

# The psychological and social profile of children victim witnesses of sexual abuse/ exploitation



INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR WOMEN  
RIGHTS PROTECTION AND PROMOTION  
„LA STRADA”

 **OAK**  
FOUNDATION

 **La Strada**  
MOLDOVA

# Short history

## The Program Fighting Child Sexual Commercial Exploitation



# Program Fighting Child Sexual Commercial Exploitation



- Starting with 2007, International Center „La Strada” launched Program Fighting Child Sexual Commercial Exploitation.
- Professionals involved in assistance and protection of children alleged to be sexually exploited, victims of child trafficking were organized in a distinct department labeled Drop in Center
- Based on gathering experience, in 2009, International Center “La Strada” launched Child Friendly Room designed for hearing children in friendly environment.
- In the beginning of 2011, the experience in hearing/ interviewing children victims of trafficking/ sexual exploitation pressed promulgation of legal provisions encompassed in art. 110<sup>1</sup>.
- Since 2011 until end of 2014, 67 children, victims of trafficking in children and connected crimes were assisted by professionals of DiC with use of Child Friendly Room.



## **„Psychological and social profile of the children victim witnesses of sexual abuse/ exploitation”**

Based on cases of child abuse/ exploitation assisted by professionals of International Center “La Strada”



# The aim of the research



- **Identification of the factors that increase child vulnerability toward sexual exploitation/ trafficking. Identification of these factors will elicit formulation of recommendations that could facilitate: (a) the process of identification of children at risk for sexual abuse/exploitation, (b) assistance and (c) rehabilitation of children victims of sexual abuses/exploitation.**

## *Main objectives*



- Quantitative and qualitative analysis of cases of abuse / sexual exploitation assisted by DiC professionals from the following perspectives :
- socio-demographic characteristics of victims of child abuse / exploitation in Moldova;
- vulnerabilities of children in front of sexual exploitation;
- grooming tools used by offenders;
- Copping mechanisms used by the victims of sexual abuse/ exploitation;
- Type of exploitation.

# Results





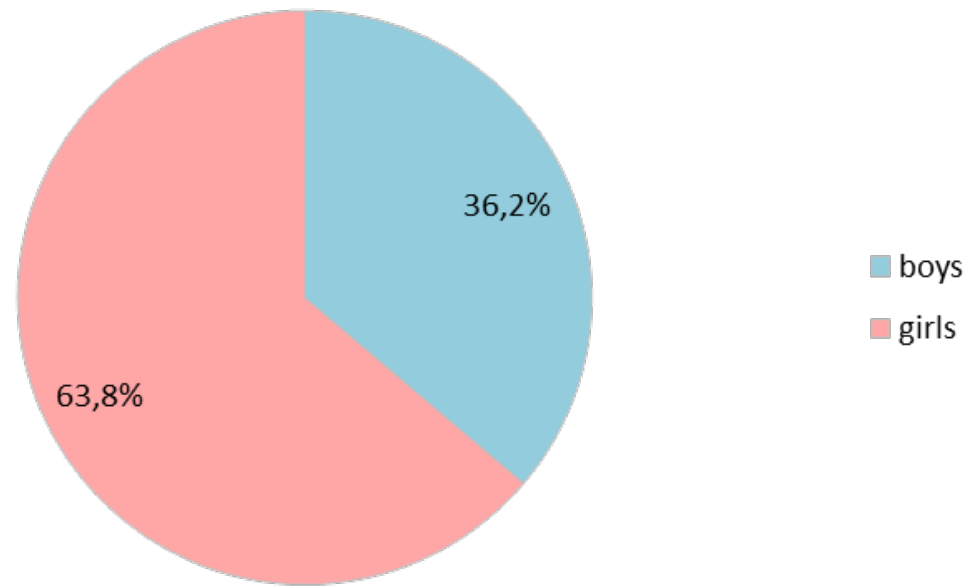
## Sample

The analysis included all children that were assisted by professionals from "La Strada", which falls into the category of victims of trafficking/ sexual exploitation/ abuse , during 2010-2014.

Thus the sample encompassed 58 children, out of which 64% girls and 36% boys.

