

EU YOUTH BELIEFS IN GENDER BASED DISCRIMINATION, SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

Andreas Ahrens¹, Jelena Zascerinska², Irina Macovei³

^{1,2} Hochschule Wismar University of Applied Sciences Technology Business and Design,
Germany

³ Asociatia Demetrius, Romania

Abstract. *Gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault are the factors that impact youth engagement in the labour market and society. Monitoring of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault among young people in the European countries remains under-developed. The research aim is to analyse beliefs of young people in the European Union in gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. The research is built on the basis of both theoretical and empirical methods. The theoretical analysis shaped the conceptual framework of the research. The empirical study was based on the survey implementation. Data were collected in five European Union countries in March-April 2022. The data were analysed via the mean calculation as well as ranking. Data interpretation was applied in order to summarise the study findings. The theoretical analysis allows for the establishment of the inter-connections between beliefs and values. The data analysis reveals that young people believe in gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. The results show that physical appearance and people race are the Top 2 beliefs that coincide in all the three phenomena, namely gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Research limitations are outlined. Future work is proposed.*

Keywords: *beliefs, gender based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, values.*

To cite this article:

Ahrens, A., Zascerinska, J., & Macovei, I. (2022). EU Youth Beliefs in Gender Based Discrimination, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault. *Education. Innovation. Diversity*, 2(5), 47-57. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17770/eid2022.2.6963>

Introduction

Gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault are the factors that impact youth engagement in the labour market and society. Young people are in the particular focus of the European Union. This particular attention devoted to young people by the European Union is reflected in the EU Youth strategy for 2019–2027 (European Commission, 2018). Youth employment and social inclusion are based on diversity (European Parliament, 2012). Therefore, monitoring of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault among young people can help recognise if any problems exist in the field of youth gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Early problems identification in the field of youth gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault allows for faster appropriate reaction that could promote the increase in overall economic growth and social cohesion.

In order to monitor the situation in the field of youth gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault, the European Union implemented a couple of surveys. In 2012 gender inequalities in the European Union were explored (European Parliament, 2012). In 2015, European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2015) revealed the prevalence of unwanted sexual attention among working population in Europe. Analysis of these studies shows that, in the previously implemented surveys, young people were not a target group. It means that the situation in gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault among young people might differ in comparison to other age groups. Hence, the studies results cannot be applied to the population of young people in the European Union. Another issue is that the studies were centred on one field, for example, the study of the European

Union was devoted to only gender inequalities in the European Union (European Parliament, 2012). A study carried out by European Institute for Gender Equality in 2015 (EIGE, 2015) concentrated only on unwanted sexual attention among working population in Europe. That means that, on the one hand, only one field, namely unwanted sexual attention, and, on the other hand, only working population, were under investigation. Consequently, monitoring of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault among young people in the European countries remains under-developed.

The research aim is to analyse beliefs of young people in gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault in the European Union.

The research is constructed on the basis of both theoretical and empirical methods. The theoretical analysis built the conceptual framework of the research. The empirical study was based on the survey implementation. The data were analysed via the mean calculation as well as ranking. Data interpretation was applied in order to summarise the study findings.

Conceptual Framework

Beliefs are defined to be individual's assumptions on what is right or wrong. Beliefs are the roots of values if values' development is considered as tree's growing as illustrated in Figure 1.

