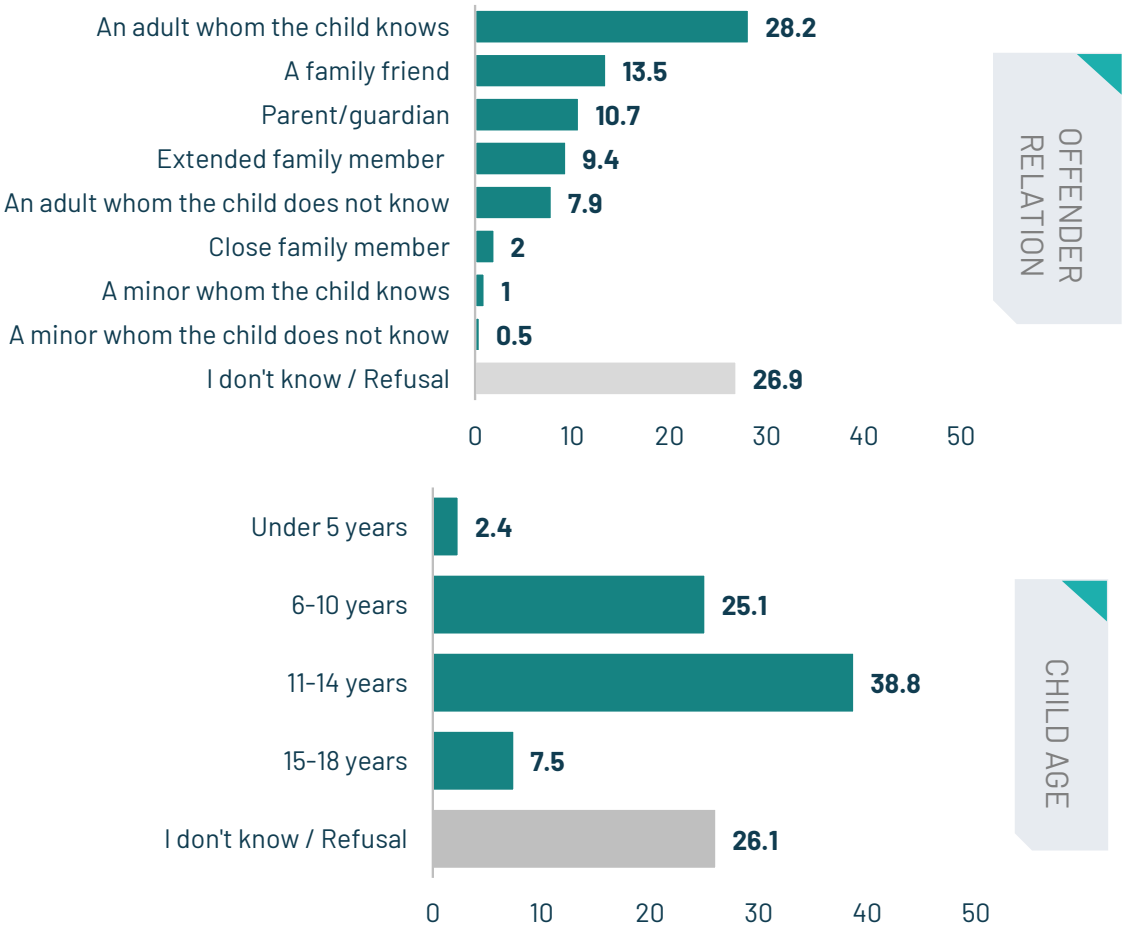
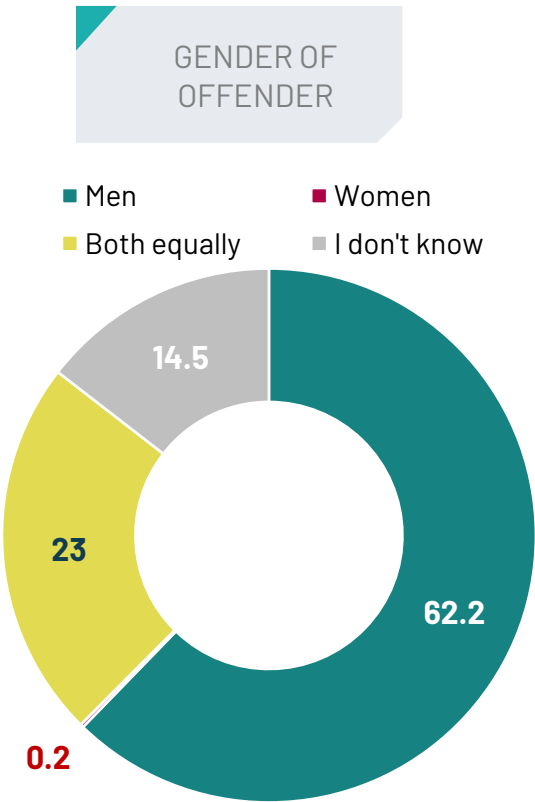


Base: All respondents
Question: How much do you feel you know about child sexual abuse (what is child sexual abuse, what are the risks and the consequences of child sexual abuse, etc.)? / Please state whether you agree or disagree with each of them.



Offender and victim

The prevailing opinion is that the offenders are predominantly men. Also, citizens believe that offenders are more likely the adults known to the child and that the most likely age at which a child is abused is between 11 and 14 years old. A significant number of citizens cannot estimate who the most likely offender is and what is age of the child that is sexually abused. People who have experienced abuse more often mention members of the extended family than those who did not.



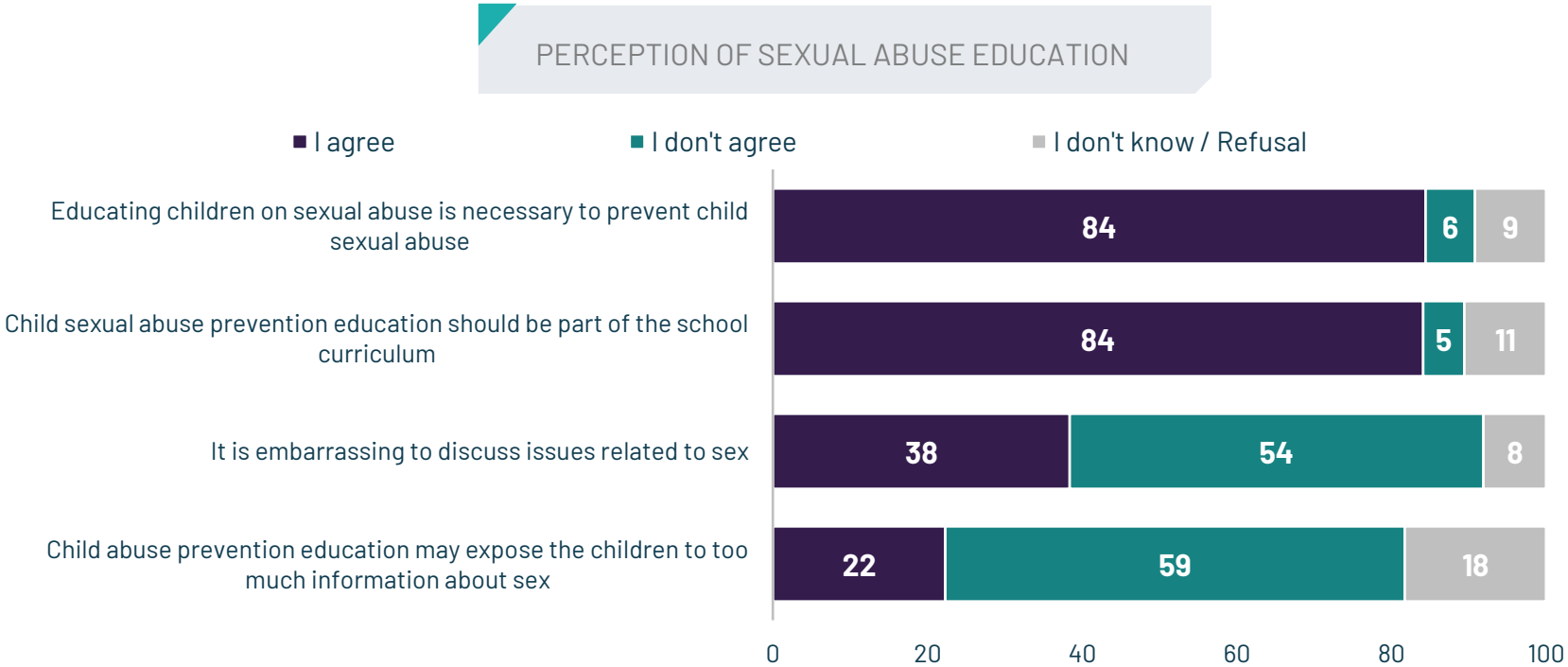
Base: All respondents
Question: Who do you believe is more likely to sexually abuse children - men or women? / Which of the following individuals do you believe is the most likely to sexually abuse a child? / At what age do you think a child is most likely to be sexually abused?

EDUCATION & INFORMATION ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE



Raising awareness about the prevention of sexual abuse

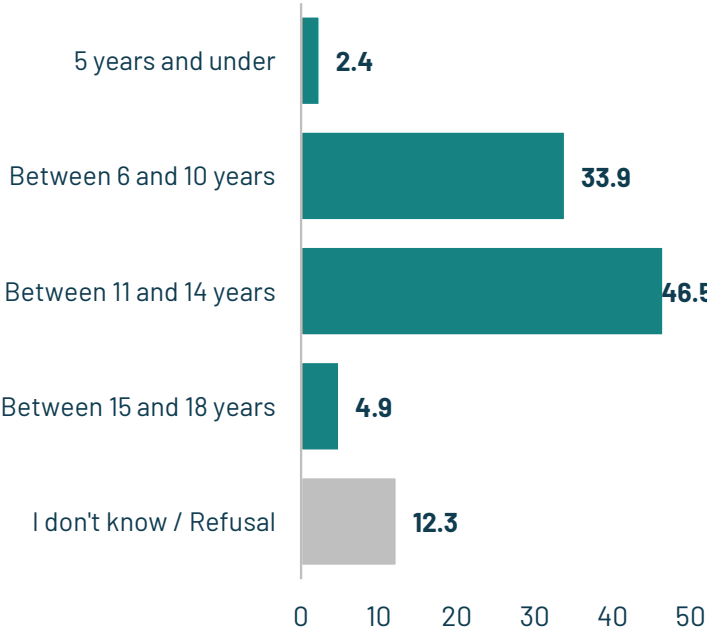
Only a small proportion of citizens believe that schools provide enough information on how to prevent and protect children from sexual abuse. There is a perception that it is uncomfortable to talk about topics related to sex. One of five citizens believe that education on child abuse prevention can expose children to too much information about sex.



