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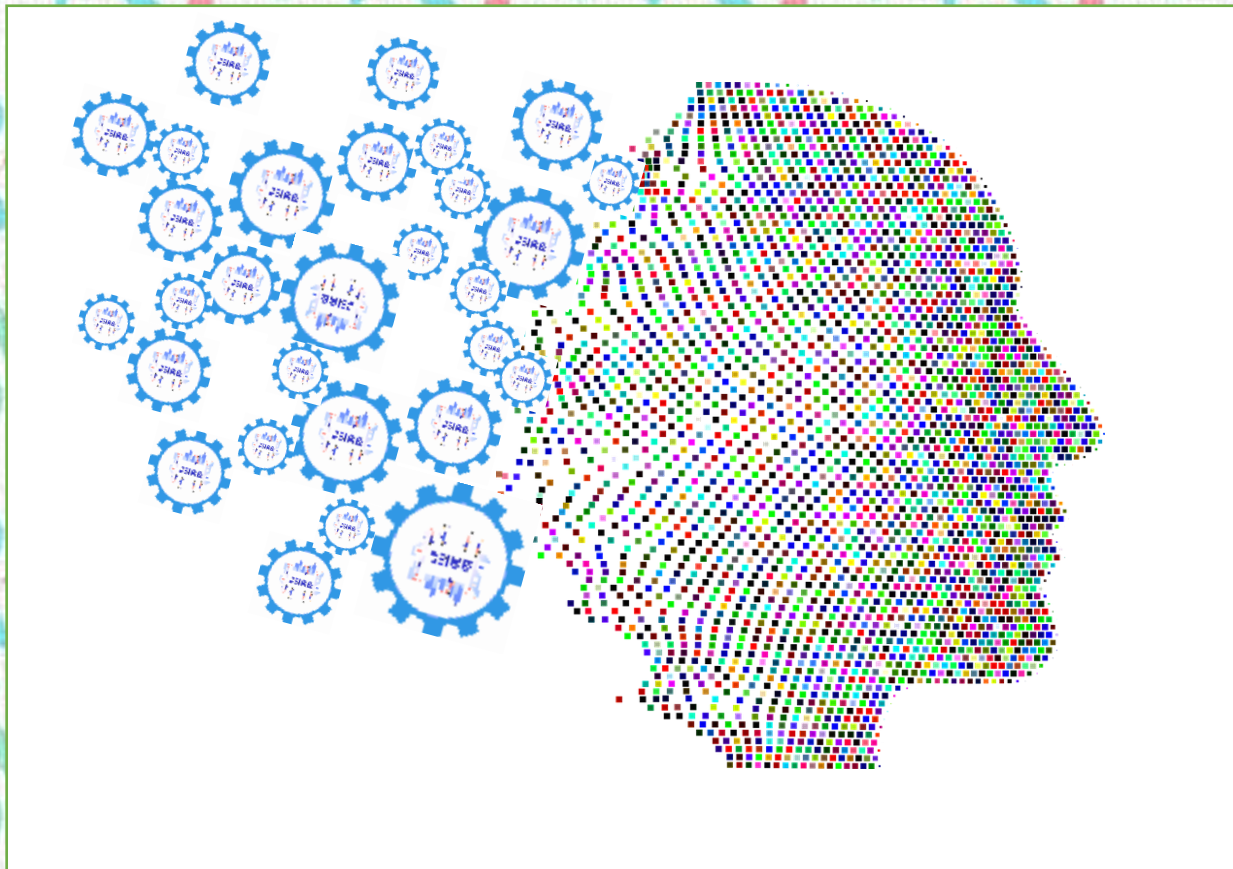


REPORT

2022

# IMPROVING TEENAGERS' MENTAL HEALTH IN ALBANIA

## Experiences and reactions on hate speech





*This study report "Improving teenagers' mental health in Albania: experiences and reactions on hate speech" was a research conducted, prepared and published by the AMAD, within the project "Reacting on hate speech, improving mental health". This report was made with the financial support of the European Union, within Reporting Diversity Network 2.0 program framework under the small grants support scheme.*

*The purpose of this study report is to provide updated data and recommendations to improve the approach of public institutions and civil society regarding youth mental health activities in Albania.*

*Its content is the sole responsibility of AMAD and as such it does not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union or the Diversity Reporting Network 2.0.*

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Tirana, June 2022

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## DEFINITIONS

**Hate speech** – any form of public expression, by any means, of promoting, inciting denigration, hatred or defamation, any disturbance, insult, negative stereotype, stigmatization or threat to a person or group of persons, as well as any justification of all forms of expression.<sup>1</sup>

**Mental health** – state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their potential, learn and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that supports our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right and is essential for personal growth, community and socio-economic development.<sup>2</sup>

**Prejudice** – 1) Wrong and unsupported opinion, embedded by the incomplete knowledge of the phenomena of the world and their causes, from which someone starts in his judgments and in his actions contrary to knowledge and reason; point of view or attitude, which is formed as a habit under the influence of society and the environment and not from knowledge and life experience; 2) Unfair opinion, which has been formed beforehand about someone or something without knowing it well and which prevents you from evaluating it impartially.<sup>3</sup>

**Hate crimes** – criminal offenses committed by non-tolerance towards an individual or certain groups in society with the motive of prejudice due to gender, race, religious belief, skin color, language, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.

**Discrimination** – any difference, exclusion, limitation or preference – based on any of the reasons mentioned in Article 1 of the law “For protection from discrimination” – which has the purpose or consequence of hindering or making impossible the exercise in the same way as others of the rights and fundamental freedoms recognized from the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, international acts ratified by the Republic of Albania, as well as the laws in force.<sup>4</sup>

- a. *Direct discrimination* – form of discrimination that occurs when one person or group of persons is treated less favorably than another person or group of persons in the same or similar situation.
- b. *Cross-cutting discrimination* – a form of discrimination in which several causes operate and interact with each other at the same time, in such a way that they are inseparable and produce separate forms of discrimination.
- c. *Discrimination due to association* – a form of discrimination that occurs when there is a difference, limitation or preference due to association with persons belonging to the groups mentioned in Article 1 of law no 10221, as well as due to the assumption of such association.

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<sup>1</sup> Law 10221, dated 04.02.2010 "On protection against discrimination", amended by Law 124/2020 (updated) <https://www.kmd.al/legjislacioni-shqiptar/>

<sup>2</sup> WHO <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

<sup>3</sup> Dictionary of the Albanian language

<sup>4</sup> Law "On Protection from Discrimination"

- d. *Multiple discrimination* – a form of discrimination that occurs when one person or group of persons is treated less favorably than another person or another group of persons in the same or similar situation, based on two or more causes acting separately.
- e. *Structural discrimination* – a form of discrimination that refers to rules, norms, practices, patterns of attitudes and behaviors in institutions and other social structures, which consciously or unconsciously present obstacles for groups or individuals to have the same rights and opportunities like others and that contribute to less favorable outcomes for them in relation to others.
- f. *Indirect discrimination* – a form of discrimination that occurs when a provision, criterion or practice, seemingly impartial, would put a person or group of persons in less favorable conditions in relation to another person or group of persons, when that provision, criterion a practice is not objectively justified by a legitimate goal, or when the means of achieving this goal are either not appropriate, or are not necessary and in fair proportion to the situation that gave rise to it.
- g. *Inciting or aiding discrimination* – a form of discrimination that occurs when one or more persons incite or assist one or more other persons, including financing them, with the intent to discriminate.
- h. *Harassment* – a form of discrimination that occurs in the case of unwanted behavior, which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of the person and creating an intimidating, hostile, contemptuous, humiliating or offensive environment for that person, as well as less favorable treatment, carried out as a result of opposition or non-submission on the part of the offended person to such conduct.
- i. *Segregation* – form of discrimination, which occurs in cases where a person or group of persons are separated from others without an objective and reasonable justification.

**Bullying** – phenomenon where one/several individuals use injury as a way to damage the victim's self-esteem.<sup>5</sup> Repeated aggressive behavior where a person (or group of people) in a position of power intentionally intimidates, abuses, or coerces an individual with the intent to hurt that person physically or emotionally. Acts of harassment can be physical or verbal. Many young people can be rude to each other during adolescence as they improve social skills and grow up.<sup>6</sup>

**Cyber bullying** – a "repeated, intentional act that hurts someone physically, psychologically or emotionally and that occurs virtually through mobile devices such as phones and tablets and/or occurs through online social networks and gaming sites".<sup>7</sup> So cyberbullying is behavior through digital communication space, intended to intimidate, anger or embarrass those who are targeted can take place on social media, messaging platforms, gaming platforms and mobile phones.