The age of children varied between 6 and 18 ani,  $m = 14$

**Note: Even if assisted cases depicts that girls are more likely to be victims of abuse / sexual exploitation , literature review shows that boys usually will rarely report sexual abuse (Sobsey și colab., 1997).**







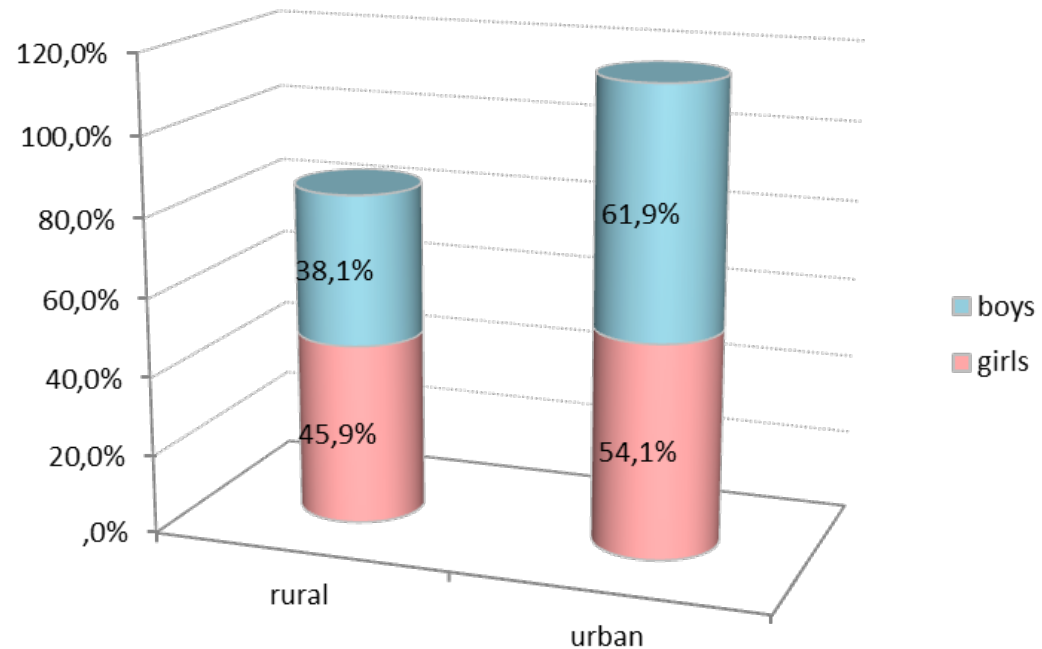
## Place of provenience

46% of girls came from the rural areas

54% of girls came from urban areas;

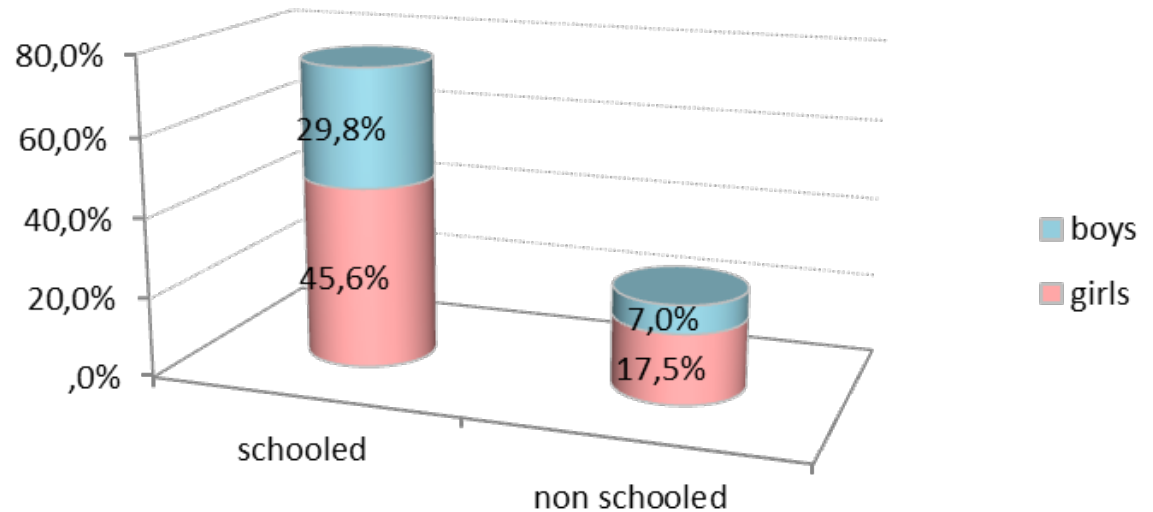
The tendency were maintained for boys as well, 38% were children from rural areas and 62% came from urban areas

Generally there were 43% children coming from rural and 57% of children coming from urban areas.



