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FOLLOW



#VERAPROJECT

EMPOWERING VOICES,
PREVENTING VIOLENCE



Project: 101194892 – VERA – CERV-2024-DAPHNE



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**VIOLENCE PREVENTION
THROUGH THEATRE-BASED
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR WOMEN
WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER**



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AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD) REFERS TO A RANGE OF NEURODEVELOPMENTAL CONDITIONS CHARACTERISED BY DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNICATION, SOCIAL INTERACTION AND BEHAVIOUR. RESEARCH SHOWS THAT ASD PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY YOUNG WOMEN, ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE SEXUAL VICTIMISATION THAN THEIR NON-AUTISTIC PEERS. STUDIES ESTIMATE THAT UP TO 90% OF AUTISTIC WOMEN REPORT AT LEAST ONE EPISODE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE, OFTEN BEGINNING IN CHILDHOOD OR ADOLESCENCE.

This increased vulnerability is not due to autism itself, but to a combination of social, emotional and cognitive differences, such as difficulties in interpreting social cues, recognising risky situations or asserting personal boundaries.

Those previously described as having ‘high-functioning autism’ often express a strong desire for social connection, but may lack the tools to navigate relationships safely.

In addition, a small proportion of people with ASD may engage in inappropriate or harmful sexual behaviour, often due to impaired social understanding or lack of access to appropriate sex education.

The VERA project addresses these issues by promoting protective factors and piloting innovative approaches to prevent both victimisation and offending.

VERA PROJECT AIMS TO

- Raise awareness of the sexuality and vulnerabilities of young people with ASD, challenging stereotypes and social stigma.
- Design and implement a comprehensive sexuality education programme tailored to the cognitive and developmental needs of young people on the spectrum, focusing not only on knowledge but also on practical skills and protective behaviours.
- Develop support strategies specifically adapted to the needs of autistic victims of violence, including psychological, emotional and social tools.
- Empower young people with ASD by training them to be “safety ambassadors” who can support their peers in identifying, preventing and responding to risk situations.
- Engage families, carers and professionals and equip them with tools to recognise, understand and respond to signs of abuse or unsafe situations.

VERA PROJECT IS EXPECTED TO DELIVER:

- Educational resources co-designed with people with ASD, carers and professionals to reflect the realities and needs of the target group.
- A tailored training programme using Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to build practical skills in identifying, preventing and reporting sexual abuse.
- Youth-led peer initiatives, with young people with ASD trained to promote safety, consent and healthy relationships among their peers.
- Awareness and policy impact, through dissemination activities aimed at service providers and policy makers to promote systemic change and ensure sustainability.
- Evidence-based knowledge gathered across three countries to support future research, education and intervention strategies.

