



RAPE CRISIS
NETWORK
IRELAND

'Storm and Stress' - An Exploration of Sexual Harassment Amongst Adolescents



Dr. Michelle Walsh
RCNI

An adolescent survivor who took part in this study, wrote a poem shortly afterwards, she has experienced abuse at every stage of her childhood and she has a message for us.



The poet wishes to remain anonymous, the poem is read today by Emma O'Brien (16)

Profile of adolescent participants in this research

Gender

Female adolescents accounted for 59% of the sample. The remaining 41% adolescent participants were male.

Age

The adolescents were divided into two cohorts; older and younger adolescents. The younger adolescents, aged 13 to 15 years accounted for 36% of participants, while the older adolescents aged 16 and 17 years, accounted for the remaining 64% adolescents.

Sexual Orientation

A total of 13% identified as LGBT+. 87% identified as straight.

Profile of youth worker participants in this research

Gender

Most, 67% of the youth workers were female and 33% were male.

Age

The participants ranged in age from 22 to 61 years of age with 76% aged between 20 – 40 years old.

Sexual Orientation

The majority, 90.5% identified as straight while 9.5% identified as LGBT+.

1

Understanding of the issues that contribute to adolescent sexual harassment

Sexual harassment and its relationship to social norms and policy and practice.

Sexual harassment exists on a continuum and needs to be viewed in this way, and that all adolescent violence started somewhere, with milder forms of harassment, before progressing to more serious forms of behaviour, only by understanding this concept can we address sexual harassment, with a bottom up approach.

What is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment is a broad spectrum of behaviours that negatively impact upon the person.

Sexual harassment is unwanted sexual, verbal and nonverbal behaviours which draw on gender-based beliefs and sexist hostility. It can range from unwanted banter, jokes, comments, gestures, and unwelcome sexual advances to unwanted, unwelcome or uninvited sexual contact. In this report that means acts up to and including rape. This is behaviour which violates a person's dignity and creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading or offensive environment.

This study set out to explore milder forms of sexual harassment but the participants reported experiences of sexual abuse, assault and in some instances rape that go well beyond milder forms of sexual harassment, I listened and in this report we respect their voice and their experiences by speaking their truth here.

Impact of sexual harassment

Adolescence is a period of significant developmental transition in the lifecycle of a person. The impact of sexual harassment at this critical juncture can be hugely impactful and have long lasting consequences for the individual.



Why do adolescents perpetrate sexual harassment?

Harmful sexual behaviours presenting in adolescence are usually part of a continuum of behaviour that develops early in childhood as a result of a number of interrelated and interdependent factors.

1. Individual skills and values/ psychological traits

The most prominent psychological traits, include:

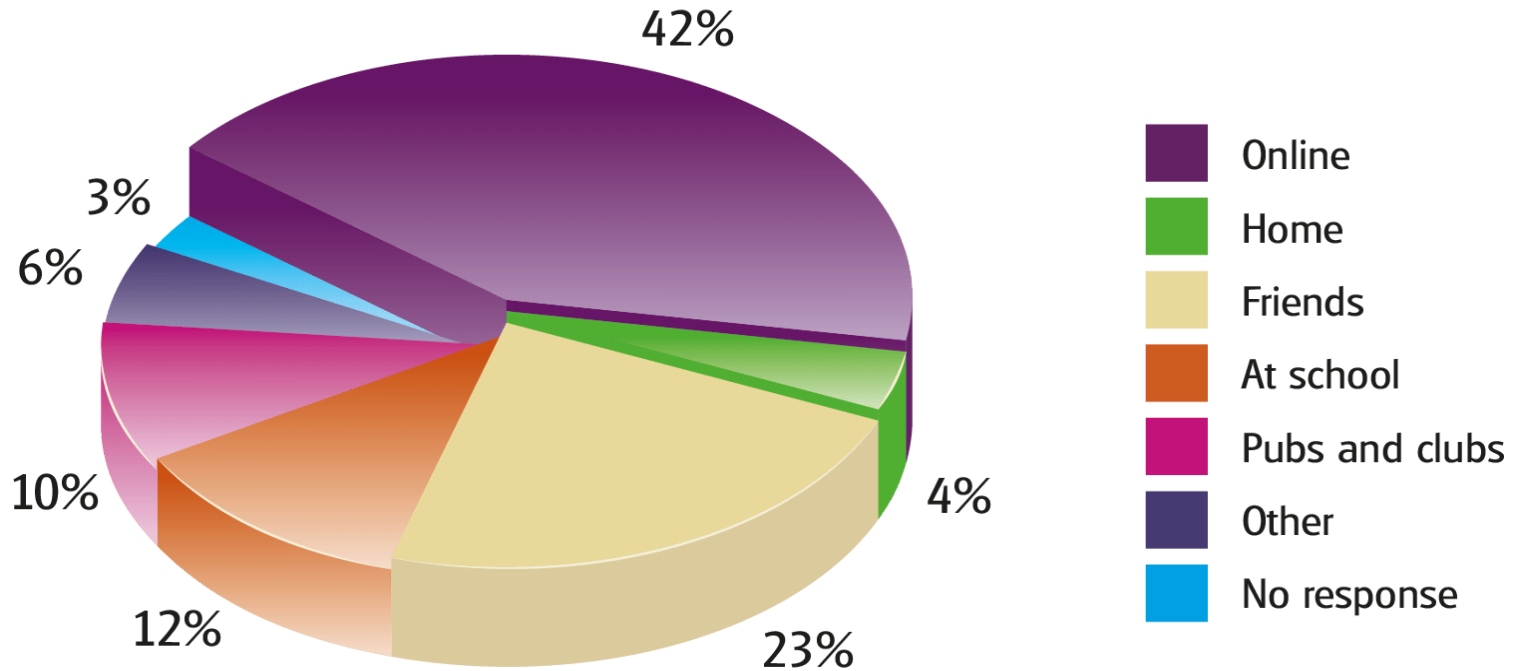
- gender expectations,
- personality and character traits,
- personal values,
- knowledge and moral reasoning,
- self-efficacy,
- self-esteem, and
- emotional regulation.