## The level of involvement of assisted children in education programs

75% of beneficiaries were children involved in the school processes, 25% of victims of sexual abuse/ exploitation dropped out of educational programs

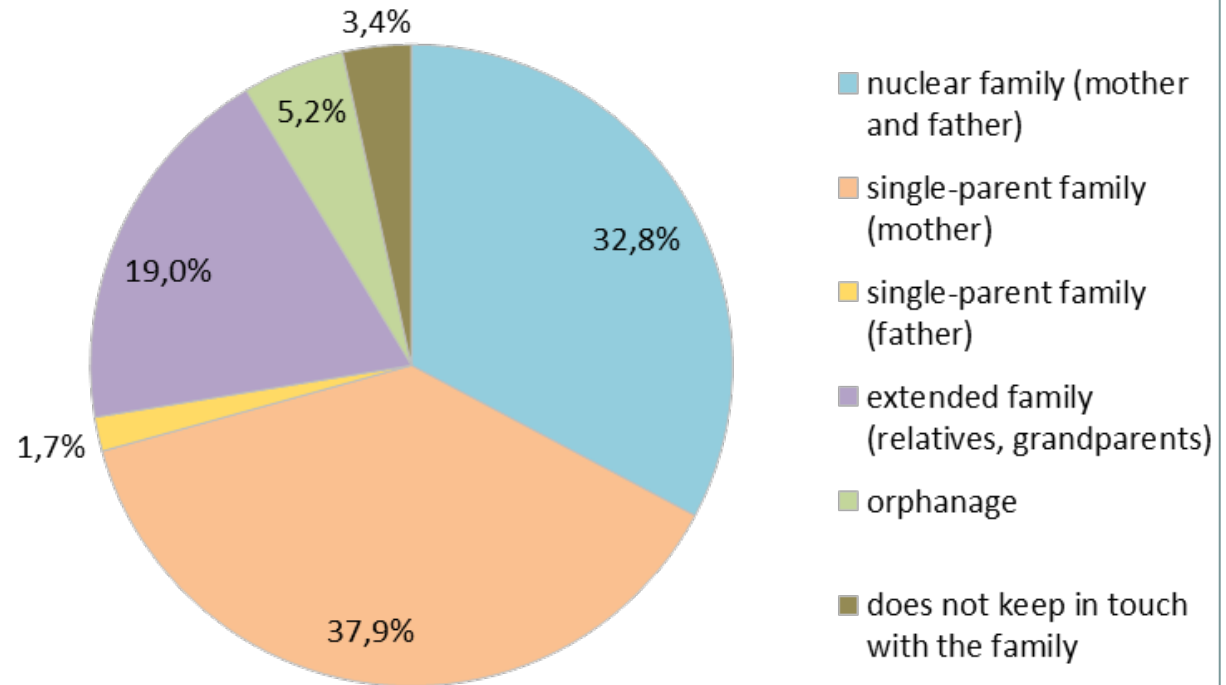




The prevalence of children victims of abuse / sexual exploitation from single-parent families is explained by the fact that the single parent is overwhelmed by family's survival having less time for child developmental and educational needs.

On the other hand, single-parent families are families that lack paternal model, which could generate vulnerability of children against abusers predominantly male (boys looking for male models, girls looking for love, lacking adequate model of interaction with the opposite sex).