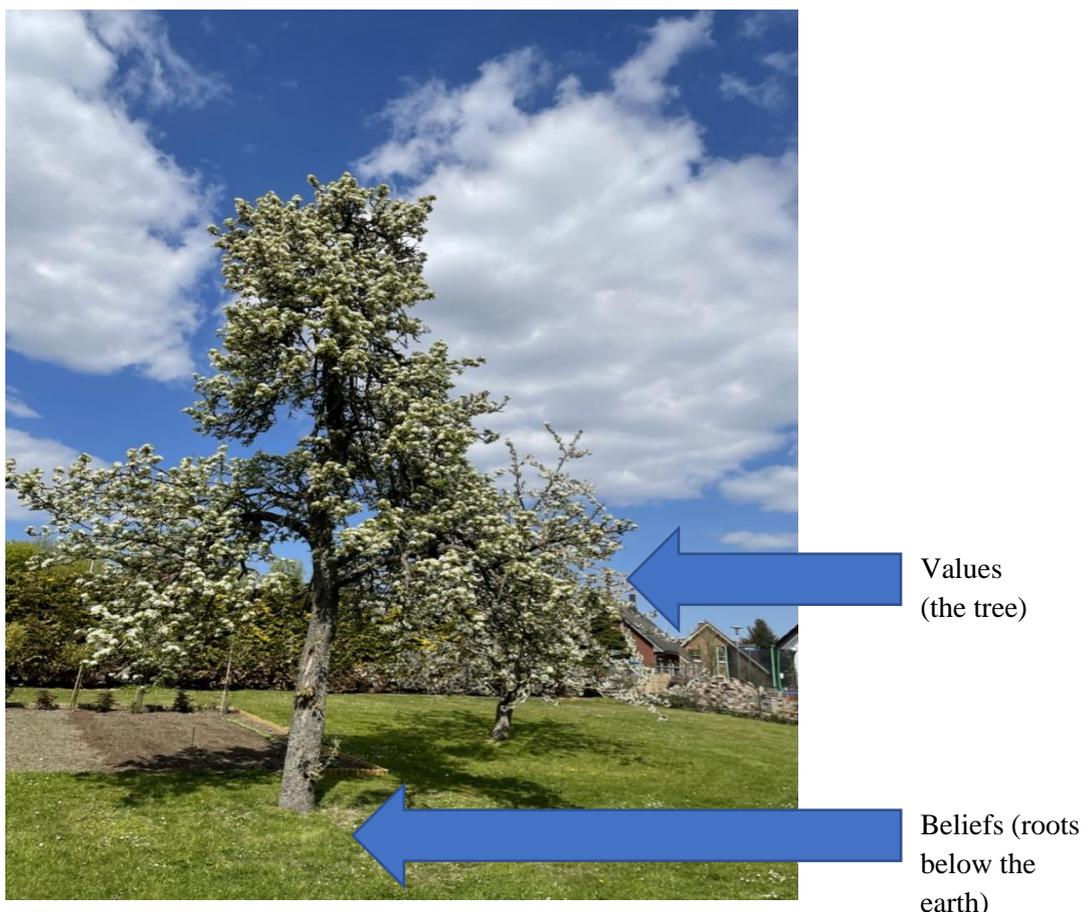


Figure 1 The relationship between beliefs and values (the authors)

Beliefs can be considered from two perspectives (Österholm, 2009):

- The social perspective, also known as the outer side, and
- The individual perspective, also defined as the inner side.

A mixture of different perspectives is a central cause for the creation of beliefs as a messy construct (Österholm, 2009).

Consequently, young people beliefs in the field of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault are crucial for the success of young people integration into the labour market and their social inclusion.

Beliefs in the field of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault summarised in Table 1 are based on the literature review implemented in December 2021-February 2022. Beliefs about employment, marital status, being young (Xiao, Zong, Geng, Deng, & Zhu, 2020), religion (Forman-Rabinovici & Sommer, 2018), race (Perry, Harp, & Oser, 2013), physical appearance (Lee, Son, Yoon, & Kim, 2017), and educational level (Carliner, Sarvet, Gordon, & Hasin, 2017) were outlined. Table 1 shows the beliefs that might impact gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Table 1 Beliefs in the field of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault (the authors)

Belief	Gender based discrimination	Sexual harassment	Sexual assault	Perspective
Being young	X	X	X	Outer/social
Race	X	X	X	Outer/social
Physical appearance	X	X	X	Outer/social
Marital status	X	X	X	Outer/social
Educational level	X			Inner/individual
Religion	X			Outer/social
Employment	X			Inner/individual

Table 1 demonstrates that gender based discrimination relates to all the beliefs found in the research literature, namely being young, race, physical appearance, marital status, educational level, religion, and employment. In turn, sexual harassment and sexual assault are found to be related to beliefs in being young, race, physical appearance, and marital status. Hence, gender based discrimination relates to both inner and outer sides of an individual while sexual harassment and sexual assault are mostly connected to the outer side of an individual. This finding explains the difference in the number of beliefs between gender based discrimination, on the one hand, and sexual harassment and sexual assault, on the other hand.