2. Key environmental processes/social predictors

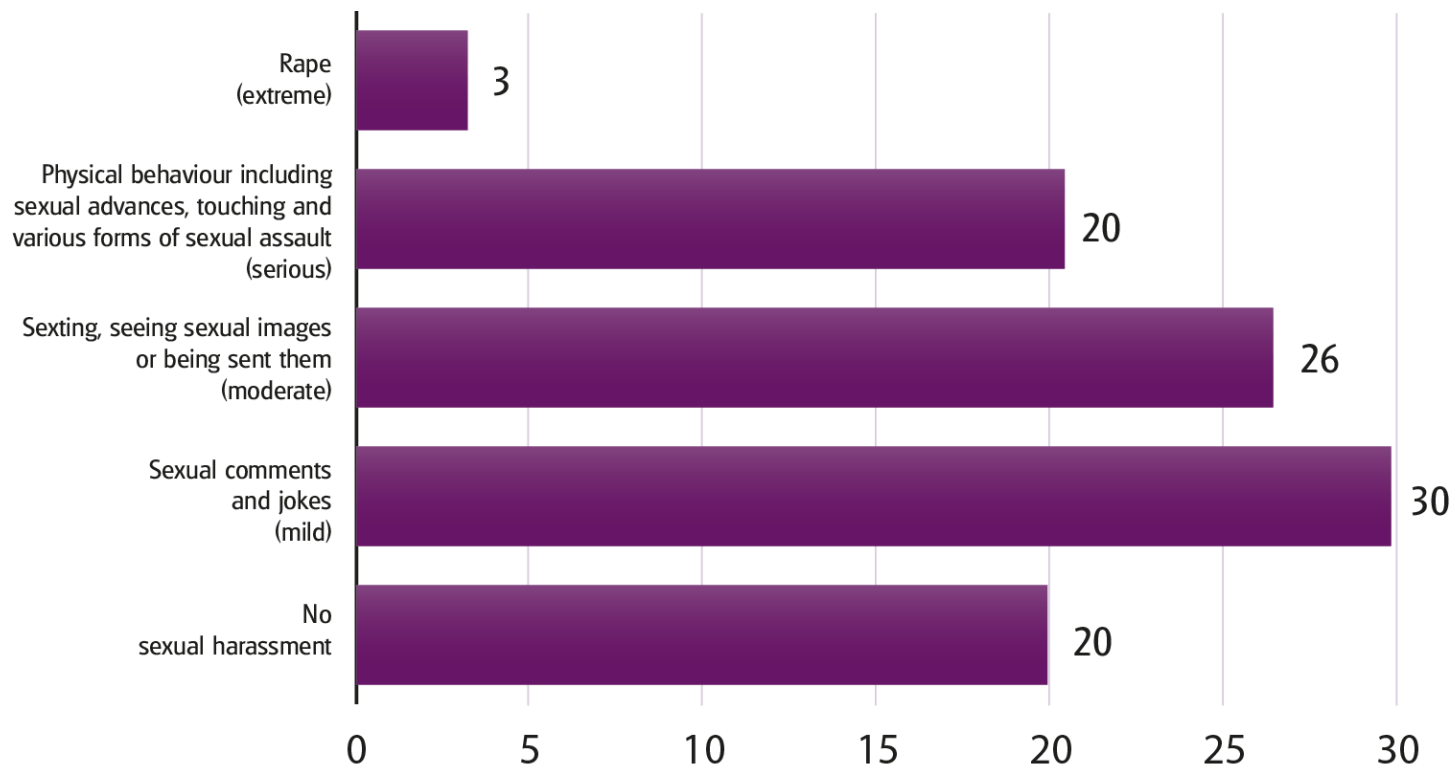
The most prominent social predictors include:

