



World Vision



Silent Battles

Adolescents' experiences and perceptions
of gender-based violence
in war-time Ukraine

> Acknowledgements

This brief is based on a broader gender-based violence (GBV) study co-produced in October 2024 by the Ukrainian non-governmental organisation (NGO), Girls, who led on the data collection and analysis, alongside World Vision's Middle East and Eastern Europe Regional Office (WV MEER) and Ukraine Crisis Response (WVUCR).

This brief was written by Delphine Valette and reviewed by Kate Kobaidze, Micah Branaman, Evita Jourdi, and Ghida Krisht.

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To ensure the safe and ethical participation of children, parents, caregivers, and other adults when they shared their experiences and perceptions, all surveys and discussion groups were conducted in line with World Vision's safeguarding protocols. All photos included in this report have provided informed consent.

> Key findings

- Adolescents' perceptions and experiences of gender-based violence (GBV) reflect deep-rooted gender and social norms. Girls in particular highlight links between violence and gender inequality, as well as the inter-generational nature of GBV, due to traditional and patriarchal upbringing that is being passed on. This is further compounded by limited access to information about GBV and available support services, particularly in rural areas and small towns, creating additional barriers for adolescent survivors seeking help.
- Adolescent boys' understanding of GBV is mostly correlated with physical aspects of violence and relationships between the sexes, as well as control. They also often view GBV as acts that undermine an individual's freedom and autonomy, while limiting personal agency.
- The gendered impacts of the war are acknowledged by adolescents who live in conflict affected areas, especially internally displaced boys and girls, who are more likely to report that women are disproportionately affected by war crimes.
- Girls are more likely than boys to recognise various forms of violence as GBV, and to have experienced various types of psychological violence – the most prevalent form of GBV among adolescents.
- Adolescent girls are identified as the most vulnerable group to GBV, with key factors such as their limited autonomy, societal expectations, and power imbalance in relationships, exposing them to higher risks of violence.
- The psychological effects of GBV are generally greater on adolescent girls who are more likely to experience a loss in self-confidence and feelings of confusion.
- Girls are less likely to seek help for GBV and are more aware of the negative consequences of reporting GBV than boys.
- Lack of access to adequate and targeted information, coupled with poor awareness of available services, impact adolescents' ability to access the support they need. Both girls and boys tend to rely on parents or friends for support but are often reluctant to discuss GBV, especially sexual violence.
- GBV significantly impacts adolescents' daily lives, with girls experiencing a wider range of consequences across various forms of violence, including disruptions to their education, social interactions, and overall well-being.
- Access to specialized GBV case management is crucial for adolescent survivors. This involves coordinated support systems that provide legal aid, safe shelters, mental health and psychosocial support, and other essential services tailored to their specific needs.
- Children with disabilities face heightened vulnerability to GBV due to prevalent societal stereotypes, discrimination, and limited access to information and resources. This vulnerability requires specific attention and targeted interventions to ensure their safety and well-being.

➤ Background

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine nearly three years ago has caused massive displacement and casualties, widespread destruction of critical civilian infrastructure, and disruptions to essential services. Increased GBV is a well-evidenced pattern of conflict and impacts women, men, boys and girls in different ways. Conflict – and crises more broadly – prey on and amplify pre-existing inequalities and deep-rooted gender norms and beliefs, driving violence disproportionately against women and girls, while also putting boys at heightened risk. This is especially true for children with disabilities, who experience significantly higher rates of violence due to societal stereotypes, discrimination, and limited access to information and resources, as highlighted in the broader study ‘Gender-Based Violence in Ukraine Amid War.

GBV was already an acute and widespread problem before February 2022.¹ While Ukraine had made some improvements in terms of gender equality, they remained modest and hampered by years of conflict and the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.² The conflict and its socio-economic consequences have severely worsened existing GBV. Girls and young women in particular, have been increasingly exposed to intimate partner violence, sexual violence, harmful online content, and sexual exploitation and abuse.³

While GBV is gendered, it is also influenced by other factors, including age. Adolescents are some of the groups more at risk of GBV especially in times of crises; yet, at the intersection of childhood and adulthood, they are often overlooked in research and, as a result, in policy and programming. This is compounded by systemic gaps in data collection, including the classification of women and girls as a single cohort, which renders adolescent girls’ specific experiences and needs invisible.⁴

Up to date, data on GBV in Ukraine is lacking, even more so when it comes to adolescents. Available GBV data is often limited to specific forms of violence and excludes adolescents’ experiences and perceptions of violence. These gaps impact the planning and delivery of adapted, targeted, and needs-based GBV preventive measures and responses.

Against this background, World Vision and NGO “Girls” jointly conducted a nationwide study to collect disaggregated and comprehensive data on GBV in Ukraine. The unique study specifically included adolescent boys and girls.⁵ It went beyond a sole focus on GBV prevalence among these groups to encompass a broader and critical focus on adolescents’ experiences, understanding, and perceptions of the various forms of GBV, its causes and of the effectiveness of current responses.

This research briefing highlights the key findings from the full study [“Gender-Based Violence in Ukraine Amid War: An Assessment Report”](#),⁶ as they pertain to adolescents. It also sets out key and actionable recommendations to address the challenges and gaps exposed by the research.

While it considers the study’s findings for both adolescent girls and boys, and the correlations between gender norms and the different types of violence they experienced, the briefing spotlights the specific experiences and perspectives of girls compared to boys, due to their heightened vulnerability to GBV.

The research findings are structured around four main themes: (1) adolescents’ perceptions and understanding of GBV; (2) the impact of GBV on adolescents’ mental health; (3) the barriers to adolescents reporting GBV and seeking help; and (4) adolescents’ views on what actions are needed to reduce GBV.⁷

1 OSCE, Well-Being and Safety of Women: Ukraine Results Report, OSCE-led survey on violence against women, 2019.

2 CARE, Rapid Gender Analysis Ukraine, October 2023.

3 Ibid.

4 Data2x, Making Adolescent Girls Visible Through Gender Data, 11 October 2022.

5 Within the context of this research, adolescents are defined as boys and girls aged 13-17 years.

6 World Vision & NGO “Girls”, Gender-Based Violence in Ukraine Amid War: An Assessment Report - Understanding Response Effectiveness, Support Gaps, and Recommendations for Comprehensive Solutions, September 2024.