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<sup>5</sup> Public Health Institute, [Bullizmi.pdf \(ishp.gov.al\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [What is bullying? | preventingbullying.promoteprevent.org](#) cited from TFL in "Sexual and reproductive health rights of adolescents in Albania" report, May 2022.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/-/council-of-europe-webinar-when-cyber-bullying-becomes-a-crime-against-our-children-council-of-europe-webinar-when-cyber-bullying-becomes-a-crime-against-our-children>



**Cyber stalking** – harassing behavior using one or more platforms in the online environment. It may include frequent and intrusive threats, cryptic messages and sexual innuendos. Its usual purpose is to create a sense of fear in the recipient, based on control and intimidation. Some adults pretend, creating fake profiles with fake ages and identities as if they are young to befriend and gain the trust of young people online.<sup>8</sup>

**Cyber deceit** – occurs when someone (often an adult) befriends a child online and builds an emotional connection with future targets of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or trafficking. The main goals of cyber-fraud are: gaining the trust of the child, obtaining intimate and personal data from the child (often of a sexual nature, such as: sex chats, pictures or videos) in order to threaten and blackmail him for further inappropriate material.<sup>9</sup>

**Stigma** – social phenomenon that determines a behavior based on a series of negative connotations and unfavorable emotional reactions, violating integrity and reputation, which are arbitrarily associated with an individual, group or activity. Thus, stigma is the negative attitude or discrimination against someone based on a distinguishing characteristic such as a mental illness, health condition or disability. Social stigmas can also be related to other characteristics including gender, sexuality, race, religion and culture.

**Adolescence** – The World Health Organization defines adolescents as the population between the ages of 10-19. Adolescence is a key stage of life that affects health and development opportunities for the rest of life. This period summarizes a series of physical, mental, social and emotional changes that determine the sexual identity and social status of the individual. Managing these changes as best as possible and very carefully to achieve optimal well-being and personal development is one of the greatest challenges and is deeply influenced by social experiences.<sup>10</sup>

**Gender** - refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women, men, girls and boys. This includes the norms, behaviors and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time.

**Gender identity** – one's innermost concept of oneself as male, female, a mixture of both or neither, i.e. how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same as or different from the sex assigned at birth.<sup>11</sup>

**Sexual orientation** – a natural or unchanging enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. Sexual orientation can be: asexual, bisexual, demisexual, heterosexual, homosexual, pansexual, polysexual and scoliois.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> TFL , “Të drejtat e shëndetit seksual dhe riprodhues të adoleshentëve në Shqipëri”, May 2022.

<sup>9</sup> [www.childsafenet.org](http://www.childsafenet.org)

<sup>10</sup> TFL

<sup>11</sup> [www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-terminology-and-definitions](http://www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-terminology-and-definitions)

<sup>12</sup> <https://tabu.al/terminologjia-seksuale-ge-te-gjithe-duhet-te-dijne/>



**Gender based violence** – refers to harmful acts directed at an individual because of gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, abuse of power and harmful norms. Gender-based violence (GBV) is a serious violation of human rights and poses a threat to life, health and protection.<sup>13</sup>

**Domestic violence** – any action or inaction, directed towards a family member or in an intimate relationship or guardianship, that violates his physical, psycho-social and economic integrity. Thus, any act of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occurs within the family or household unit or between spouses or partners or between ex-spouses or ex-partners, regardless of whether the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim.

**Physical violence** – using physical force against someone in a way that hurts, harms or endangers that person. Physical violence includes but is not limited to behaviors such as: scratching, pushing, throwing, grabbing, biting, putting hands on the throat, biting, punching, pulling hair, arm twisting, slapping, squeezing, hitting, beating, kicking, burning, stabbing, strangulation/suffocation. Physical violence may also include a person's use of physical size and force, restraints, and/or weapons (e.g., firearms, knives, or other objects) to gain and maintain control over another person". Physical violence often causes some form of harm or injury and can even cause death.<sup>14</sup>

**Psychological violence** – behaviors that are intended to psychologically and emotionally abuse an individual or group of individuals. a) *Emotional abuse* – destroying an individual's sense of self-worth and/or self-confidence. This can include constant criticism, humiliation, underestimating a person's abilities, bullying, degrading and damaging one's relationships with his or her children. b) *Psychological abuse* – includes causing fear through intimidation; the threat of physical self-harm, harm the partner, the children or the partner's family or friends; the threat of abandonment; killing of domestic animals and destruction of property; threats to take custody of children; violent isolation from family, friends, school and/or work and denial of access to money or economic support.<sup>15</sup>

**Economic violence** – includes economic dependence, not allowing employment, continuous and detailed control of expenses, not giving monetary means, etc., to a person in a family relationship. So, this form of violence is defined as keeping control over money by an individual, regardless of whether it is earned by him/her or not, the constant threat of cutting off economic resources, etc.

**Person with disabilities** – an individual who has long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which – in interaction with various obstacles, including environmental and attitudinal ones – may prevent the full and efficient participation of these persons in society, on equal terms with others. In the simplest sense of the word, "disability" means a person cannot easily do without any special help or support what others could do it without any great effort/difficulty.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> [UNHCR - Gender-based Violence](#)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> <http://handi-kos.org/terminologjia-e-drejte-per-personat-me-aftesi-te-kufizuara/>

## INTRODUCTION

Reacting to hate speech in Albania and using the voice to raise awareness about mental health still seems to need more engagement, awareness and advocacy. However, there can be no physical health unless equal care and attention is paid to the mental health. The research indicators present the initial problem that basic information is missing in society in terms of mental health awareness and correct understanding of it. So, for example, one of the sources of stigma in Albanian society in terms of mental health is the lack of distinction between psychological and psychiatric treatment.

Hate speech and discrimination contradict the treatment of rights, human dignity, coexistence and understanding provided for in the legal framework in force, starting from the Constitution and ending with other laws and by-laws, in compliance to the hierarchy of normative acts in the Republic of Albania. Referring to publications and initiatives made public over the last few years, it seems that their focus (articles, reports, etc.) has mostly been addressed on the use of hate speech in the media, gender identity (especially the LGBT+ community) as well as bullying, but there seems to be a lack of more extended reports that give a wider panorama in terms of hate speech in different microenvironments as well as different types of how it appears.

Among other things, the correlation of experiencing hate speech and its impact on mental health of individuals is of great interest in general and especially in the adolescent group age. Despite the microenvironments where hate speech appears, it seems that from the institutional point of view and the handling of the issue, it remains mostly for the security officer - introduced in recent years as a structure in high schools - as well as the State Police which are present in reporting when the situation/case is presented as violence or crime. Again, there is room for improvement, particularly in the targeting, reporting and handling of hate crimes. However, these are not the only institutional structures, which, in addition to civil society organizations, are responsible for dealing with all the problems related to hate speech.

The report "Improving the mental health of adolescents in Albania: Experiences and reactions to hate speech" aims to bring quantitative and qualitative findings, based on the analysis of the situation and the collection of findings through interactive instruments and in direct communication with the target group. In carrying out the analysis, a specific methodology was implemented, combining the use of several instruments for sampling and collecting findings, such as:

- a) short writings/essays about experiencing hate speech

- b) questionnaire with closed, open and mixed questions on hate speech
- c) meetings and talks with focus groups of beneficiaries
- d) to conclude it with the inter-institutional round table with representatives of government agencies that directly affect the object of this study, civil society organizations, media and experts in the field.

The analysis of this report brings the projection of the findings at the level of microenvironments and determination of determinants as essential factors in the use of hate speech, linked to the psycho-social analysis of the experiences and psycho-emotional reactions of individuals, as an approach to improving mental health. A very influential determinant is the time period when this study was conducted, because social developments, demographic and socio-economic factors undergo changes under the influence of various events or movements. Thus, the study extended over a period of time for about 1 month (from May 2, 2022, to June 4, 2022), divided into two phases. Specifically:

- phase I, 02-20 May 2022, collection of short writings/essays and meetings with focus groups were carried out
- phase II, May 30 – June 4, 2022, distribution and collection of answers through the structured questionnaire.

This study marks the first step to see hate speech and mental health not only as two sides of the same coin, but also by bringing an analysis with micro and macro elements to show the panorama of this problem even more widely. Therefore, the approach of this analysis and this report does not aim to be exhaustive or comprehensive, but certainly brings an analysis with indicators that aim to awaken activation in inclusion as well as bringing recommendations in the service of curbing hate speech and improving mental health of teenagers in Albania.

