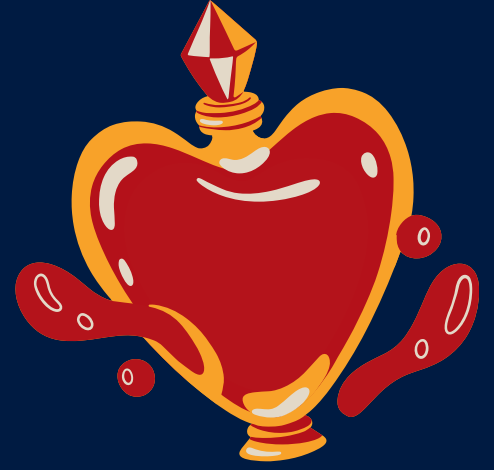




SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN OUR CULTURE

SEXUAL VIOLENCE: THE REALITY



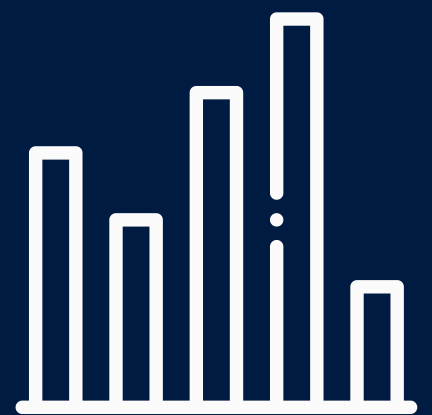
Sexual violence is a serious issue in Ireland.

We've all witnessed the devastating impact of sexual violence in our society, highlighted by the recent high-profile case such **involving Conor McGregor.**

In recent years, Ireland has made strides in **addressing sexual violence through legislative updates, public awareness campaigns, and improved support services for survivors.**

However, understanding the law, particularly regarding consent and age-related matters, is **crucial for young people navigating relationships.**

Let's take a look at the facts...



THE STATISTICS:

According to the Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI), **one in five women and one in ten men** report experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime. (2020)

According to the Central Statistics Office, **52% of women** in Ireland have experienced sexual violence in childhood or adulthood. (2023)

40% of people in Ireland have experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime.

22% of men have experienced sexual violence before their 18th birthday.

In 2023, there were **3,354** reported cases of **sexual crimes**, including rape of a male or female, child pornography, aggravated sexual assault or defilement of a male or female under **17 years of age**.

The suspected offender was known to the victim in **seven out of every ten** detected sexual offence in 2022.

In 2023, **81% victims** of reported incidents of sexual offences were female and about half of all victims **were under 18 when the incident took place**.

Male victims took longer than females to report sexual offences. Only **12% of males** reported incidents within a year, compared to **88% of females**. (2023)

MODES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE:



Sexual violence takes many forms, all of which cause significant harm to individuals.

Below are the main types of sexual violence and the penalties that can apply:

Sexual Assault:

This refers to any non-consensual sexual act, including groping, unwanted touching, or penetration. It is a violation of personal boundaries and bodily autonomy.

Penalties: A person convicted of sexual assault can be faced with up to 5 years in prison, longer sentences may apply for aggravated cases.

Rape:

Rape is a severe form of sexual violence involving non-consensual penetration. It is a criminal act that often carries severe physical, emotional, and psychological repercussions.

Penalties: The maximum penalty for rape is life imprisonment.

Sexual Harrassment:

This includes unwelcome sexual advances, comments, or behaviour. It can occur in workplaces, schools, online, or public spaces, and it disproportionately affects women and girls.

Penalties: If the harassment involves threatening, abusive, or obscene behaviour, the offender may face a fine or imprisonment for up to 7 years depending on the severity.

Image-based Sexual Abuse:

This includes actions like sharing explicit images or videos without consent. Recent laws in Ireland, like Coco's Law, specifically address this type of abuse.

Penalties: Up to 7 years in prison for sharing intimate images without consent with the intent to cause harm.

Spiking and Sexual Violence:

Spiking involves adding drugs or alcohol to someone's drink without their knowledge to make them more vulnerable to sexual assault. This dangerous practice is illegal and can have devastating consequences for victims, who may struggle to recall or report the incident.

Penalties: Up to 10 years imprisonment for administering substances with intent to cause harm or facilitate another crime (e.g., sexual assault).

