

# **NATIONAL SURVEY OF CHILD AND YOUTH VICTIMIZATION IN POLAND**

*Research report*



**Nobody's Children Foundation**

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Developed under the auspices of the Ministry of National Education and the Children's Ombudsman, Mr. Marek Michalak.



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## **1. Key findings**

- 71% of teenagers (11 to 17-year-olds) have experienced at least one form of victimization.
- More than half of the respondents have experienced peer and sibling victimization, which is the most common category of victimization. The most frequent forms of peer and sibling victimization are peer or sibling assault (41%) and emotional bullying (28%).
- More than one in three (34%) teenagers has been abused by known adults. Every fifth young person has experienced psychological abuse by adults (22%), and nearly the same proportion have been physically abused (21%).
- 27% of teenagers have fallen victim to conventional crime. The largest proportion of young people have experienced vandalism (21%), while robbery and assault with a weapon have been much less common (8% and 5%, respectively).
- 18% of the respondents have witnessed violence at home.
- 9% have experienced at least one form of noncontact sexual victimization in most cases these were the less severe forms of sexual abuse: verbal sexual harassment (5,3%) and online grooming (5,1%); 6% of teenagers have fallen victim to at least one form of contact sexual victimization.
- 6% of children have experienced neglect.
- One in ten teenagers is a polyvictim which means that he or she has experienced 6 or more forms of victimization.

## **2. Introduction**

The report presents the key findings of the research project “National Survey of Child and Youth Victimization in Poland”, carried out by the Nobody’s Children Foundation in 2012. Detailed results and additional data analyses will be published by the Foundation in 2013.

The research subject was child and youth victimization. The specific forms of victimization that were measured in the study are described in more detail in the “method” section of the report.

The project was inspired by similar research conducted in the USA by the Crimes against Children Research Center and in the UK by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. “National Survey of Child and Youth Victimization in Poland” is the first Polish survey on child and youth victimization conducted on a representative sample of children and young people aged 11–17. The project was carried out by the Research Department of the Nobody’s Children Foundation: Katarzyna Makaruk, Monika Sajkowska, Joanna Włodarczyk and Szymon Wójcik, in cooperation with Millward Brown research agency.

## **3. Research objectives**

1. To identify the forms of violence and sexual abuse experienced by children and young people in the preceding year and in their lifetime.
2. To compare the prevalence of child victimization in Poland with findings from other countries.
3. To identify risk factors.
4. To obtain new data to be used for improving and planning prevention and intervention efforts.

## **4. Method**

The aim of the study was to explore victimization in the population of children and youth in Poland aged 11-17<sup>1</sup>. In 2012 this population was estimated to 2 788 794<sup>2</sup>.

The study was conducted on a national sample (N=1005) of children and young people in October and November 2012. The maximum error of estimation for this size of the sample is +/- 3,09% for 95% level of confidence.

In order to ensure maximal validity and reliability of the research the methods used had been adapted to sensitive subject and specific target group. Therefore the Audio-CASI technique was applied, which excludes the participation of the interviewer and is recommended in this kind of research. Each participant was provided with a laptop, on which the questionnaire was presented, and headphones where the pre-recorded questions were read out aloud by a reader. The tool script was developed with the Nipo Odin software.

The survey was conducted in educational institutions (schools) by 26 specially trained employees of Millward Brown. The project required both the school principals' and the parents' consent to the students' participation in the survey.

### **4.1. Questionnaire**

The tool used for gathering information about young people's victimization experiences was inspired by the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ) by Sherry L. Hamby and David Finkelhor<sup>3</sup> (Hamby, Finkelhor 2001). This questionnaire was designed to collect data about the broadest possible range of young people's victimization experiences.

When developing the questionnaire for the Polish survey, the authors drew on the JVQ by using its concept of victimization. However, several changes and additions were introduced in order to make the tool as non-disturbing as possible and to adapt it to the Polish context.

Questions used in the survey concerned 22 forms of victimization: violence and abuse by both peers and adults. To make it easier for the respondent to understand the questions and to recall incidents of victimization, each question was preceded by a short, two-sentence story coming in two versions – for boys and for girls<sup>4</sup>. Each of the stories described a

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<sup>1</sup> Some questions were asked to respondents aged 12 or 13 and older

<sup>2</sup> The population of 30 June 2012, GUS. (2012). Ludność według płci i roku urodzenia. <http://demografia.stat.gov.pl/bazademografia/Tables.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> Hamby, S., Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., & Kracke, K. (2011). The Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire toolkit. [http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/jvq/index\\_new.html](http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/jvq/index_new.html).

<sup>4</sup> Introduced by Monika Sajkowska

situation illustrating the form of victimization to be assessed. Here is an example of how the questions were asked:

**Caroline was walking home at night. Suddenly a drunk man came up to her and threatened her with a knife.**

At any time in your life, did anyone hit or attack you with an object or weapon, e.g., a stick, a knife or a rock?

*If this has happened to you more than once, answer the questions below thinking of the last time when it happened.*

- Yes
- No
- I don't want to answer this question

If the respondent answered "Yes" to the main question (*At any time in your life...?*), additional questions were asked concerning the time (*Did this happen in the last year?*), the perpetrator (*Who did this? What was the gender of this person?*) and, in some cases, other details.

After adaptation the JVQ questionnaire, the following forms of victimization were assessed in the study:

## **1. CONVENTIONAL CRIME**

### Robbery

*At any time in your life, did anyone use force to take something from you that you were carrying or wearing?*

### Vandalism

*At any time in your life, did anyone break or damage any of your things on purpose?*

### Assault with weapon

*At any time in your life, did any adult stranger hit or attack you with an object or weapon, e.g., a stick, a knife, or a rock?*

## **2. ABUSE BY ADULTS**

### Physical abuse by adults

*At any time in your life, did any grown-up family member or another known adult hit, kick or physically hurt you in any other way ?*

### Psychological/emotional abuse by adults

*At any time in your life, did any grown-up you know ever call you names, say mean things about you, or say they don't want you?*

### **3. NEGLECT**

#### Physical neglect

*When you were under 12, did you ever come to school wearing dirty clothes, because you had no clean ones to put on?*

#### Lack of care

*When you were under 12, did it ever happen that no one looked after you when you were sick?*

### **4. PEER AND SIBLING VICTIMIZATION**

#### Group assault

*At any time in your life, did any group of unfamiliar kids or young people hit, jump, or attack you?*

#### Peer or sibling assault

*At any time in your life, did your friend, sibling or another child/teenager in your family hit you?*

#### Bullying

*At any time in your life did your friends, siblings or other children/teenagers in your family bully you?*