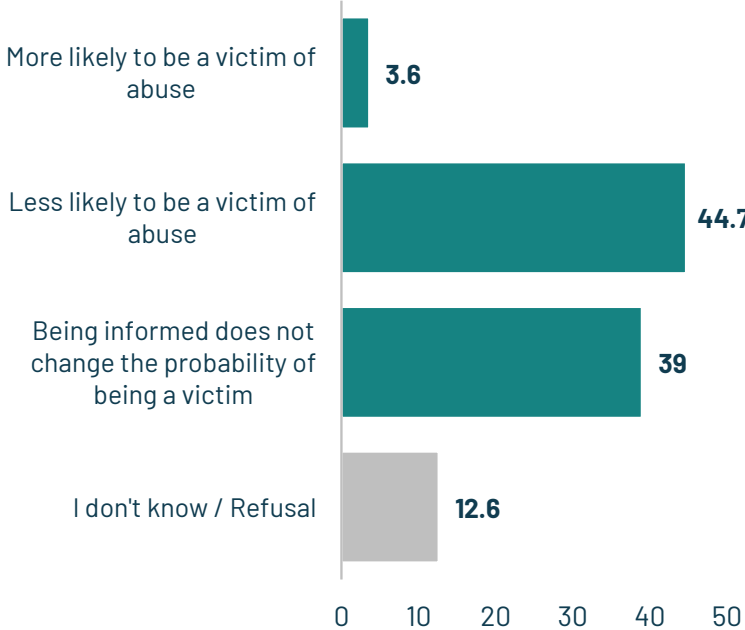
Raising awareness about the prevention of sexual abuse

Almost half of citizens believe that the right age for children to receive information about child sexual abuse is between the ages of 11 and 14, and another third believe that it is between the ages of 6 and 10. Most citizens point out that education will contribute to making it less likely for a child to become a victim. However, a high proportion also believes that education will not change the likelihood of a child becoming a victim.

AGE OF THE CHILD WHEN THEY SHOULD GET INFORMED ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE



DO YOU THINK THAT A CHILD WHO RECEIVES SEXUAL EDUCATION IS...?

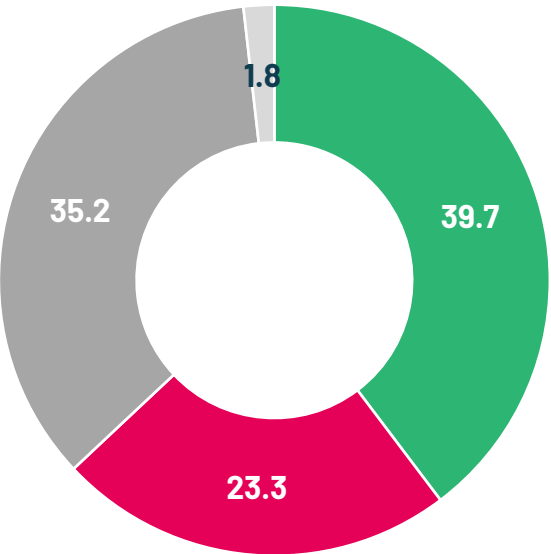


Raising awareness about the prevention of sexual abuse

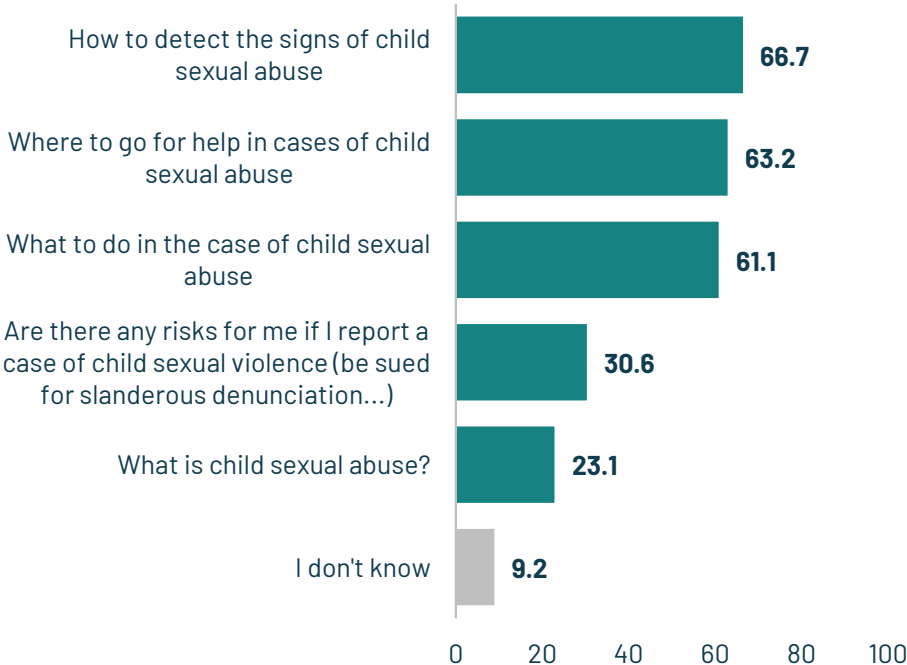
More than half of parents living in households with children have not (yet) talked to their children about sexual abuse. Around 2/3 of citizens would like to know more about how to detect signs of child sexual abuse, how to help children in case of sexual abuse, and what to do in case of child sexual abuse.

DISCUSSION ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE WITH THE CHILD - PARENTS

■ Yes ■ No ■ No, not yet ■ I don't know / Refusal



USEFUL INFORMATION NEEDED FOR UNDERSTANDING THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN - CITIZENS



SERVICES AND INFORMATION AVAILABLE

Recognition and reactions in case of a suspicion of child sexual abuse

Only a third of citizens believe that they can recognize behaviours that could indicate sexual abuse of children, while 2/3 do not know or cannot recognize them. In the case of suspicions of sexual abuse of children, they would primarily contact the police or talk to the parents/guardians of the children.



WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU SUSPECTED CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?



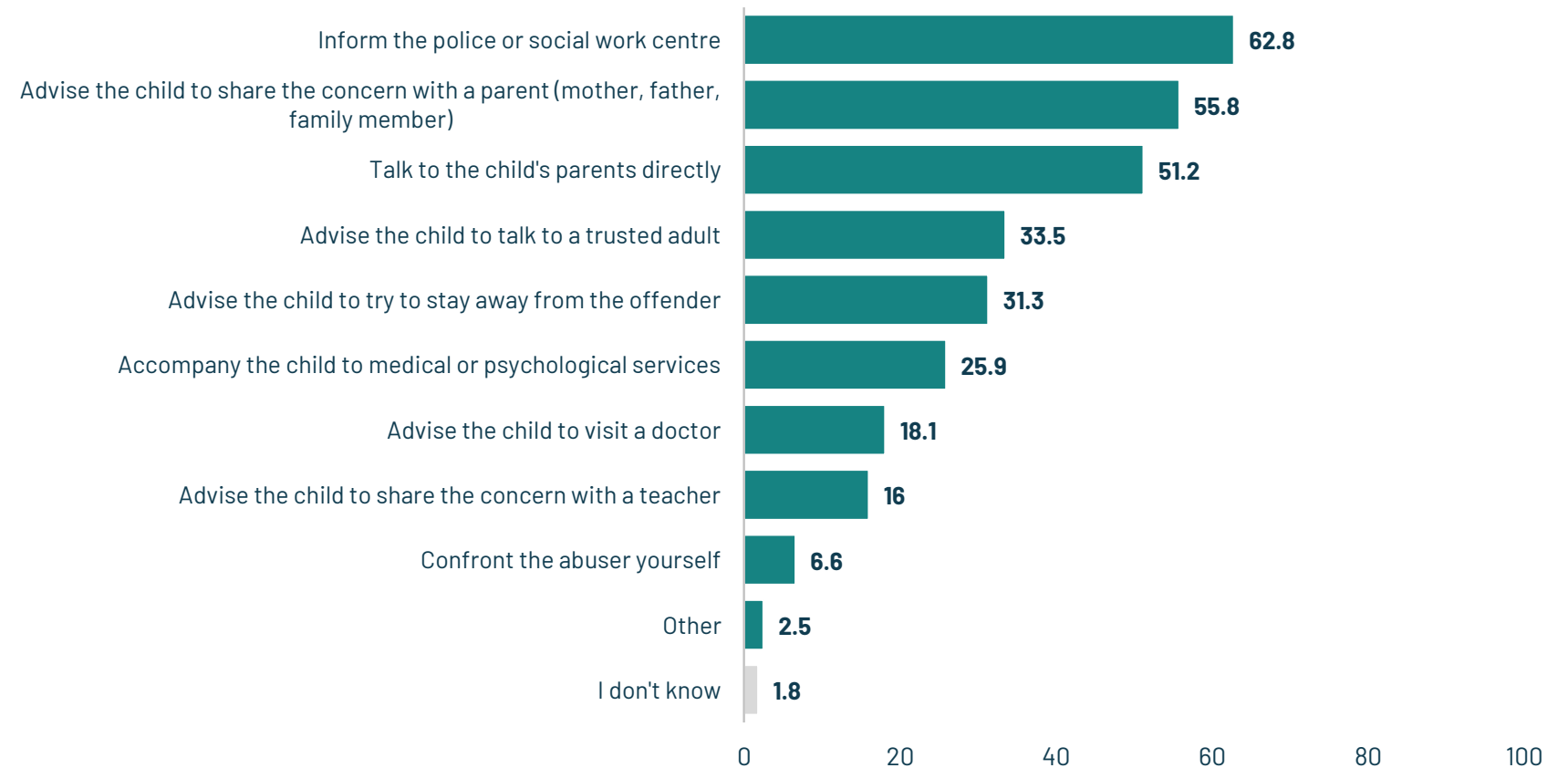
Base: All respondents

Question: Do you think you would be able to recognize behaviours towards a child that might suggest sexual abuse? / If you suspected that a child was at risk of being sexually abused, what would you do in the first instance?



