Article

Youth Voices Participating in the Improvement of Sexual Consent Awareness Campaigns

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Abstract: Communication concerning sexual consent among young people is a significant concern for prevention in our society today. While sexual consent awareness campaigns (SCACs) hold importance in various communication modes, they predominantly rely on speech acts despite scientific literature providing other elements beyond these. This research aims to fill this gap through dialogues between young people and the scientific literature. A content analysis of 23 international and national campaigns was conducted alongside fieldwork in Spain with 77 young participants (18–25 years old) and 24 professionals from the field of education and society engaging in dialogue with scientific evidence on sexual consent. The results provide three aspects for future campaigns: (a) to be based on scientific evidence, (b) to introduce clear examples of coercive discourse and interactive power, and (c) to aim at new alternative masculinities rather than targeting potential victims.

Keywords: sexual consent; youth; communicative acts; campaigns; citizen science

1. Introduction

Sexual violence and harassment remain widespread issues across the European Union, significantly impacting women. According to data from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), over half of all women (55%) in the EU have faced some form of sexual harassment since the age of 15, and one in three women (33%) have experienced physical or sexual violence [1]. The impact is particularly severe for young women, with 43% of those aged 18–29 reporting unwelcome touching or other forms of physical harassment in the year prior to the survey. Despite the prevalence of such incidents, many victims do not report these crimes, citing reasons such as shame, fear of further victimization, or the belief that authorities would not act. Agencies such as the FRA are urging the creation of educational campaigns on the issue that focus on men's behavior to tackle the problem.

In Spain, sexual offenses have seen a significant increase in 2023, reaching a total of 21,825 cases compared to 19,013 in 2022 [2]. The most common criminal category remains sexual assault and abuse, accounting for 58.3% of all offenses. This overall rise underscores the urgent need for more effective preventive measures and support to combat these criminal behaviors.

Communication of the research findings concerning sexual consent to young people may significantly aid in recognizing situations as either coercive or mutually consensual. While lack of access to scientific evidence for the public can have serious consequences [3], science communication and public engagement in science have shown positive impacts [4]. Initiatives aimed at enhancing scientific literacy are increasingly prioritized to mitigate negative outcomes of deficiency of access to scientific information [5,6] that can be particularly grave in the context of sexual consent.

Effective sexual consent awareness campaigns (SCACs) should include both evidence from scientific literature as well as voices from the targeted public to prevent gender violence. Various initiatives have been shown to effectively provide citizens with access to scientific advancements and their associated benefits [7,8]. Current research underscores citizen participation in scientific processes to enhance research and foster effective communication strategies [9], particularly through deeper engagement levels like co-creation [10,11].

Aligned with the European Commission's emphasis on research leading to social improvements and the H2020 project ALLINTERACT (ALLINTERACT. Widening and Diversifying Citizen Engagement in Science: European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2020), there was a recognized need to incorporate the voices of young people, professionals from a variety of fields, and campaign managers in discussions about sexual consent based on scientific evidence. This dialogue with researchers aimed to uncover aspects young adults believed were lacking in sexual consent campaigns. Through citizen participation, this research shows how these dialogues discussing existing scientific evidence between researchers, young people, and professionals provide insights into effectively disseminating scientific knowledge on sexual consent, offering concrete improvements for SCACs to incorporate.

1.1. Impact of SCACs on Youth

Over the past decade, there has been a rise in campaigns and social movements targeting awareness of sexual violence among youth. Despite their broad reach, research suggests that these initiatives often have limited impact in reshaping attitudes related to the understanding of sexual consent [12]. SCACs concerning sexual violence, particularly sexual consent, have progressively integrated scientific evidence. An example is the shift from the initial "No means no" to an affirmative consent approach, as explained in the subsequent section.