## **I. PROBLEM ANALYSIS**

Based on published data (articles, reports, studies, etc.), the data on hate speech in Albania are partial and in some cases even missing. According to the observation by AMAD of the problem analysis and the situation, it turns out that these publications present findings that focus mostly on the language of hate in the media microenvironment as the media is active in conveying different messages and influencing a wide mass of the population. Also, it can be said that in addition to hate speech in the media, the publications so far have mostly dealt with the presence of hate speech and hate crimes against a specific target group, such as based on gender identity, belonging religious or even ethnic. However, no real analysis or study was found on the experience of hate speech among teenagers in the age group of 14-18 years and the impact it has on their mental health. In this situation of insufficient and even missing statistics and analyses, AMAD brings a quantitative and qualitative analysis combining projections based on determinants and factorial indicators.

## **II. METODOLOGY**

The methodology of this report services to the best approach to data collection for the given time by combining instruments and study methods, serving the respective purpose and objectives.

### **i. Scope and objectives of the report**

The purpose of this study is to present a quantitative and qualitative data analysis on the experience of hate speech and its impact on mental health in Albania, specifically in the target group of teenagers.

Objectives:

- a) Collecting public opinion on the use of hate speech
- b) Reflecting an analysis according to determinants
- c) Highlight of the impact that hate speech has on mental health, especially among Albanian teenagers

### iii. Study and report phases

In order to perform an adequate analysis, a methodology was defined based on a combination of tools and with processes defined according to the relevant phases. Regarding the timing of the development of this analytical material, the following phases were followed.

Table 1. Phases followed in this study report



### iii. Sampling and tools

The first phase of determining the sampling concerns the selection of the primary sampling units **PSU - Primary Sampling Units**. In order to carry out this study, the primary sampling unit was defined as teenagers aged 14-18 years, in a public school in Albania.

The following instruments were used to collect responses:

- a) open call for essays/short writings on their experiences of hate speech
- b) focus group meetings in school settings
- c) structured questionnaire (with closed, open and mixed questions), distributed via email and whatsapp message.

I. For the first tool, **essays/short writings**, the selected sampling method was determined according to the **SS (Stratified Sampling)** type, with a simple random selection, **SRS (Simple Random Sampling)**.

Table 2. Sampling

Population	Residents in Albania
Strata	Students in Albania
Simple random selection - SRS	Student age group 14-18 years old in a public school in Albania
Sampling	At least 50 essays in total

The open call for essays was published on the profiles of the AMAD organization on social networks, i.e. on Facebook and Instagram. Essays/short writings were submitted by students and collected by AMAD over an 18-day period, from 02 – 20 May 2022. Essays were collected via Google Forms format. The submitted essays had the target to be expanded at the national level (Tirana, Shkodra, Lezha, Kukësi, Puka, Laçi, Shijaku,

Lushnja, Fieri). In total, 83 essays were collected, of which 21 responses sent did not meet the criteria as:

- 6 replies sent contained only the title or were empty
- 15 were taken in whole or in part from ready-made articles published on the net.

## II. Meetings with focus groups of students

The meetings were conducted with the approval of the teacher in charge and/or the head of the school. Realization of free conversation about personal experiences of hate speech was possible in 3 schools:

- Gymnasium "Kajo Karafili", Maminas, Shijak
- Gymnasium "Partizani", Tirana
- "Misto Mame" School, Tirana.

These focus group meetings were conducted during the data collection period, i.e. May 2 - June 4, 2022. In these **3 focus groups** were included **41 students** from the age group of 14 to 18 years.

## III. Data collection through the questionnaire

The questionnaire tool was used as a reinforcement tool in the study to generate more quantitative and qualitative data. The structuring of the questions and orientation to the focus of the study helped to further enrich the analysis of this report based on the findings of the study conducted. The method followed for distributing the questionnaire was different from that of the other two tools mentioned above. In order to collect answers through the questionnaire was followed the track established by the contacts of two other tools (essays and focus groups). This means that the questionnaire was distributed electronically via email and whatsapp using the snowball method. So, the questionnaire have been forwarded to the key contacts who were involved during the first stages (essays and focus groups) and the latter distribute it to contacts in their network of acquaintances.

The time of data collection through the questionnaire was kept short. This is because it was a complementary tool in the study, so not the main one, and we were also limited by the duration of the project. In overall were collected **a total of 682 questionnaires** in national level (Tirana, Shkodra, Lezha, Kukësi, Puka, Laçi, Shijaku, Lushnja, Fieri, etc.), **where 310** of them were answered by **students in the age group of 14-18 years**.

### **III. FINDINGS ANALYSIS**

Through the graphs<sup>17</sup>, this report reflects the main results of the study in total, where each item of the following graphs marks the data analyzed through the answers collected from the questionnaire tool. Meanwhile, the qualitative findings reflect the results from the analysis projection of data from all three instruments together (essay, focus group, open-ended and mixed questionnaire).

In this study, according to its purpose and objectives, the following issues were identified in the general and specific results.

#### **1. General results**

The findings of the study are based on the analysis of quantitative and qualitative indicators comes in this part of the report through general results.

The overall results help us to understand whether the experience of hate speech is present in a certain category or affects our society more broadly. For this reason, in the study we bring significant findings that highlight the problem of the phenomenon of hate speech in Albanian society, as well as the experiences of damage to the mental health of any individual, without focusing on 1 specific target group (gender, age, microenvironment, form , type etc.).

#### **1.1 Biodata of the people involved in the study**

This session contains demographic data of the study, such as the biodata indicators of the people involved with their responses to the study, through one of the three instruments used to collect the findings.

##### ***1.1.1 Gender***

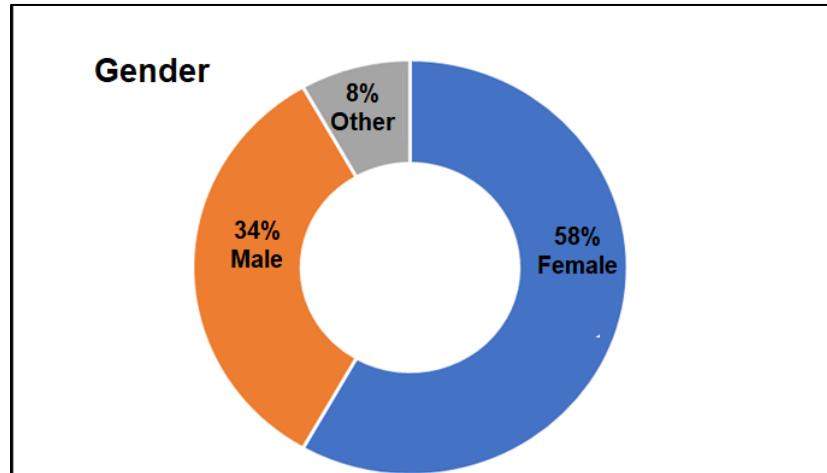
The involved persons (682 in total), according to their own declaration, turned out to be 58% female, 34% male. An interesting indicator is that 8% answered "other", who did not want to define their gender identity in either of the two genders (see graph 1).

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<sup>17</sup> In some graphics, visually the total amount may not be equal to 100% due to the possibility of choosing more than one alternative, as well as in some cases due to the rounding of individual figures.



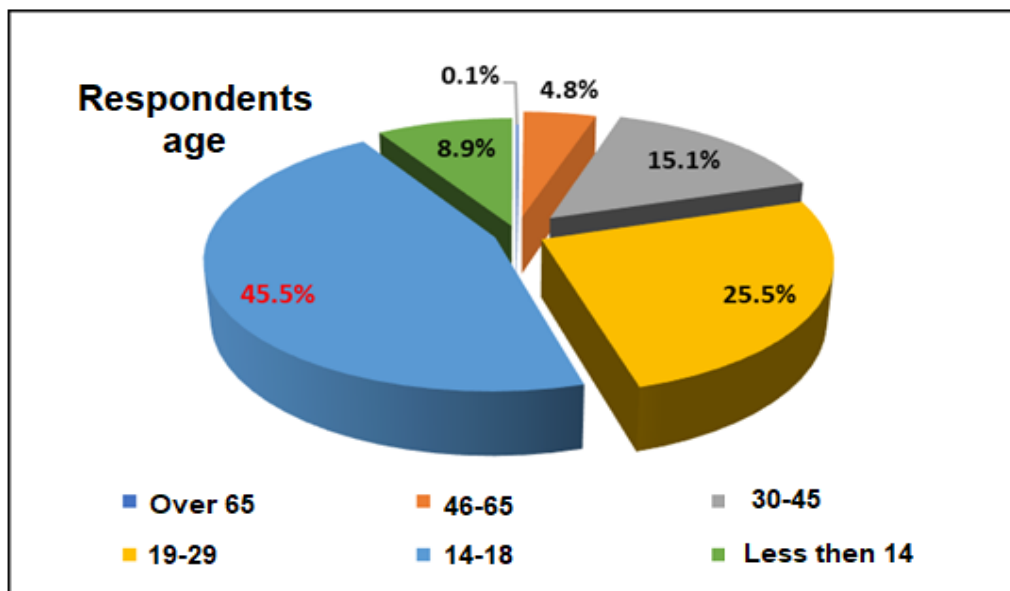
Graphic 1. Gender of the respondents



### 1.1.2 Respondents' group age

Since the study was also extended to other age groups (only in the case of the questionnaire tool), in order to evidence the presence of hate speech and the impact on mental health according to the age factor<sup>18</sup>, from the responders it was found that 45.5% of them were the target group of 14-18 years old, 25.5% 19-29 years old, 15.1% 30-45 years old, 8.9% less than 14 years old (who turn out to be individuals in the stage first of adolescence, i.e. 10-13 years old), 4.8% 46-65 years old and only 0.1% over 65 years old (see graph 2).