## Dates about families

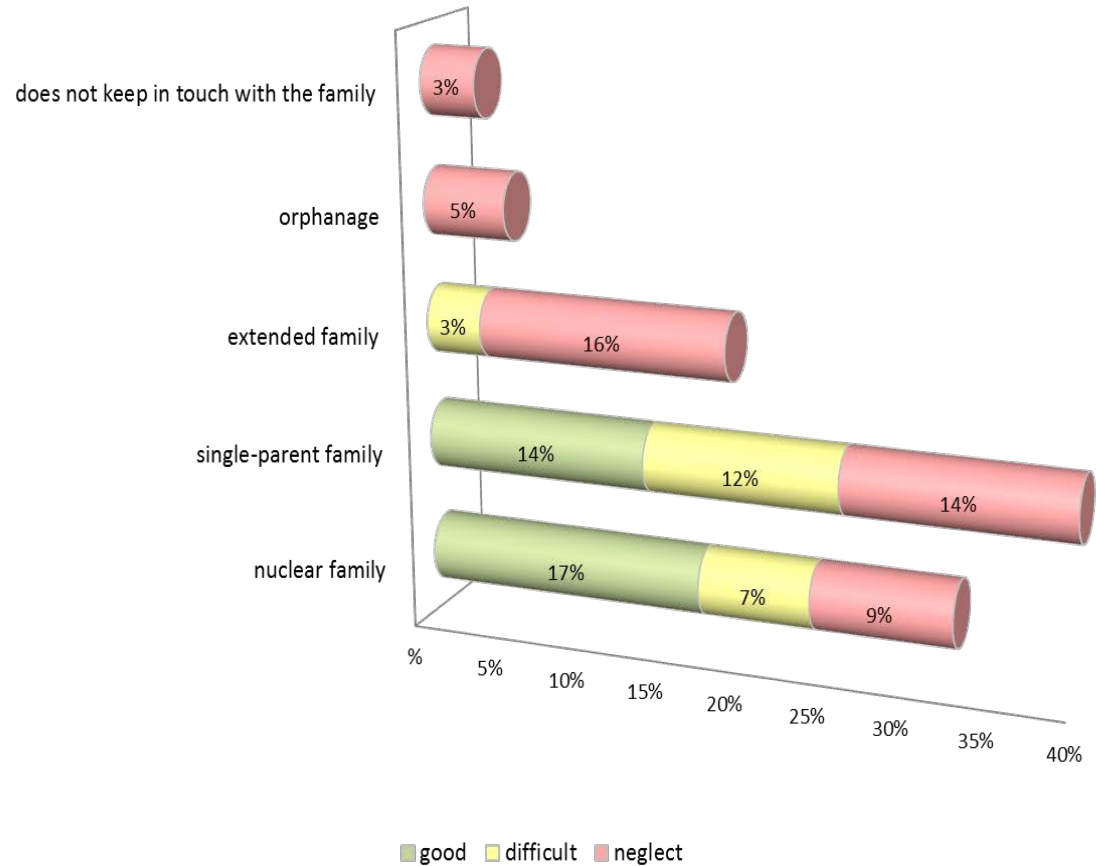




## Relationship with caregivers

mostly children in the care of both parents or single parent reported good relations / supportive parents.

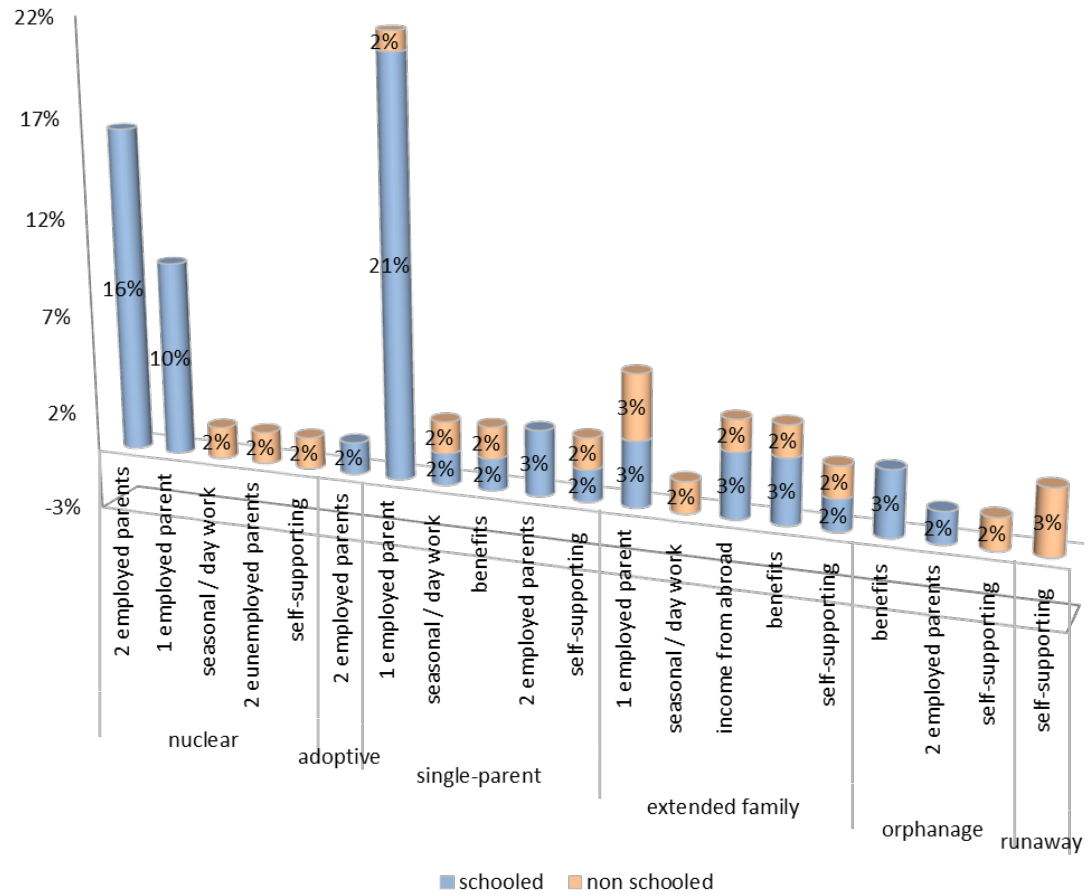
29% of children from residential institutions, in care of relatives or runners from home, register difficult relationships with caregivers.