Methodology of the Survey Analysis

Beliefs in the field of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault illustrated in Table 1 served as the basis of the survey questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was based on respondents' self-assessment. Each question in the questionnaire was applied the 4 point Likert scale as demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2 The 4 point Likert scale in the survey questionnaire (the authors)

The 4 point Likert scale in the questionnaire	A short description of the 4 point Likert scale
1	Strongly disagree
2	Disagree
3	Agree
4	Strongly agree

It should be noted that the survey questionnaire contained 62 questions in total. In this work, we keep the original number of the question in relation to beliefs in gender based discrimination (Questions 5-11), sexual harassment (Questions 38-41), and sexual assault (Questions 55-58).

In March-April 2022, the survey based on the elaborated questionnaire was carried out in five European Union countries. Altogether 309 respondents from Czech Republic, Italy, Germany, Lithuania, and Romania took part in the survey. Table 3 discloses the survey results in socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 3 Survey results in socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (the authors)

Nr	Question	Number of answers					
		Romania	Germany	Italy	Lithuania	Czech Republic	TOTAL
1	Which country are you from?	69	61	56	63	60	309
2	What is your gender:						
	a. Male	15	43	10	28	17	113
	b. Female	53	18	44	35	35	185
	c. Other	1	0	2	0	8	11
3	What is your employment status:						
	a. Employer	1	1	0	0	3	5
	b. Employee	9	4	17	5	24	59
	c. Student	59	54	39	58	33	243
	d. Entrepreneur	0	2	0	0	0	2
	e. Other	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	What is your educational level:						
	a. Secondary school	34	0	5	1	15	55
	b. High school	1	0	2	24	0	27
	c. Vocational school	1	0	1	1	0	3
	d. College	0	0	0	32	44	76
	e. University	33	61	48	4	0	146
	f. Other: please, specify	0	0	0	1	1	2

Thus, 309 respondents, young people, aged 18-30 from Romania, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, and Czech Republic participated in the survey. Related to the gender of our respondents, 185 were females, 113 males, and 11 have chosen the category “other”.

The majority of the respondents from Romania are the female students from colleges and universities.

The majority of the respondents from Germany is represented by the male university students.

The majority of the respondents from Italy are female university students.

The respondents from Lithuania almost equally represent female and male students from colleges and universities.

The respondents from the Czech Republic are mostly female students from colleges.

The majority of all the respondents are university students.

The data collected by each partner was integrated into one EXCEL file. Afterwards, the data were cleaned and prepared for analysis. This included the survey questionnaire - previously translated into national languages - to be integrated into the unified file. The data preparation also aimed at checking the connections between the question and the question number in the partner's surveys. The data were analysed via two methods:

- The mean and
- Ranking (Ahrens & Zascierinska, 2020).

The mean of a question in the dataset from the survey questionnaire represents the average value of the question in this dataset. The mean is based on the data taken from every observation shown by the respondents of the survey questionnaire. The mean indicates the center value in each question in the survey questionnaire. The center of the collected data is a numerical value from 1 to 4. The mean allows for the description of the data tendency. In the case of the present research, the mean shows whether the respondents agree or disagree with the survey questions about gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. The mean results were analysed at the levels of:

- Mean in each category, namely gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault, in each country,
- Mean as the overall value in each category, namely gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault, in all the five partner countries, namely Czech Republic, Italy, Germany, Lithuania, and Romania.

On the level of each country, the results of each question on each level of the 4 point Likert scale were calculated separately and presented in a table.

Ranking refers to an evaluation used for the advancement of the evaluated item (Ahrens & Zascierinska, 2020). The use of the ranking method was thought as the act of summing up young people beliefs into a single, holistic number or score is meant (Elbow, 1994). Ranking was intended to emphasise vertical differences between the options (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007).

The obtained mean of each question of each country was ranked. The options available were placed in order without any attempt to describe how much one differs from another or whether any of the alternatives are, for example, good or acceptable (Coe, 2010, p. 45). It should be pointed that ranking differs from rating as rating means that the used categories are often given numerical labels, such as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 (Coe, 2010, p. 45). The higher was the mean the higher the question was ranked.

Research results

Table 4 reveals the mean results related to gender based discrimination in five participating countries.

