

**Preliminary Survey Report
on Gender-Based Violence in the Slovak Deaf Community**

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Slovakia

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1. Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a preliminary survey conducted between 23 November 2024 to 15 December 2024, examining gender-based violence within the Slovak Deaf community. The survey collected data from 102 valid respondents through an anonymous online questionnaire, which was made accessible in Slovak Sign Language and simplified written language.

Key Findings:

- 43 individuals (42.2%) reported experiencing violence
- 37 women (86%) of reported violence cases
- Only 13 survivors (30.2%) sought help
- 30 survivors (69.8%) expressed interest in receiving support services

Demographics Profile:

- 85 participants (83.3%) identified as Deaf, 16 (15.7%) as hearing impaired
- 69 women (67.6%), 23 men (22.5%), 6 non-binary (5.9%), 4 undisclosed (3.9%)
- Transgender identity: 8 participants (7.8%) identified as transgender
- Sexual orientation: 76 heterosexual (74.5%), 12 bisexual (11.8%), 8 homosexual (7.8%), 6 undisclosed (5.9%)
- Highest participation from age groups: 28 people aged 31-40 (27.5%) and 27 people aged 41-50 (26.5%)
- Geographic distribution: 24 from Bratislava region (23.5%), 16 from Nitra region (15.7%), 15 from Presov region (14.7%)

Critical Issues Identified:

- Significant gap between 43 experiencing violence and only 13 seeking help
- Limited awareness about what constitutes violence
- 20 people (66.7%) requested psychological support and 15 (50%) legal assistance
- Need for specialized services with sign language access

Primary Support Needs:

- 20 people requested psychological counselling
- 15 people needed legal advice
- 12 people sought social worker support
- 10 people wanted peer support groups
- 8 people required financial assistance

This survey reveals urgent needs within the Slovak Deaf community regarding violence prevention and support services. While preliminary in nature, these findings provide crucial insights for developing targeted interventions and will inform future European project initiatives aimed at establishing specialized support services for the Slovak Deaf community.

The results emphasize the importance of creating accessible, culturally appropriate support systems while highlighting the need for broader education about violence recognition and prevention within the community.

2. Methodology

2.1. Survey Design and Implementation

The survey was conducted from 23 November to 15 December 2024, through an online questionnaire created by our partner Turkoois (NL) and distributed by Innosign (SK) using Google Forms. To ensure accessibility, all questions were translated into Slovak Sign Language and written in simplified language at A2/B1 level. The questionnaire focused on gender-based violence experiences within the Slovak Deaf community and was designed to support a European project aimed at implementing specific support services.

2.2. Data Collection and Sample Size

The survey reached 102 valid respondents from an estimated population of 4,000 Deaf sign language users in Slovakia, representing 2.55% of the target population. While this sample size is smaller than traditional statistical requirements, several factors support its validity as preliminary research: the survey's accessibility in Slovak Sign Language, geographic representation from all regions, and the hard-to-reach nature of the Slovak Deaf community. One suspicious entry showing inconsistent responses was removed from the analysis.

2.3. Analysis Methodology

For data analysis and report preparation, we employed a comprehensive AI-assisted approach combining a large language model with programmed RAG (Retrieval-Augmented Generation) systems. The RAG system was specifically programmed to retrieve and analyse data from the Excel spreadsheet containing survey responses. This combined approach significantly improved accuracy in data processing. Human oversight was maintained throughout to ensure proper interpretation within the context of the Slovak Deaf community.

2.4. Data Protection and Ethics

All responses were collected anonymously, with full GDPR compliance maintained throughout the process. The survey introduction clearly stated its purpose: to gather data about gender-based violence in the Slovak Deaf community, with the ultimate goal of implementing support services and preventive measures.

2.5. Limitations

A notable limitation of this preliminary survey is the inherent difficulty in verifying online responses. During follow-up conversations with some participants, we discovered that many respondents had difficulty recognizing or labelling their experiences as violence, despite detailed explanations provided in both video format and written text. The data provides valuable initial insights for program development, though results should be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive for the broader Deaf population.

3. Demographics profile

The survey gathered responses from 102 participants, representing diverse demographics across age, gender, and disability status within the Slovak Deaf and hearing-impaired community.

3.1. Age Distribution

The majority of respondents fell within the middle-age brackets. The age distribution shows that 28 participants (27.5%) were aged 31-40 years, closely followed by 27 participants (26.5%) in the 41-50 age group. Young adults aged 18-25 comprised 23 participants (22.5%), while 14 respondents (13.7%) were between 26-30 years old. The survey also included 7 participants (6.9%) aged 51-60, and 3 participants (2.9%) in other age categories.

