

# Two-thirds of the Belgian population is sexually victimised during their lifetime

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Sexual violence is rampant in Belgium. In the first large-scale representative and gender- and age-sensitive study on sexual violence in Belgium, called UN-MENAMAIS '(Understanding the Mechanisms,

Nature, Magnitude and Impact of Sexual Violence in Belgium), experts from Ghent University, the University of Liège, and the National Institute for Criminology and Criminalistics found that two third of the Belgian population experienced sexual violence during their life.

In people between 16 and 69 years, 64 percent (81 percent females and 48 percent males) experienced sexual violence during their life. Two in five women and one in five men indicated to have been subjected to hands-on sexual violence (with [physical contact](#) between the assailant and the victim) with 5 percent of men and 16 percent of women indicating to have been raped.

80 percent of LGBTQIA+ persons were exposed to any type of sexual violence; 79 percent experienced hands-off sexual violence (e.g. [sexual harassment](#), forms without physical contact between the assailant and the victim) and 42 percent hands-on sexual violence, of which 24 percent concerned (attempt to) rape.

For applicants of international protection residing in Belgium victimization rises to over 84 percent, in 61 percent this happened in the last 12 months when they were already in Europe or Belgium.

Sexual violence was linked to adverse mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, PTSD and suicide attempts.

Most victims had not sought for help so far. Only 7 percent looked for professional help and 4 percent reported their victimization to the police.

Almost 70 percent (N = 1951) of the doctors interviewed have seen at least one victim of sexual violence during their career, but the victims usually come forward after several years.

We are currently in a transitional phase in which different forensic models are being implemented.

Regardless of the forensic model, victims are systematically confronted with secondary victimization (becoming a victim again because of the attitude or procedure of the police, the judiciary, doctors, etc.) due to the long judicial process about which they get little information.

Today, June 15th, is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD). Therefore, we want to draw specific attention to our study results on sexual violence in [older adults](#).

In addition to 44 percent of participants of 70 years and older reporting they had been victimized in their life, one in 12 older adults of 70+ said they had been victimized in the past 12 months: 7 percent reported hands-off, 2.5 percent hands-on sexual violence and 0.6 percent (attempted) rape.

Women and men were equally victimized at this age. Older victims continue to cope with mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, PTSD and hazardous alcohol use, as a result of sexual violence earlier in life.

Less than half of the older victims had ever talked about their experience to someone in their social network, 6 percent sought professional help, and only 4 percent reported the violence to the police.

This study was conducted by an interdisciplinary research consortium from Ghent University, ULiège and NICC, led by Prof. Ines Keygnaert (Ghent University) and funded by BELSPO between 2017-2021. In order to get a better understanding of the mechanisms, nature, magnitude and impact of sexual [violence](#), a representative sample of more than 5000 people living in Belgium and professionals were questioned on [sexual violence](#) through an online survey as well as face-to-face interviews. Moreover, over 150 participants who were victimized were interviewed in-depth on the impact of the victimization on their lives as

well as on that of their families. In addition many healthcare and judicial professionals were questioned on forensic responses through a knowledge, attitude and practice survey as well as interviews.

**More information:** UN-MENAMAIS: [www.belspo.be/belspo/brain-be/ ... s/UN-MENAMAIS en.pdf](http://www.belspo.be/belspo/brain-be/...s/UN-MENAMAIS_en.pdf)

Provided by Ghent University

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