- gender norms,
- parental modelling, siblings, family dynamics,
- peers,
- popularity among friend groups,
- school,
- social background,
- culture,
- media exposure, and
- affiliation to sports or other group activities.

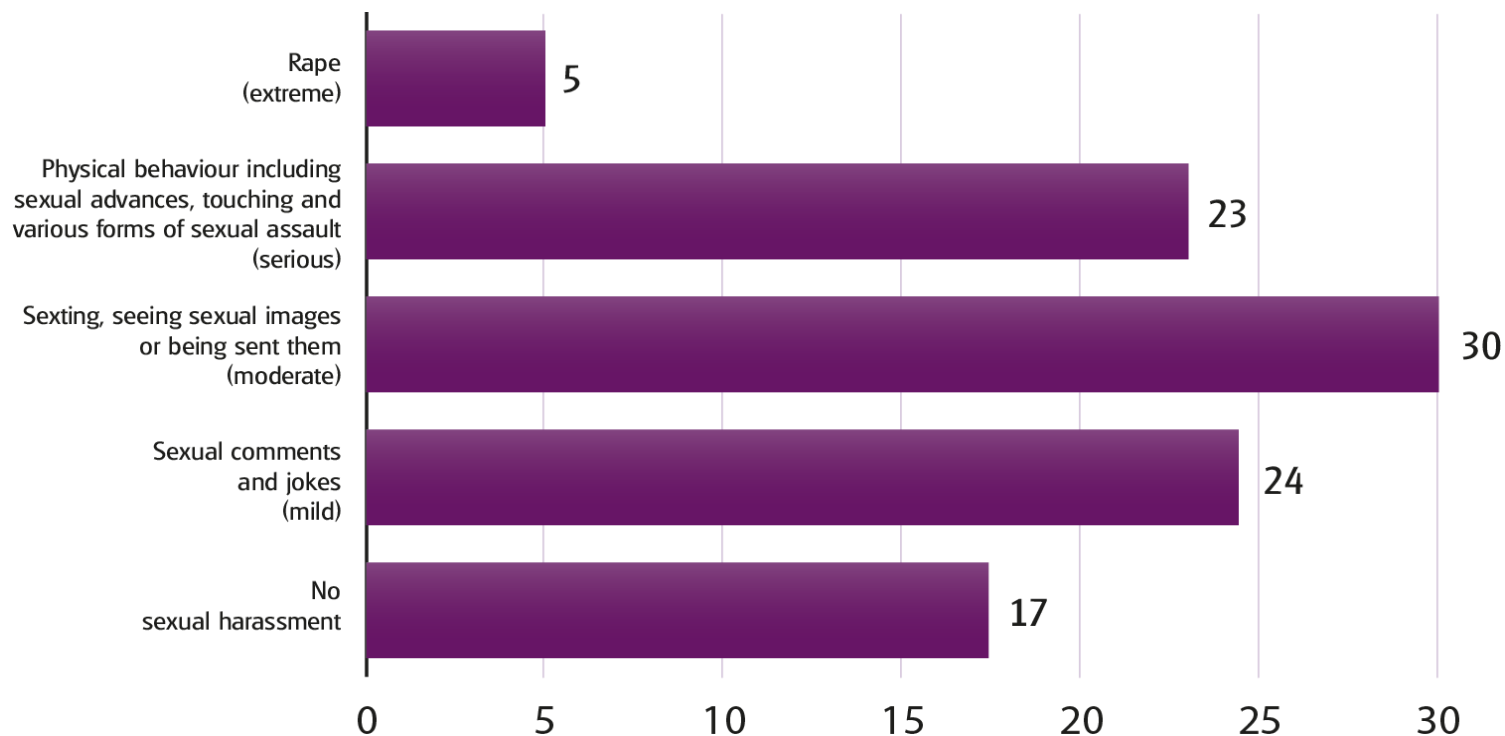
Graph 3: Adolescent sexual harassment by location (n=599)



Graph 1: Levels and type of sexual harassment experienced by adolescents (n=599)



Graph 2: Levels and type of sexual harassment witnessed by adolescents (n=599)



Age

Adolescents aged 16-17 were subjected to much higher levels of sexual harassment than teens ages 13-15

- Older Irish adolescents (16-17) were 2.71 times more likely to report that they had been forced to do something sexual against their will when compared with younger adolescents (13-15).
- Older adolescents were 1.83 times more likely to experience inappropriate, non-consensual touching than younger adolescents.
- Older adolescents were 1.96 times more likely than younger adolescents to agree that sexual harassment occurred within their peer community.