Graphic 2. Respondents' group age



<sup>18</sup> It is worth noting that people outside the 14-18 age group were family members and teaching staff, who were involved in the study voluntarily, as an effect of the snowball method in the distribution of the study tool, as well as due to individual interest and desire. to express their experiences, even though they were not the direct target of this study.

### *1.1.3 Geographic distribution*

The zoning, or geographical distribution achieved by this study through the three instruments used (essay, focus groups, questionnaire) as well as three different methods (open call, direct meetings, "snowball" circulation). From the analysis of data showed that the people included in the study are residents of different areas in the territory of the Republic of Albania. Specifically:

- Tirana
- Maminas, Shijak
- Rubik, Mirdita
- Rrëshen, Mirdita
- Lezha
- Fushë-Kuqe, Lezha
- Shëngjin, Lezha
- Kukës
- Bardhoc, Kukës
- Laç
- Has
- Kamëz
- Elbasan
- Vora
- Durrës
- Manza, Durrës
- Fier
- Lushnjë
- Vlora
- Puka
- Berat
- Shkodër
- Bajza, Shkodër

This geographical distribution shows a national involvement of the people who voluntarily became part of the study, as a need to share their personal experiences and voice-up the reaction to the problem of hate speech and mental health improvement.

## **1.2 Treguesit e përgjithshëm mbi gjuhën e urrejtjes**

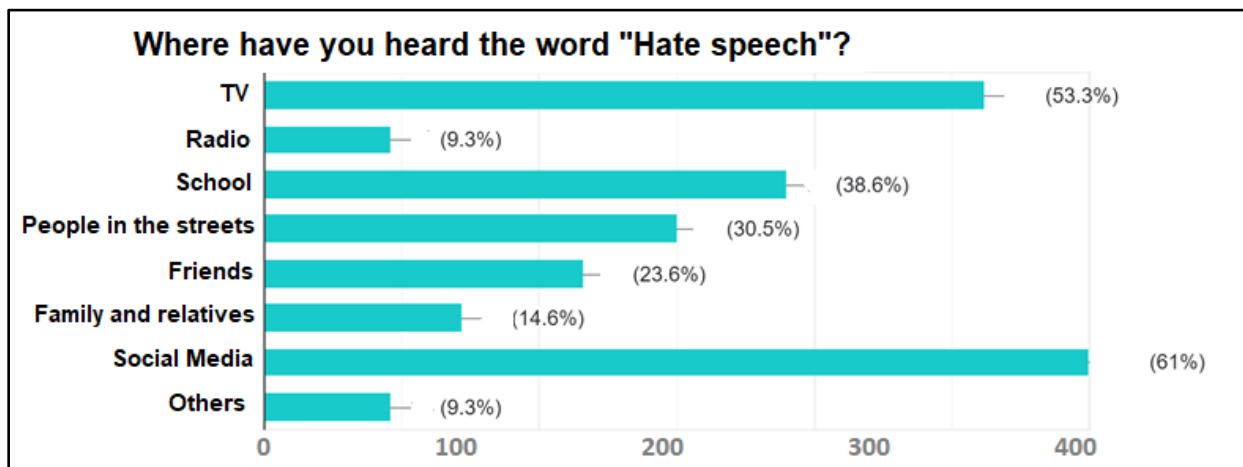
This bud in the report presents the findings of the study according to its objectives and purpose, highlighting general information on hate speech, the environments where it is encountered, the communication channels through which it is transmitted, the forms it is presented in, as well as individual reactions psycho-emotional that hate speech promotes in the individuals involved in this study.

An important element in the study is the period of time, or the "momentum" that the phenomenon can take under the influence of a certain event. Bullying, hate speech and mental health received a voice thanks to the media through programs, which, as the study evidenced, in addition to social anti-values<sup>19</sup>, managed to convey an echo to the audience regarding these issues. So, for example, the reactions to the characters in "Big Brother Vip Albania" and the dimensions of viewership, interaction, reactions on social networks, as well as the first topic of discussion in coffee, etc. caused them to "explode" words of support for their favorite character and mostly to attack with words, which are categorized as hate speech, the rival characters of their favorite. Above all, the verbal attacks turned into threats against both public figures and their followers. What led to the reactions of public figures of the screen and not only on curbing hate speech, but also in touching the topic of mental health.

### 1.2.1 Incountering hate speech

For the reasons mentioned above as well as due to the ranking factor of the most used communication channel for receiving and spreading information during the last years, the projection of the analysis of the findings reflected that the term "language of hatred" (bullying, discrimination, exclusion, etc.) the people involved in the study encountered mostly in social networks (60% of them), TV (53.3% of them), as well as school (38.6% of them). As reflected by the analysis of the collected data, the radio is less, considered as a communication channel, rather as a musical space and not a strong treatment of social topics. Also, the family (which shows the need to increase the informative and educational role of the family).

Graphic 3. Communication channel where the term "hate speech" was heard/read

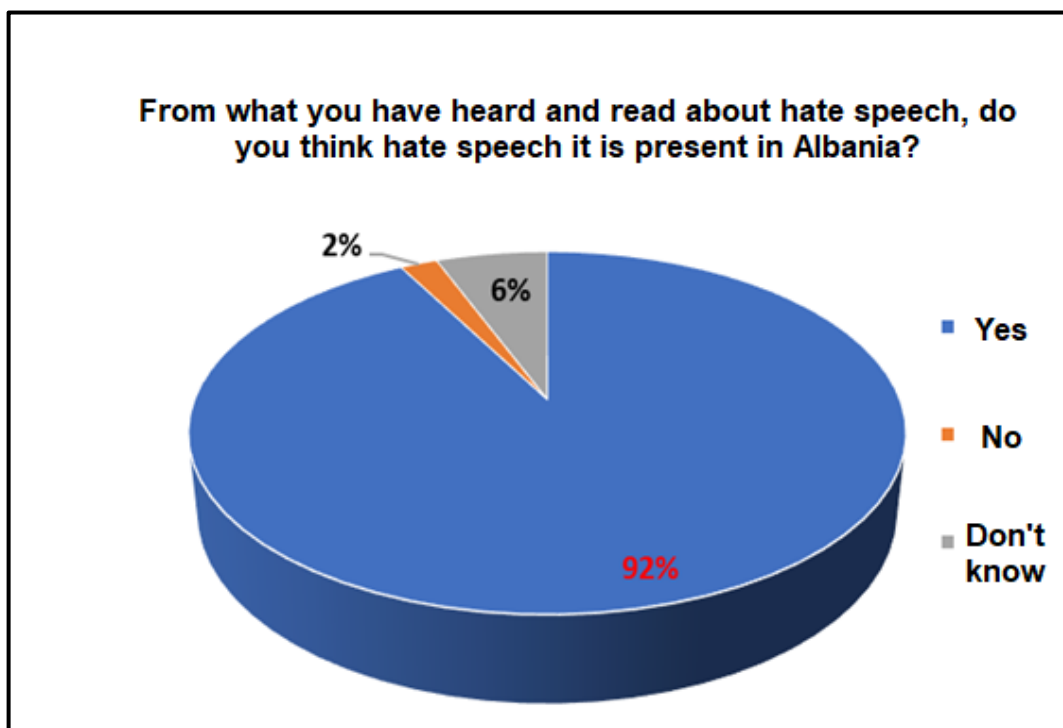


<sup>19</sup> Considered as such by the audience

### *1.2.2 Perceptimi mbi përdorimin e gjuhës së urrejtjes në Shqipëri*

According to the general perception, from the total responses collected for the realization of this study, it turned out that 92% think that hate language is usable in our country and only 2% of them think that hate language is not used in Albania (see graph 4). This element shows the rate of how much individuals are really aware of and vulnerable to this phenomenon.