7 Danish Refugee Council, DRC Quarterly Protection Monitoring Report - Ukraine, January - March 2024, 22 May 2024.

➤ Research design and participant demographics

The study was conducted between February and March 2024. It combined a desk-based review, focus group discussions (FGDs) and an online survey with adults and adolescents,⁸ with a focus on inclusivity, geographical representation, and adequate participation of adolescent girls and boys.⁹ The context of active conflict posed limitations on in-person reachability of staff and participants, particularly in underrepresented areas. Additionally, reliance on online methods in some regions may have excluded populations with limited internet access, despite efforts to ensure inclusivity and geographical representation. The participation of adolescents was as follows:

- 6 FGDs with adolescents – 3 with girls and 3 with boys - were conducted.
- 1,200 (600 boys and 600 girls) adolescents took part in an online survey.¹⁰
- 44% of adolescents who responded to the survey were directly affected by the conflict: 33% were displaced and 11% remained in a conflict zone.
- 28% of adolescents belonged to vulnerable families: families living in difficult circumstances (14%), families affected by war (7%), families who have lost their homes (3%), and families with children with disabilities or special needs (4%).
- 72% of the online respondents were adolescents living with both parents and 76% did not belong to a vulnerable category. 39% of adolescents were struggling financially to cover basic needs (31%) or did not have enough money to cover basic needs (8%).
- Adolescents surveyed lived across the western, southern, eastern and central regions of the country, in urban areas including frontline areas (77%) and rural areas (23%).

8 The survey questions were based on the results of the key informant interviews and FGDs and included the most frequently mentioned answers as response options for survey participants.

9 A signed informed consent from adolescents' parents was mandatory for their participation in the research.

10 The survey also included adults, but the findings presented focus on responses provided by adolescents.

1. > What are adolescents' perceptions and understanding of GBV?

Adolescents' perceptions of GBV reflect deep-rooted gender and social norms, with girls highlighting links between violence and gender inequality, and boys often associating GBV with behaviours like using force to assert dominance, bullying, harassment, and humiliation.

Adolescent boys and girls in Ukraine **have a broad understanding of GBV**. Both groups recognise psychological violence as a form of abuse that can manifest through verbal abuse, criticism, isolation, and social marginalisation—occurring not only in school but also within family and social relationships. Adolescent girls are aware of the link between psychological violence and physical harm. They are more inclined to characterise violence as coercion to actions that result in bodily harm and pay more attention to personal boundaries. Boys, however, generally talk about violence as the use of force against a weaker person to assert dominance through bullying, harassment and humiliation.

Adolescent girls tend to have a better understanding than boys of the link between GBV and gender inequality, and more generally, of the causes of GBV as they relate to gender norms. They are more likely to pay attention to gender roles and expectations, as well as gender inequality and discrimination. They may be more sensitive to gender issues and more consciously consider them in the context of violence.

Adolescent boys' understanding of GBV is mostly correlated with physical aspects of violence and relationships between the sexes as well as control. They also often view GBV as acts that undermine an individual's freedom and autonomy and limit personal agency. However, boys tend to find it harder to explain the causes of GBV (35%), compared to girls (25%).

Adolescent girls are also more likely to believe that there are no specific situations or circumstances that can provoke GBV, putting the onus of the aggression on the perpetrator as a person.

“ I think the answer lies in the name itself – gender-based is the violence that happens based on your gender. It is not a mandatory thesis that it should be the opposite sex, in fact, a woman can also morally and physically commit violence against a woman because of her gender. I think that many people face this, but most gender-based violence is aimed more at women.” – FGD, girl participant.

According to the survey's findings:

- 1 in 3 adolescent girls (35%) – versus 1 in 5 boys (21%) – think that GBV is caused by ideas about gender roles.
- Less than half as many adolescent boys (13%) than adolescent girls (25%) think that GBV is the result of unequal distribution of power in society. Generally, adolescents living in urban areas are more likely to perceive gender roles and unequal distribution of power as some of the main causes of GBV, while adolescents living in rural areas are less likely to be able to identify causes of GBV.
- Twice as many adolescent girls (15%) do not believe that a situation or specific circumstances can provoke GBV, compared to adolescent boys (7%).
- More adolescents living in urban areas in the western and eastern regions are aware of the impact gender roles had on GBV than adolescents living in other regions or in villages.
- Living conditions/life events are more likely to be reported as a cause of GBV by adolescents living in eastern or central Ukraine, both affected by the war.

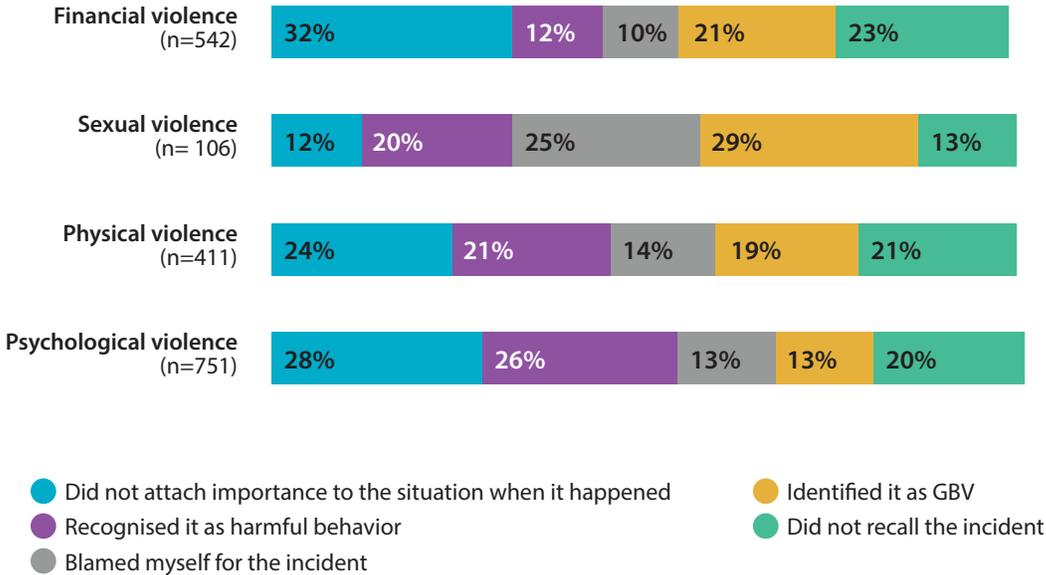
In the FGDs, adolescent girls emphasised the systemic nature of GBV, traditional and patriarchal upbringing, the culture of impunity, and the power imbalance in relationships as key factors contributing to or exacerbating violence against women and girls. However, all adolescents that took part in the online survey identified addiction (alcohol, substance, gambling) as the main factor contributing to/exacerbating GBV, with no noticeable differences between boys and girls.