Disseminating scientific evidence through different channels is increasingly important, especially as young people are increasingly relying on the internet for information about sexual relationships [13,14]. This holds particular importance in addressing misinformation, where social media, alongside the propagation of misinformation [15], is emerging as a powerful tool for disseminating scientific evidence [16]. Although campaigns are increasingly incorporating scientific advancements, there is a noticeable absence of recent key evidence.

Many campaigns addressing the importance of prior sexual consent assume a shared understanding of what consent entails, primarily emphasizing affirmative consent based on verbal communication [17]. In addition to this, concerns are growing in academic and expert circles about youth sex education programs in educational settings, as these programs tend to focus primarily on pregnancy prevention and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) [18], neglecting other crucial topics such as sexual consent. Even when sexual consent is addressed in these sexual educational programs, the focus remains on the importance of a clear "no" or "yes" [19], thus limiting itself to verbal acts and overlooking other communicative acts that take place.

To enhance effectiveness, recommendations for sexual consent initiatives targeting youth endorse co-creation. This involves integrating young people's perspectives alongside the latest scientific findings, considering all the factors involved in communication beyond verbal and non-verbal aspects.

This research highlights the importance of engaging young people and stakeholders in scientific co-creation to improve SCACs. This participation allows valuable input, improving research and evidence-based information. Incorporating elements identified by youth can enhance the effectiveness of the campaign and promote scientific participation to improve research on this topic.

1.2. SCACs: Latest Trend in Recent Years

The transition to affirmative consent reflects society's demand for a redefined understanding of consent [20]. This shift acknowledges that saying "No" might not always happen due to fear of confrontation or concerns about the consequences of refusing sexual advances [21,22]. Supported by scientific evidence, numerous SCACs have embraced the concept of affirmative consent [23], where an explicit "no" is no longer required to express a lack of consent. These campaigns also began to highlight elements like informed consent (requiring full information), specific consent (for each activity and encounter), and reversible consent (right to change one's mind at any time) (California Legislative Information. 2014. "SB-967 Student Safety: Sexual Assault". (https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140SB967 (accessed on 14 September 2024))).

The incorporation of elements of affirmative consent from scientific research at SCACs has led to one of the most current definitions for sexual consent describing it as an affirmative, conscious, sober, and voluntary agreement to engage in a specific sexual activity "with a particular person within a particular context" [24]. These aspects of affirmative consent include the clarification that silence does not imply consent and sometimes emphasizing enthusiasm as a necessary element (2019). This conception of consent brought about substantial progress, marking a departure from the requirement of explicit verbal refusal to signal non-consent and shifting the focus to other types of signals beyond just verbal ones.

However, the "yes means yes" approach, while eliminating the need to say "no" explicitly for lack of consent, has not resolved all the issues. Just as some individuals felt unable to decline consent by saying "no" in the context of unequal power situations, they encounter comparable challenges in refraining from saying "yes" or merely acquiescing when they do not desire the sexual encounter. Some individuals may still feel compelled to give constrained consent or consent due to a sense of having no other choice rather than genuine positive consent [25]. This can be influenced by power imbalances, such as differences in age, gender, and popularity, among others [26]. Constrained consent has been previously explored by scholars and is considered a major problem in the discussions around sexual consent [27,28].

Based on this insight, the significance of non-verbal cues in communicating sexual consent has increasingly gained recognition. While words could indicate consent, actions like freezing, lack of reaction, or distancing may indicate a lack of it [29]. Research increasingly demonstrates a preference for non-verbal cues over verbal ones in expressing sexual consent [30], with verbal form preferred only in contexts of greater trust and intimacy [31]. Some believe that explicit verbal communication during intercourse can disrupt the mood [32,33].

As scientific evidence highlighted the importance of non-verbal cues in the communication of sexual consent, some awareness campaigns began to incorporate messages about non-verbal cues to confirm verbally expressed consent, addressing situations where verbal "Yes" conflicted with non-verbal signals indicating non-consent. In such cases, most campaigns suggested checking and confirming consent through verbal explicit formulas like "is it okay like this?" (for more information, see the following: https://www.wannatalkaboutit.com/ accessed on 14 June 2024) (for more information, see the following: https://www.nsvrc.org/ accessed on 14 June 2024).