*Graphic 4. The presence of hate speech in Albania*



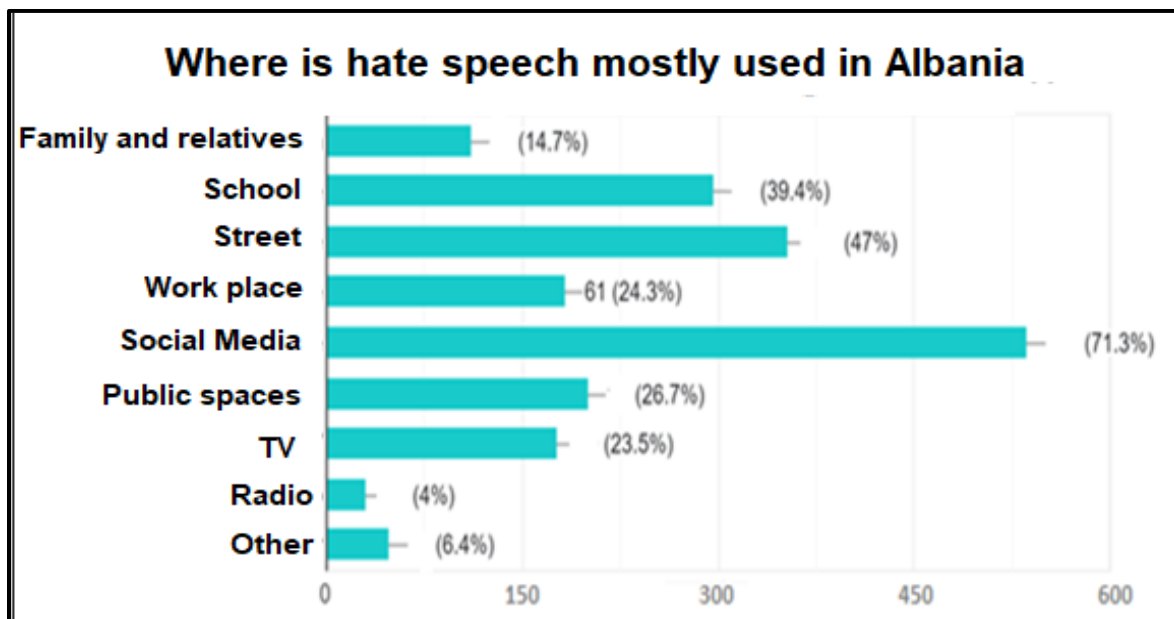
### *1.2.3 The microenvironment where hate speech is used the most*

The microenvironment defines a space where a specific activity takes place for a certain time in the daily activity of an individual, or a group of individuals. According to the categorization of microenvironments, the analysis of the data from the collected responses reflects how social networks and virtual reality are seen as the space where hate speech is used the most (71.3%). This high indicator comes as an impact of the element of technology and digital communication, which especially during and after the pandemic has received a development in human activity. As the WHO also addresses in the article published on December 1, 2021, one of the direct consequences in global society is the communication crisis as a result of the

networks/media/social platforms usage.<sup>20</sup> The WHO points out that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown increased access to information and communication on social networks and the Internet, especially by young people. The same tools also enable and reinforce the infodemic (disinformation, misinformation, and mal-information), which continues to undermine the global response and jeopardizes measures to control the pandemic.

With 47%, the street is ranked as the environment where hate speech, insults, harassment, contemptuous glances are encountered (since as evidenced by the answers received, hate speech can be verbal or non-verbal). The presence of hate speech in this microenvironment is mostly evidenced by the female gender, with a prevalence of 12% by the male gender.

Graphic 5. Hate speech encounter microenvironments



#### 1.2.4 Hate speech victims

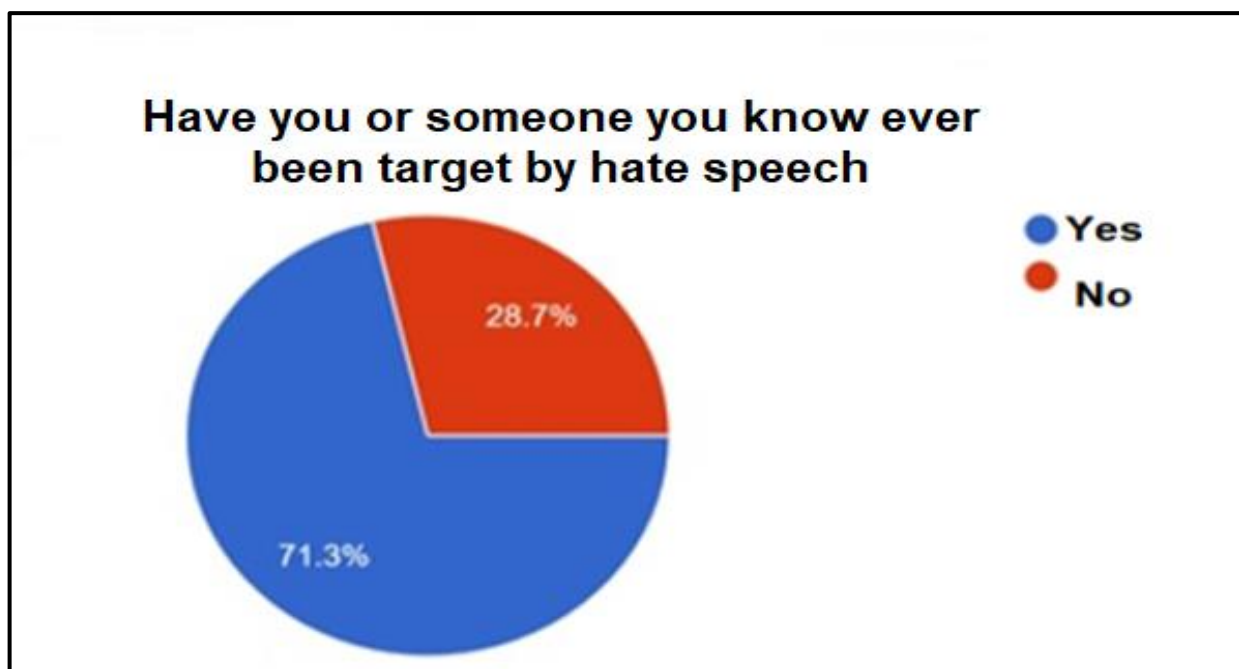
Encountering hate speech and sometimes becoming a victim of hate crimes can be presented in two basic approaches:

- Experiencing hate speech on oneself
- Assisting/being present in a situation (face-to-face or/and online communication) where the direct victim is someone else.

The study showed that 71.3% of the respondents claim that they have experienced hate speech on themselves or/and have been present when someone else has been using hate speech.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/social-media-covid-19-a-global-study-of-digital-crisis-interaction-among-gen-z-and-millennials>

Graphic 6. Have you ever been directly/indirectly a hate speech victim yourself?



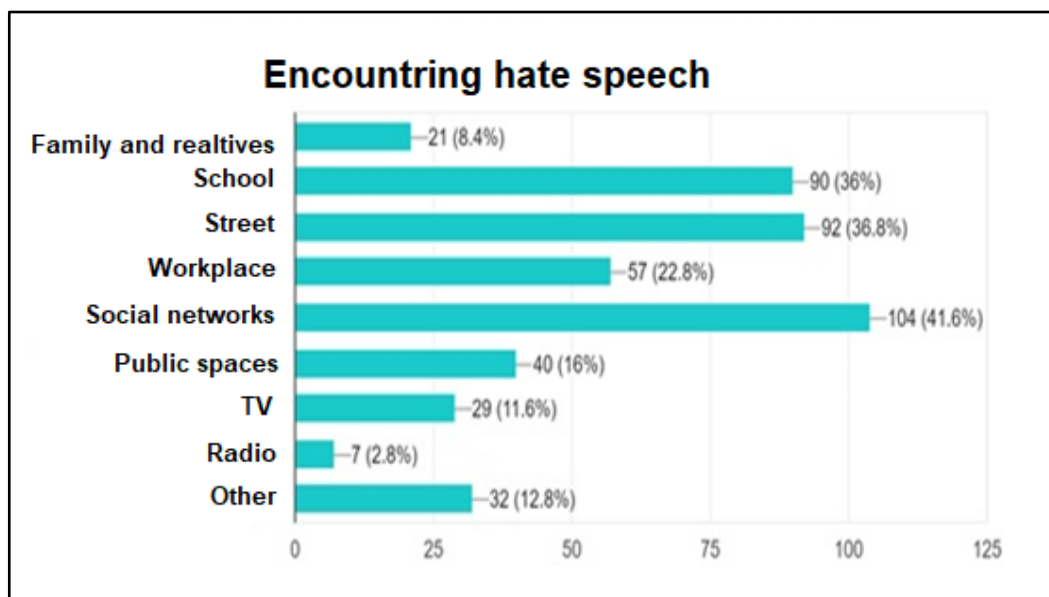
### *1.2.5 Environments with presence of hate speech*

The analysis of the findings shows that 41.6% of the people involved in the studies claimed to have encountered hate speech on themselves on social networks, 36.8% on the street, 36% at school, 22.8% in work environments (recorded on mostly from the age group over 16), 16% in public spaces, 11.6% TV etc.