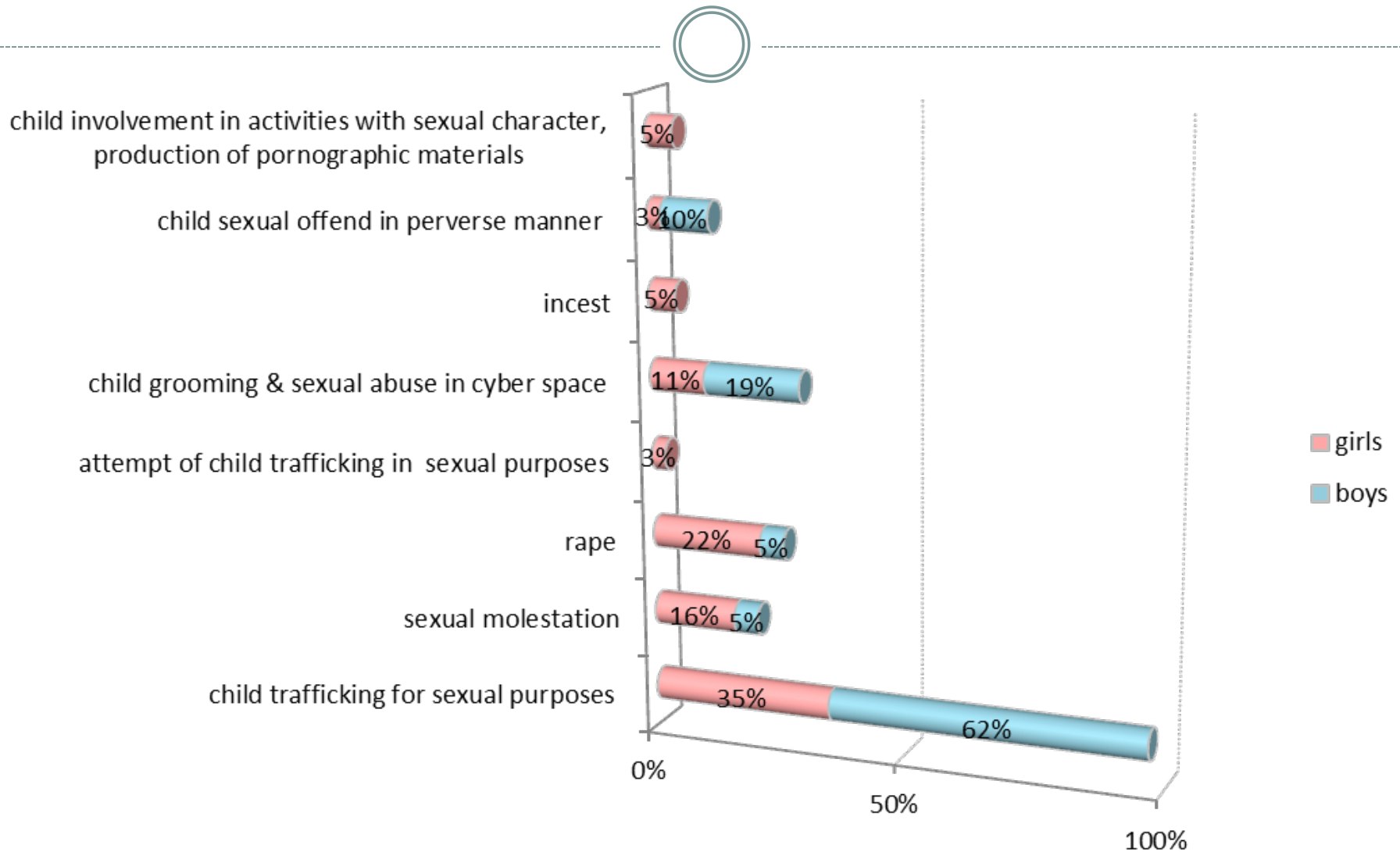


# Degree of involvement of children in the school programs by type of family, and in relation to the caregivers employment

In the families where there is no social productivity model (parental employment) the risk of school absenteeism and child involvement in exploitative situations is increased