#### Emotional bullying

*At any time in your life, did you feel really bad because other children or teenagers called you names, said mean things about you, told you that you were unwelcome, or didn't want you around?*

#### Dating violence (over 13)

*At any time in your life, did a boyfriend or girlfriend slap you?*

### **5. CONTACT SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION**

#### Sexual assault by a known adult

*At any time in your life, did any of your adult family members or another grown-up you know touch your private parts when they shouldn't have, make you touch their private parts, or force you to do other sexual things?*

#### Non-specific Sexual Assault

*At any time in your life, did a grown-up you did not know touch your private parts when they shouldn't have, make you touch their private parts, or force you to do other sexual things?*



Commercial sexual exploitation

*At any time in your life, did you have sex in exchange for money or other gifts?*

Sexual assault by a peer/sibling

*At any time in your life, did any other child or teenager touch your private parts, make you touch their private parts, or force you to do other sexual things?*

Statutory rape and sexual misconduct

*Before you turned 15, did you have any form of sexual contact with an adult (anyone 18 or older), even when you both wanted it?*

**6. NONCONTACT SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION**

Flashing / Sexual exposure

*At any time in your life, did anyone make you look at their private parts?*

Verbal sexual harassment

*At any time in your life, did anyone hurt your feelings by saying or writing something sexual about you?*

Online grooming

*At any time in your life, did you make friends on the internet with a person who later tried to urge you to some sexual activity?*

**7. WITNESSING, INDIRECT VICTIMIZATION**

Witness to domestic violence

*At any time in your life, did you see one of your parents/caregivers get hit by the other parent/caregiver?*

Witness to parent/caregiver assault of peers/siblings

*At any time in your life, did you see you parent/caregiver hit or beat your siblings or other children in the family (e.g., cousins), not including spanking on the bottom?*

## 4.2. Pilot study

The first phase of work on the research tool was the analysis of Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire and selection of the victimization forms which were to be covered by the study in Poland. Afterwards the selected questions were translated and adapted to Polish context.

In May and June 2012 a preliminary pilot study was carried out in order to test the research tools. Firstly, 9 face-to-face interviews were conducted with teenagers aged 12–17, which led to introduction of modifications to the original version of the questionnaire. At next stage the tool was consulted with psychologists working with children. After introducing all suggested changes, the second phase of the pilot study was conducted on a sample of 75 respondents (3 groups of 25 students of the primary school, middle school, and secondary school, respectively). The survey confirmed that the questions were understandable and accessible for young target group. Pilot study also proved the headphones with the recorded questions to be highly useful.

## 4.3. Sample

The study was conducted on a stratified random sample N=1005 of Polish teenagers. The sample structure was based on school type (Table 1).

**Table 1.** *Sample structure: type of school and form, (unweighted data)*

School type	Total		Gender				Age			
			Female		Male		11-14 years		15-17 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary school	391	39%	200	20%	191	19%	391	39%	-	-
Middle school	389	39%	238	24%	151	15%	271	27%	118	12%
Comprehensive secondary school	100	10%	66	7%	34	3%	-	-	100	10%
Technical secondary school	125	12%	56	6%	69	7%	1	-	124	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1005</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>560</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>445</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>663</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>34%</b>

There were 56% of girls and 44% of boys, 66% of 11-to-14-year-olds and 34% of 15-to-17-year-olds in the sample. The data was weighted for analysis to take into account the demographic structure of the population.

**Table 2.** Sample structure after data weighting (rounded to the nearest whole number)

School type	Total		Gender				Age			
			Female		Male		11-14 years		15-17 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary school	391	39%	193	19%	198	20%	391	39%	-	-
Middle school	389	39%	199	20%	190	19%	271	27%	118	12%
Comprehensive secondary school	96	10%	59	6%	37	4%	-	-	96	10%
Technical secondary school	129	13%	51	5%	78	8%	1	-	128	13%
<b>Total</b>	1005	100%	503	50%	502	50%	663	66%	342	34%

#### 4.4. Limitations

Due to several limitations of the study the possibility of underestimation of the victimization scale in Poland should be considered. These limitations were primarily connected with the fact that the study relied solely on participants' answers. Some experiences could have been not revealed, some could have been difficult to recall or were not considered by children to be the cases of victimization.

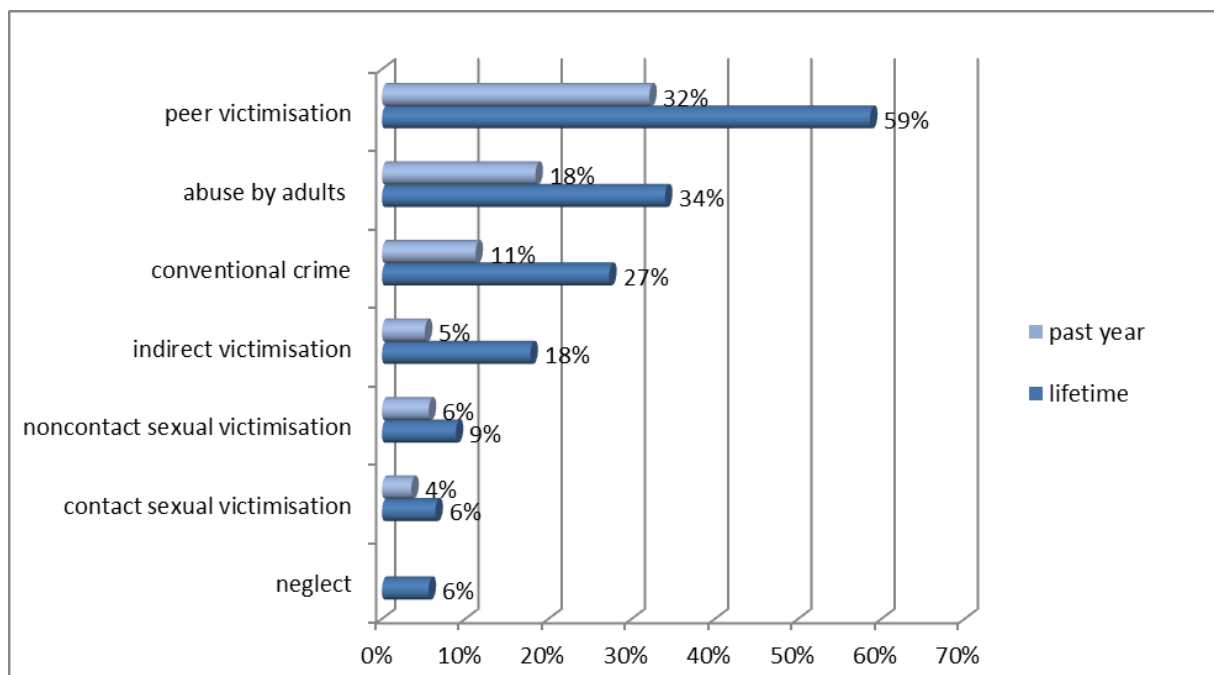
The next limitation was a requirement of parental consent for participation in the study. There is a risk that parent perpetrators would refuse such permission. Therefore prevalence of victimized children in Poland could be in fact higher than reported.