Despite progress in including non-verbal consent cues in SCACs, a limitation remains: verbal confirmation is relied upon for clarity on consent when non-verbal cues are dubious, assuming verbal signals offer unequivocal confirmation. This is the major limitation observed in analyzed campaigns: the inclusion of non-verbal acts without considering communicative acts, overlooking the strong influence of coercive situations on sexual consent [34].

The scientific literature offers evidence and examples that youth-oriented SCACs have yet to include in their messages. Various reasons can lead to acquiescence to a sexual relationship without genuine consent [35]. Some authors have explored how both

verbal and non-verbal signals can falsely indicate consent, describing scenarios where some women may feign pleasure to exit uncomfortable situations of unwanted sex [36]. Additionally, authors have introduced the relevance of the context as a decisive element influencing consent communication [37], leading to cases where consent is expressed when not really wanted.

The Theory of Communicative Acts [38,39] goes a step further by introducing the concept of interactive power, encompassing all elements that can influence communication (physical, institutional, and interactive). These previously overlooked elements encompass all variables by which the expression of consent can be coerced.

1.3. Beyond Affirmative Consent and Communicative Acts—Latest Evidence That SCACs Should Include

Scientific literature already emphasizes considering not only verbal and non-verbal acts, but also contextual factors and the individuals involved [40]. Coercion can stem from various sources of power in the interaction, including physical power, institutional power, and interactive power [41,42], as categorized by the Theory of Communicative Acts. While physical (use of force) and institutional power (arising from hierarchical relationships) have received extensive attention, interactive power has been less explored.

Interactive power also refers to the use of a hierarchical position in order to obtain coerced consent but in a different context than an academic or work, such as a social setting impacting an individual's will to express consent. For instance, a situation where a regular customer and a bartender collaborate to obtain coerced consent from a third person through continuous alcohol refills illustrates the use of interactive power [43]. Similarly, in a social setting such as a party or gathering, interactive power can occur when someone is separated from their peer group and left alone with the acquaintances of the person making the sexual advances. In such an environment, the absence of familiar support can make it harder for the individual to resist or decline, as they may feel socially isolated or pressured to acquiesce to the advances.

These power interactions exert a direct influence on consent coercion, not only during but also before and after the sexual-affective relationship. In this sense, some authors mention "pick up artists" (PUA) communities, where heterosexual men exchange and implement strategies to overcome women's resistance to sexual activity during a date [44]. Other studies discuss "pre-given" consent situations, where experiences and interactions prior to sexual activity can lead to automatic interpretations of consent by the proposer [45]. This occurs as the proposer takes steps to make the sexual proposal appear less forced, such as transitioning from a public to a more private setting [46–48].

Additional examples in the scientific literature for pre-given consent situations include actions like buying a drink or offering to escort a woman home after a party [49]. The more pre-consenting actions, the harder it becomes to refuse sexual acts at a later point [50]. This coercion also occurs in online environments, including non-consensual sexting and coerced sexting [51,52].

Another element contributing to power communicative acts is coercive discourse [53], which refers to a predominant social narrative that links attraction and violence, significantly influencing the socialization of girls and women, especially in their first affective-sexual relationships. By promoting the attractiveness of violence, it presents aggressive behaviors as appealing while diminishing the appeal of respectful behavior. This coercive discourse is a significant risk factor for gender-based violence as it pressures young people to choose partners or relationships characterized by violent attitudes, often expressed through powerful communicative acts [54]. Individuals endorsing violent attitudes are more likely to exert coercion through power interactions compared to those who treat others respectfully and engage in dialogic communicative acts.

Power communicative acts can involve various actors, including direct participants, bystanders, and the surrounding environment, often influenced by coercive discourse. However, individuals communicate through dialogic communicative acts when ensuring

that the environment is one of complete freedom and refrain from exerting any pressure to obtain consent. This approach to communication corresponds to new alternative masculinities (NAM) [55].