Despite a good general understanding of GBV and an appreciation of its importance, adolescents have different levels of awareness of the issue. Younger adolescents' understanding of gender equality also tended to be articulated using examples of gender stereotypes, with many citing traditional expectations around male and female roles as a basis for their perceptions of gender-based violence.

“ I know about [GBV] but not in such a deep way. Sometimes, my friends and I raise the topic of gender stereotypes, [but we] noticed that older people more often talk about gender stereotypes.” – FGD, girl participant.

This results in **varying levels of recognition** among adolescents **about the types of GBV** they have experienced, how they felt when the situation took place, and how they responded to it. Given that adolescence is a period marked by significant physical, emotional, and mental changes, it is not surprising that the results vary, as adolescents may experience and recognize GBV in diverse ways during this time of overwhelming transformation.

Reported GBV experiences (n=1,200)



Girls are more likely than boys to recognise various forms of violence as GBV.

Across all forms of GBV, adolescent girls are more likely than boys to recognise violence as GBV, while boys are more likely to not remember or attach importance to their experiences of GBV, with the noticeable exception of sexual violence. Nearly twice as many girls (22%) than boys (12%) said they do not attach any importance to the situation. This may reflect an almost “expected” situation on the basis of their gender, age and societal norms and attitudes.

Sexual violence is in fact the most recognisable form of GBV for adolescent girls and boys, and it is also the least prevalent form of GBV experienced “often” or “sometimes” (in the last year) by adolescents, with no noticeable differences between boys and girls. Internally displaced adolescents are disproportionately affected, with 17% reporting being threatened with sexual violence ‘sometimes’ or ‘frequently’ in the past year.

While adolescent boys tend to focus more on the physical act of sexual GBV, such as the act of rape itself or sexual harassment, **girls are more likely to consider the broader context of sexual violence, such as its social and psychological consequences and its impact on self-esteem and mental health.** They also focus more on the coercive element of sexual violence – being forced to have sex without their consent.

Other forms of GBV, in particular psychological and financial violence, are less likely to be recognised as GBV by adolescents. Interestingly, boys occasionally recognise economic discrimination as a form of GBV, such as wage gaps, although it is less frequently discussed.

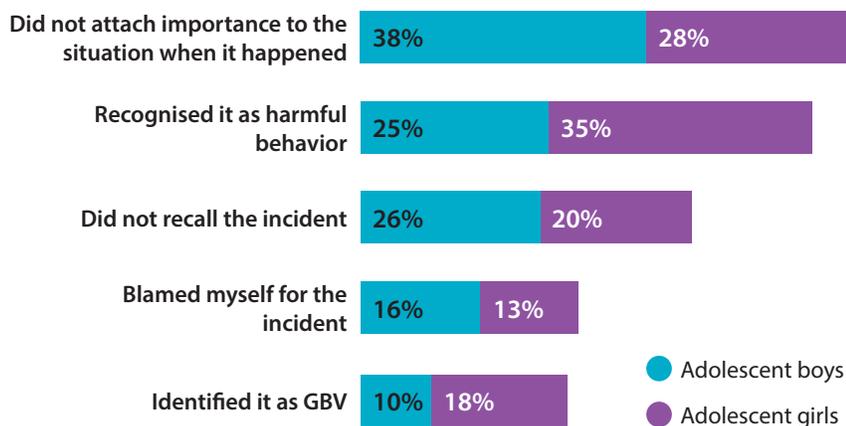
“ GBV is, so to speak, discrimination against a certain gender, for example, unequal wages. When a woman is paid less than a man.” – FGD, boy participant.

Psychological violence is also the most prevalent form of GBV experienced “often” or “sometimes” by adolescents in the past year, with internally displaced adolescents and returnees (i.e. adolescents who have experienced displacement in the past year but have since returned home) more likely to have experienced that form of violence.

Despite its prevalence, when they have experienced psychological violence, adolescents did not consider it important when it happened, or they recognised it as harmful but did not analyse it any further. This may suggest that this behaviour is perceived as being normal or expected within the community.

A closer look at the responses provided by adolescent girls and boys shows that **more girls than boys realised that psychological violence was a bad situation and that it was a form of GBV when it took place.** Adolescent boys are more likely to pay less attention by not considering it important or not remembering it. **Adolescent girls are also more likely to have experienced various forms of psychological violence than boys in the last year.**