During research process efforts were made to provide the highest level of comfort and anonymity (the Audio-CASI technique), however, in cases of sensitive questions some of experiences could remain unrevealed.

## 5. Results

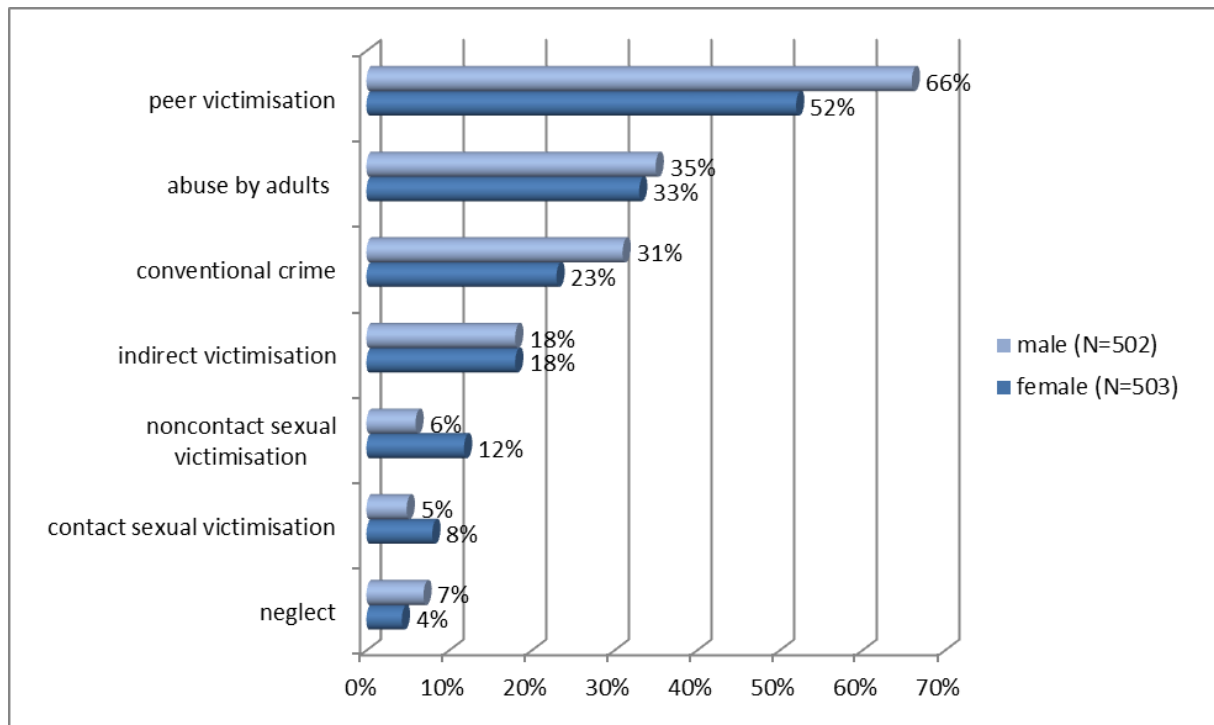
The vast majority (71%) of the youth aged 11-17 have experienced at least one form of victimization during their lives. Peer and sibling victimization (59%) is the most frequent form experienced, while the percentage of victims of abuse by adults is just above half the number (34%). One in four teenagers (27%) has fallen victim to conventional crime, and one in five (18%) has witnessed violence. 9% of respondents reported noncontact sexual abuse and 6% contact sexual abuse. Also 6% has experienced neglect (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Lifetime and past year rates of victimization (main categories), N=1005



Boys were more frequently victims of peer and sibling victimization (66% vs. 52%) and conventional crimes (31% vs. 23%). Whereas girls (12%) experienced more noncontact sexual victimization than boys (6%). The differences between girls and boys in rates for physical abuse by adults, contact sexual victimization and neglect do not exceed than 3% (Figure 2).

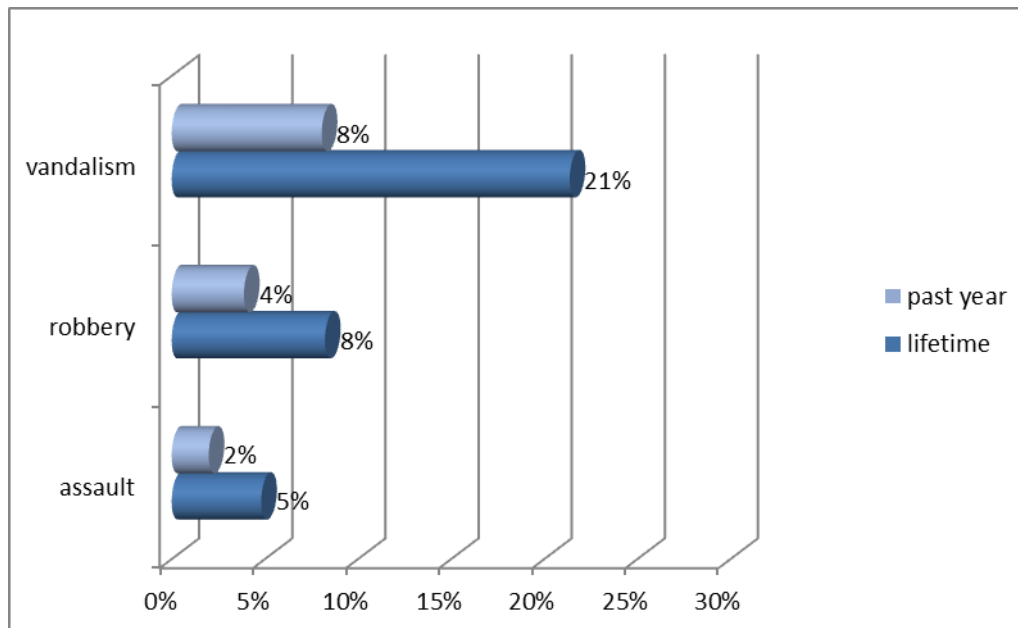
**Figure 2.** Lifetime rates of victimization (main categories) - by gender, N=1005