Table 4 Mean results related to gender based discrimination (the authors)

Nr	Question	Mean results in each country					Total Mean	All questions' mean
		Romania	Germany	Italy	Lithuania	Czech Republic		
5	Do you believe that younger people are more often to experience gender based discrimination?	2,71	2,52	2,91	2,76	2,69	2,72	2,87
6	Do you believe that race of people might	2,81	2,67	3,36	2,75	3,23	2,96	

	impact gender based discrimination?						
7	Do you believe that physical appearance of people might impact gender based discrimination?	2,72	2,72	3,55	3,05	3,27	3,06
8	Do you believe that marital status might impact gender based discrimination?	2,46	1,54	2,93	2,59	2,98	2,5
9	Do you believe that your educational level might impact gender based discrimination?	2,61	2,67	3	2,43	3	2,74
10	Do you believe that your religion might impact gender based discrimination?	2,65	2,69	2,95	2,63	3,15	2,81
11	Do you believe that gender based discrimination might impact your employment?	2,51	2,54	3,21	2,62	2,92	2,76

Source: The authors.
n=309

The mean results presented in Table 4 point that young people in Italy and Czech Republic have a stronger belief in gender based discrimination in comparison to the respondents from Romania, Germany, and Lithuania.

Table 5 shows the mean results of each question and each question ranking in relation to gender based discrimination.

Table 5 Mean and ranking results related to gender based discrimination (the authors)

Nr	Question	Total Mean	Ranking
5	Do you believe that younger people are more often to experience gender based discrimination?	2,72	6
6	Do you believe that race of people might impact gender based discrimination?	2,96	2
7	Do you believe that physical appearance of people might impact gender based discrimination?	3,06	1
8	Do you believe that marital status might impact gender based discrimination?	2,5	7
9	Do you believe that your educational level might impact gender based discrimination?	2,74	5
10	Do you believe that your religion might impact gender based discrimination?	2,81	3
11	Do you believe that gender based discrimination might impact your employment?	2,76	4

Source: The authors.
n=309

The ranking results demonstrate that young people have a stronger belief that people experience gender based discrimination due to their physical appearance, race and religion. Physical appearance, race and religion relate to the outer side of an individual. In regard to religion, we consider it to be an outer sign as individual's religion could be recognised on the basis of an individual's clothing, religious crosses, etc.

The mean results related to sexual harassment are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Mean results related to sexual harassment (the authors)

Nr	Question	Mean results in each country					Total mean	All questions' mean
		Roma nia	Germ any	Italy	Lithu ania	Czech Republic		
38	Do you believe that younger people are more often to experience sexual harassment?	2,94	2,80	2,66	2,94	2,81	2,83	2,81
39	Do you believe that people race might impact sexual harassment?	2,70	2,71	3	2,68	3,18	2,85	
40	Do you believe that people physical appearance might impact sexual harassment?	2,93	2,86	3,43	3,03	3,55	3,16	
41	Do you believe that marital status might impact sexual harassment?	2,29	2,16	2,28	2,33	2,85	2,38	

Source: The authors.
n=309

The mean results shown in Table 6 allow finding out that young people in Czech Republic, Italy and Romania have a stronger belief in sexual harassment in comparison to the respondents from Germany and Lithuania.

Table 7 demonstrates the mean results of each question and each question ranking in relation to sexual harassment.

Table 7 Mean and ranking results related to sexual harassment (the authors)

Nr	Question	Total mean	Ranking
38	Do you believe that younger people are more often to experience sexual harassment?	2,83	3
39	Do you believe that people race might impact sexual harassment?	2,85	2
40	Do you believe that people physical appearance might impact sexual harassment?	3,16	1
41	Do you believe that marital status might impact sexual harassment?	2,38	4

Source: The authors.
n=309

The ranking results emphasized in Table 7 allow for a finding that the young people have a stronger belief that sexual harassment refers to people physical appearance, race, and

being young. Physical appearance, race and being young represent the outer side of an individual.

Table 8 discloses the mean results related to sexual assault.