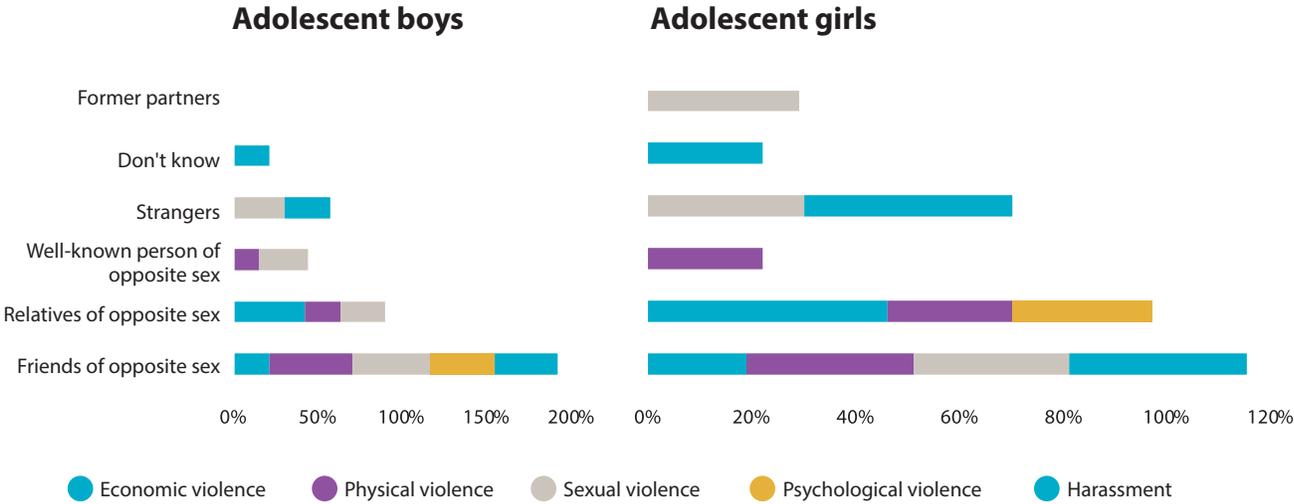
Reported common reactions to psychological violence (n=751)



Adolescent girls are more likely to experience GBV from strangers and former partners than adolescent boys.

Adolescents have a broader understanding of GBV in terms of its perpetrators. Across all forms of GBV, friends of the opposite sex are identified as the main perpetrators of GBV by adolescent girls and boys, reflecting their experiences of GBV in similar settings, in particular school, where adolescents are most likely to interact with their friends. However, the types of perpetrators of GBV against adolescent girls are broader. Adolescent girls are also more likely to experience sexual violence, physical violence, and harassment from strangers and, in the specific case of sexual violence, former partners. Girls in the FGDs overwhelmingly spoke of men as the main perpetrators of GBV, even more so in the context of sexual violence. In the FGDs, adolescent girls described male perpetrators as aggressive and manipulative, and larger and much older than their victims in the case of sexual violence.

Perceived GBV perpetrators by gender and violence type



Generally, adolescents interviewed in FGDs and those who responded to the survey perceive GBV as harmful acts that can happen anywhere, both at home, in the community, and online.



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Adolescent girls are more likely to experience GBV than boys.

Globally, adolescent girls are at a heightened risk of GBV, and rates of GBV are higher among adolescent girls compared to boys and adult women,¹¹ even before humanitarian crises.¹² Gender and social norms and expectations influence adolescent girls' ability to protect themselves from GBV and amplify the risks they face. Adolescence is also a time when societal constructs around gender shift from childhood to adulthood expectations. Control over adolescent girls' lives begins and harmful gender norms are reinforced as a way of exerting power and dominance over adolescent girls.¹³

Nearly half (49%) of the adolescents who responded to the survey and all FGDs conducted with women and girls categorised adolescent girls as the most vulnerable group to GBV, in particular due to their limited autonomy. Girls' position of dependence and power imbalance in relationships were also identified by adolescent girls as key factors which affect their ability to make decision-making and assert their opinions and choices. Other factors such as weight, non-typical appearance, lack of trendy clothes and gadgets, and disability, were also acknowledged as increasing adolescent girls' vulnerability to different forms of GBV. **Adolescent girls in the FGDs specifically singled out their vulnerability to experiencing GBV online, mirroring the online survey's responses and global trends.**¹⁴

The gendered impacts of the war are more acknowledged by survey respondents who live in conflict-affected areas, including internally displaced boys and girls, who are likely to report that females are disproportionately affected by war crimes. However, in the FGDs, the impact of the conflict on adolescent girls' vulnerability to GBV was not specifically acknowledged, nor was an increase in GBV recognised as an issue. Instead, adolescent girls thought that the conflict may divert perpetrators and potentially perpetrators [men] from committing GBV.

“ I think that the war somehow showed that there is a real enemy and a real problem, and those who were engaged in such things, it seems that [this issue] has fallen into the background, because there are more important things.”
– FGD, girl participant.

11 Sardinha, L., Maheu-Giroux, M., Stöckl, H., Meyer, S. R., and García-Moreno, C., Global, regional, and national prevalence estimates of physical or sexual, or both, intimate partner violence against women in 2018. *The Lancet*, 399 (10327), 803–813, 2022.

12 UNFPA, Health Cluster and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Area of Responsibility (AoR), Listen, Engage and Empower - A strategy to address the needs of adolescent girls in the Whole of Syria, March 2018.

13 Women's Refugee Commission, I'm Here: Adolescent Girls in Emergencies: Approach and Tools for improved response, 2014. See also: CARE International, Rapid Gender Analysis: Ukraine, October 2023