# Dates about type of abuse

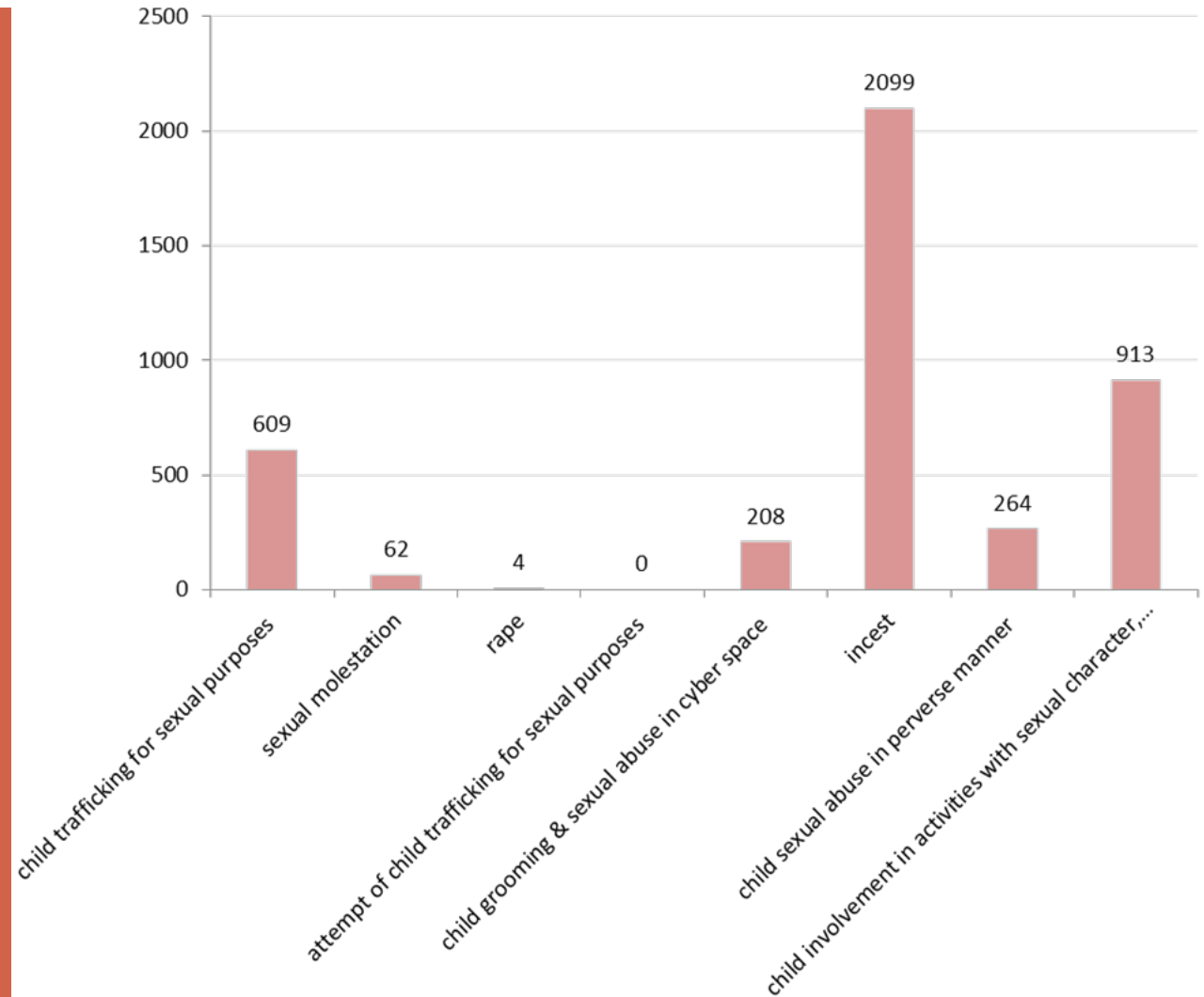




## Exploited vulnerability

Average N<sup>o</sup> days a child is dealing by him(her)self with abuse/ exploitation for the entire sample - **428** (min- 1 d; max -3650 d).

N<sup>o</sup> of days when a child is normalizing the idea of normality to be treated as an object, sexualized object.

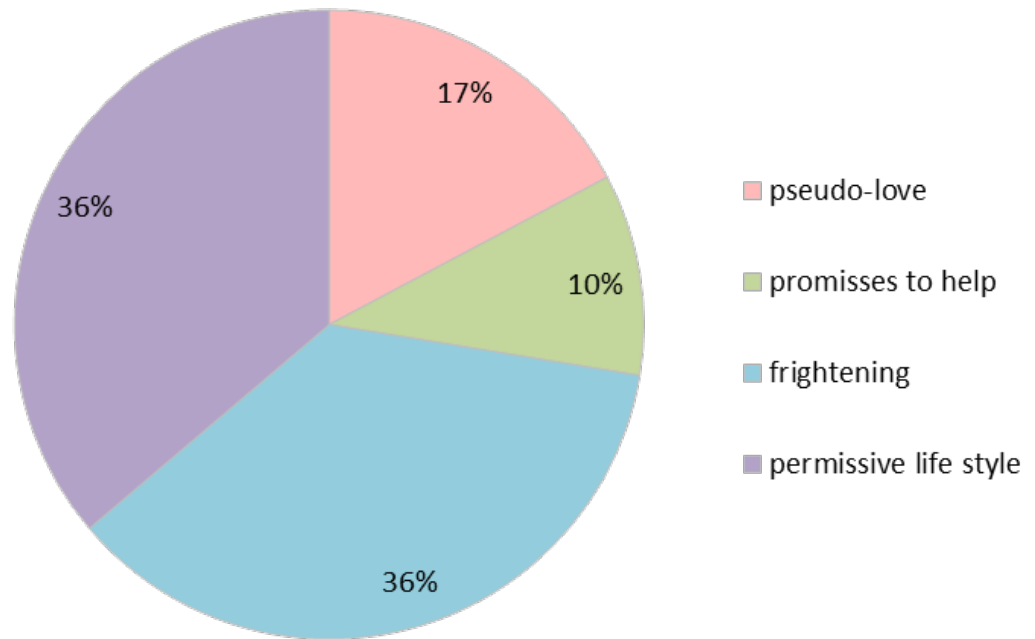




On the subjective level the cognitive contradictions are felt as confusion, which in turn increase child (applies to adults) vulnerability for further grooming processes.