“It’s just the way it is. Like you could be standing talking to your friends and like some guy will try and grab you or whatever. Like you just have to push them off or whatever. So, it’s kind of accepted, that just what boys do. Like, it is hard because no one is going to do anything. It happens to everyone at least once.”

(Adolescent participant)

Gender

Girls were subjected to higher levels of sexual harassment than boys

- Girls were 2.11 times more likely than boys to report that they experienced unwelcome sexual comments.
- Girls were 2.49 times more likely to have experienced unwanted sexual touches than boys.
- Girls were 1.92 times more likely to have experienced online sexual harassment than boys.
- Girls were 1.50 times more likely than boys to agree that sexual harassment occurs within their adolescent peer community.
- Boys were 1.92 times more likely to be exposed to homophobic name calling than girls.

“So, he brought me away from the playground where everyone was, and he started trying to touch me. Then I pushed him off me and he kept pushing me back to him. Then I pushed him away and I started crying and he was like ‘Your friend told me you wanted to do this’”

(Adolescent participant)

Sexuality

Adolescents who were LGBT+ were subjected to higher levels of sexual harassment than those who were heterosexual

“I think because a lot of my friends being LGBT, like it happens a lot more. Like almost every one of my close friends has experienced some sort of sexual harassment”

(Adolescent participant)

- LGBT+ adolescents were 2.95 times more likely to have experienced unwelcome sexual comments in comparison to straight adolescents.
- LGBT+ adolescents were 1.97 times more likely to have been forced into a non-consensual sexual experience than straight adolescents.
- LGBT+ adolescents were 1.99 times more likely to experience inappropriate or unwanted touching than adolescents who were straight.
- Adolescents who identified as LGBT+ were 2.73 times more likely than respondents who identified as straight to agree that sexual harassment occurs within their adolescent peer community.
- Homophobic name calling is by no means confined to LGBT+ people and the use of homophobic slurs against straight adolescents is part of the way that a general homophobic atmosphere is created and maintained. However, LGBT+ adolescents were 11.81 times more likely to have the direct experience of being called gay or lesbian in a negative way than straight adolescents.
- 68% of those who identified as LGBT+ experienced serious sexual harassment compared with 20% of the whole population in the study.

In a 12 month period:

80% of adolescents disclosed being subjected to some form of sexual harassment

24% of adolescents disclosed that they were subjected to physical or extreme forms of sexual harassment

83% of adolescents witnessed some form of sexual harassment

“It’s always other causes, you never hear of anybody coming in to our age group looking for our opinion and what you’re doing right now, I just really appreciate what you’re doing I just wanted to say that to you.”

(Adolescent participant)

In a 12 month period:

28% of adolescents witnessed physical or extreme forms of sexual harassment

78% of adolescent participants said that sexual harassment occurred within their peer community

100% All of the youth workers who participated in the study stated that they had witnessed sexual harassment with levels varying from verbal to extreme forms of sexual harassment

“I actually had to cancel two groups because of being harassed myself. In the end, it was a decision that I had to say ‘I am no longer going on this group because of the way I am being treated by these young people. At the time on one of the groups I was actually pregnant there was a lot of comments on ‘How often did I have sex with my husband to get pregnant?’ would I ‘have sex with them in the bathroom’ this sort of thing, so I was coming into work knowing I was facing this”

(Youth Worker participant)

In a 12 month period:

57% of youth workers experienced sexual harassment from adolescents while at work

68% of LGBT+ adolescent participants experienced serious sexual harassment compared with 20% of the whole population

47% of adolescents did not know how to report sexual harassment within their school.

“I felt that I had nothing, I couldn't have any positive influence on them, and that's how I saw it, that I have my own limitations and because I'm female, and at that time... that I had no good thing to bring to those people”

(Youth Worker participant)

Dr. Walsh's Ecological Framework



Individual Level (Microsystem)

Includes personal beliefs and experiences that are shaped by our interpersonal connections.

Agencies this section applies to: **Adolescents**

Dr. Walsh's Ecological Framework



Individual Level (Microsystem)

Includes personal beliefs and experiences that are shaped by our interpersonal connections.