14 Plan International, State of the World's Girls 2020: Free to Be Online?, 2021.



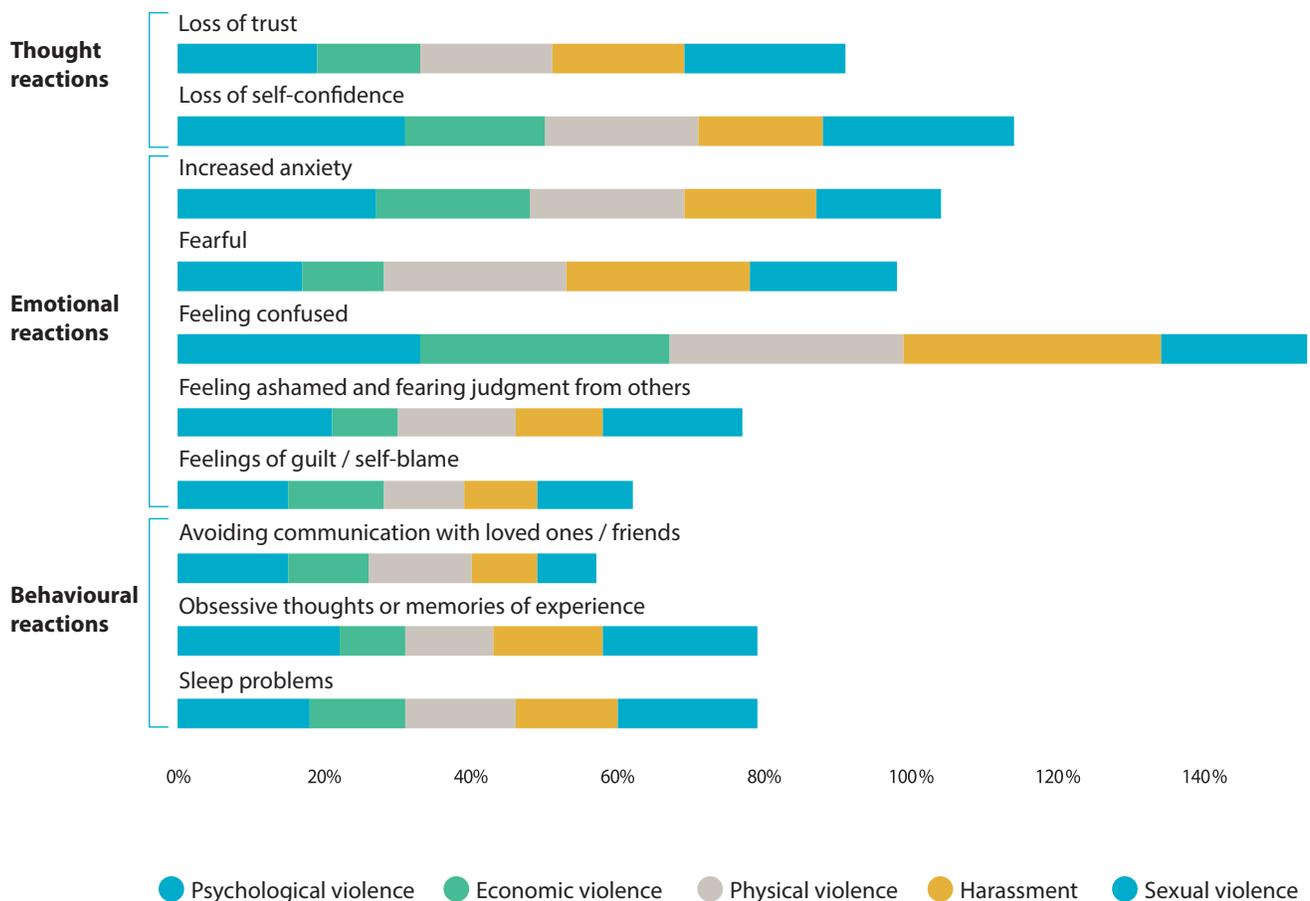
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2. > How do experiences of GBV affect adolescents' mental health?

Boys' and girls' mental health is affected by GBV but the psychological effects of GBV are generally greater on adolescent girls across all forms of violence.

GBV affects both adolescent girls' and boys' mental health and well-being, specifically their behaviour, emotions, and reactions. Confusion, loss of self-confidence, and increased anxiety are the feelings most reported by adolescents across all forms of GBV.

Most reported psychological impacts of GBV
(n=751) - multiple choice



However, across all forms of GBV, adolescent girls' psychological health is generally more likely to be impacted than boys. More girls than boys are also likely to report disruptions to their daily lives as a result of their experiences of GBV. Key results from the survey include:

- Two in every five girls (37% and 39%, respectively) report losing self-confidence and feeling confused compared to a quarter of boys (24% and 26%) after experiencing psychological violence.
- Physical abuse left 36% of girls feeling confused and 26% with a loss in confidence versus 29% and 17% of adolescent boys.
- 41% of girls feel confused and 21% report losing confidence compared to 27% and 12% of boys after experiencing harassment.

This may be explained by the fact that **adolescent girls are more likely than boys to recognise various forms of violence as GBV, and boys are generally less likely to remember or attach importance to their experiences** of GBV. However, in the case of sexual violence, twice as many girls (22%) than boys (12%) reported not attaching any importance to the situation. This may reflect an almost “expected” or “normal” situation on the basis of their gender, age, and societal norms and attitudes.¹⁵

“ Now, I think, there is much more moral violence. It was implemented over many people. If physical violence has traces on the body, then moral violence only marks the soul.”
– FGD, girl participant.

15 Hlavka, H. R., Normalizing Sexual Violence: Young Women Account for Harassment and Abuse. *Gender & Society*, 28(3), 337-358, 2014.



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3. > What are the main barriers to adolescents reporting GBV and seeking help?

Adolescent girls are less likely to seek help for GBV and are more aware of the negative consequences of reporting than boys.

Adolescent's coping mechanisms in response to experiencing GBV largely rely on turning to family members and friends for help and less on reaching out or accessing formal support services. However, in the FGDs, some adolescents expressed shame and embarrassment about discussing GBV with their parents, especially sexual violence, and may be reluctant to speak about GBV with their parents because of fear of misunderstanding or judgement from their parents. If and when they do seek help outside informal and close relationships, adolescents are more likely to contact psychologists, police, and lawyers. The survey's findings, however, show that across all forms of GBV, a large majority of adolescents did not seek help.

A staggering 81% of adolescents reported not seeking help for psychological GBV.

Adolescent girls are less likely to seek help (75%) than boys (59%) for GBV, reflecting the negative perceptions they have when considering the problems GBV survivors may face when reporting/seeking help.

- **Adolescent girls are more likely to believe that reporting will not change anything** (23%) compared to boys (19%) and fear that reporting the experience will be negatively perceived by others (25% versus 17% of boys).
- **Girls are also more likely to be able to identify challenges that GBV survivors may face when seeking help**, such as: misunderstanding or indifference to the reporter's experience (35%), being accused of provoking the violence (30%), and the unwillingness of specialists to work on the survivor's case (22%).
- More than one-third of boys (39%) do not know what problems GBV survivors would face when asking for help/reporting GBV.