To overcome the inner conflict, regardless of age, under the influence of external manipulation, defenses will come into play (eg. Justification, normalization), which are designed to help cognitive system to remain functional.

### Methods used for involvement of children in abusive activities / maintaining







## **Salience that kills**

Normalization of abusive / exploitative relations appears to have adaptive function for traumatized child. This adjustment mechanism is enhanced by the fact that, when the child was abused until it is identified, passes more than a year and the normalization decreases confusion, reduce stress, justifies behaviors and "decisions".



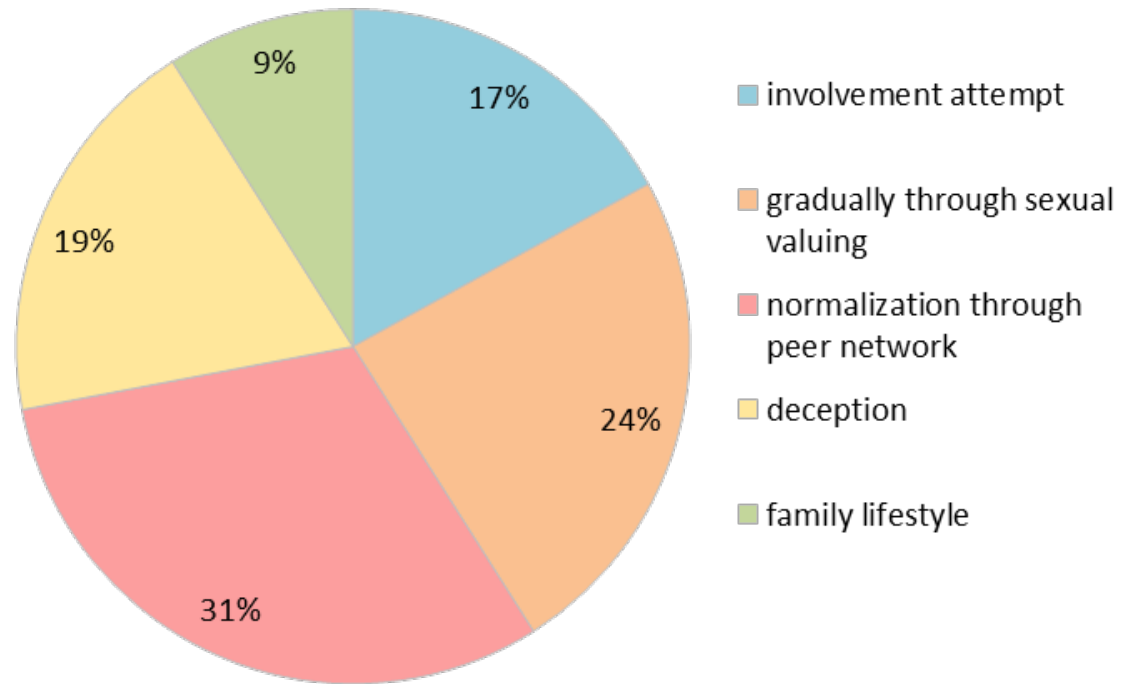


1. Children were members of subcultures popularized in the circles of peers, where prevails material values, involvement in sex work were perceived as courage or the way you disembroil.

2. Gradual sexual valuation of a child, reducing concepts such as intelligence, valuable, uniqueness, reducing child value to his/her utility as sexual being.

Note: Children internalize the feed-back of significant others regarding their behavior, therefore they internalize sexualized behaviors as part of their self-images. Hence normalization of exploitation/abuse is reinforced. Sexualized appearances become a way to validate and value self concepts.