It is important to note, although not the leading figures in the graph below, but 8.4% of the collected responses singled out family and relatives as users of hate speech against them, often with insults, depreciation, denigration, demoralization, etc. Presenting the problem in the basic cell of the functioning of a healthy society: Family.

Meanwhile, in the open alternative "Other", public transport is singled out as one of the environments of direct contact with hate speech. Also, it has been presented, among other things, as environments where individuals feel the use of hate speech against them, i.e. face-to-face contacts with government officials, policy makers and their representatives in the Parliament of Albania, as well as the Parliament hall as one of the places where in the eyes of the citizen, hate speech is practiced, with labels such as "highlander", etc.

Graphic 7. Encountering hate speech



### *1.2.6 Cause of discrimination and hate speech*

To find the root problem it is necessary to go to the cause and base element that can be the object of the discrimination, bullying, harassment, hate speech, exclusion, etc. In this part of the study it is presented the Referring to the data analysis, 27.1% of the respondent involved in the study listed physical characteristics (body shape, weight, etc.) as a cause or object of discrimination and hate speech.

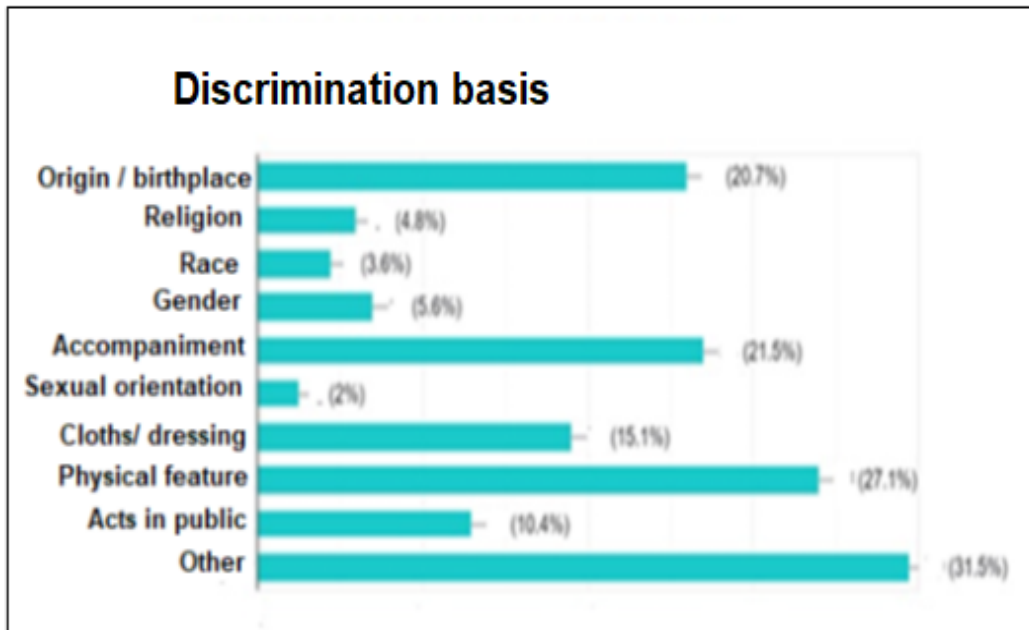
Furthermore, 21.5% of the respondents said that they had due to association with a person who is the language of discrimination and hatred for a physical, demographic or socio-economic feature. Meanwhile, 20.7% of the people involved in the study have stated that they have suffered themselves or/and have witnessed discrimination on region basis and the origin of the place of birth. Followed by 15.1% declaring that they have been discriminated based on their choice of clothing, etc.<sup>21</sup> (see graph 8).

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<sup>21</sup> This element in the questionnaire was limited to three alternative answers, the respondents have chosen the option "Other", mentioning more than 3 alternatives on which they had experienced discrimination and hate speech. Also, under the option "other" the respondents have involved various reasons/causes such as non-adherence/non-membership in a different political party, living in a dormitory, ethnicity, etc.



Graphic 8. Cause of discrimination

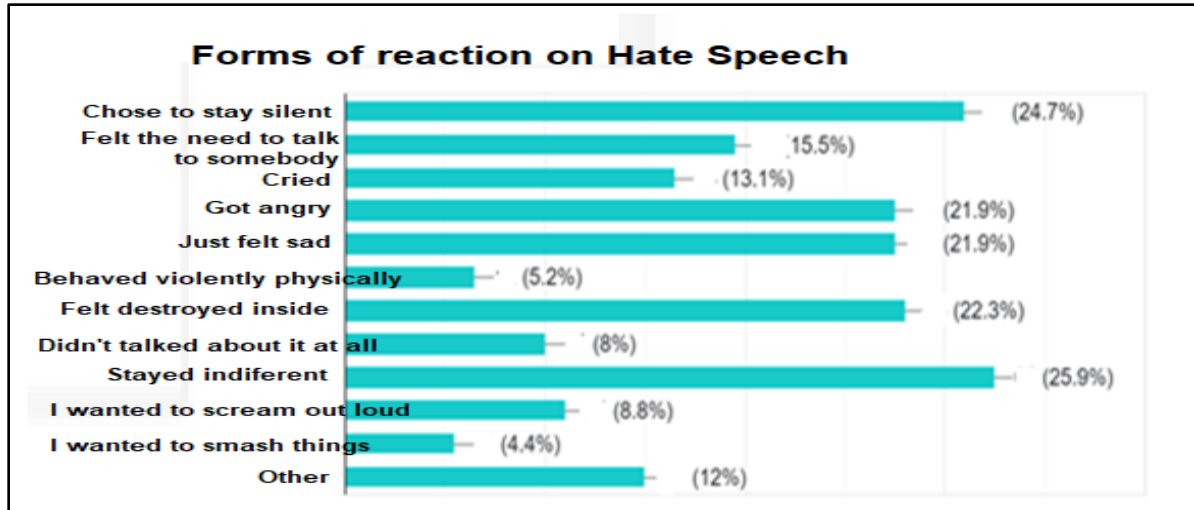


### *1.2.7 Experiencing and reacting when being the victim of hate speech*

The data analysis brings into the findings that the reaction of the individual in presence of hate speech is usually passed silently. The reaction seems to be vague finding the victim mostly in a frozen mode to react, staying passive, silent attitude and suffocating within oneself the desire and strength to react. The most selected alternatives in the multiple-choice question are: I stayed indifferent to the words and hate speech directed at me; I have chosen to remain silent by continuing to stay in that environment; I haven't discussed it at all, but I've experienced it and I'm still confused; I just felt sad, etc.

Other reactions include the desire to scream, but this reaction was repressed internally, as in some cases it is claimed that hate speech has brought physical violence on them and/or towards the perpetrator transforming the victim into the aggressor, some other times the physical violence has been presented in addition to psychological violence, leading to reports of conflict and hate crimes, etc.

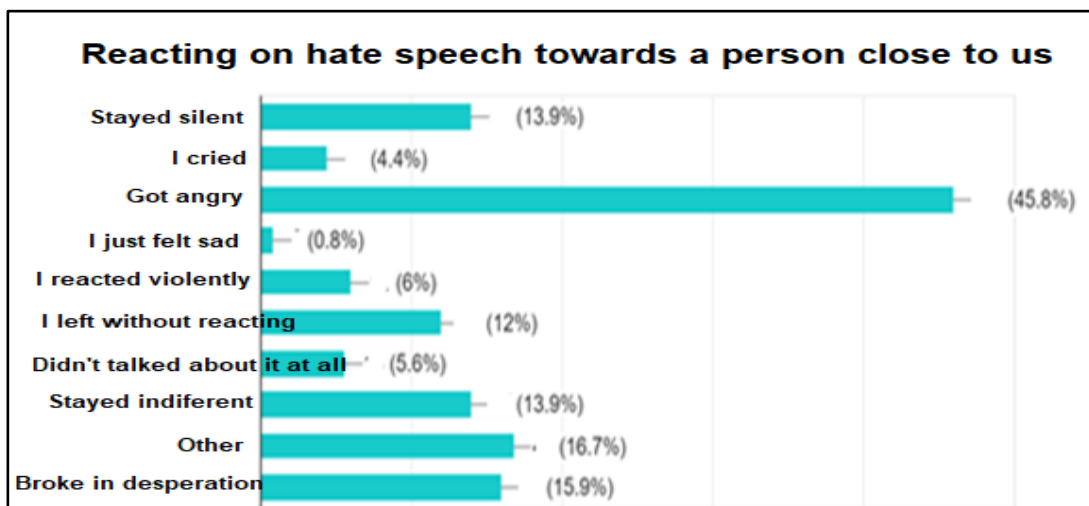
Graphic 9. Reacting when directly being the object of hate speech and discrimination



### 1.2.8 Reacting when witnessing hate speech towards a close one

The opposite happens when discrimination and hate speech is inflicted on oneself – which is observed that in most cases there is a lack of reaction and suppression of emotions, classifying them as untreated traumas, – the reaction is strong and immediate when a close to heart person (a relative, family, or friend, etc.) is the victim of discrimination. It seems that the individual tends to be protective and take a defensive position/ role when a person who they have close relations (whether in a romantic relation, the family circle, friends, acquaintances, etc.) is discriminated against and becomes a victim of hate speech. These reactions are more loud, expressive and actively engaged. For more details regarding these quantitative and qualitative data check the graph below.