Disclosing and reporting sexual abuse

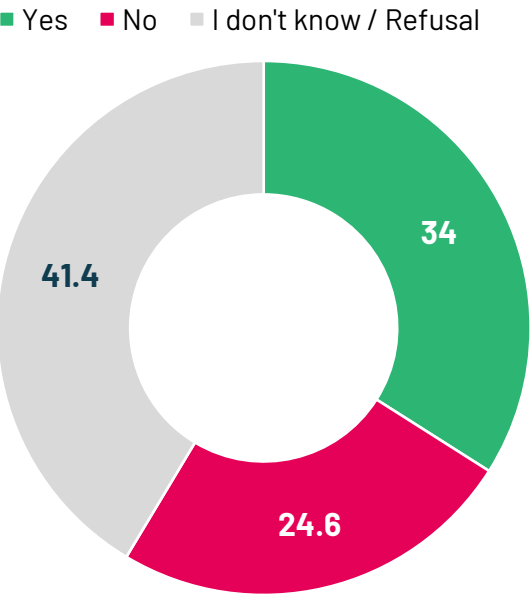
If a child would confide to respondents that they had been sexually abused, most would call the police or the social work centre, advise the child to share the concern with a parents, or talk to the child's parents directly.



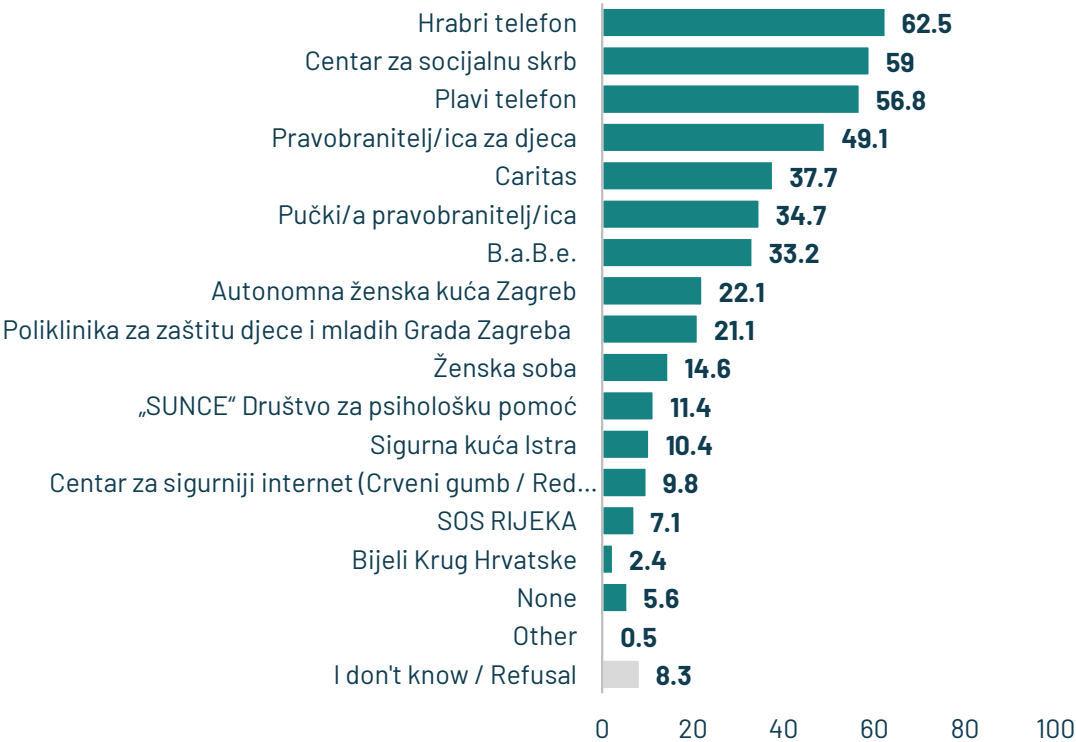
Knowledge of organisations providing assistance for victims of sexual abuse

About a third of citizens believe that there are adequate services for child victims of sexual abuse. A quarter of them state that there are none, and another 40% say they don't know. Among the organizations and programs that operate in Croatia and that we offered to respondents, the most well-known are Hrabri telefon, the Centre for Social Welfare and the Plavi telefon.

THE AVAILABILITY OF SERVICES



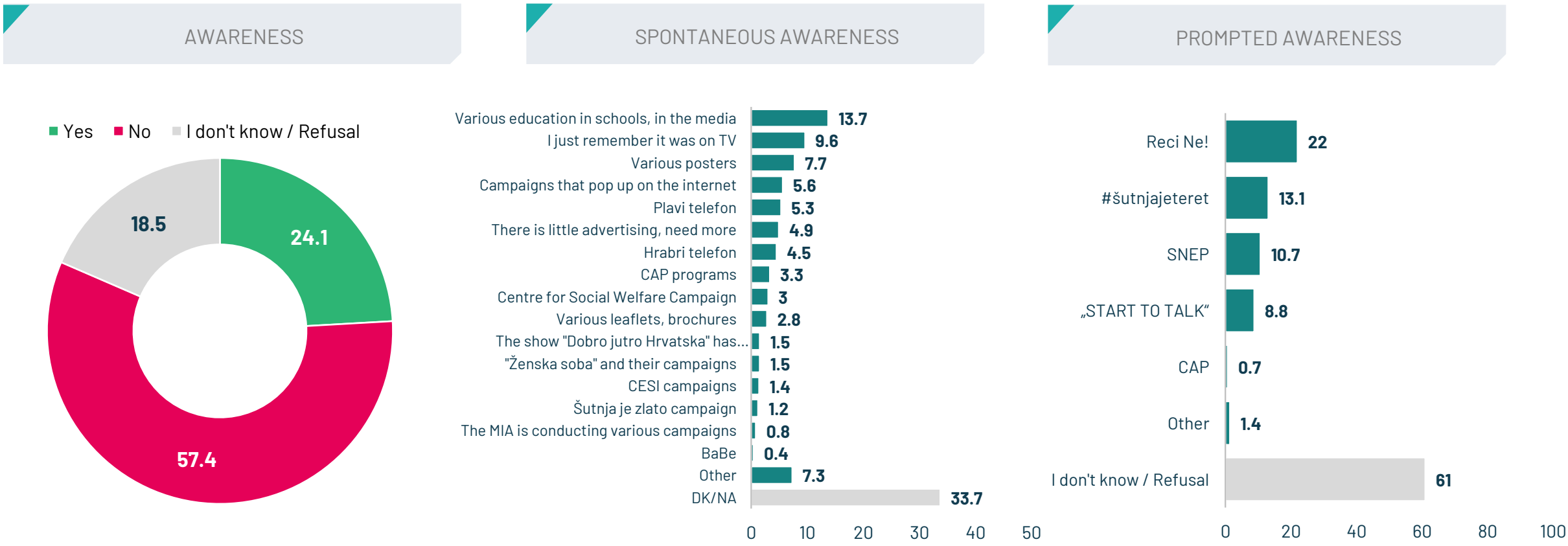
AWARENESS OF ORGANISATIONS PROVIDING ASSISTANCE



Base: All respondents
Question: Do you believe there are appropriate services for child victims of sexual abuse in Croatia ? / Are you aware of the following organisations/programmes you can contact for information about child sexual abuse should you require such information/advice?

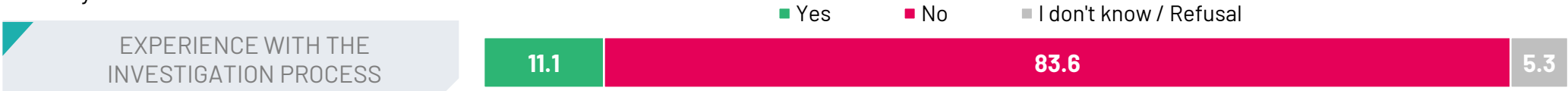
Awareness of campaigns on the prevention or protection of children against sexual abuse

A quarter of citizens state that they have seen, heard or read information or campaigns on the prevention or protection of children against sexual abuse. The recollection of exact campaigns is poor, most of the recollections are general. The campaign „Reci Ne! was recognized by 22% of citizens. More than half of the citizens do not remember any of the mentioned campaigns.



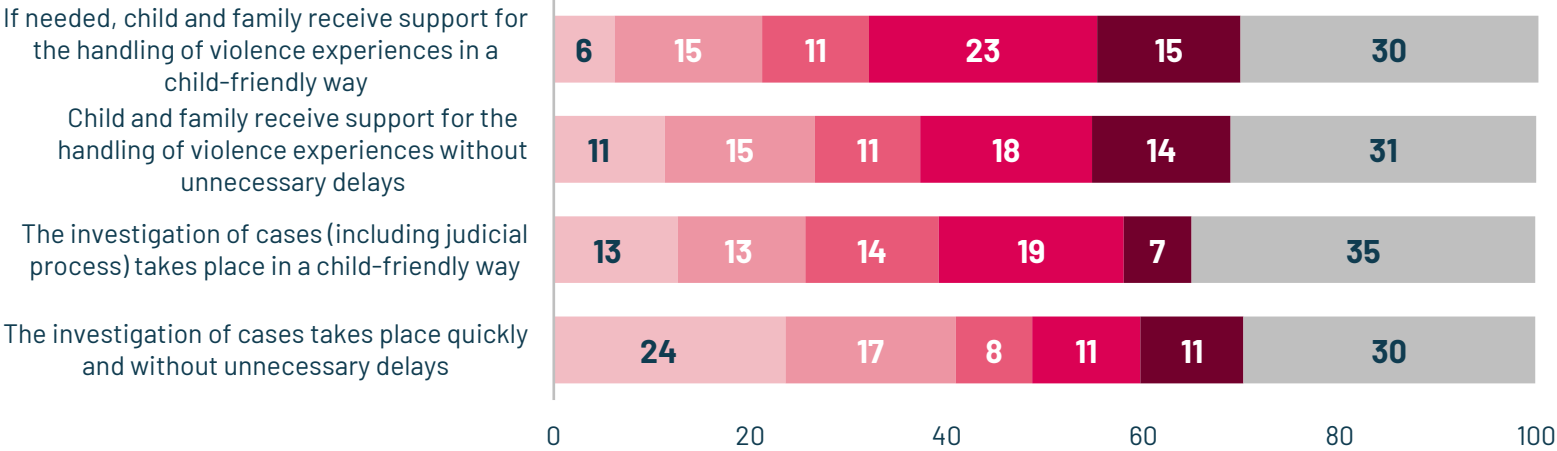
Attitudes about the functioning of our service system

Direct or indirect experience with the investigation process is relatively rare, only one of ten respondents reported this. Most agree that if needed, child and family receive support for the handling of violence experiences in a child-friendly way and least agree that the investigation of cases takes place quickly and without unnecessary delays. People who have had experience do not agree that child and family receive support for the handling of violence experiences without unnecessary delays.