“Sexual assault . . . I have heard from many girls who come home late, they are afraid to walk the dark streets simply because they are women. And they have such thoughts that they can be caught here, raped, and then [fear that other people] will say that they provoked [the person to attack them].” – FGD, girl participant.

Adolescents in the FGDs also mentioned the potential negative consequences of reporting/seeking help. In particular, they believe that adults are prejudiced against them based on exemplary or non-exemplary behaviour at school. They also fear that the perpetrator may disclose certain secrets that their parents do not know about them, either through direct or latent blackmail. Adolescent girls point to the divide between the younger and the older generations, the latter more likely to blame the victim for experiencing GBV.

“The majority [of adults] would support [a victim], but there would always be older people who would probably blame the victim because they had a different upbringing from another time.” – FGD, girl participant.

Lack of access to adequate and targeted information and poor awareness of services available impact adolescent girls' ability to access the support they need.

In addition to fearing the negative reactions of people they seek help from, adolescents may not be able to ask / access support and assistance due to lack of (useful and relevant) information on GBV and awareness of what services are available. Access to targeted and appropriate information is not only vital for responding to GBV cases but also to supporting help-seeking behaviours among GBV survivors, who, as amplified by adolescent girls, face multiple barriers to seeking help.

Adolescents in the survey and FGD participants reported that activities at school, including lectures and workshops, are their main source of information on GBV. However, FGD participants highlighted gaps in the content provided, specifically that it may not focus on GBV but violence more generally, or it does not cover important aspects of the issue – including GBV prevalence, how to recognise it through examples of everyday situations, and where to seek help if needed.

 **They came to school to talk about it, but I wouldn't say it was great. I would say it was boring, uninteresting. They didn't tell us the scale of it, they didn't tell us that every person faces it every day." – FGD, girl participant.**

The survey's findings also showed that adolescents' awareness of services available to GBV survivors where they live is limited. This amplifies the challenges they raised around GBV survivors being able to access support and assistance. This is especially the case for support groups (57%), financial assistance (68%), crisis rooms for victims (71%), and shelters (66%) for which adolescents do not know if they are available. Adolescent boys are even less likely than girls to be aware of GBV support services. The FGD discussions, however, point to adolescents' general awareness of services available at school, such as psychological care.

Specifically, the 'Gender-Based Violence in Ukraine Amid War' report reveals that adolescent awareness is low regarding the following support services:

- Social worker/social protection services: Only 48% of respondents were aware of these services, with awareness significantly lower in rural areas (27%).
- Free psychological services: A mere 34% of adolescents knew about free psychological support options, highlighting a critical gap in access to mental health care.
- Legal assistance: While 54% were aware of legal aid in general, accessibility and knowledge about specific services for GBV survivors remain unclear.
- Hotlines/helplines: Awareness of these crucial support channels stood at 49%, with variations across regions and settlement types.

This limited awareness, coupled with the scarcity of services in rural areas and small towns, creates significant barriers for adolescents seeking help, particularly for those experiencing forms of GBV beyond physical violence.

4. > What do adolescents think is needed to reduce GBV?

Adolescent girls believe that a combination of measures, including a stronger response, is needed to reduce GBV in Ukraine.

The research also considered adolescents' views and recommendations on actions needed to reduce GBV in Ukraine. Adolescents - girls in particular - believe that **raising awareness on GBV and increasing adolescents' access to information** - including how to recognise its multiple forms, where to seek help, and ensuring survivors are supported - should be one of the main priorities to reduce GBV in Ukraine. In the FGDs, girls call for specific measures to be implemented, such as placing informational materials about GBV on boards at schools or other places where teenagers can read them; introducing sex education classes; hosting information activities; and offering training/lectures at school on preventing and responding to GBV. Generally, adolescents would like schools to step up the prioritisation of GBV, including through having a trained psychologist in every school.

“ [We should] talk about it more, starting from the very junior school. I remember that they started talking to us about it in the 7th grade, but no one had told anything about this before. Even then, only 15 minutes during the first lesson of the semester were allocated for it, and it was not informative at all. We need to talk about it more.”
- FGD, girl participant.

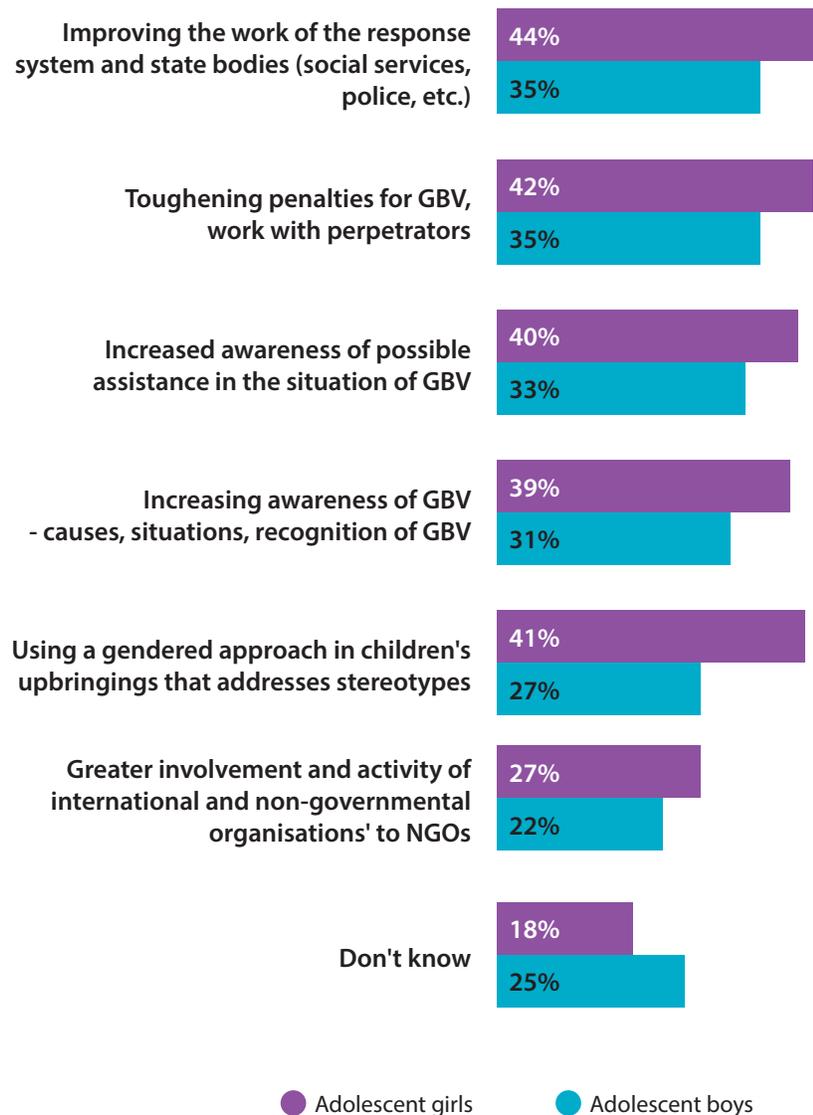
The need for concrete protection measures, such as safe shelters for adolescents specifically - was expressed strongly by adolescent girls during FGDs, alongside tougher laws and more severe punishments for perpetrators. These are priorities that were echoed in the survey's findings. In addition, **44% of adolescent girls in the survey selected improving the effectiveness of the response system as their top priority to reduce GBV.**