### 5.1. Conventional crime

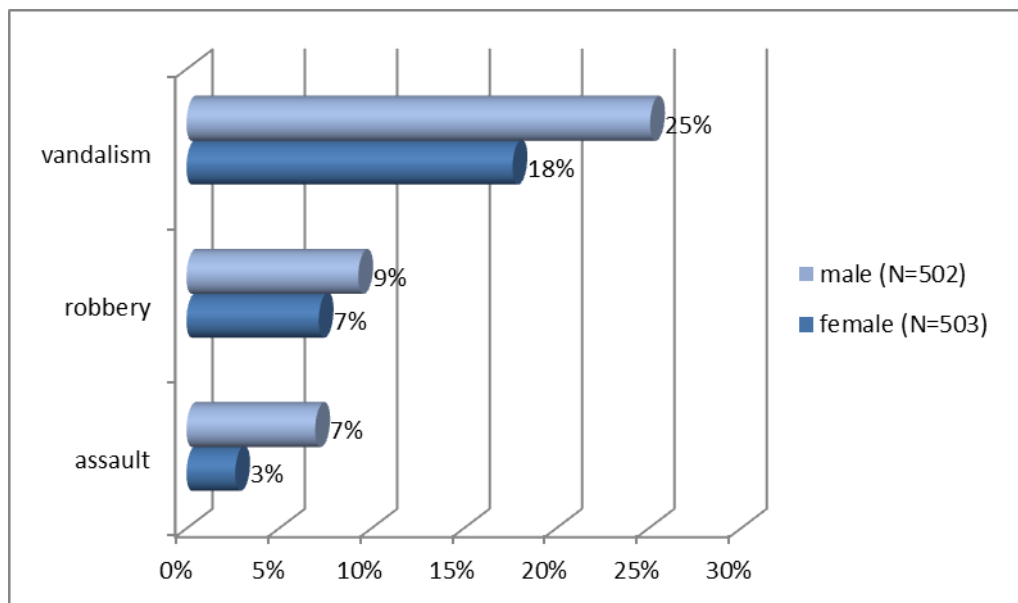
Conventional crime is the third most common category of victimization experienced by children and young people. The highest number of teenagers have experienced vandalism (21%), while robbery and assault with weapon are much less frequent (8% and 5%, respectively) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Lifetime and past year rates of different forms of conventional crime, N=1005



For all categories of conventional crime, there are more victims among boys than girls. The largest difference (7%) has been observed for vandalism (Figure 4). Furthermore, in all cases the vast majority of perpetrators were males (vandalism: 70%, robbery: 69%, assault with weapon, 78%).

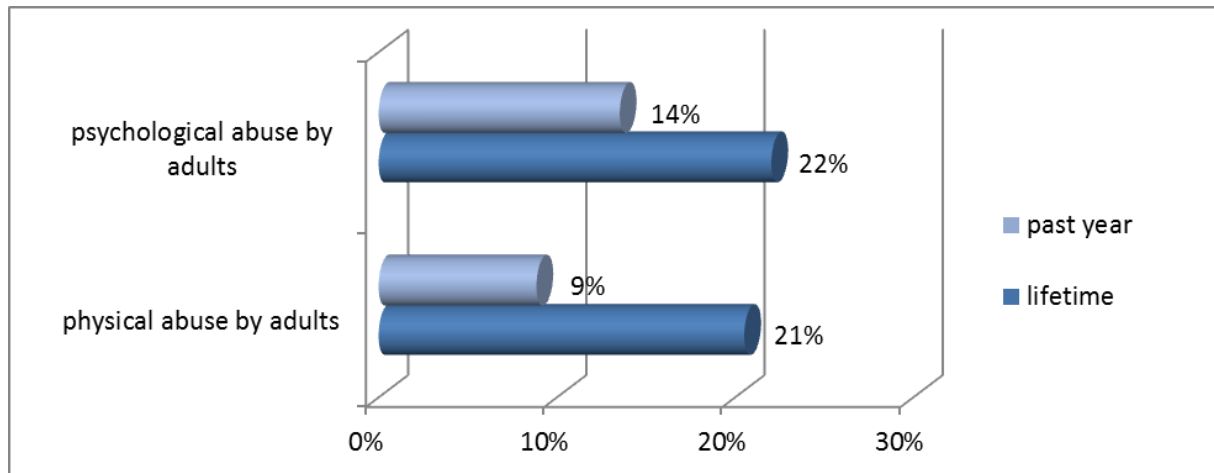
**Figure 4.** Lifetime rates of different forms of conventional crime – by gender, N=1005



## 5.2. Abuse by adults

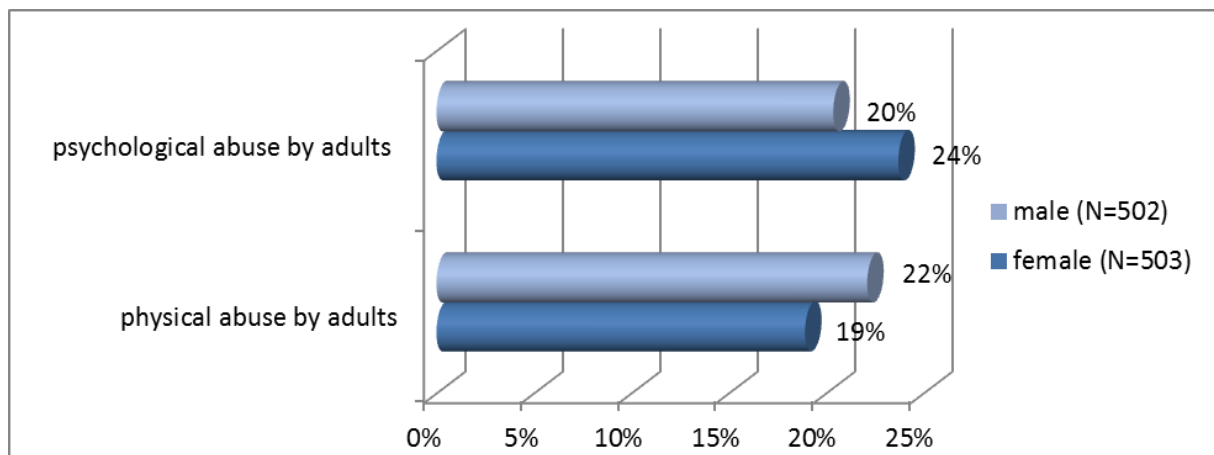
One out of five respondents has experienced psychological abuse by adults (22%), nearly the same percentage have been physically abused - 21% (Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** Lifetime and past year rates of different forms of abuse by adults, N=1005



Boys are more likely to be abused physically, while girls are more likely to become victims of psychological abuse (Figure 6).

**Figure 6.** Lifetime rates of different forms of abuse by adults – by gender, N=1005



In more than half of the cases of both physical abuse (54%) and psychological abuse (55%), the perpetrators were children's parents (Table 3). One in three respondents did not disclose who the abuser was.