Agencies this section applies to: **Adolescents**

Interpersonal Level (Mesosystem)

Includes belief systems and experiences of close family, friends and relations that are shaped by our interpersonal connections.

Agencies this section applies to:

Family **Parents** **Guardians**
Carers **Friends**

Dr. Walsh's Ecological Framework



Individual Level (Microsystem)

Includes personal beliefs and experiences that are shaped by our interpersonal connections.

Agencies this section applies to: **Adolescents**

Community Level (Ecosystem)

Includes schools, work, places of worship and other organisations within community where our individual and interpersonal beliefs are shaped.

Agencies this section applies to:

Youth workers

Educators & teachers

Social care organisation

Community organisations

Sports organisations

Health professionals

Legal professionals

Interpersonal Level (Mesosystem)

Includes belief systems and experiences of close family, friends and relations that are shaped by our interpersonal connections.

Agencies this section applies to:

Family

Parents

Guardians

Carers

Friends

Dr. Walsh's Ecological Framework



Societal Level (Macrosystem)

Includes all areas of society including government, policy, practices and all forms of media that help shape the belief systems held by the other levels of the framework.

Agencies this section applies to:

- Policy makers
- Government departments
- Mass media & entertainment content creators
- Internet service providers
- Law makers
- Religious organisations

Community Level (Ecosystem)

Includes schools, work, places of worship and other organisations within community where our individual and interpersonal beliefs are shaped.

Agencies this section applies to:

- Youth workers
- Educators & teachers
- Social care organisation
- Community organisations
- Sports organisations
- Health professionals
- Legal professionals

Individual Level (Microsystem)

Includes personal beliefs and experiences that are shaped by our interpersonal connections.

Agencies this section applies to: Adolescents

Interpersonal Level (Mesosystem)

Includes belief systems and experiences of close family, friends and relations that are shaped by our interpersonal connections.

Agencies this section applies to:

- Family
- Parents
- Guardians
- Carers
- Friends

Dr. Walsh's Ecological Framework

Intergenerational Level (Chronosystem, Norms, Structures, Practices)

Includes changes that happen over time from one generation to the next.

Agencies this section applies to:

Whole of society

Societal Level (Macrosystem)

Includes all areas of society including government, policy, practices and all forms of media that help shape the belief systems held by the other levels of the framework.

Agencies this section applies to:

Policy makers

Government departments

Mass media & entertainment content creators

Internet service providers

Law makers

Religious organisations



Community Level (Ecosystem)

Includes schools, work, places of worship and other organisations within community where our individual and interpersonal beliefs are shaped.

Agencies this section applies to:

Youth workers

Educators & teachers

Social care organisation

Community organisations

Sports organisations

Health professionals

Legal professionals

Individual Level (Microsystem)

Includes personal beliefs and experiences that are shaped by our interpersonal connections.

Agencies this section applies to: Adolescents

Interpersonal Level (Mesosystem)

Includes belief systems and experiences of close family, friends and relations that are shaped by our interpersonal connections.

Agencies this section applies to:

Family

Parents

Guardians

Carers

Friends

Responding to Adolescent Sexual Harassment - because they asked us to and because they believe in *themselves* and in *us*.

- 81% of adolescent participants felt that, with the support of their peer group, they had the power to combat sexual harassment.



Individual Level (Microsystem)

Includes personal beliefs and experiences that are shaped by our interpersonal connections.

Agencies this section applies to: **Adolescents**

Interpersonal Level (Mesosystem)

Includes belief systems and experiences of close family, friends and relations that are shaped by our interpersonal connections.

Agencies this section applies to:

Family **Parents** **Guardians**
Carers **Friends**

2

**Outlines recommendations
needed to address
adolescent sexual
harassment**

Responding to Adolescent Sexual Harassment - because they asked us to and because they believe in *themselves* and in *us*.

- 84% of the adolescents in this study felt that the adults including their parents, teachers and other influential adults that they interact with within the school environment have the power to address issues of adolescents' sexual harassment.



Community Level (Ecosystem)

Includes schools, work, places of worship and other organisations within community where our individual and interpersonal beliefs are shaped.

Agencies this section applies to:

Youth workers

Educators & teachers

Social care organisation

Community organisations

Sports organisations

Health professionals

Legal professionals

Individual Level (Microsystem)

Includes personal beliefs and experiences that are shaped by our interpersonal connections.

Agencies this section applies to: Adolescents

Interpersonal Level (Mesosystem)

Includes belief systems and experiences of close family, friends and relations that are shaped by our interpersonal connections.