Table 8 Mean results related to sexual assault (the authors)

Nr	Question	Mean results in each country					Total mean	All questions' mean
		Roma nia	Germ any	Italy	Lithu ania	Czech Republic		
55	Do you believe that younger people are more often to experience sexual assault?	2,64	2,66	2,76	2,86	2,77	2,74	2,71
56	Do you believe that people race might impact sexual assault?	2,54	2,66	3,02	2,60	3,07	2,78	
57	Do you believe that people physical appearance might impact sexual assault?	2,55	3,14	3,12	2,60	3,35	2,95	
58	Do you believe that marital status might impact sexual assault?	1,87	2,11	3	2,38	2,48	2,37	

Source: The authors.
n=309

The mean results shown in Table 8 allow discovering that young people in Lithuania have a stronger belief in sexual assault in comparison to the respondents from Germany Czech Republic, Italy, and Romania.

Table 9 demonstrates the mean results of each question and each question ranking in relation to sexual assault.

Table 9 Mean and ranking results related to sexual harassment (the authors)

Nr	Question	Total mean	Ranking
55	Do you believe that younger people are more often to experience sexual assault?	2,74	3
56	Do you believe that people race might impact sexual assault?	2,78	2
57	Do you believe that people physical appearance might impact sexual assault?	2,95	1
58	Do you believe that marital status might impact sexual assault?	2,37	4

Source: The authors.
n=309

The ranking results emphasized in Table 9 assist in finding that the young people have a stronger belief that sexual assault refers to people physical appearance, race, and being young. Physical appearance, race and being young represent the outer side of an individual.

Table 10 reveals Top 3 beliefs of young people in relation to gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Table 10 Top 3 beliefs of young people in relation to gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault (the authors)

Ranking	Gender based discrimination	Sexual harassment	Sexual assault
1	Physical appearance of people might impact gender based discrimination	Physical appearance of people might impact sexual harassment	Physical appearance of people might impact sexual assault
2	People race might impact gender based discrimination	People race might impact sexual harassment	People race might impact sexual assault
3	Religion of people might impact gender based discrimination	Being young might impact sexual harassment	Being young might impact sexual assault

Source: The authors.
n=309

The ranking results summarized in Table 10 allow identifying that the young people have a strong belief that gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault are impacted by people physical appearance and race. It should be noted that physical appearance and race represent the outer side of an individual.

Survey Findings

The data analysis shows that the total mean of young people beliefs about gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault is 2,80 as shown in Table 11.

Table 11 Total mean in relation to gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault (the authors)

Gender based discrimination	Sexual harassment	Sexual assault	Total mean
2,87	2,81	2,71	2,80

Source: The authors.
n=309

The results of the young people self-assessment carried out through the survey questionnaire contribute to the finding that physical appearance and people race are the Top 2 beliefs that coincide in all the three fields, namely gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. All the three phenomena, namely gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault, are influenced by an individual's outer side or social perspective.

The survey questionnaire also discloses that young people in Czech Republic and Italy have stronger beliefs in gender based discrimination and sexual harassment while young people in Lithuania have a stronger belief in sexual assault.

Discussion

An interesting observation is formulated by Österholm (2009). Österholm (2009) finds that a mixture of different perspectives is a central cause for the creation of beliefs as a messy construct (Österholm, 2009). The author would prefer to view beliefs from only one perspective: either from the social perspective or from the individual perspective.

Against this, another approach that identifies the unity of both perspectives - the external (social) perspective and the internal (individual) perspective - was elaborated by Zašcerinska (2011). The approach received the name "Developing the System of External and

Internal Perspectives” (Zaščerinska, 2011). In this approach, there is a cycle based on three phases of the development of the system (beliefs in our research):

- In Phase 1, beliefs are identified from the external (social) perspective,
- In Phase 2, beliefs are defined as the unity of both perspectives - the external (social) perspective and the internal (individual) perspective, and
- In Phase 3, beliefs are analysed from the internal (individual) perspective.

Each phase is built on the previous one. If necessary, each phase and the whole cycle can be repeated.

Another issue that requires a deeper analysis is the belief of young people in physical appearance and race that might most impact the exposure of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Physical appearance and race are defined as an individual’s outer side or social perspective. It would be great to find out if an enrichment of an individual’s inner side or individual perspective through education could help diminish the impact of people physical appearance and race on the exposure of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Conclusions

The theoretical analysis allows for the establishment of the inter-connections between beliefs and values. The mean in relation to young people beliefs in gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault shows that young people believe in gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Results reveals that the respondents agree that a young age, people race and physical appearance, and marital status might impact gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. For young people, physical appearance and people race are the most important factors related to all the three phenomena, namely gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Marital status, educational level, and employment might not be so important when considering gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. The study allows for a conclusion that an individual’s outer side or social perspective prevails when discussing gender based discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. The carried out study helps understand that the evaluation of gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault by young people in the selected European countries is heterogenous as young people have beliefs of different levels in regard to gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Thus, young people in Czech Republic and Italy have stronger beliefs in gender based discrimination and sexual harassment while young people in Lithuania have a stronger belief in sexual assault.