ATTITUDES ABOUT THE FUNCTIONING OF OUR SERVICE SYSTEM

■ I strongly disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Neither agree or disagree ■ Somewhat agree ■ I strongly agree ■ I don't know / Refusal



Mean*

	Total	Has experience	Do not have experience
If needed, child and family receive support for the handling of violence experiences in a child-friendly way	3,4	3,3	3,4
Child and family receive support for the handling of violence experiences without unnecessary delays	3,1	2,7	3,2
The investigation of cases (including judicial process) takes place in a child-friendly way	2,9	3,0	2,9
The investigation of cases takes place quickly and without unnecessary delays	2,5	2,3	2,6

*Mean: Average score on a scale of 1 (I strongly disagree) to 5 (I strongly agree)

Base: All respondents
Question: Do you have or does someone you know have experience from investigation processes that have to do with sexual violence against children (child sexual abuse)? / What do you think about the functioning of our service system in following cases, where a child has been a victim of sexual violence.

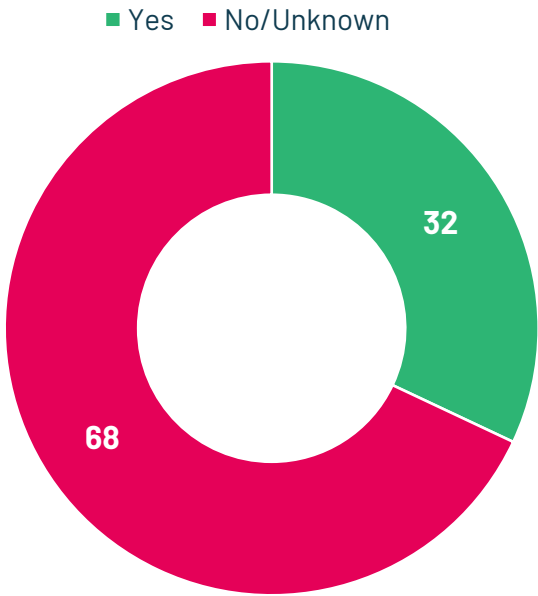


PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

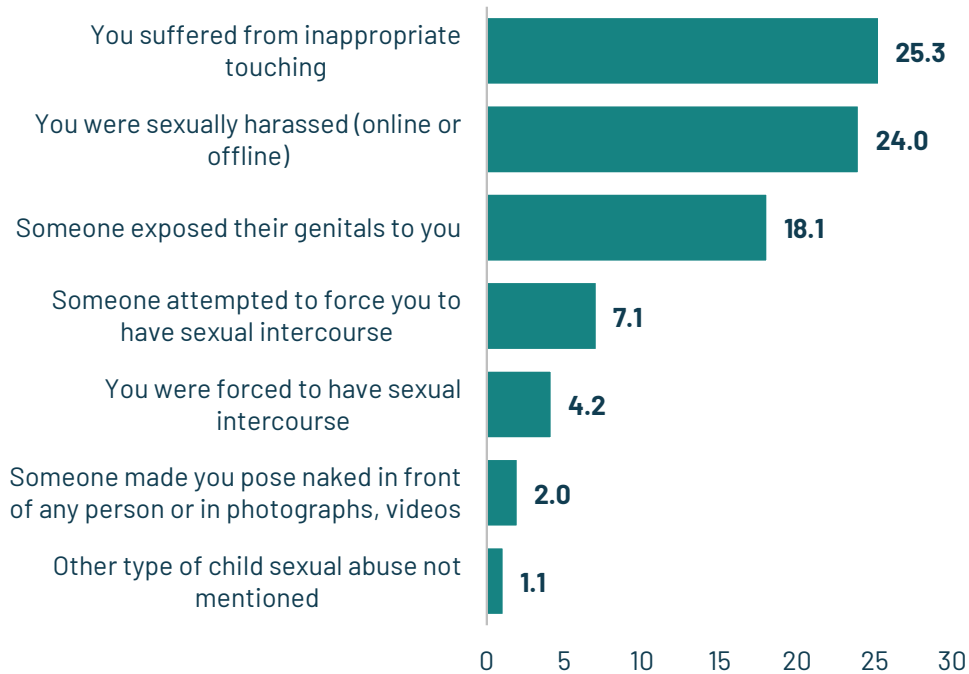
Experience with sexual abuse during childhood

A third of Croatian citizens (32%) report experiencing some form of sexual abuse as a child. The most common reported experiences were inappropriate touching, sexual harassment (online or offline) and exposing genitals.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE



TYPE OF SEXUAL ABUSE



Victims

Women

10-15 years old

They were with friends

**Most often:
inappropriate touching**

One-time act

**Less than half of acts
were disclosed and only
for 6% was filled a
criminal/legal complaint**



Offenders

Male

All age groups

One offender

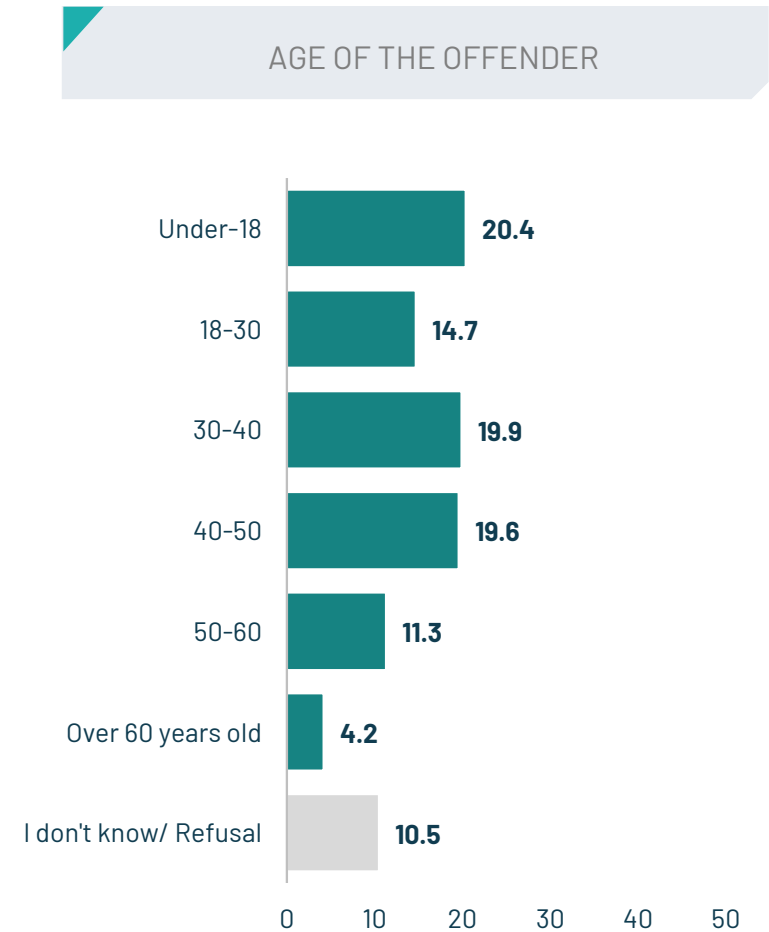
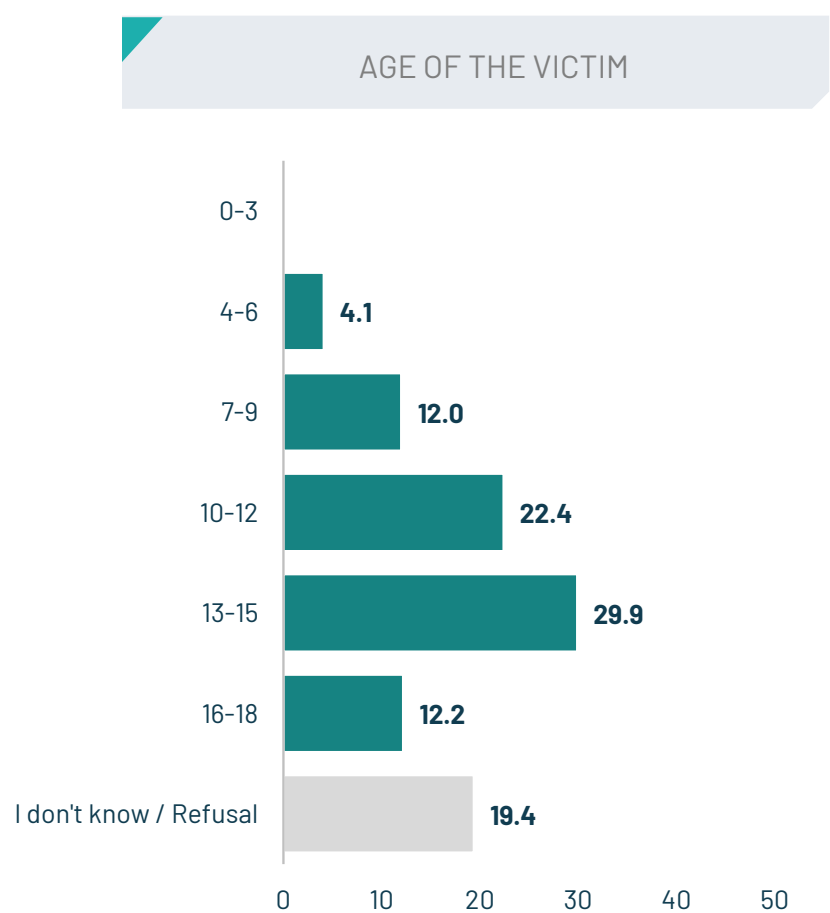
**Adult person that the
victim did know**

**No later encounters and
no contact with victim
today**



Age of the victim and of the offender

Most often, the victims were between the ages of 10 and 15, while the offenders almost equally spread among age groups. One of five offender was minor as well.