Interlocutors employing dialogic communicative acts are essential as campaigns have traditionally focused on victims and potential aggressors. Nevertheless, scientific literature emphasizes the significance of active bystanders or upstanders [56] since their involvement can be crucial in deterring aggressors and protecting victims. Specifically, research highlights the crucial role of new alternative masculinities (NAM) [57]. Unlike the traditional dichotomy of violent masculinities (dominant traditional masculinity—MTD) portrayed by socialization as desirable and those who, while not violent, do not challenge these norms (oppressed traditional masculinity), NAMs provide a genuine alternative. They reject aggression and actively oppose it, making them attractive to others.

According to the theory of communicative acts, sexual consent is recognized when communicative acts are dialogical and devoid of any form of power, whether physical, institutional, or interactive. So far, SCACs have mentioned terms like "coercion", "intimidation", and "unequal power dynamics" as factors that override consent but have offered limited specific examples of interactive power situations that young people can identify beyond verbal and non-verbal cues.

This article analyzes SCACs designed for young audiences worldwide, aiming to highlight essential elements derived from research on sexual consent that should be incorporated into campaigns targeting young individuals, including the voices of young participants and other professionals from different fields.

2. Materials and Methods

We aimed to identify key evidence-based components for SCACs targeting young people and integrate them effectively. Our research used a mixed methods approach combining content analysis and fieldwork. Firstly, a content analysis involving the review of 23 SCACs from 2011 to February 2022 was conducted, including 14 international and 9 Spanish campaigns. This analysis was conducted independently of the participants.

The fieldwork methodology was communicative methodology [58], considered particularly suitable for research with vulnerable groups [59]. This methodology's success in social impact stems from the researcher's equal stance with participants, fostering egalitarian dialogue for the social improvement of the participants by including their voices [60], allowing research to address issues raised by the participants.

Fieldwork was conducted in Spain and involved two separate processes: one with 77 young adults aged 18 to 25 (through 49 individual communicative daily life stories and 7 communicative focus groups) and another with 24 campaign managers and other professionals working with young people and sexual violence victims who participated through 19 individual or paired interviews. During fieldwork with young adults (through communicative daily life stories and communicative focus groups), the results of this content analysis of the campaigns were shared and discussed to gather their feedback and perspectives on existing campaigns. Subsequently, the results were also shared with the professionals, who were informed about the improvements suggested by the young adults. These suggestions were examined in light of existing scientific evidence from the field. In total, 101 participants were involved across these two groups.

Both the young and professional groups were informed of the research goals and signed informed consent forms. The study received approval from the research group ethics committee with reference number 20230123.

2.1. Content Analysis of SCACs Targeting Young People at National and International Level

For the SCACs' content analysis, searches were conducted at the international and national levels. To be included in the analysis, campaigns had to focus on sexual consent initiated after 2011 (coinciding with the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women

and Domestic Violence, November 2014, ISBN 978-92-871-7990-6, available online: https: //www.refworld.org/docid/548165c94.html (accessed on 14 September 2024))), until February 2022, target young people, and focus on any type of affective-sexual relationship (stable or sporadic). Emphasis was placed on SCACs portraying situations or examples beyond verbal communication.

The search for SCACs employed two methods. The primary approach was through open searches in Google using a combination of keywords, initially in English for international SCACs and later in Spanish for state level. While most results came from this search method, some were discovered during a previous phase of the project involving social media analysis (SMA). After selection criteria, 23 campaigns were identified for further analysis—14 at the international level and 9 at the national level (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. International SCACs analyzed and duration of activity.