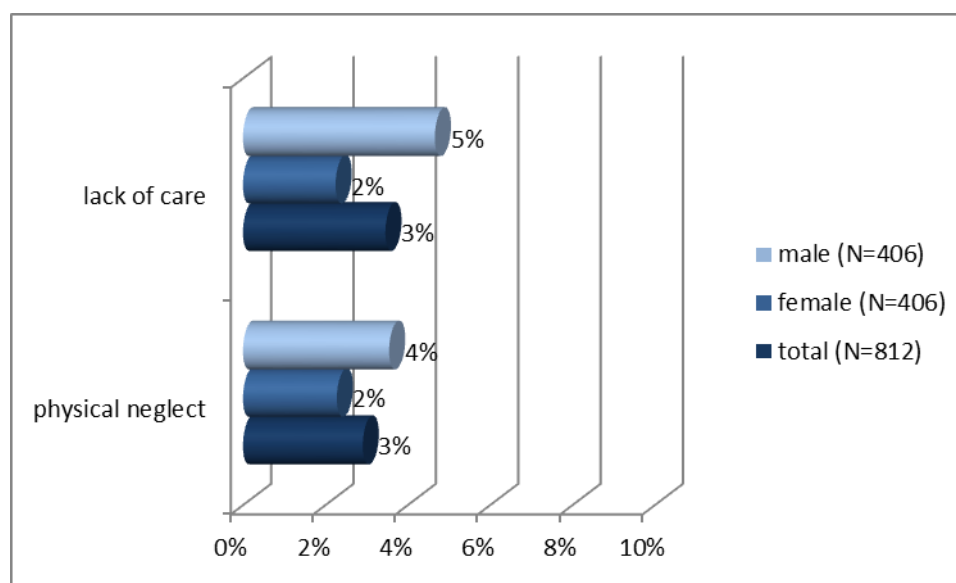
**Table 3.** Adult abusers, % (the percentages do not sum up to 100, because respondents could choose more than one answer)

	N	Father	Stepfather / mother's partner	Mother	Stepmother / father's partner	Another family member	Another known adult	I don't want to answer
physical abuse by adults	206	34%	3%	20%	1%	9%	11%	31%
psychological abuse by adults	222	33%	4%	22%	0%	8%	15%	28%

### 5.3. Neglect

Very few respondents reported they had experienced neglect. Both physical neglect and lack of care have been experienced by 3% of the sample (Figure 7).

**Figure 7.** Lifetime rates of different forms of neglect, - by gender, N=812 (the question was asked to respondents aged 12 and older)

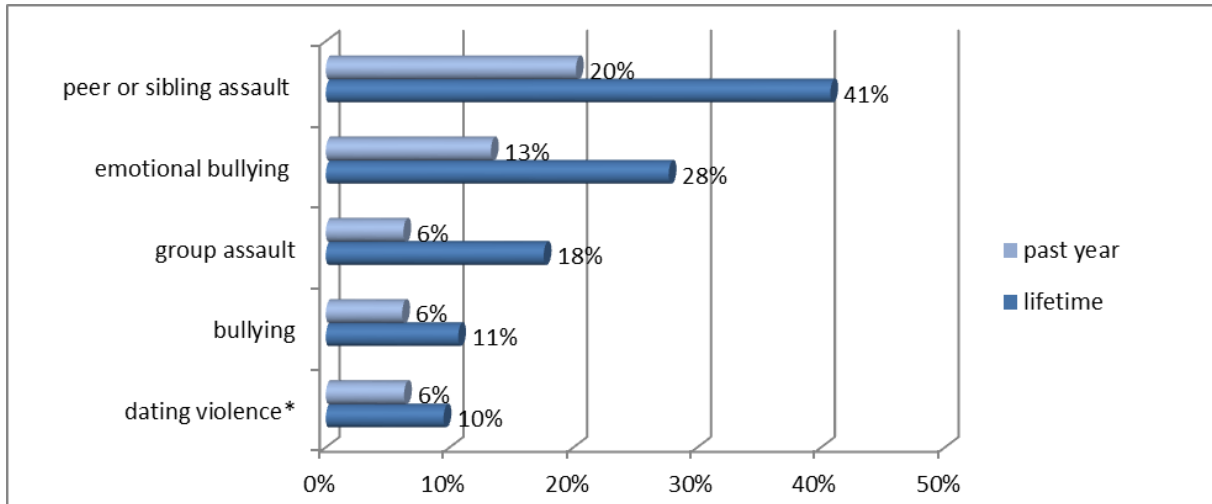


### 5.4. Peer and sibling victimization

Peer and sibling victimization is the most common category experienced by children and young people. The most frequent form is peer or sibling assault (41%), followed by emotional bullying (28%). Group assault has been experienced by one out of six respondents (18%), and bullying by one out of nine (11%). Among all the forms of peer victimization, dating violence turns out to be the least common (10%; the question was not asked to 11- and 12-year-olds) (Figure 8).



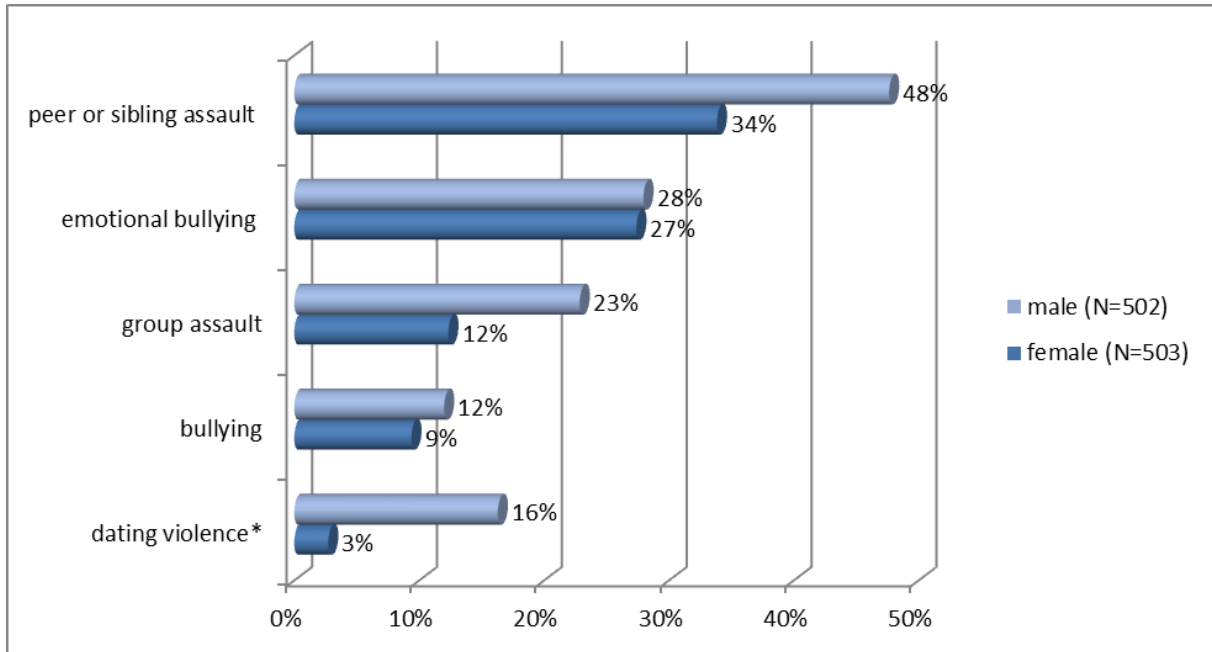
**Figure 8.** Lifetime and past year rates of different forms of peer victimization, N=1005