## Mechanisms of normalization of exploitative relations

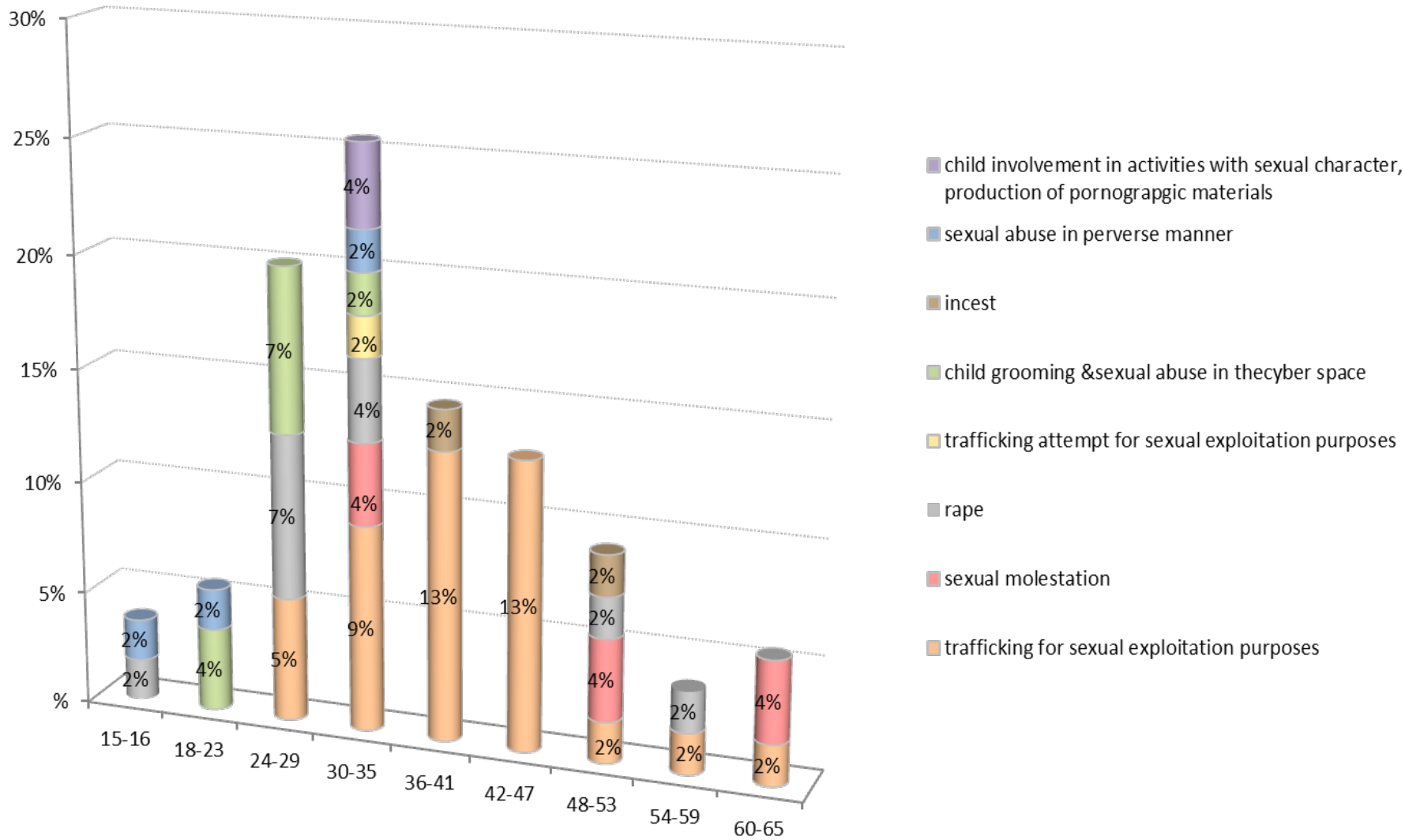




## Offenders profiles

Offenders are found in all age groups. Type of abuse seems to be dependent on the degree of cognitive and sexual maturation / potency





# Deviant sexual behavior: Pedophilia, Hebophilia and Dissexuality



Abusers are those who select victims according to their preferences (for girls, boys or both sexes).

Depending of age and body preferences offenders are classified into:

- Preferences for prepubescent children (**Pedophilia**)
- adolescents (**Hebophilia**).
- **Dissexuality** „ sexual expression of the failure to comply with rules, whether that failure is punished or not legally”. In other words it is about ignorance of partners' interests (Beier, 1995).
- **These terms represent clinical diagnoses and not legal terms until the propensity for abuse goes beyond thoughts and translate into action of child sexual abuse.**
- While pubescent and adolescent abusers will most often offend by rape or perverse actions, this will rather be an indicator of immaturity, low level of information, dysfunctional behavior patterns than a reflection of predisposition for pedo-, or hebophilia. At the same time, it is worth to draw attention to the experience of offence, it is also a formative experience that has the potential to predispose some minor offender for their future adult sexual preferences.

# Information



- The prevalence of hebephilia in general population is estimated to be approximately 1% (Beier, Bosinski, & Loewwit, 2005).
- It is estimated that a perpetrator, will abuse / exploit sexually in average 10 children.
- Persons distributing / producing child pornography demonstrate patterns of arousal, specific pedophiles (Seto, Cantor, & Blanchard, 2006).

The strategy for the prevention of abuse / sexual exploitation of children, will be an incomplete one if it fails to address individuals susceptible to sexually abuse / exploit minors.