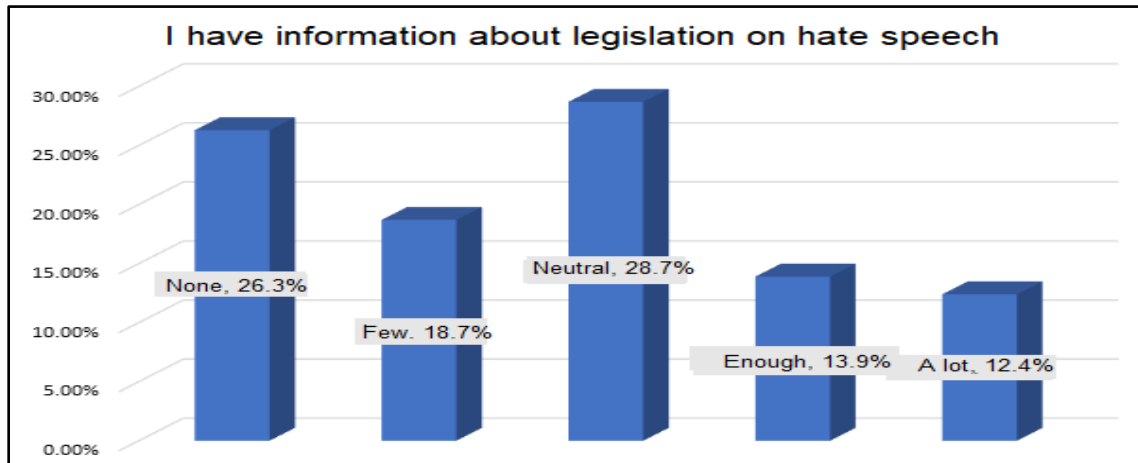
Graphic 10. Reaction when the victim of hate speech is a close to heart person



### 1.2.9 Knowledge the legal basis on hate speech

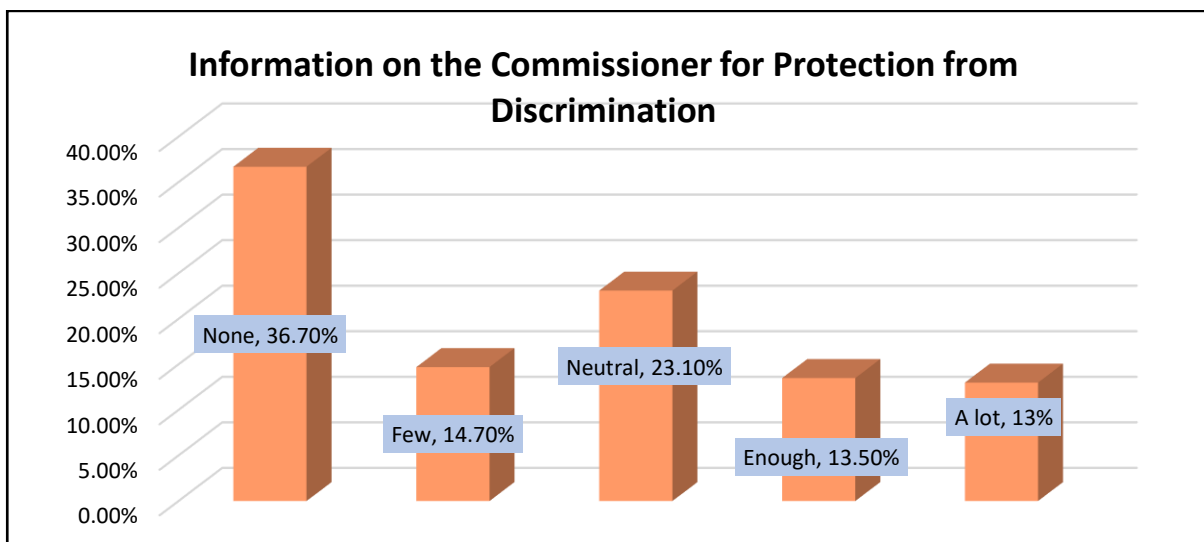
According to a scaled assessment, the projection of the analysis shows that the information on the legislation in force regarding hate speech and hate crimes is scarce or insufficient (detailed data in graph 11).

Graphic 11. Information on legislation



Also, the lack of information, especially among teenagers, is also in terms of the competences, functions, and the services of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (CPD) institution, as reflected in graph 12.

Graphic 12. Information on CPD competences



## 2. Specific results (qualitative)

The data analysis in this session have in focus only the determinants related to hate speech in the target group of teenagers aged 14-18 years. The findings of this analysis in this chapter specifically to the category targeted in the study has been studied based on the projection of each determinant/factor as well as elements related to behavior, personality and post-traumatic stress disorders.

### 2.1 Information on the notion of hate speech among teenagers

The notion of hate speech often seems unclear in the perception of teenagers in the 14-18 age group. Referring to the short writings (essays) on their experiences of hate speech, it is observed that in some cases the notion of "hate speech" is treated the same as the notion of "hate in general", so just seen in a general prism. However, from the submitted essays and the responses gathered from the questionnaires, it appears that the age group of 14-18 years has the highest percentage of exposure and experience of hate speech. This age-group also affirms (92% of them) that they know the term hate speech. If we approach it in the comparative dimension according to the age determinant, 92% of young people in this age group claimed to have experienced direct hate speech. This indicator marks 20 points higher in relation to the general indicator, brought to analysis in chapter 1 part 2.4 (check above). Meanwhile, the source of information on the term and the microenvironment where they encountered hate speech, the trend of young people of this category seems to be widely influenced by information and linguistic rhetoric, but also behavior, from social networks, virtual spaces and access to online interaction in the virtual space of the world wide web (www). These young people find it difficult to answer which is the environment where they encounter hate speech and the communication channel that, through the messages conveyed, affects the well-being and mental health of individuals. For this reason, about 75% of the answers given in relation to this item in the questionnaire have two or more alternatives. This indicator reflects the fact of the massive and comprehensive influence of the 14-18 age group.

## **2.2 Analysis of the experience of hate speech in adolescents**

### ***2.2.1 Gender factor***

Hate speech based on gender trait/factor is not a feature identified by this study, but has been widely reflected in past studies, analyses, statistics and reports. In this aspect, the gender factor is presented as a manifestation of Gender-Based Violence, but mostly focused on psychological and verbal violence, according to the economic determinant, limitation of ability, etc., but emphasized and amplified due to the gender determinant in weighting what considered by patriarchal society, culture and historical behavior, as the weaker gender (women and the LGBTQ+ community). Referring to data from the General State Police, in Albania, 8 hate crimes were reported and registered to the Police during the first 6 months of 2022, which had as their object the violation of the individual due to gender. In addition to direct discrimination due to gender, it is important to highlight the deprivation of a number of rights and the exercise of violence against women and members of the LGBTQ+ community, continues to be underreported (due to stigma, manipulation and gaslighting, fear, love etc.).

### ***2.2.2 The microenvironment factor***

From the comparative correlative approach, it is observed that even for this age group, the same microenvironments are the source of generating and conveying hate speech, directly affecting the mental health of individuals. So, school, media, social networks, neighborhood/society/peer group, but the family in this case stands with indicators 18 points higher than the projection analyzed above in the general results. What this means is that there is a major problem as what should have been seen as the safe corner and barrier of hate speech, a source of empowerment and increased capacities that go hand in hand with the individual's psychomotor development since early childhood, turns out to be one of the most present problem.