3.2. Gender Representation

Women formed the largest group of respondents with 69 participants (67.6%), while men accounted for 23 participants (22.5%). The survey also included 6 non-binary individuals (5.9%), and 4 participants (3.9%) chose not to disclose their gender identity.

Regarding transgender identity, 8 participants (7.8%) identified as transgender. While this number might seem surprising within the Slovak Deaf community where transgender individuals are not publicly visible, we respect these responses as part of our commitment to anonymous data collection. The confidential nature of the survey may have provided a safe space for individuals to express their identity freely.

3.3. Disability Status

The majority of participants identified as Deaf, with 85 respondents (83.3%) belonging to this category. Additionally, 16 participants (15.7%) identified as hearing impaired. A small portion of the respondents, 2 participants (2%), fell into other categories including Deaf-Blind and CODA (Child of Deaf Adult).

3.4. Sexual Orientation

Heterosexual individuals represented the largest group with 76 respondents (74.5%), followed by 12 bisexual participants (11.8%). The survey included 8 homosexual respondents (7.8%), while 6 participants (5.9%) preferred not to disclose their sexual orientation.

3.5. Geographic Distribution

The survey captured responses from across Slovakia, with the highest representation from Bratislava region with 24 respondents (23.5%), followed by Nitra region with 16 participants (15.7%), and Presov region with 15 participants (14.7%). Additionally, 11 respondents (10.8%) were living abroad at the time of the survey. The remaining participants were distributed across other Slovak regions: Kosice region 9 (8.8%), Trnava region 8 (7.8%), Zilina region 7 (6.9%), Trencin region 7 (6.9%), and Banska Bystrica region 5 (4.9%).

4. Violence Experience Analysis

From the total of 102 respondents, 43 individuals (42.2%) reported experiencing some form of violence, while 59 participants (57.8%) reported no experience of violence.

However, it is crucial to note that these numbers might not reflect the full reality of violence in the community. During follow-up conversations with some participants, we discovered that many individuals had difficulty recognizing or labelling their experiences as violence. This suggests that the actual number of violence cases might be higher, but due to lack of awareness or education about what constitutes violence, some experiences may go unreported or unrecognized.

The survey identified various forms of violence, with many respondents experiencing multiple types. Emotional violence was the most prevalent, reported by 28 respondents (27.5%), followed closely by physical violence with 26 cases (25.5%). Sexual violence was reported by 19 participants (18.6%), while online harassment affected 14 individuals (13.7%). Additionally, 11 respondents (10.8%) experienced financial or property-related abuse, and 6 cases (5.9%) involved neglect.

Regarding the age of first violence experience, the teenage years proved to be particularly vulnerable. The highest number of first incidents occurred between ages 13-17, with 13 cases (12.7%). The next most common period was young adulthood (18-24 years) with 11 cases (10.8%). Early adulthood (25-30 years) saw 6 cases (5.9%), while childhood years (5-12) accounted for 5 cases (4.9%). Early childhood violence (0-4 years) was reported by 3 respondents (2.9%), and 5 cases (4.9%) occurred in later adult years.

The data shows that women experienced a higher rate of violence compared to other gender identities. Of the 43 individuals who reported violence, 37 were women (86% of violence cases), 4 were men (9.3%), 1 were non-binary individuals (2.3%), and 1 identified as transgender (2.3%). One respondent preferred not to specify their gender (2.3%).

For future research within the European project, we recommend including questions about the relationship between victims and perpetrators. This additional data would help understand the dynamics of violence within the Slovak Deaf community and develop more targeted prevention strategies and support services. Such information would be particularly valuable for designing appropriate interventions while maintaining strict confidentiality protocols given the small size of the Slovak Deaf community.

5. Help-Seeking Behaviour

The survey revealed significant insights about help-seeking patterns among violence survivors in the Slovak Deaf community. Of the 43 individuals who experienced violence, 13 respondents (30.2%) sought help, while 30 individuals (69.8%) did not seek any assistance. This indicates a concerning gap in support service utilization.

When asked about future support needs, 30 participants (69.8%) expressed interest in receiving additional support, while 13 respondents (30.2%) indicated they did not want support. Among those who expressed interest in support, their specific needs included:

- Psychological support and counselling (20 respondents, 66.7% of those seeking help)
- Legal advice and assistance (15 respondents, 50%)
- Social worker support (12 respondents, 40%)
- Support groups with other survivors (10 respondents, 33.3%)
- Financial assistance (8 respondents, 26.7%)
- Housing support (5 respondents, 16.7%)
- Medical care (3 respondents, 10%)

The primary reasons given for not seeking help included:

- Strong belief in self-reliance and ability to handle situations independently
- Fear of community reaction and potential stigma
- Lack of trust in available support systems
- Concerns about personal safety
- Limited awareness about available support options
- Emotional barriers such as shame and guilt
- Lack of knowledge about their rights

The data also shows that many respondents were uncertain about whether their experiences qualified as violence, suggesting a need for better education about violence recognition and available support services. This uncertainty might contribute to the low rate of help-seeking behaviour.