There are some limitations in the present research. A limitation is that the inter-connections between beliefs and values have been set. The extended literature review might increase the list of young people beliefs in relation to gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. A limitation also is the participation of the respondents from only five selected countries. Participation of respondents from other countries in the survey might change the study results.

Future work proposed to compare young people beliefs about gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault with a level of exposure. Comparative studies with other age groups are to be carried out, too.

Acknowledgement

Project “Say NO to gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault! – #NOT ME”, KA220-YOU – Cooperation partnerships in youth, Project Number 2021-1-

RO01-KA220-YOU-000028555. Duration: 1st November 2021 – 31st October 2023.
Coordinator: Asociatia DEMETRUS, Iasi, Romania.

We express our gratitude to all the project partners who helped us with the data collection.

References

- Ahrens, A. & Zascierinska, J. (2020). Comparison of Teacher's and Students' Ranking of English for Academic Purposes Sub-Topics. *Education. Innovation. Diversity*, 1(1), 16-25. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17770/eid2020.1.5328>
- Coe, R. (2010). Analysing ranking and rating data from participatory on-farm trials. *African Statistics Journal*, 10, 14- 53. Retrieve from <http://apps.worldagroforestry.org/downloads/Publications/PDFS/JA10133.pdf>
- Elbow, Peter, (1994). *Ranking, Evaluating, Liking: Sorting Out Three Forms of Judgment*. College English. 12. Retrieved from https://scholarworks.umass.edu/eng_faculty_pubs/12
- European Commission (EC). (2018). *EU Youth Strategy*. Retrieved from https://europa.eu/youth/strategy_en.
- European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2015). *Unwanted Sexual Attention Among Working Population*. Retrieved from: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/genvio_sex_assa_sur_ewcs_unwantedsexatten.
- European Parliament. (2012). *Gender inequalities in the European Union. Report*. Flash Eurobarometer 341 - TNS Political & Social. Retrieved from <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2012/the-gender-inequalities-in-the-european-union/aggregate-report/en-aggregate-report-the-gender-inequalities-in-the-european-union-201203.pdf>
- Forman-Rabinovici, Aliza , Udi Sommer. (2018). An impediment to gender Equality?: Religion's influence on development and reproductive policy. *World Development*, Volume 105, 2018, 48-58. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.12.024>.
- Lee, H., Son, I., Yoon, J., Kim, S-S. (2017). Lookism hurts: appearance discrimination and self-rated health in South Korea. *Int J Equity Health* 16, 204(2017). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-017-0678-8>.
- Marginson, S., & van der Wende, M. (2007). To Rank or To Be Ranked: The Impact of Global Rankings in Higher Education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, Vol. 11, 3/4, 306-329. DOI:10.1177/1028315307303544.
- Österholm, Magnus. (2009). Beliefs: A Theoretically Unnecessary Construct? Proceedings of CERME 6, January 28th-February 1st 2009, Lyon France © INRP 2010. Retrieved from www.inrp.fr/editions/cerme6.
- Perry, BL, Harp, KL, & Oser, CB. (2013). Racial and Gender Discrimination in the Stress Process: Implications for African American Women's Health and Well-Being. *Sociol Perspect*, 56(1), 25-48. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3783344/>
- Xiao, Y., Zong, L., Geng, J., Deng, Z., & Zhu, S. (2020). Analysis of demographic profile, sexual offenses and defense ability among intellectually disabled females. *Forensic Science International: Reports*, Volume 2, 100121. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsir.2020.100121>
- Zašcerinska, J. (2011). Language Acquisition and Language Learning: Developing the System of External and Internal Perspectives. In: Zuģicka I., sast. *Proceedings of the 52nd International Scientific Conference of Daugavpils University* (pp. 412-417). Daugavpils: Daugavpils Universitātes Akadēmiskais apģads „Saule”, 2011, Latvia.