Child Sexual Abuse:

Child sexual abuse involves any sexual act directed toward a minor. It is an abuse of power and trust, often carried out by someone the child knows. Ireland has laws to protect minors, including the Romeo and Juliet law, which addresses consensual relationships between teenagers close in age.

Penalties: Maximum sentences range from 14 years to life imprisonment, depending on the age of the victim and the nature of the abuse.

Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence:

Domestic violence includes physical, emotional, and sexual abuse within intimate relationships. Sexual violence in this context includes non-consensual acts within a relationship. Domestic violence can be particularly harmful, as it involves ongoing abuse, manipulation, and control, often leaving victims isolated and afraid to report the violence.

Penalties: Penalties range from fines to up to life imprisonment, depending on the severity (e.g., assault causing harm or serious harm).

WHY SEXUAL VIOLENCE OCCURS:



Power and Control: Perpetrators often use sexual violence to exert power and control over the victim, manipulating or dominating them emotionally, physically, or sexually.

Cultural Norms: Societal attitudes that objectify individuals, especially women, or perpetuate gender inequality, contribute to a culture where such violence is more likely to occur.

Lack of Consent: A misunderstanding or disregard for the concept of consent, where individuals fail to respect boundaries.

Psychological Factors: Some perpetrators may have a history of trauma or psychological issues that distort their perceptions of relationships.

Alcohol and Drugs: The influence of substances, such as alcohol or drugs, can impair judgment and reduce inhibitions, leading to increased instances of sexual violence.

Gender Roles: Traditional gender roles and expectations often perpetuate harmful beliefs about dominance, aggression, and entitlement, particularly among men.

Lack of Parental Controls and Exposure to Pornography: Children as young as 9 are accessing pornography online. This early exposure can distort their understanding of consent, relationships, and boundaries, normalising harmful behaviors and increasing the risk of abusive attitudes developing over time.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE VS. SEXUAL ABUSE:

The terms sexual abuse and sexual violence are closely related but have distinct meanings.

Sexual Abuse:

Sexual abuse refers to a pattern or repeated instances of non-consensual sexual acts, often involving a violation of trust, power, or authority. It frequently occurs in ongoing relationships, such as within families, schools, or institutions.

Sexual Violence:

Sexual violence is a broader term encompassing any act of a sexual nature committed without consent.

Key Differences:

Aspect	Sexual Abuse	Sexual Violence
Focus	Ongoing or repeated acts in a relationship of trust/power.	Broader, includes one-time acts or systemic issues.
Context	Often tied to relationships or trust violations.	Often focused on acts themselves or societal issues.

THE AGE OF CONSENT 👍👍

In Ireland, the **legal age of consent is 17 years old.**

This means that **engaging in sexual activity with someone under this age is considered illegal**, even if both parties consent.

The law aims to **protect minors from exploitation and abuse.**



However, this strict approach raised concerns about **criminalising consensual sexual relationships** between teenagers close in age.

To address this, Ireland introduced what is commonly referred to as the **Romeo and Juliet law** as part of the **Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017.**

Let's have a look...



WHAT IS THE ROMEO AND JULIET LAW?



The **Romeo and Juliet law** is a provision designed to protect young people in consensual relationships from facing criminal charges simply due to their age.

Under this law:

➤ Close-in-age Exemption:

If both individuals are aged 15 or 16, and the age difference is no more than two years, consensual sexual activity is not considered a criminal offence. This applies only if neither party is in a position of authority over the other or exploiting the other.

➤ Protection from Exploitation:

The law ensures that young people are not unfairly penalised for consensual relationships while still safeguarding them from predatory or exploitative behavior.

➤ No Defence for Adults:

This law does not apply to individuals over 18 engaging in sexual activity with someone under the age of consent, ensuring robust protection for minors.

SUPPORT



For those affected by sexual violence, there are support services available in Ireland:

Rape Crisis Ireland: Provide free and confidential counseling, advocacy, and support.

1800 77 8888

www.rapecrisisireland.ie

Cari Foundation: Supports children who experience sexual violence and their families.

0818 924 567

www.cari.ie

Childline: A resource for young people under 18 who need someone to talk to.

1800 66 66 66

www.childline.ie