No.	Campaign	Activity Period	Country/Institution	No.	Campaign	Activity Period	Country/Institution
1	Let's Talk about YES	2020–2023	International Amnesty Denmark	8	NSVRC National Sexual Violence Resource Center	2000–current	
2	The Gemini Project	2018–2023	UK	9	Paving the way to a culture of consent	2015	
3	Safer U	2021–2023	Sri Lanka	10	SAAM 2019—I Ask for consent https://www. nsvrc.org/i-ask-consent (accessed 14 June 2024)	2019	NSVRC National Sexual Violence Resource Center USA
4	Understanding Consent (13 Reasons Why)	2020	Netflix ACHA USA	11	SAAM 2020—I Ask	2020	
5	WannaTalkAboutIt	2019–2023	Netflix USA	12	SAAM 2021—We can build safe online spaces	2021	
6	#ConsentIsEverything	2015	Thames Valley Police UK	13	Don't be that guy	2021	Police Scotland Scotland
7	This is Abuse	2010–2014	UK	14	When it comes to consent, there are no blurred lines	2019	UNWOMEN

Table 2. National SCACs analyzed and duration of activity.

No.	Campaign	Period of Activity	Institution
1	Festivities free of male violence. NO means NO.	2016–2019	Madrid City Council
2	Remember! I decide, you respect	2017–2022	Pontevedra Provincial Council
3	If you don't understand a no you are a potential sex offender	2020	Ministry of Equality. Government Delegation against Gender Violence
4	Sex is a yes	2021	
5	Don't even think about it	2020	Totana City Council
6	Only "yes means yes" campaign	2020–2023	Malaga City Council
7	Without a yes is no	2016–2023	Women's Institute of Castilla La Mancha
8	"We Won't Be Silent"	2018–2023	Barcelona City Council
9	Respect. Fun without aggression	2019–2023	Jerez City Council

An analysis chart was developed and utilized to collect information across three main areas: (1) campaign identification data; (2) social impact of the campaign; and (3) campaign mechanisms and strategies for educating the target audience about distinguishing consent from coercion. Within each of these three areas, more specific information was provided.

Within the first one (1), information was collected on the name of the campaign, the institution or collective in charge, whether it was a top–down or bottom–up initiative, the period of duration, and the location. Within the second area (2), information was collected regarding the specific target group (men, women, witnesses, and specific members of certain communities); the age group; the type of relationship; the scope of the campaign, including indicators such as views on different platforms, attendance to training promoted by the campaign, repercussion on social networks; and social impact measured in the improvement of people's lives if applicable.

Finally, for the third area (3), content-specific information included the type of campaign (e.g., general awareness-raising and development of action protocols); the dissemination strategy (e.g., design of posters, brochures, stickers, comics, explanatory videos, mobile applications, bystander training programs, social media, etc.); and most importantly, whether and how the campaign addressed sexual consent elements based on preexisting scientific literature or, if not, which ones were missing or poorly present. We followed an inductive approach to identify how the campaigns defined or explained to the audience examples and messages that, in different ways, conveyed what sexual consent is about. We found that most campaigns used similar descriptions of consent, such as affirmative, enthusiastic, free, informed, specific, reversible, and verbal or non-verbal actions. Some of them included what sexual consent is not, including coercion such as intimidation, deception, threats, and insistence. As the analysis progressed, these categories emerged to account for the diversity of campaigns. This process allowed us to identify which elements from the scientific literature were mainly incorporated into the campaigns and which were missing or scarcely represented.

Content Analysis Results

The results show us how the analyzed campaigns already included elements from the scientific literature, such as definitions of affirmative consent, informed consent, and consent as reversible, with particular emphasis on verbal consent and, to a lesser extent, on non-verbal consent. Campaigns also referenced the idea that silence does not imply consent and gave examples aimed at diverse audiences. In a few cases (specifically in the international campaigns analyzed), there was an acknowledgment of the possibility of expressing consent and non-consent non-verbally, and some examples were explained through narratives or drawings.

However, several key elements highlighted in the literature were absent from the campaigns, particularly concerning the use of communicative power acts in coercion. References were mostly limited to acts of physical or institutional power, with no mention of interactive power. Additionally, discussions of coercion were confined to individuals directly involved in the relationship without sufficiently addressing the power of communicative acts exerted by the broader environment and peer groups.