Adolescents of this age group state that the family does not convey security, support or inspiration to them. The crisis of finding the identity, the feeling of not belonging in the basic environment, as well as supporting the psycho-emotional developments of age, promote the vulnerability of this age category. Among the most common damages are those related to mental

health, but sometimes they are also manifested by change/aggression (towards themselves and/or to others) in daily behavior in society, family, education and any other microenvironment with interaction activity beyond the personal.

### *2.2.3 Geographical and demographic factor*

Geographical factor and regional discrimination is mostly observed and manifested in big cities, this population has a mixed typology of areas of origin, culture, zonal norms, behaviors dictated by the environment of growth, i.e. family and close friends. Regionalisms, dialects, colloquialisms are not just notions in communication sciences, but are used as means to bully and attack the targeted person. Such tool is also encountered in the media, through pseudo-humor, the communication of policy makers, TV shows with "special" themes, etc. This has made the notions of regional discrimination, stigma due to the place of birth, regional affiliation and speech, one of the most widespread forms of hate speech.

As expressed by the young people in their submitted answers, it seems that such hate speech rhetoric is so widespread that it has taken on normalization dimensions and has reduced advocacy and awareness-raising reactions in blocking hate speech due to provincial affiliation. However, regional discrimination still constitutes hate speech and the indicators of the impact of this form of discrimination on the mental health of adolescents reflect damage to behavior such as disorders related to insomnia, stress, anxiety and interaction with others, etc.

### *2.2.4 The socio-economic factor*

The socio-economic factor directly affects the vulnerable categories and marginalized groups, which cause damage to mental health due to the fact that they feel less privileged, discriminated against, excluded, etc. However, when the socio-economic feature is used as a tool of stigmatization, discrimination and exclusion, the individual of the age group of 14-18 years feels many times more burdened in his mental health, when he is attacked by those who should be part of the group of friends / peer group. The socio-economic factor is related to the external social and economic indicators where the family or individual is located.

In a society oriented towards appearance and commercialization, teenagers often fall prey to bullying and discrimination because of clothing, digital tools and following fashion trends, etc. Under the pressure of society and peers, young people in the age group of 14-18 years face

behavioral disorders, anxiety, stress and lack of self-confidence or low self-esteem. What hurts them in the short term and/or long term to progress, sometimes even to be successful. According to the analysis of the data in this report, it is evident that the socio-economic factor affects the student's results at school, socialization with others, interactive relationship with the outside world, psycho-emotional state, etc.

### *2.2.5 Acquaintance with the legislation and the mechanism by teenagers aged 14-18*

Acquaintance with the legislation is a need and right of every person. Legislation on the mechanism of protection against any form of violence, as well as hate speech, serves as a protective layer for the holder of information about him. Knowing what the legal and social protection mechanisms are is a basic element of empowerment, especially for young people. However, it seems that young people still have a greater need to be informed about legal protection mechanisms, even though basic knowledge of the law ranks easily above average. So, knowledge of legislation and mechanisms of protection against violence in this study is marked at 58%, whereas the information is limited to knowledge of basic rights, some basic principles of discrimination and seeking help/referral to the State Police and social service in schools. Young people of this age group state that they have heard about the institution of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, even though the information is very limited.

What is noted as a positive indicator is the willingness expressed by young people to be cooperative in the implementation of good practices and the sharing of information obtained from the meetings and conversations in this study. The young people of this age group themselves say that in most cases they are not aware of the punishment mechanisms and the consequences of the acts, which can be considered harmful to the individual. Even fewer seem to have information about the damage to mental health. However, young people claim that the encouragement from the group of friends is too great and that sometimes pranks, or thoughtless games have faced them with consequences. From a psychological point of view, it is understandable that such reactions are present in this target group. Therefore, the intensification of educational, informative and awareness-raising work would increase the number of positive models in society.



### *2.2.6 School, teachers and the relationship with the psychologist and/or the social worker*

The young people involved in this study have expressed that their relationship with the psychologist and the social worker is almost non-existent. They state that the approach to the psychologist can turn the person into a target of stigma, bullying and ridicule. Which would further aggravate his mental health condition. They even state that they do not even find a psychologist or social worker approach, not considering him as a person to whom they can turn to talk or ask for help. Analyzing the data collected by the respondents – regarding the communication with these youngsters – it is understood that the role of the psychologist is sometimes "taken on" by the teacher or a peer.

Young people have affirmed that discrimination and hate speech in the school environment occurs mostly in the student-student relationship, but sometimes also in the teacher-student relationship. In rare cases, teenagers claim to have witnessed situations where hate speech was used even among teachers. What affects building relationships of trust, education and responding to hate speech.

The general perception of the social community towards psychologists and social workers is negative as a result of missing or/and little information about this matter. A lack of information is often confirmed when the social worker is considered a psychiatrist. From the cultural point of view, social norms and lack of information, it seems that even young people in the age group of 14-18 years old (regardless of their residential area) are not cooperative and communicative with psychologists or social workers.

### *2.2.7 The approach with family members and the close circle*

The family microenvironment lies at the core of the formation of the individual's personality from early childhood to adulthood. Practicing positive, inclusive and inspiring communication is not always delivered in the family environment. The young people involved in this study have affirmed that they feel misunderstood, excluded, neglected, pushed away and often psychologically and/or physically attacked in their family microenvironment.

Some of the young people even claim and bring cases of violence directly in the family environment, or even evidence of physical and/or psychological violence in family relationships.

However, they have not talked about these situations before, not reporting them for fear of worsening the situation or a vengeful reaction from the family member who commits violence.

If asked directly about the experience of hate speech, quite a few young people claim that hate, denigrating and devaluing language is used against them both in the family environment and in the educational environment. Which poses a major problem and in urgent need of intervention. About 10% of teenagers aged 14-18 who were included in the study claimed to have constant self-harming thoughts and a lack of will to live, while about 45% of them claimed that they sometimes feel like leaving from the family environment due to the lack of affection. What is again a concern is that the problems and severity of mental health in teenagers is their lack of confidence to rely on family, school or society. However, a positive indicator is the desire of young people to express their experiences through different instruments (mainly short writing/essay, or open conversation).

The problems presented in relation to the family environment and the close circle of friends, in addition to other microenvironments, manifest in the young people included in the study indicative signs such as: anxiety disorders, behavioral and emotional disorders, dissociation and dissociative disorders, eating disorder, sleeping disorders, etc.

#### **IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the analysis of the findings of this study on the experience of hate speech and its impact on mental health in the age group of teenagers, 14-18 years old, were identified the main microenvironments encountering hate speech. This study was carried out on a national scale and comprehensive approach. Two instruments were used for sampling, the open call for essays on the experience of hate speech and the questionnaire distributed according to the snowball method. This study was guided by comprehensive age and social inclusion approaches.

The biggest problems developed by the use of hate speech and its impact on mental health were identified in: media, social networks, schools, family and society. Meanwhile, it was confirmed that the age of 14-18 is the most exposed category to hate speech and disorders related to mental health.

For the orientation and treatment of problems related to the reaction to hate speech and the improvement of mental health, mainly in teenagers, this study presents the following recommendations:

1. Introducing mental health as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum and a chapter dedicated to hate speech exclusively. This would inform and educate young people of school age, know and pave the way for the implementation of good global practices in dealing with various problems, such as: bullying, discrimination, cyber/online bullying, exclusion, hate crimes and any form of violence, improving mental health, etc.
2. Training teachers on handling the situation and blocking hate speech. Teachers appear to be a helpful link in educating and informing the community, since the educational environment serves as a meeting bridge between three key groups: students, educational staff and parents. If teachers were prepared through specific training, they would be equipped with the right tools to block hate speech and improve mental health, contributing to a healthier community.
3. Informing and educating the child's parents/legal guardian about hate speech and mental health. Holding meetings with parents, involving them in informational and awareness-raising activities would help for a proper treatment of problems related to hate speech and mental health.
4. Toolkit for addressing discrimination, hate crimes and improving mental health. The preparation of an addressing toolkit would help both professionals in the field and interest groups.
5. Education/training on political communication, public speaking ethics and social integrity for politicians and officials. Since political officials and representatives are among those with a high rate of hate speech production or transmission, their training should be continuous and up-to-date, especially for the images that represent different institutions in the media.
6. Treating the media as a collaborator. Media is the space that has the powerful instrument of conveying the message and reaching a wide audience. Being equipped with the power of influence, but also with the interest of news production, cooperative communications with the media, whether national or local, audio-visual or written, should be strengthened.
7. Treatment of hate speech according to all determinants: ethnicity, race, color, sexual orientation, religious affiliation; birthplace (area, province), urban origin (city-village), etc. Hate speech should not be seen as isolated to a particular environment (such as the media) or to a

particular community. The forms, factors and impact of hate speech appear in any environment, in any form and are comprehensive reaching anyone. Nobody and nowhere has immunity.