Agencies this section applies to:

Family Parents Guardians

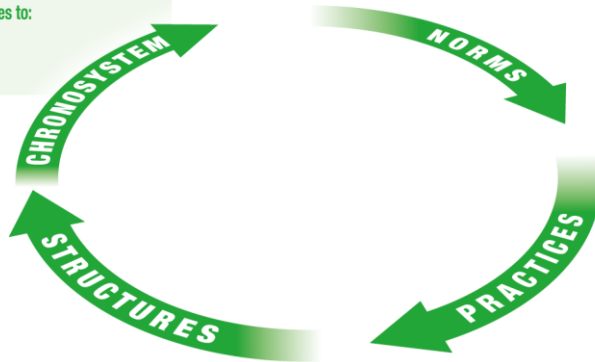
Carers Friends

Intergenerational Level
(Chronosystem, Norms, Structures, Practices)

Includes changes that happen over time from one generation to the next.

Agencies this section applies to:

Whole of society



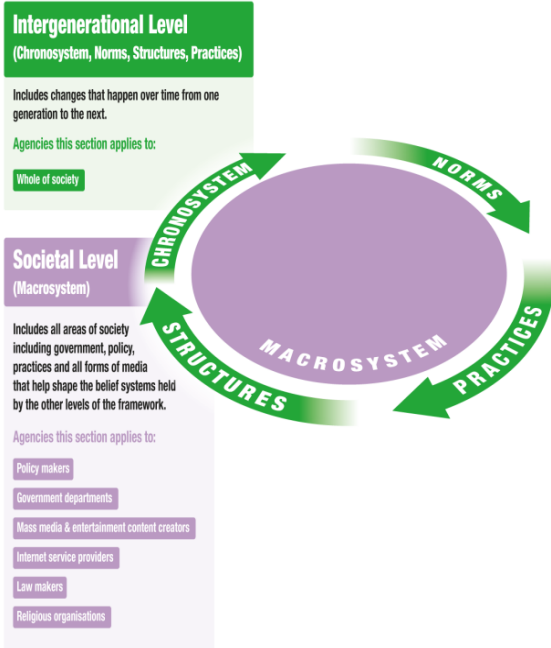
RCNI's Ecological Intergenerational Recommendations

To

Address
Sexual
Violence

Let's make the world a
better place for this
next generation and
the next.

RCNI's Ecological Society Recommendations



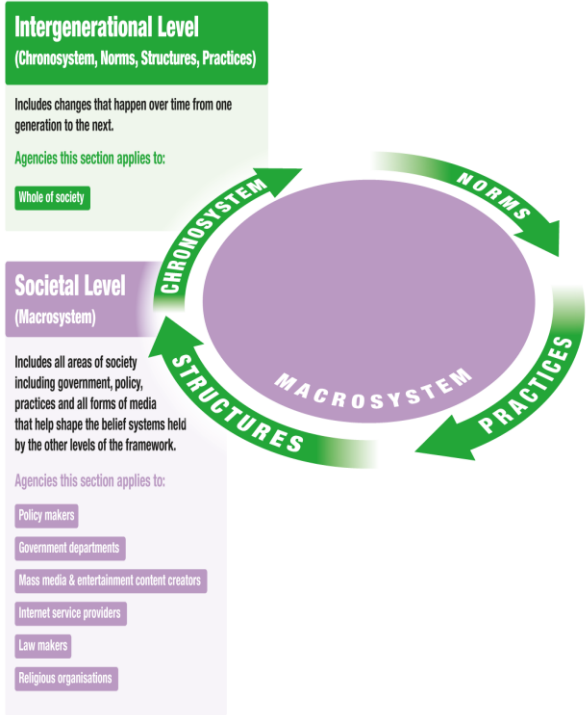
1. Change the messages - whole of society prevention and awareness including the impact of drugs, alcohol use, pornography, and online sexual violence.
2. Ensure legislation and protections are sufficient and appropriate to respond to and protect from online harassment including a dedicated Online Safety Commissioner & an individual complaints mechanism.
3. Ensure adolescent intervention programmes are available nationwide.
4. The 3rd National Strategy on Domestic Sexual and Gender Based Violence should contain a framework of monitoring, research, evaluation and review specifically on adolescent vulnerability and empowerment.