*\*the question was asked to respondents aged 13 and older (N=617)*

In almost all categories of peer victimization, boys are more likely than girls to be victimized. Only one category, emotional bullying, has been experienced by the same proportions of boys and girls. The difference between boys and girls is the largest for their reported experience of dating violence (Figure 9). One should bear in mind that the question concerned only the experience of “getting slapped” by a boyfriend or girlfriend. It is possible that at the same time girls experience other, more severe forms of dating violence (including physical abuse). Such an interpretation seems to be supported by the fact that half of the girls who had experienced dating violence (50%) reported that they felt pain the next day, had a bruise, a cut or a broken bone; among boys only 5% of those who had experienced dating violence reported such injuries. Nevertheless, thorough analyses are recommended to further explain this finding.

**Figure 9.** Lifetime rates of different forms of peer victimization – by gender, N=1005



*\*the question was asked to respondents aged 13 and older*

In most cases the perpetrators were known peers not related to the victim. This was especially the case of bullying (72% of offenders) and emotional bullying (79%). In case of peer or sibling assault the victim's brother was more likely to be the perpetrator (27%) than in other forms of peer victimization (Table 4).

**Tabela 4.** Perpetrators of peer victimization, % (the percentages do not sum up to 100, because respondents could choose more than one answer)

	N	brother	sister	another relative	boyfriend /girlfriend	another known peer	I don't want to answer
Peer or sibling assault	409	27%	11%	3%	4%	57%	6%
Bullying	107	13%	11%	4%	6%	72%	7%
Emotional bullying	278	4%	1%	2%	4%	79%	12%

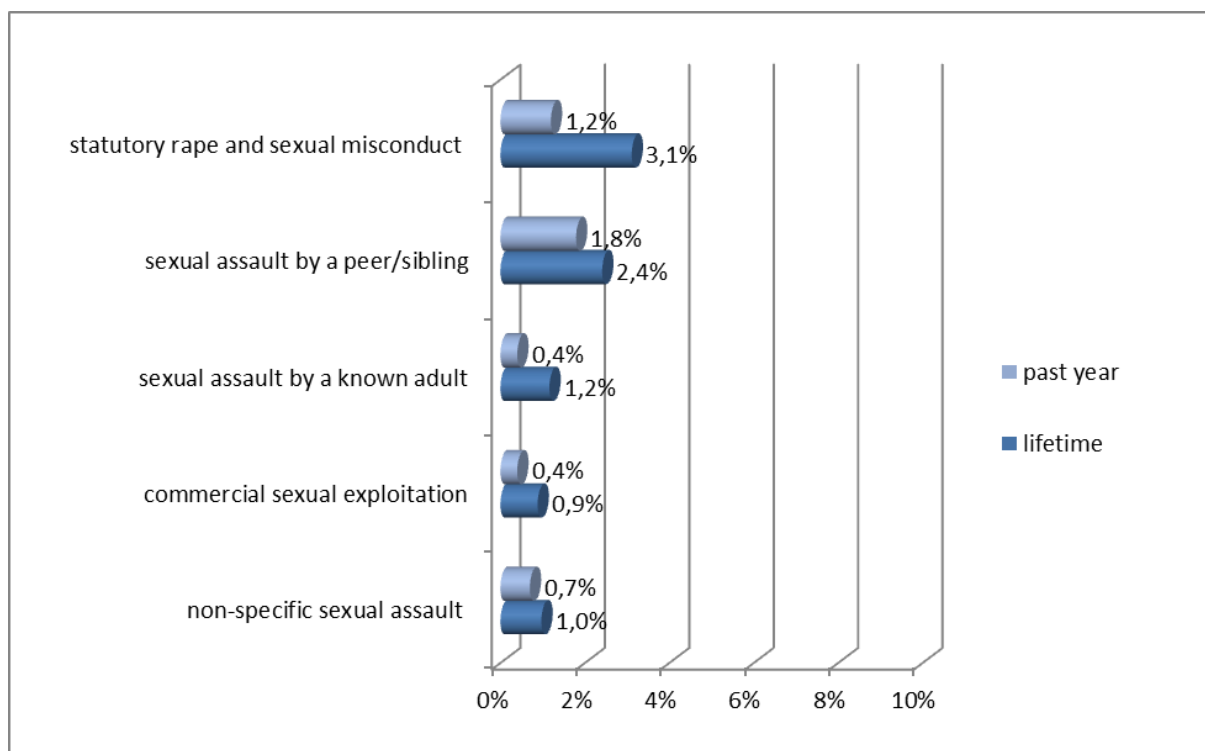
## 5.5. Sexual victimization

Because of very small rates sexual victimization data should be analyzed with caution. In some cases only few respondents reported the abuse which make complex analysis difficult and sometimes impossible.

### 5.5.1. Contact sexual victimization

The largest proportion has experienced a statutory rape and sexual misconduct, i.e., sexual contact between a grown-up and a child under 15 (3.1%), and sexual assault by a peer/sibling (2.4%) (Figure 10).