Sharing the results of the campaign analysis first with the youth and later with the professionals led to the three findings presented in this article.

2.2. Fieldwork with Young Adults Aged 18–25

Seventy-seven young adults aged 18–25 (26 males, 51 females) from Spain participated in the study through 49 individual communicative daily life stories and 7 focus groups. For ethical considerations, participation was limited to individuals aged 18 and above; however, participants were queried about experiences preceding their 18th year and any perceived changes. Diversity was sought in terms of socioeconomic status, education, and occupation. Among them, 50 were college students, 7 were grad students, 7 were high school students, and 8 were professionals. Fieldwork took place from June to October 2021.

2.2.1. Participant's Selection

Participants were initially recruited through researchers who invited former students to voluntarily participate in the study. Subsequent contacts were made by snowballing. To

prevent conflicts of interest, current or prospective students were excluded. Fieldwork was conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams (version 1415/24081700421) due to pandemic restrictions, using two research instruments: communicative daily life stories (49 participants) and communicative focus groups (28 participants) (Table 3). Participation was recorded with prior consent and later transcribed. Categories were developed based on the information collected during the literature review. Participants were informed about the main findings of the scientific evidence gathered and the key results from the content analysis of the campaigns. The categories were created both deductively and inductively, allowing for new themes to emerge organically during the analysis. Individual communicative daily stories averaged 35 min, while focus groups lasted 1 h.

Table 3. Research instruments and participants by gender.

N	Research Instrument	Male	Female	Total
49	Communicative daily life stories	18	31	49
7	Communicative focus groups	8	20	28
	Total	26	51	77

All participants completed an informed consent form online before participating, self-assigning a code for identification upon form submission. The consent form provided information on the research's aims and participants' right to withdraw. While no personal questions were asked, concrete examples were provided, when possible, without specifying whether these were from experiences of their own or those of others. They were also informed that they could skip any of the topics raised.

2.2.2. Communicative Daily Life Stories

Communicative life stories is a methodological approach designed to foster collaborative dialogue between researchers and participants, focusing on the interpretation and reflection of personal experiences. Successfully used in research with young people, particularly in violence prevention [61], this communicative approach encourages participants to narrate and analyze their lives—past, present, and future—within a familiar and comfortable setting. The goal is to achieve a mutual understanding of their worlds through a shared dialogue where both researcher and participant contribute their perspectives. This method emphasizes creating a trusting environment, guided by a pre-established framework, and ensuring participants are aware of the research objectives.

For the present study, researchers conducted 49 communicative daily life stories using a semi-structured script combining scientific evidence with questions. The script aimed to establish a dialogue with participants by informing them of scientific evidence on sexual consent while obtaining insights from their context.

2.2.3. Communicative Focus Groups

A communicative focus group is a methodological approach, also grounded in the communicative perspective, designed to foster collective interpretation of specific issues through egalitarian dialogue [61]. Unlike traditional focus groups that primarily gather information, this approach aims both to collaboratively generate scientific knowledge and to transform the context by reaching a consensus on diverse interpretations. The researcher plays a crucial role in facilitating honest communication, clarifying differing positions, and guiding a process of negotiation among participants. By conducting communicative focus groups, especially with teenagers, researchers can compare varied perspectives, address individual and group subjectivities, and obtain comprehensive insights into the needs, interests, and concerns related to emotional and sexual relationships.

Seven communicative focus groups were formed based on natural friendship groups, prioritizing this natural relationship over a determined number of participants. This

approach resulted in varied group compositions ranging from 2 to 8 participants, totaling 28 young adults involved in focus groups.