RCNI's Ecological Society Recommendations

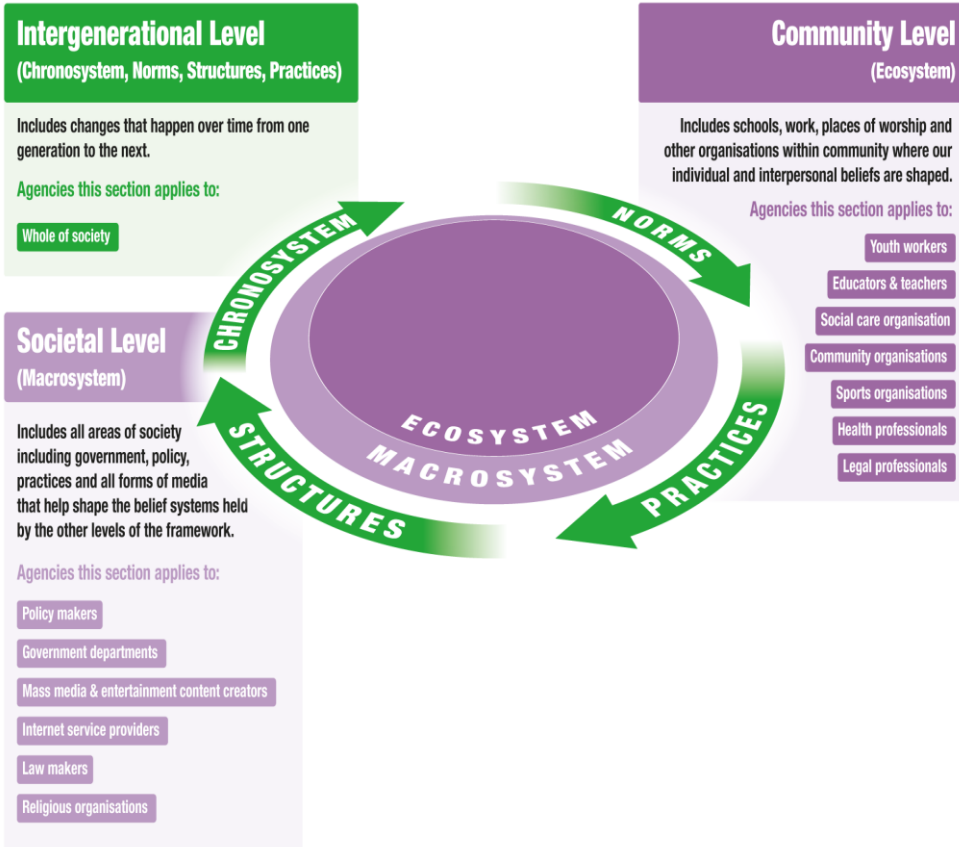
5. Build safer schools – Dept. of Education: National Framework for schools to include:

- Delivery of proven curriculum content
- Train and support the trainers
- Proactively challenge and exploring social norms, gender inequality and intersectionality in the school wide culture.
- Support and partner with parents
- Clear system of reporting
- Clear systems of support for those who experience sexual harassment
- Clear systems of intervention for those adolescents who perpetrate sexual harassment
- Protect workers through adequate organisational response and zero tolerance practices
- Support staff experiencing sexual harassment through appropriate processes and legal remedies if necessary

6. Include wrap around recommendations on adolescent prevention and support in the 3rd National Strategy on Domestic Sexual and Gender Based Violence