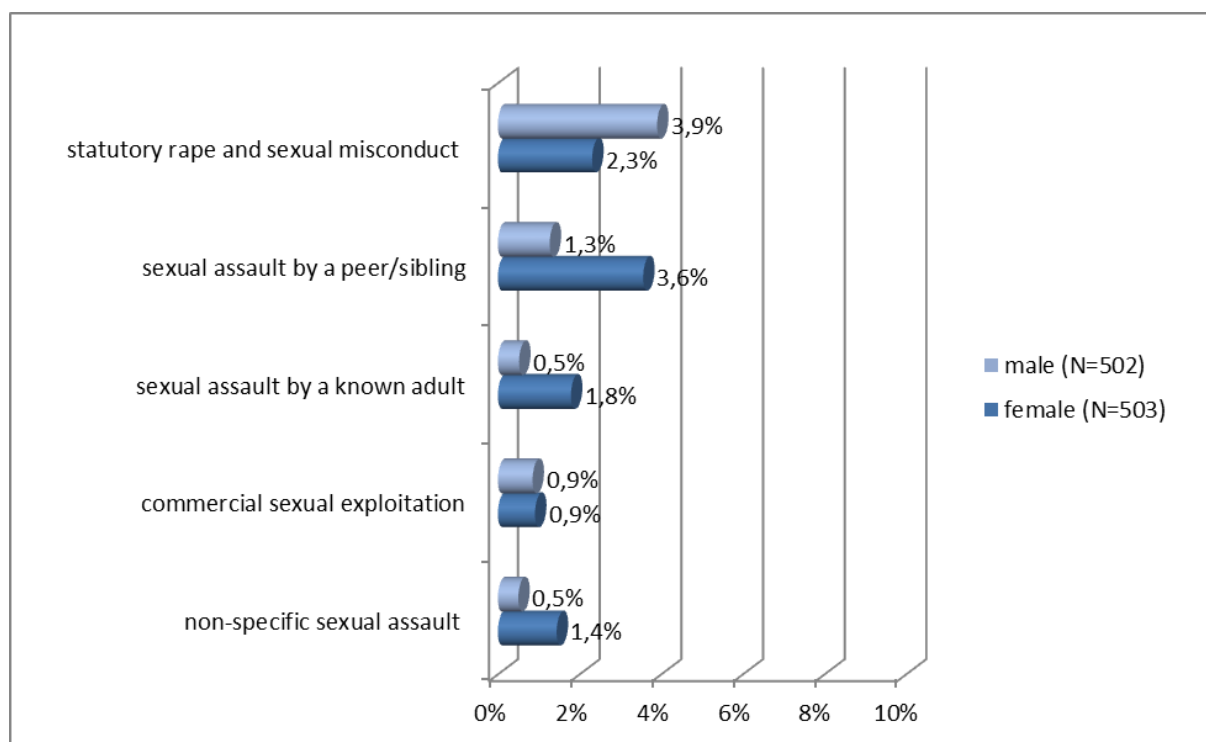
**Figure 10.** Lifetime and past year rates of different forms of contact sexual victimization, *N=1005*



For almost all forms of sexual victimization there are more girls than boys among the victims. The only exception is sexual contact between an adult and a child under 15 (the question included situations when both persons wanted to have sex) – more boys than girls have experienced this form of victimization (Figure 11). This is in accordance with other findings that boys in Poland become sexually active earlier than girls<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Mazur, J., Małkowska-Szkućnik, A. (2011). Wyniki badań HBSC 2010. Raport techniczny. Instytut Matki i Dziecka: Warszawa.

**Figure 11.** Lifetime rates of different forms of contact sexual victimization - by gender, N=1005



The majority of perpetrators of nearly all forms of sexual victimization are males. The only exception is sexual contact between a grown-up and a child under 15, where most of the victims were boys and in all reported cases heterosexual contact was involved. In most cases such sexual contact occurs between the victim and his/her girlfriend/boyfriend or another known adult .

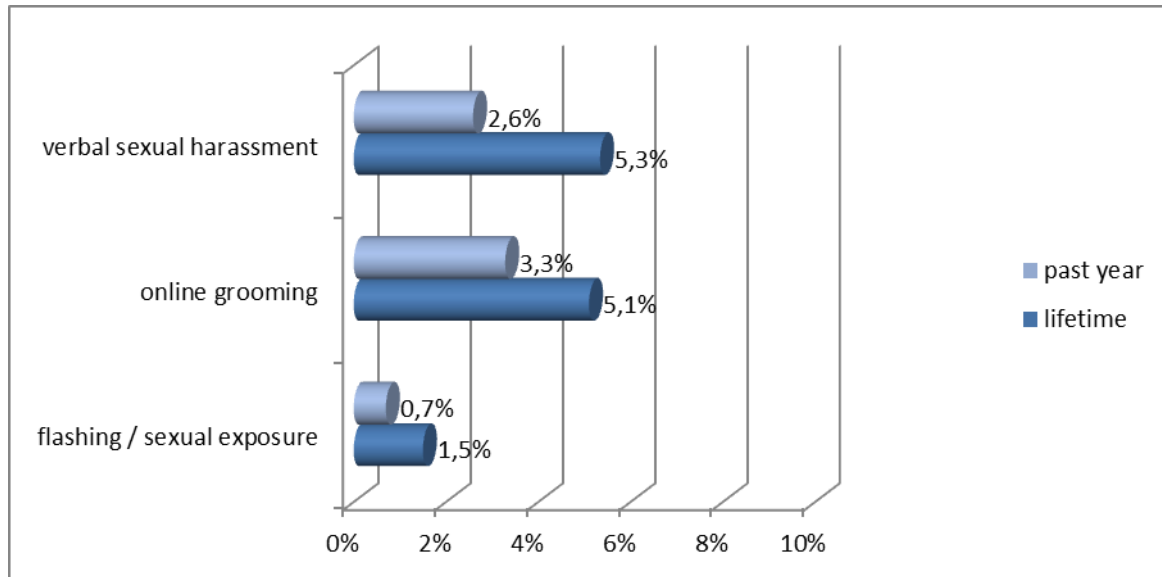
The vast majority of familiar adult perpetrators of sexual assault or forcing children to do other sexual things are the victims' relatives. The opposite is true for sexual assault or being forced to do other sexual things by a peer: here the majority of perpetrators are known peers who are neither related to the victim nor in an intimate relationship with him/her.