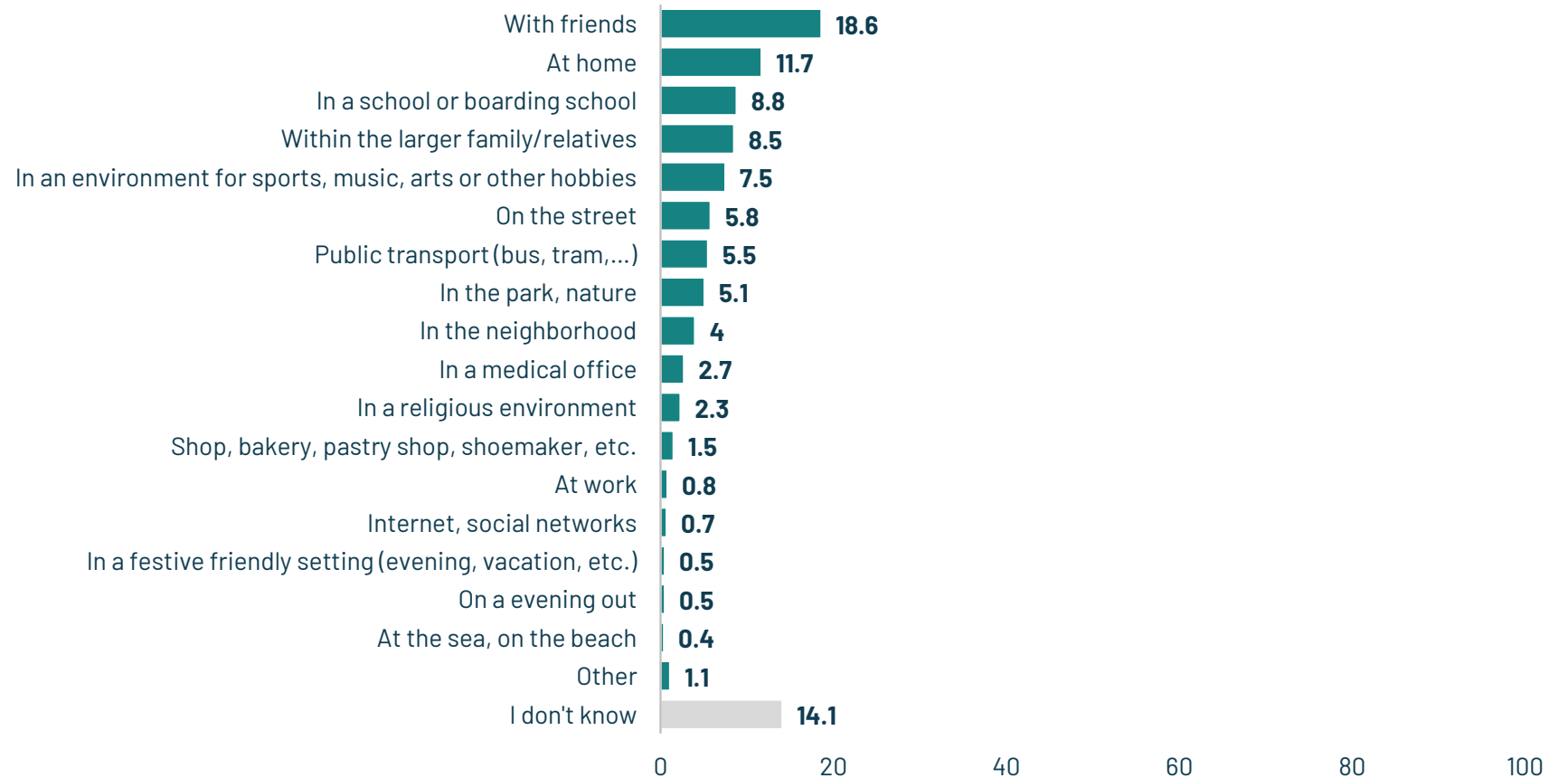


Base: Individuals who experienced any form of sexual abuse as children (N=273)
Question: How old were you at the time you experienced the worst sexual abuse (if there were more than one experience of sexual abuse)? / At the time, approximately how old was/were the offender(s)?



Circumstances of sexual abuse during childhood

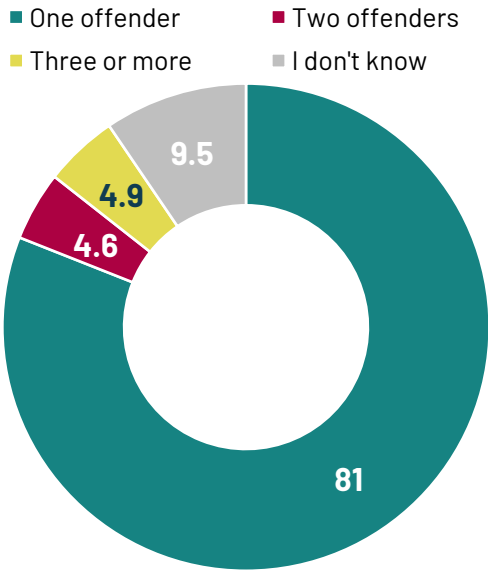
Abuse occurred in different places and under different circumstances, somewhat more often when socializing with friends and at home.



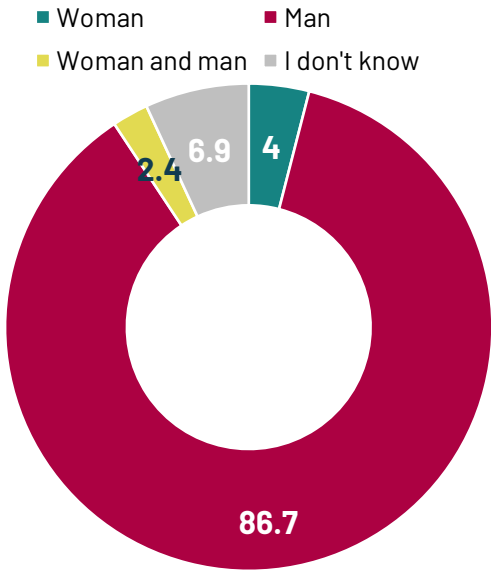
The offender(s) of childhood sexual abuse

In most cases, the abuse was committed by one person, only in a small number of cases were multiple offenders. The offenders were predominantly men. About a quarter of the offenders were (adult) strangers, while most of the offenders (62%) were people known to the victim (family friends, acquaintances, friends ...).

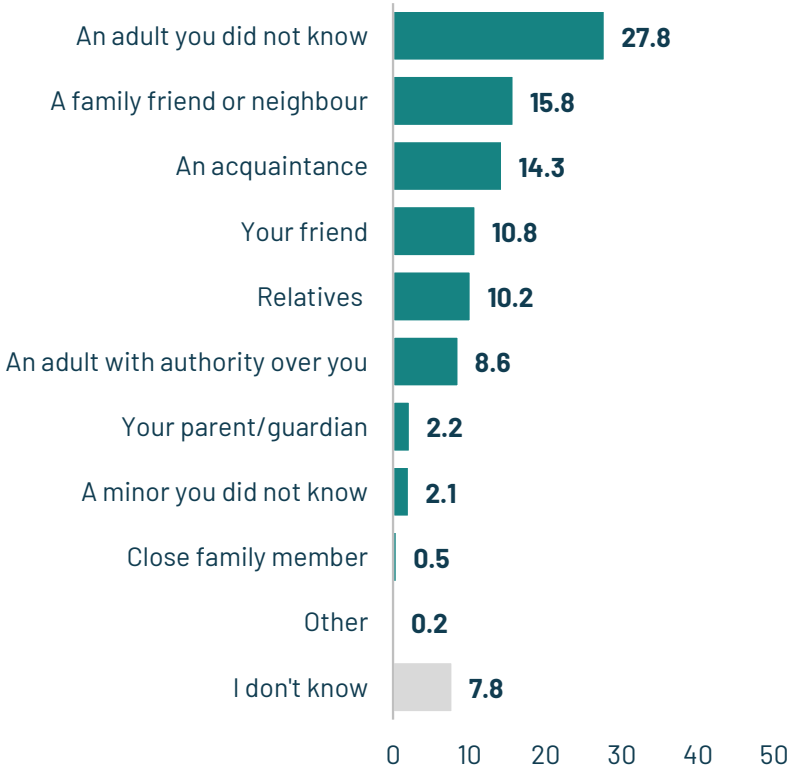
NUMBER OF OFFENDERS



GENDER OF OFFENDER

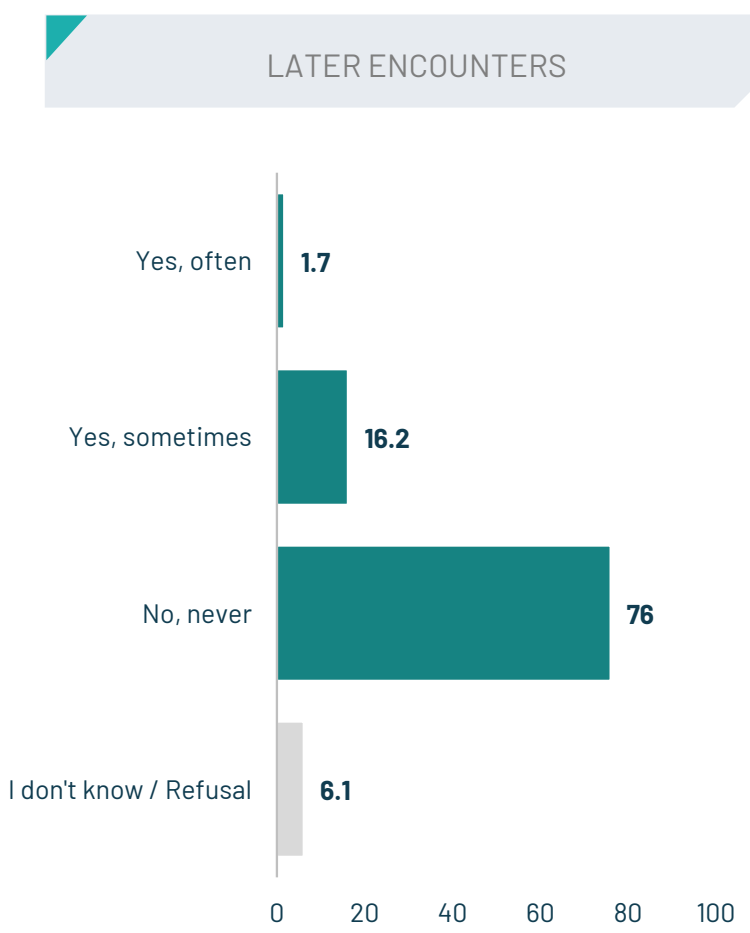
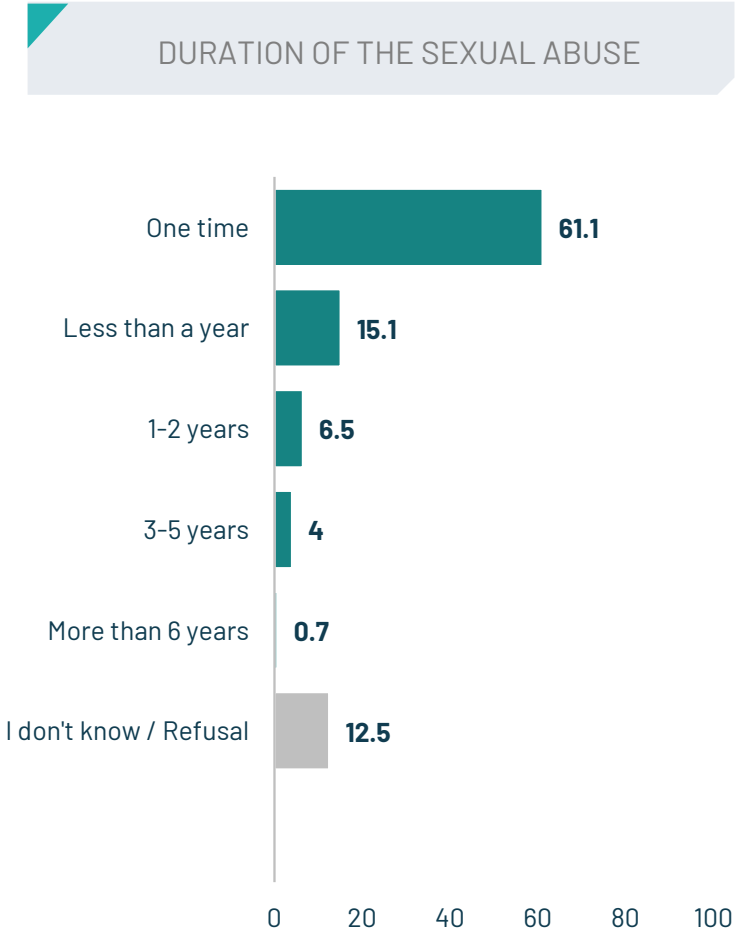


RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OFFENDER



The offender(s) of childhood sexual abuse

Two thirds of the cases mentioned happened only once, while slightly less than a third happened over a longer period. One out of ten cases lasted more than a year. Victims no longer have contact with most offenders. In an extremely small number of cases, they have frequent encounters.

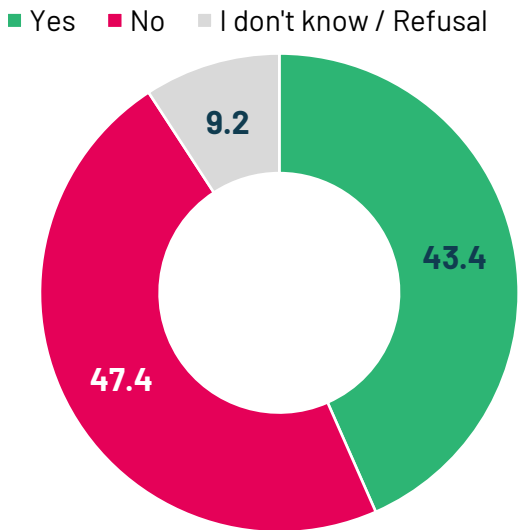


Base: Individuals who experienced any form of sexual abuse as children (N=273)
Question: With that offender, how long did the abuse last? / Today, do you happen to come across this or these person(s)?

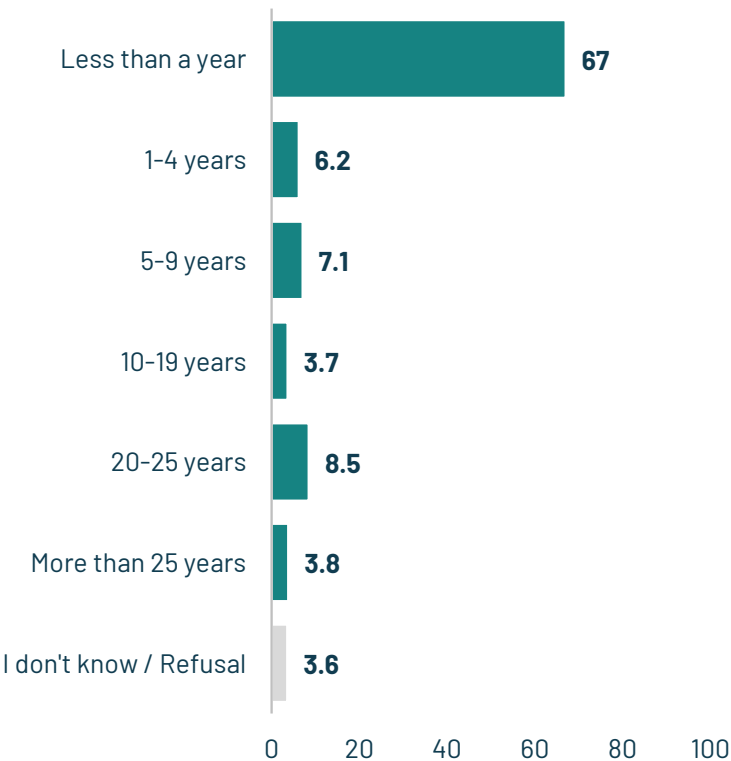
Disclosure of sexual abuse during childhood

Almost every second victim did not tell anyone about the abuse. Those who decided to report it did so within a year, and most often told a friend or parents.