For those who did seek help, the survey indicates that support services need to be more accessible and tailored to the specific needs of the Slovak Deaf community. The significant gap between those experiencing violence (43 individuals) and those seeking help (13 individuals) highlights the need for targeted interventions and improved support systems.

6. Discussion and Recommendations

The survey findings highlight several critical areas that require attention and intervention within the Slovak Deaf community regarding gender-based violence. This preliminary research reveals both challenges and opportunities for improvement.

6.1. Key Discussion Points

The low rate of help-seeking behaviour (only 30.2% of violence survivors sought help) indicates significant barriers within the current support system. This is particularly concerning given that 42.2% of respondents reported experiencing violence. The gap between experiencing violence and seeking help suggests systemic barriers that need addressing.

The high number of respondents (69.8%) expressing interest in future support services indicates a clear need for specialized services. The most requested forms of support - psychological counselling (66.7%) and legal assistance (50%) - point to specific service gaps that need filling.

A critical finding is the apparent lack of awareness about what constitutes violence. Many respondents initially reported no violence experiences but later recognized violent incidents after receiving more information. This suggests a significant education gap within the community.

6.2. Comparative Analysis

Our preliminary survey data suggests potential patterns of violence within the Slovak Deaf community, with 42.2% of respondents reporting experiences of violence. When compared to the general Slovak population, where studies show 34% of hearing women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence according to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (source: https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2016.5493_mh0216775enn_pdfweb_201702151_00605.pdf?t), these initial findings warrant further investigation.

The help-seeking patterns in our survey shown that only 30.2% of Deaf survivors sought assistance. This preliminary data points to possible additional barriers faced by Deaf individuals in accessing support services, compared to the general population where approximately one-third of women who experience physical or sexual abuse contact authorities.

A significant observation from our survey interactions is the knowledge gap about violence recognition. Through follow-up conversations, we found that some participants only identified their experiences as violence after receiving detailed explanations about different forms of abuse. This suggests a need for:

1. Specialized support services with sign language access
2. Educational programs about recognizing different forms of violence
3. Enhanced data collection methods that include Deaf populations in national surveys

6.3. Recommendations

Immediate Actions Needed:

1. Develop accessible education programs about recognizing different forms of violence
2. Create specialized support services with sign language access

3. Establish confidential reporting mechanisms designed specifically for the Slovak Deaf community
4. Train professional support staff in Deaf culture and sign language

Long-term Strategic Goals:

1. Build a comprehensive support network including:
 - Psychological counselling services in sign language
 - Legal support with qualified interpreters
 - Safe houses with staff trained in sign language
 - Support groups for survivors
2. Implement prevention programs:
 - Early education in schools for Deaf children
 - Community awareness campaigns
 - Training for healthcare providers and social workers
3. Develop institutional capacity:
 - Train more Deaf professionals in counselling and social work
 - Create partnerships with existing violence prevention organizations
 - Establish regular monitoring and evaluation systems

These findings and recommendations should inform the development of the planned European project, ensuring that interventions are tailored to the specific needs of the Slovak Deaf community while addressing the identified gaps in current support systems.

7. Conclusion

This preliminary survey of 102 respondents from the Slovak Deaf community provides valuable insights into the prevalence and impact of gender-based violence. With 42.2% of participants reporting experiences of violence, the findings highlight a significant issue that demands immediate attention and systematic intervention.

The survey reveals several concerning patterns. While 43 individuals reported experiencing violence, only 13 sought help, indicating a substantial gap in support service utilization. However, the fact that 30 participants expressed interest in receiving support suggests there is potential for positive change if appropriate services are made available.

A critical finding is the apparent knowledge gap regarding violence recognition. Many participants struggled to identify their experiences as violence, suggesting that the actual prevalence might be higher than reported. This underscores the urgent need for education and awareness programs within the Slovak Deaf community.

The demographic diversity of respondents - spanning different age groups, gender identities, and regions across Slovakia - provides a broad perspective of the challenges faced by the Slovak Deaf community. The high representation of women among violence survivors (86% of reported cases) indicates a particular vulnerability that needs addressing.

These findings, while preliminary, provide a foundation for developing targeted interventions and support services. They will inform the planned European project, helping to shape programs that are both accessible and culturally appropriate for the Slovak Deaf community. The data clearly shows that there is not only a need for specialized support services but also a willingness within the community to utilize such services if properly developed and implemented.

Moving forward, this research underscores the importance of creating comprehensive support systems that address both immediate needs and long-term prevention strategies, while ensuring all services are fully accessible to the Slovak Deaf community through sign language and Deaf-aware professionals.