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What's needed to reduce GBV?

Adolescents' perspectives by gender



The survey also shows that adolescent girls are more confident than boys in terms of knowing what is needed to reduce GBV. Amplifying previous responses on the influence of gender norms and stereotypes, 41% of adolescent girls (compared to 27% of boys) identified a gendered approach in child rearing as their third priority.

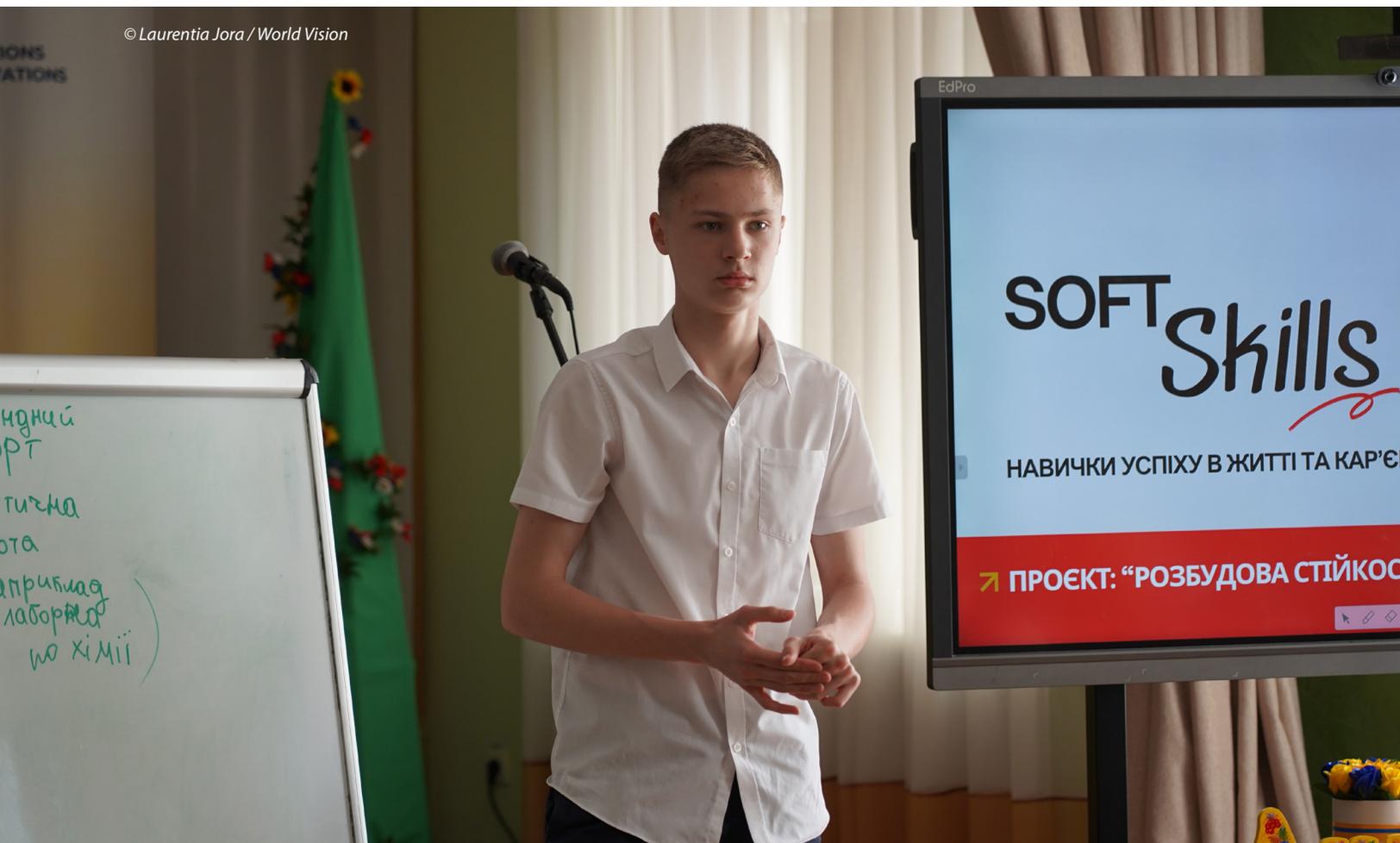
“ Perhaps they expect to hear that they are not to blame for this, but, more often than not [children] are not protected from GBV. [This is why victims should] not close themselves off, on the contrary, they should try to open up to people [so victims don't feel alone].”
– FGD, girl participant.