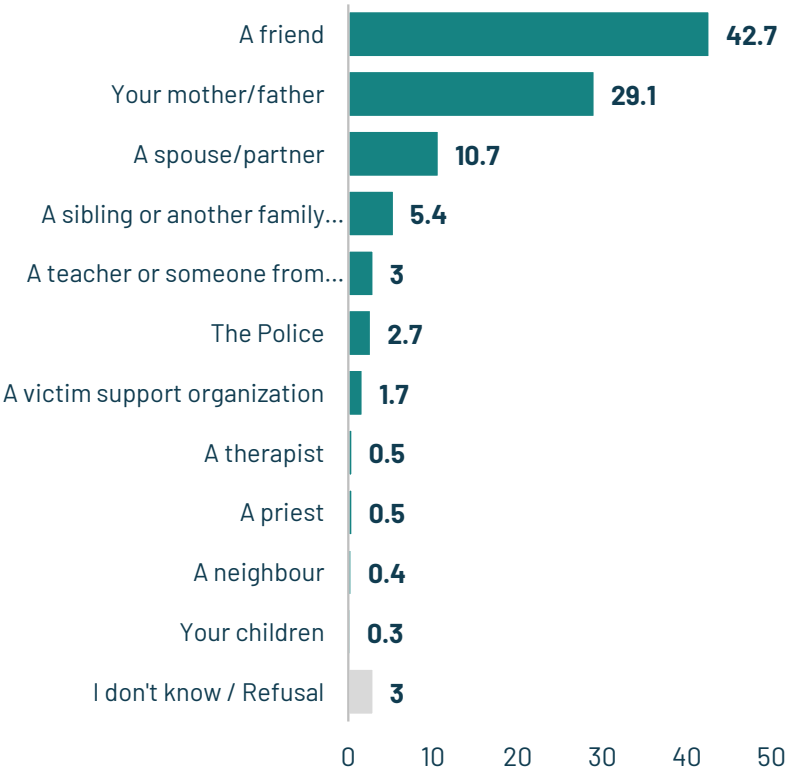
DISCLOSURE



TIME OF DISCLOSURE



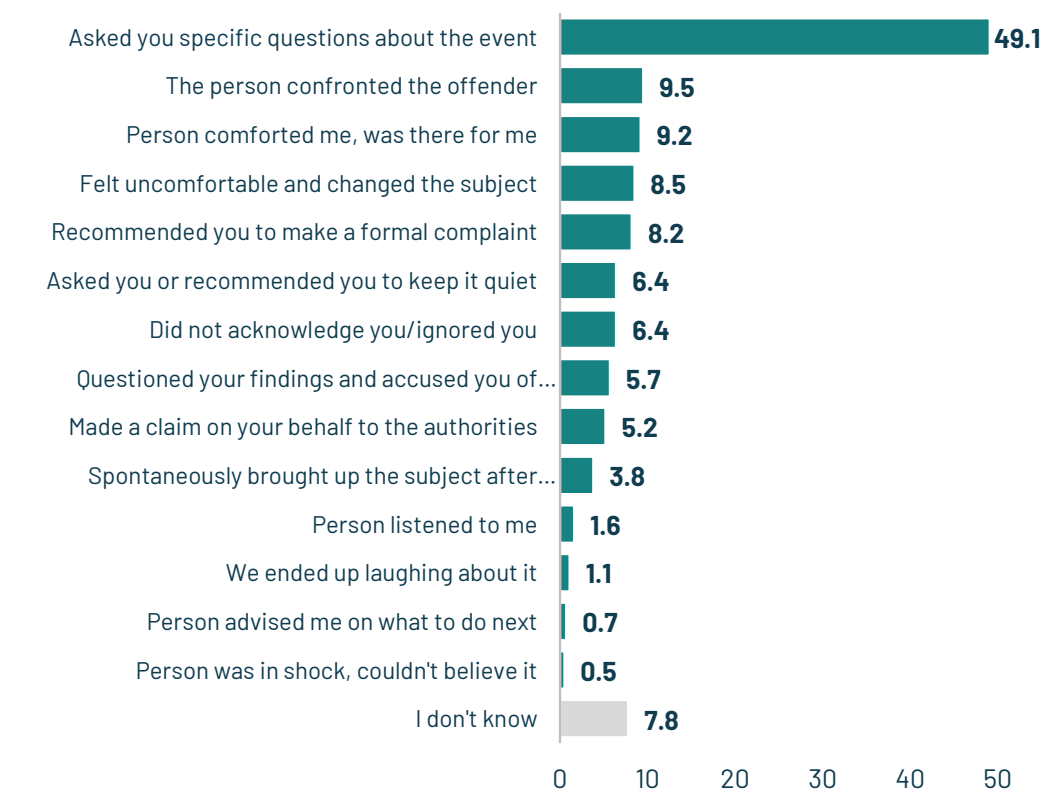
THE FIRST CONFIDANT OF THE VICTIM



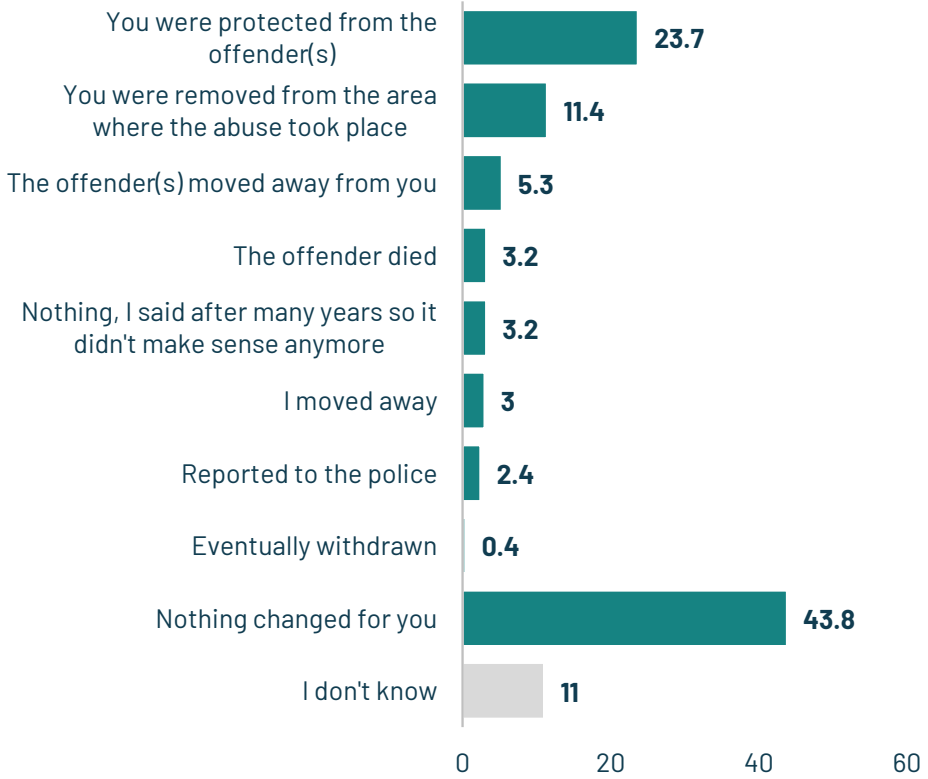
The reaction of the confidant

The people who were given information primarily asked questions about the incident. In one in ten cases, the person confronted the offender. In almost half of the cases, nothing happened after the incident was discussed. In one in four cases, the victim was protected from the perpetrator, and in one in ten cases, the victim was removed from the area where the abuse took the place.

RESPONSE OF THE CONFIDANT



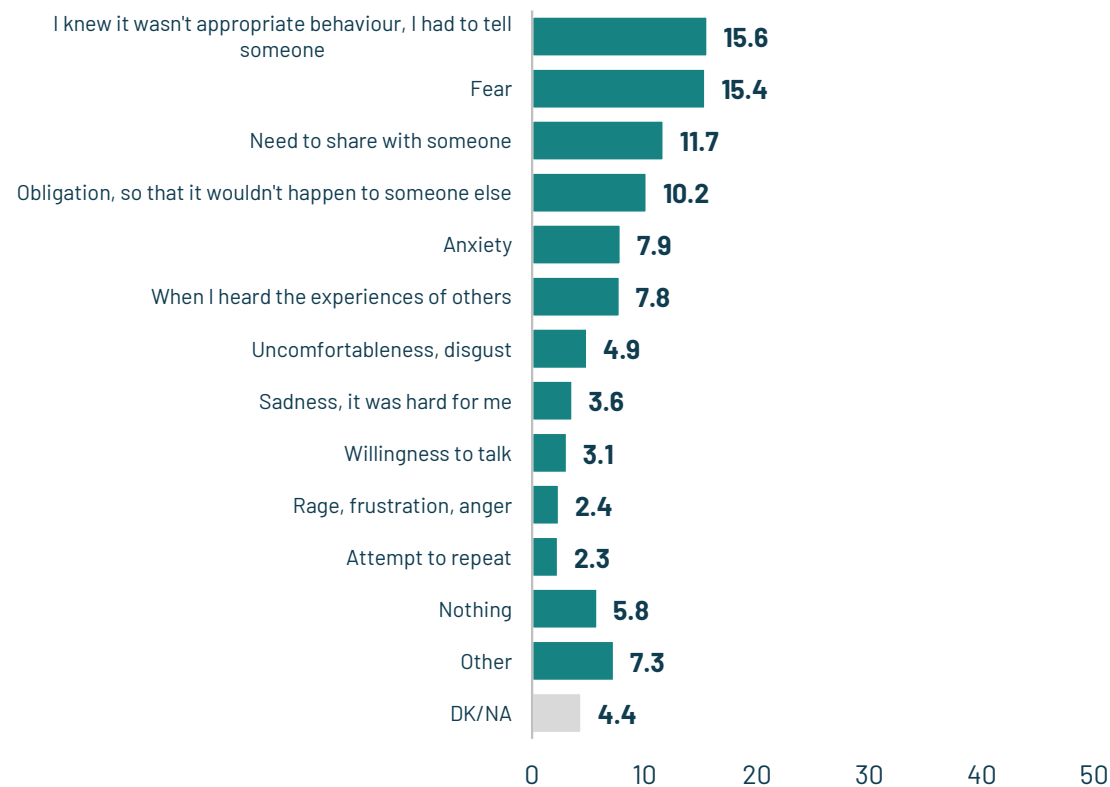
ACTIONS FOLLOWING THE DISCLOSURE



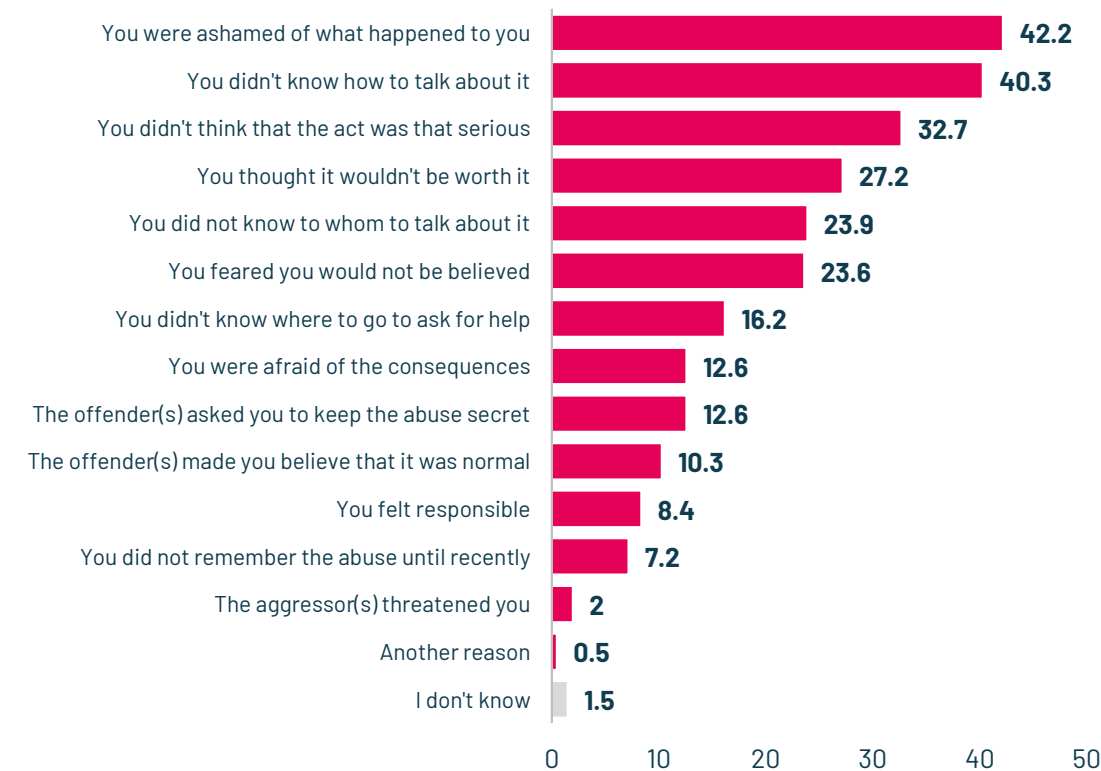
Reasons for the (non) - disclosure of sexual abuse during childhood

The main reasons victims disclosed the abuse was that they need to talk because they knew it was inappropriate behaviour, fear for repeat, need to share and obligation for prevention to others. The main reasons why victims did not report the incident were a sense of shame and not knowing how to talk about it. A third felt that the act itself was not serious and that would not be worth to mention it. Around a quarter of victims were afraid that they would not be believed.

REASONS FOR THE DISCLOSURE



REASONS FOR THE NON-DISCLOSURE

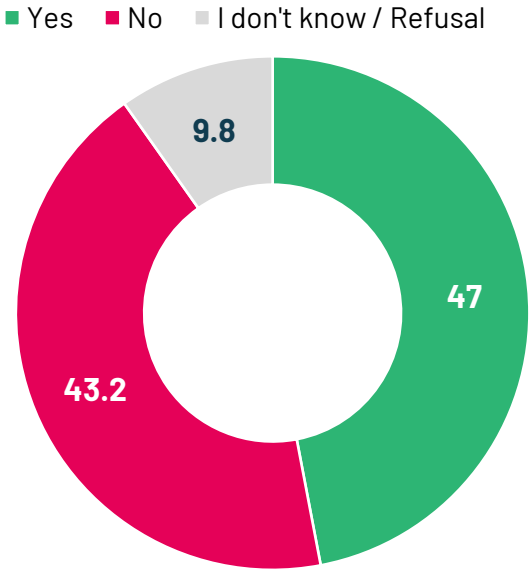


Base: Individuals who told someone about sexual abuse (N=118) / Individuals who did not tell someone about sexual abuse (N=129)
Question: What led you to disclose the abuse? / Until today, why have you not talked about the abuse?

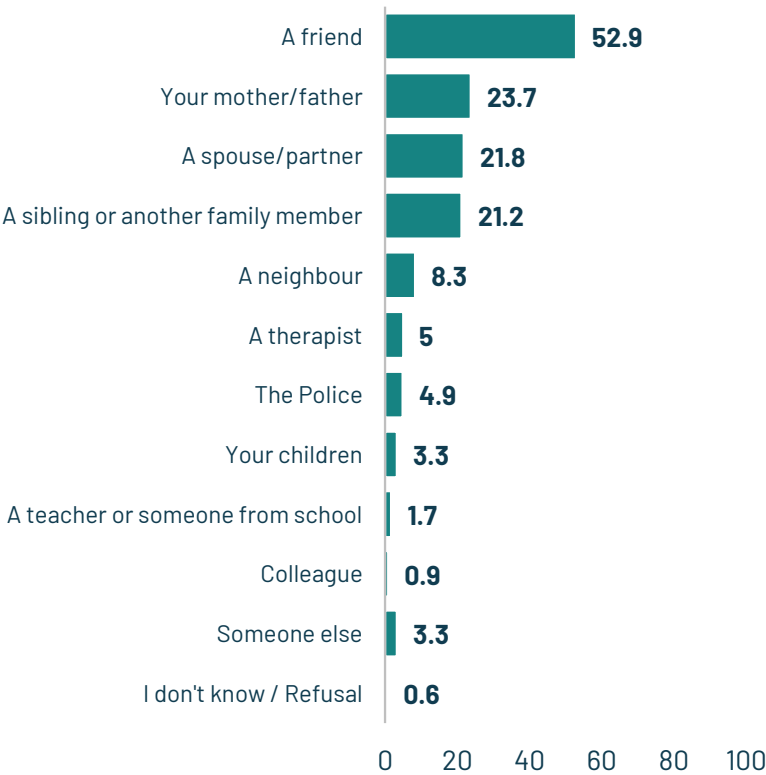
Other confidants in terms of sexual abuse

About half of those who had already talked about the event shared their experience also, with other people, and again, the most common conversation was with friends. An extremely small number of victims spoke to an official.