### 5.5.2. Noncontact sexual victimization

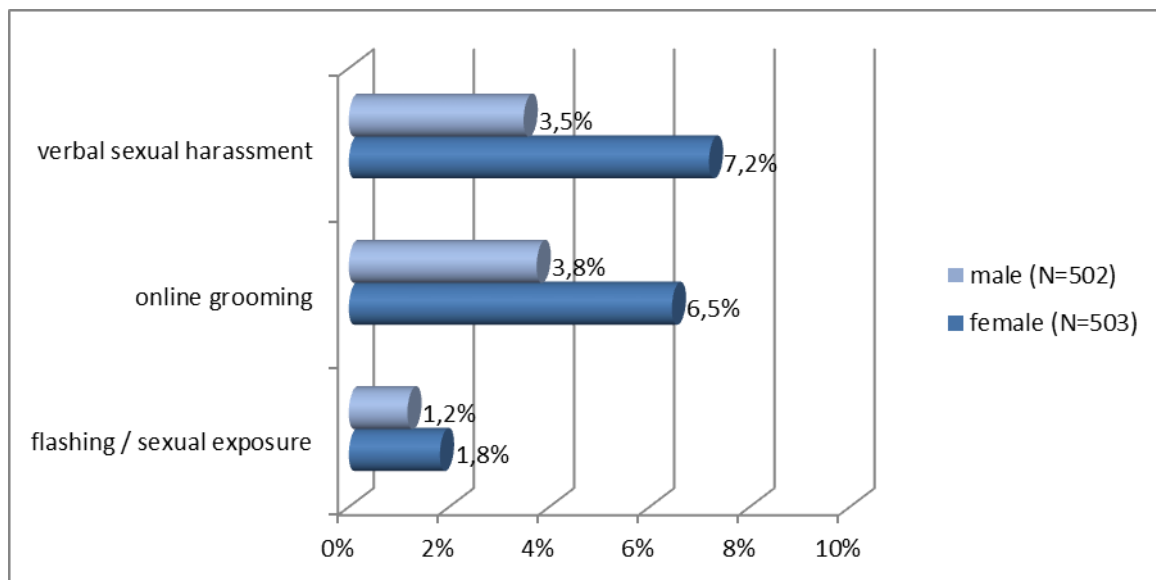
The largest proportion of respondents have experienced verbal sexual harassment: someone hurt their feelings by saying or writing something sexual about them (5.3%); and online grooming: they met someone on the internet who later tried to urge them to some sexual

activity (5.1%, Figure 12). Noncontact sexual victimization is more common among girls (Figure 13)

**Figure 12.** Lifetime and past year rates of different forms of noncontact sexual victimization, N=1005



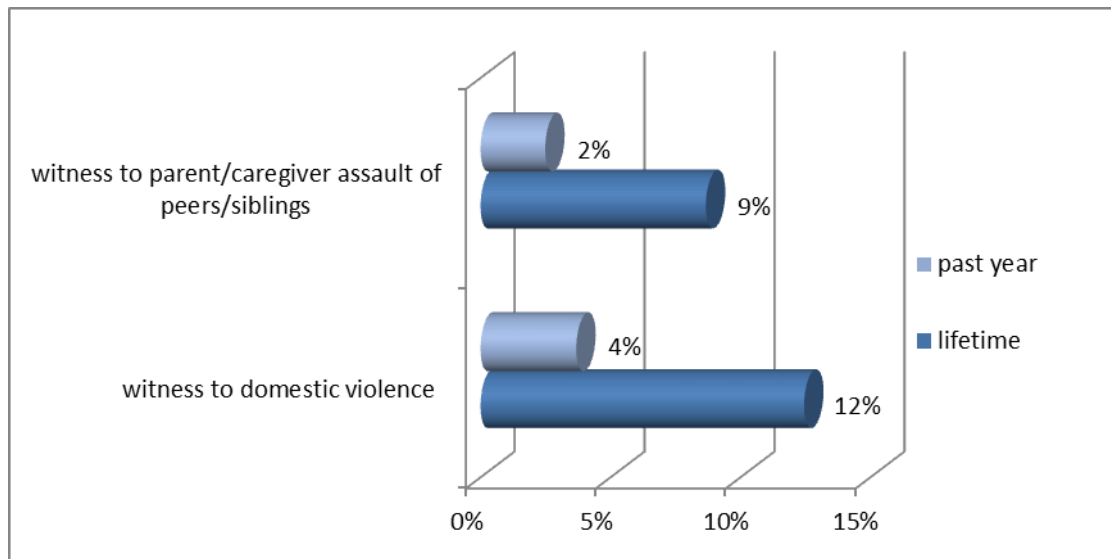
**Figure 13** Lifetime rates of different forms of noncontact sexual victimization – by gender, N=1005



## 5.6. Witnessing, indirect victimization

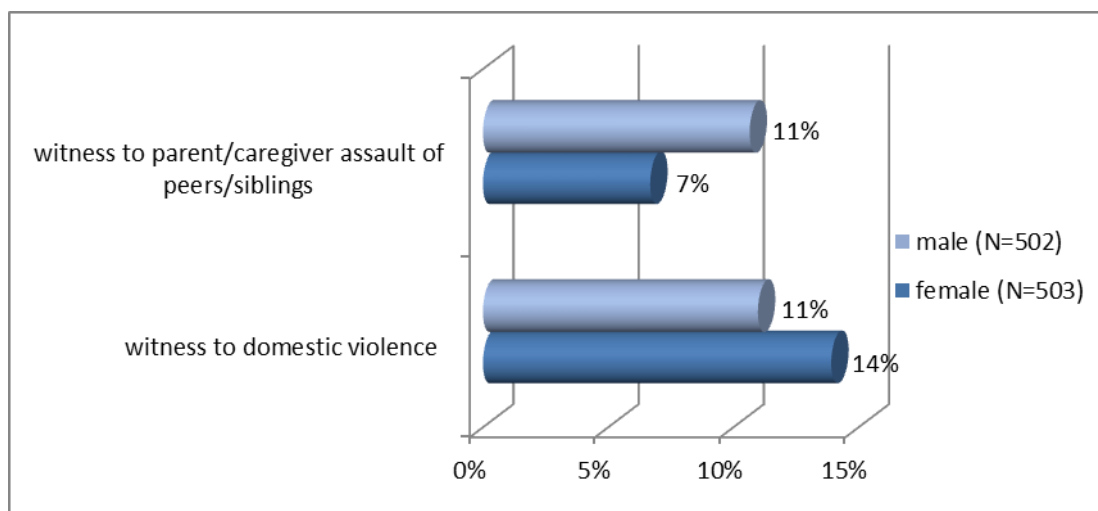
Indirect victimization involves being a witness to violence, i.e. domestic violence (between adults) or violence by a grown-up toward a child. More respondents have witnessed the former (12%) than the latter (9%) (Figure 14).

**Figure 14.** Lifetime and past year rates of different forms of indirect victimization, N=1005



Witnesses to domestic violence (partner violence) are more likely to be girls (14%), while being a witness to parent/caregiver assault of a child is more likely to be experienced by boys (11%) (Figure 15).

**Figure 15.** Lifetime rates of different forms of indirect victimization – by gender, N=1005



## 5.7. Polyvictimization

One measure of the scale of victimization may be the number of victimization forms experienced by children and young people. Only 29% of the sample reported they had not experienced any of the 22 forms of victimization included in the questionnaire. Nearly half of the sample have experienced 1 to 5 forms of victimization (60%). One in ten respondents (10%) is a “polyvictim”, having experienced at least 6 forms of victimization (Figure 16).

**Figure 16.** Number of forms of lifetime victimization, N=1005