> Conclusion

Often excluded from or neglected in prevention and response efforts, adolescents have unique vulnerabilities to GBV and specific needs that must be given greater attention. Lack of disaggregated and up-to-date data on GBV in Ukraine perpetuates adolescents' invisibility in programmatic and advocacy efforts. It hinders the delivery of a targeted approach that meets adolescents' priorities and needs, especially adolescent girls who are identified as the most vulnerable to GBV. The research however provides unique insights into the most prevalent forms of GBV that adolescent girls experience and the disproportionate impacts of GBV on their psychological and mental well-being. **It is evident that psychological violence is the main type of violence adolescent girls experience, but it is also one of the forms of GBV least considered in responses.**

As specified under the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was ratified by Ukraine in 1981, the Government of Ukraine must prioritise the prevention of all forms of discrimination and violence against girls and women. When considering the need for action in response to increasing GBV in Ukraine, it is critical for government institutions, donor agencies, as well as national and international humanitarian organizations, to work together and take tangible steps to protect adolescents from GBV. **Concerned stakeholders must plan and deliver a comprehensive, holistic approach that reflects the multiple and overlapping forms of GBV that adolescents experience to create a safer and more supportive environment for them, with a special focus on girls.** They must also consider the diversity of their needs and risks, including for adolescents living in regions affected by conflict and displacement.

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> Recommendations



The government of Ukraine, in coordination with donors and non-governmental organisations, must:

- **Plan and deliver comprehensive services, programmes, and awareness activities that are centred around and tailored to meet the specific needs and priorities of adolescent girls in Ukraine through:**
 - consultations with service providers, schools, and adolescent girls to ensure interventions are adapted specifically for adolescent girls
 - participation of adolescent girls in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of activities that equip them with life and leadership skills and knowledge on how to prevent and respond – including how to seek help after the fact – to various forms of GBV, including psychological violence
 - empowerment activities that provide adolescent girls with tools and opportunities to increase their self-confidence and ability to speak out
 - awareness-raising sessions with service providers and humanitarian actors around the distinct needs of adolescent girls, the importance of including these needs in other sectoral interventions, and the necessity of addressing social and cultural norms that perpetuate the circumstances that keep adolescent girls more vulnerable
 - providing safe and confidential spaces for adolescent girls to seek help and support, increase awareness of GBV, understand their rights and services, and encourage peer-to-peer exchanges.
- **Expand targeted and adapted school- and community-based GBV educational and awareness-raising interventions that focus on prevention and response, including through:**
 - engaging and relevant awareness-raising and educational activities that encompass sex education, knowledge, and skills to help adolescents recognise different forms of GBV
 - creating safe spaces for adolescents to seek specialised support services and assistance and ensuring they have the information on where and how to access that support and report GBV cases.
- **Provide adolescent-friendly mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) that caters for the distinct needs of girls and boys by:**
 - integrating MHPSS interventions into schools
 - providing MHPSS in youth centres and safe spaces
 - training MHPSS providers on how to provide adolescent-friendly services
 - creating and making accessible – including online – tools and resources.

- **Increase awareness-raising campaigns on GBV and offer courses for parents, educators, caregivers, and faith and community leaders, particularly targeting older generations, on how to:**
 - talk about GBV with different ages of children
 - explain the different forms of GBV among adolescents and how to recognise them
 - understand the impacts of GBV
 - acknowledge a culture of silencing GBV survivors
 - put an end to victim blaming children for experiencing GBV.



Donors and development agencies must:

- **Increase funding towards GBV programming in Ukraine, which stood at only 1% of total allocated funding in 2023. They should:**
 - allocate targeted funding to programmes and advocacy and research initiatives focusing on preventing and responding to multiple forms of GBV against adolescent girls
 - increase specific funding towards adolescents, including boys, engagement and support programmes tackling GBV issues
 - invest in programmes specifically tailored to adolescent girls and youth-led advocacy initiatives on GBV prevention and response
 - provide direct and flexible funding to women- and youth-led and women's and children's rights organisations working with and supporting adolescent boys and girls for the prevention of GBV.



International and national non-governmental organisations must:

- **Ensure the specific needs of adolescents, especially girls, are better understood and more visible through:**
 - collaboration with children's rights, women's rights, and youth-led organisations to ensure the consideration and inclusion of adolescents in response
 - organisation of awareness campaigns in Ukraine with a clear call to action around the 16 Days of Activism against GBV with a focus on adolescent girls
 - advocating via existing humanitarian coordination fora, such as clusters and NGO coordination networks, for increased action to address the unique challenges faced by adolescent girls in the context of GBV and discuss advocacy and programmatic opportunities.
- **Generate compelling data on the needs and varying impacts of multiple forms of GBV on adolescents, including adolescent girls with disabilities, to better inform programming and advocacy, including:**
 - calling for increased disaggregated data collection on issues affecting adolescent boys and girls in Ukraine, including GBV
 - deepening the research on contributors of multiple forms GBV among adolescents, disaggregated by gender, age, and other intersectional vulnerability factors.
 - expanding sampling efforts to include underrepresented areas, increasing sample sizes, and incorporating hybrid methods – combining virtual and in-person data collection – to better reach populations with limited internet access.

- **Advocate for:**

- increased Funding for GBV Programs: Current funding for GBV programs in Ukraine falls drastically short of meeting the needs, with only 1% of total humanitarian funding allocated in 2023, representing just 33% of the identified needs.
- implementation of the Istanbul Convention: Despite ratification, the lack of implementing legislation hinders the convention's effectiveness in protecting GBV survivors. Urgent action is needed to align national laws and policies with the convention's provisions.
- specialized GBV Case Management: Investment in training and deploying qualified GBV case managers is essential for providing coordinated and comprehensive support to adolescent survivors, including legal aid, safe shelter, mental health and psychosocial support, and referrals to other necessary services.

Prioritizing these recommendations will allow stakeholders to work towards establishing a more robust and responsive support system for adolescent GBV survivors in Ukraine, ensuring their safety, well-being, and access to justice.





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