DISCLOSURE TO OTHER PERSONS, IN ADDITION TO THE FIRST CONFIDANT



OTHER PERSONS TO WHOM THE VICTIM DISCLOSED THE ACT

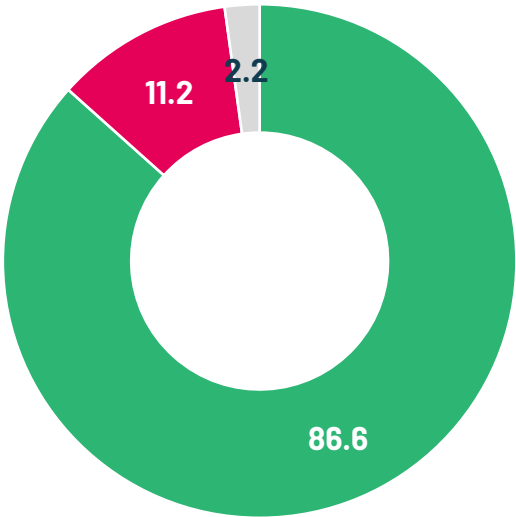


Support of family and others

In the case where they turned to their families, they received support in many cases. Support from their environment was present, but to a lesser extent than from their families.

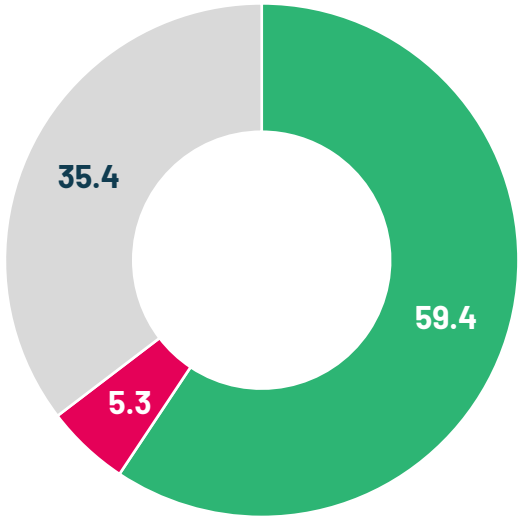
SUPPORT OF THE FAMILY*

■ Yes ■ No ■ I don't know / Refusal



SUPPORT OF OTHERS*

■ Yes ■ No ■ I don't know / Refusal

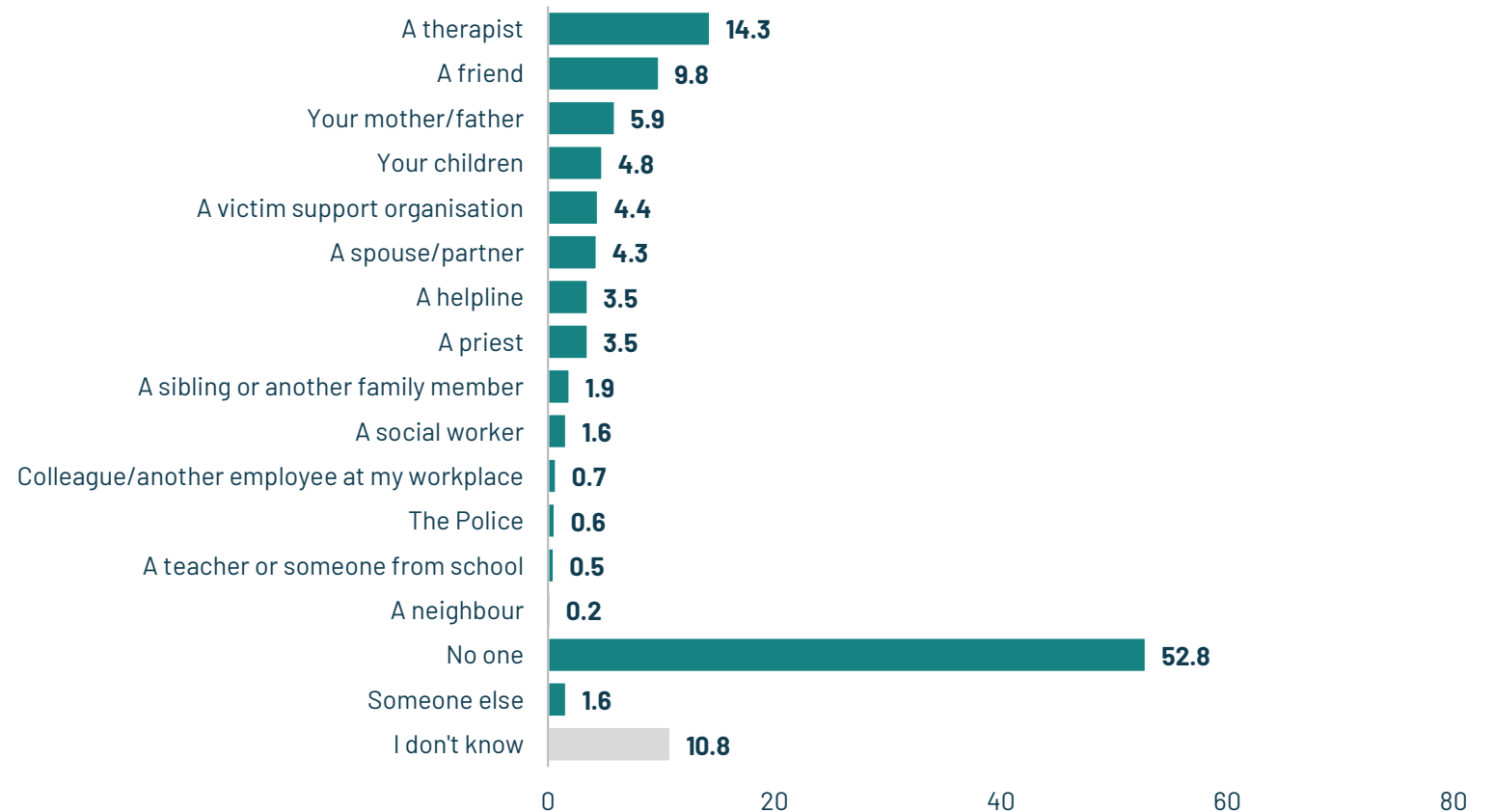


*Note: The number of respondents is small, so the results should be interpreted with caution.



Person with whom the victim would like to talk now

More than half of the victims do not feel the need to talk about it now, and among those who are willing to talk, they would first turn to a therapist.

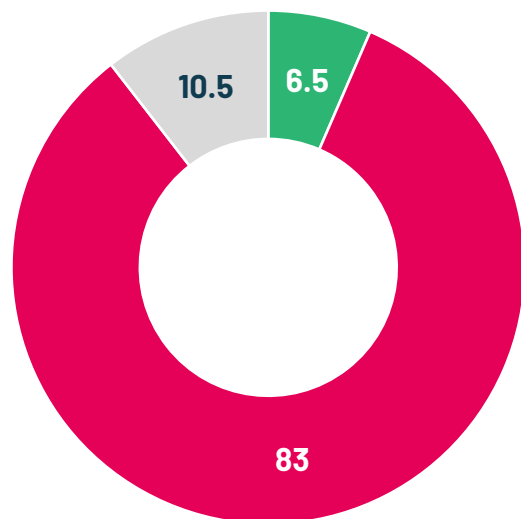


Filing a complaint and its consequences / Medical support

Only a small number of cases were officially reported (N=8), most of the incidents were not reported. No one was provided with medical assistance.

FILING A CRIMINAL/LEGAL COMPLAINT

■ Yes ■ No ■ I don't know / Refusal



CONSEQUENCES/RESULT OF THE CRIMINAL/LEGAL COMPLAINT

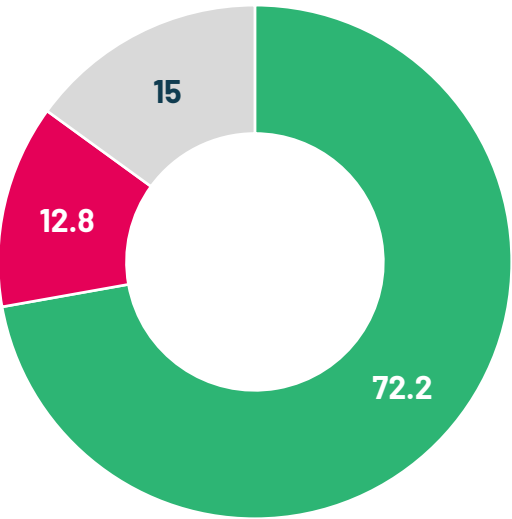
- There was a judicial investigation (N=3)
- The officer did not report the case (N=3)
- There was a trial followed by a conviction (N=2)
- I withdrew the charge (N=1)

Today knowledge of the resources intended to help the victims of sexual abuse

Today, most victims would know who to turn to, but more than half of them would not feel comfortable to do.

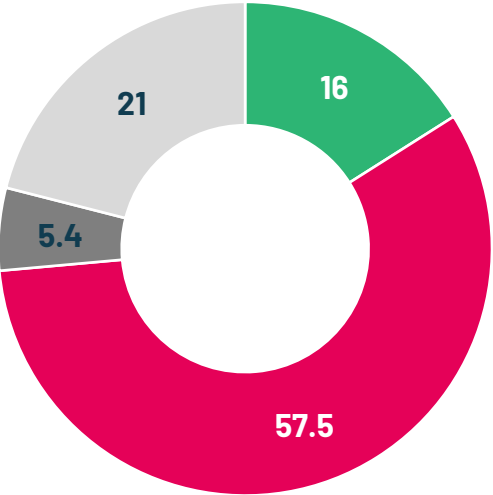
KNOWLEDGE WHAT TO DO TODAY

■ Yes ■ No ■ I don't know / Refusal



WOULD YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE TO CONTACT THE SERVICES TODAY

■ Yes ■ No
■ I am not aware of any service ■ I don't know / Refusal



THANK YOU

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