2.3. Fieldwork with Campaign Managers Working with Young People in the Field of Education and Society

Twenty-four professionals (twenty females, five males) with diverse professional backgrounds participated in individual or paired semi-structured interviews (19 interviews), and three participated in internal project meetings as part of the advisory committee. These participants were from two spheres: professionals in education and society working with young people and SCAC managers from state-level campaigns previously analyzed. The education and society group included experts in formal and non-formal education, social workers, journalists, members of women's organizations, psychologists, and medical doctors. The campaign managers' group included 2 campaigners and a former government representative responsible for violence prevention training (Table 4). Interviews took place from March to June 2022.

Table 4. Sample fieldwork with campaign managers and professionals working with young people in the field of education and society.

	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Campaign managers and/or members of the administration	0	3	3
Formal or non-formal education professionals (with young people)	3	2	5
Social workers	1	2	3
Members of women's organizations	0	3	3
Journalists	0	3	3
Other professionals	0	7	7
TOTAL	4	20	24

Similar to the fieldwork conducted with young people, the interviews were carried out virtually via Microsoft Teams. Participation was recorded with prior consent and subsequently transcribed. The analysis categories were developed based on information gathered from the literature review, employing both deductive and inductive approaches to facilitate the emergence of new categories.

Regarding the interviews conducted, a total of 18 entities, organizations, or centers in the fields described below at the national level were reached (Table 5).

Table 5. Scope of institutions or organizations reached by the fieldwork.

No.	Profile of Institution/Organization	No.	Region
2	Institutions involved in the SCACs analyzed	1 1	Andalusia Castilla La Mancha
3	High schools	1 1 1	Asturias Valencian C. Catalonia
1	Supervised flat for minors (The location of the supervised flat is not indicated in order to protect the identity of workers and inmates, as the small size of the region could make it identifiable.)	1	-
3	Media and journalists' organizations	2 1	Spain (national) Catalonia
4	Sexual health centers or sexual violence victim support agencies	4	Madrid
18	TOTAL institutions/organizations reached		

Semi-structured interviews with professionals mirrored the communicative approach used in fieldwork with youth. This approach aimed to foster dialogue on the scientific evidence of the elements of SCACs and to gather information on specific issues in the context of their work. The content of the interviews was shaped by findings from the fieldwork with young people and the content analysis of SCACs, enabling the inclusion of elements highlighted by young participants and campaigns in the dialogue with professionals.

To facilitate this, a script for conducting the interviews was developed, referred to as "Interview Script for the Co-Creation of Knowledge with Professionals in the Field of Education and Society". This script incorporated the following: (a) the results of the category analysis of the campaigns, with a particular emphasis on elements beyond speech acts, accompanied by specific excerpts and examples from the analyzed campaigns; and (b) the reflections of young participants regarding these results for each element, supported by direct quotations.

3. Results

The analysis of the campaigns reveals a lack of reference to interactive power and the role of bystanders in these situations. When discussing these findings with participants, both young people and professionals, they emphasized the importance of including these elements, as highlighted in the scientific literature. They recognized that these aspects are relevant to their lives and that access to this information could help prevent these situations.

Participants also acknowledged the existence of communicative acts beyond verbal language related to power interactions and that, although campaigns address issues such as intimidation or persistence, the participants stressed the need for concrete examples to help identify these interactions, giving them more prominence as they are often overlooked and misunderstood, especially among young people. This highlights the need to address these commonly normalized situations.

Furthermore, participants suggested that it is not only important to focus on those directly involved in the communication of consent, but also on the positions taken by witnesses, particularly regarding the role of new alternative masculinities. Through the inclusion of participants' voices, these three areas are improved with specific contributions to be incorporated into future campaigns.

Thus, three key observations emerged. Firstly, campaigns should be grounded in the latest research findings on sexual consent, which may challenge previously disseminated information. Secondly, providing concrete examples of coercive discourse and interactive power beyond speech acts is crucial, highlighting situations where individuals may feel compelled to "consent" when unwilling. Lastly, there is a lack of messages addressed to upstanders, specifically new alternative masculinities (NAM), on how they can intervene in situations where sexual consent is absent.