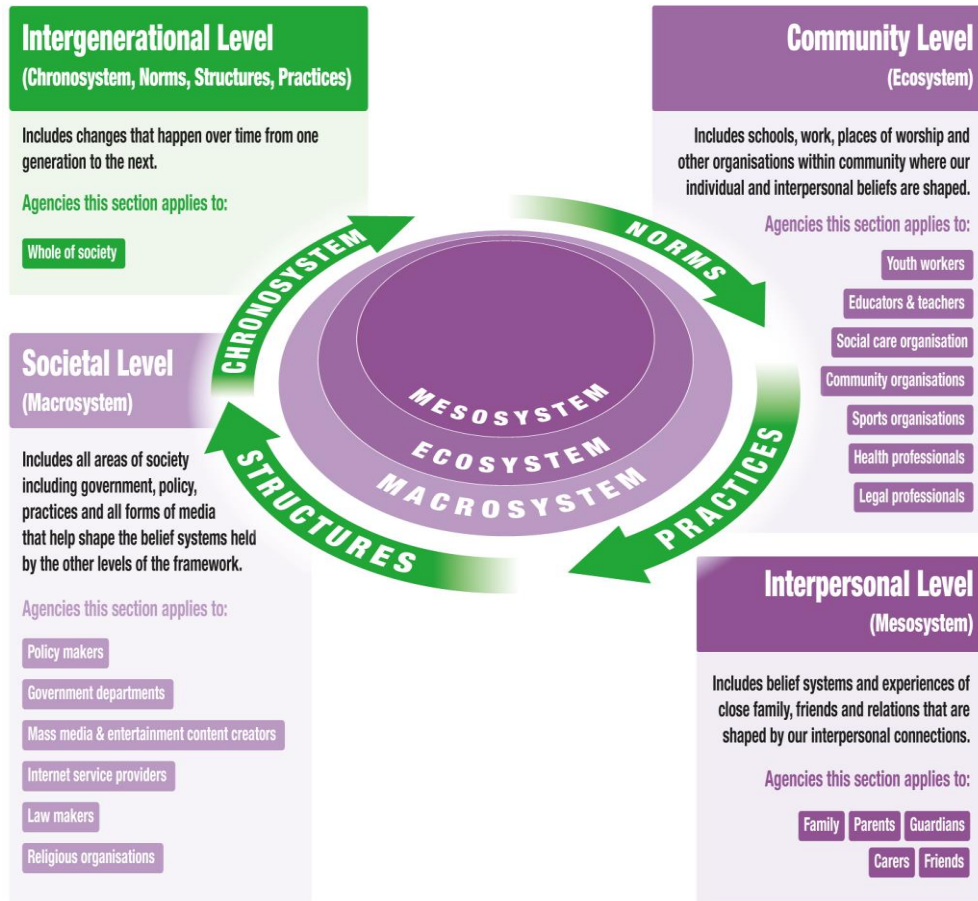


RCNI's Ecological Community Recommendations



1. Be there for adolescents when they need us
 1. with clear referral and collaboration pathways for parents, adolescent self-referral, schools and other organisations.
 2. Ensure adolescent sexual harassment counselling and support is available in schools, in Rape Crisis Centres and other community settings.

RCNI's Ecological Interpersonal Recommendations



1. Listen and respond to adolescents.
2. Support parents in the community including providing digital skills resources and tools

RCNI's Ecological Individual Recommendations

Intergenerational Level

(Chronosystem, Norms, Structures, Practices)

Includes changes that happen over time from one generation to the next.

Agencies this section applies to:

Whole of society

Societal Level

(Macrosystem)

Includes all areas of society including government, policy, practices and all forms of media that help shape the belief systems held by the other levels of the framework.

Agencies this section applies to:

Policy makers

Government departments

Mass media & entertainment content creators

Internet service providers

Law makers

Religious organisations

Community Level

(Ecosystem)

Includes schools, work, places of worship and other organisations within community where our individual and interpersonal beliefs are shaped.

Agencies this section applies to:

Youth workers

Educators & teachers

Social care organisation

Community organisations

Sports organisations

Health professionals

Legal professionals

Interpersonal Level

(Mesosystem)

Includes belief systems and experiences of close family, friends and relations that are shaped by our interpersonal connections.

Agencies this section applies to:

Family Parents Guardians

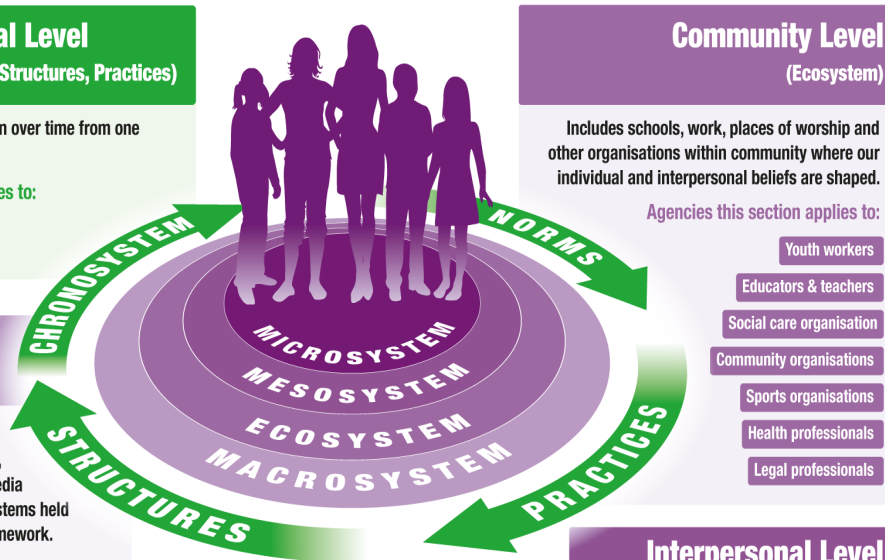
Carers Friends

Individual Level

(Microsystem)

Includes personal beliefs and experiences that are shaped by our interpersonal connections.

Agencies this section applies to: Adolescents



Challenge your own gender and social norms, adopt a zero tolerance attitude towards all forms of sexual violence.

Thank you