3.1. Need for SCACs to Be Based on Scientific Evidence

A professional in the field of education and society highlighted the link between SCACs' limited impact among young people and the lack of scientific evidence in these campaigns. As previously mentioned, integrating scientific findings on sexual consent into these campaigns entails surpassing previous information. By doing so, SCACs can provide young individuals with a more comprehensive understanding of sexual consent that may address unexplained aspects of their previous experiences.

Both the young adults and professionals interviewed raised concerns about the campaigns lacking scientific evidence. They were presented with the latest research on sexual consent during the interviews, emphasizing the importance of its inclusion.

> GS34: *The campaigns in general are very much about ethics, so I think they don't reach them because perhaps they have focused for a long time on (. . .) on the victim. . . which are in the language of ethics and fundamentally do not incorporate scientific evidence. So, I think this is the main reason why they [SCACs] don't reach them (. . .).*
>
> Female, member of women's organization

Similarly, a newspaper editor-in-chief alluded to the need for the media, including campaigns, to base their messages and methods on scientific evidence and also in the field of gender. As she pointed out, this alignment would enhance public information and elevate the media's reputation:

HI83: *Now we are at a time when journalism also needs a scientific basis, not only in medicine, (. . .) but in all gender issues (. . .) The. . . media have an important role to play, both to improve their prestige, to improve the scientific knowledge of the public and for boys and girls who want a source of information, that's why they have the media don't they? [. . .] Then you need the scientific part. (. . .) This mix is needed for recognizing science within journalism [. . .]*

If these campaigns, which are based on science, and the magazines, take from the scientific training about gender, about relationships, about coercive power, it obviously reaches the boys and girls and make them think. And this leads to interaction, you provoke a topic of debate within the group of friends. And I'm sure that many boys and girls, when there is real scientific evidence, identify themselves, and then. . . that's when the debate is generated.

Female, newspaper editor-in-chief (media)

Participants, especially those in media and education, emphasized the importance of disseminating gender and sexual consent evidence to young people. This extends beyond conventional media to include informal and entertainment platforms, as well as different educational spaces, where these issues should reflect the latest scientific research.

Some education professionals mentioned that when addressing these topics with young people in different educational spaces with a foundation in the latest scientific insights rather than common assumptions helped them better understand and identify real-life situations.

EG32: *When you put the concepts on the table, they look back and say: "I was pressured here, I was pressured there". (. . .) In the first year of ESO I had conversations [with his students] of: "No, it's just that the group of friends in sixth grade were already telling me why I didn't hook up with that guy or why I didn't sleep with that one".*

Male, secondary education professional

MA04: *In tutoring sessions, I think it's very important to bring also when sensitive issues come up (. . .) You talk to them about the evidence, and they pay attention and interest because it is a delicate subject that we must talk about based on the evidence. (. . .) And if you bring it to them, they accept it very well and it's something that has a lot of repercussions.*

Male, secondary education professional

The absence of the latest research findings on sexual consent in SCACs for youth highlights deficiencies noted by the young adults interviewed. These relate to aspects of sexual consent beyond verbal expressions, often overlooked in the campaigns they encounter. Specifically, some participants referred to the limitations of "Only Yes means Yes" campaigns, emphasizing that freedom to say "no" is not always present, and in such cases, even a "yes" may not constitute valid sexual consent.

CL29: *The current "Only Yes means Yes" does not allow for what it is. . . because there are times when you have said "yes" when you really didn't want to, so. . . How do you make this a campaign? Well, I really have no idea. But. . . how to dismantle that? Of course, because in the end eh. . . the other person knows perfectly well when a situation is uncomfortable and when it is not.*

Young woman, age 21

RC24: *Based on the things I have experienced, I have realized that we cannot always say no. So, if I don't feel free to say NO we will always say YES. So that definition was not enough for me, and for me right now it is a little more that there is certainty on both sides*

to be able to do what one wants to do and that, having that freedom, one decides to do it. But if that freedom really exists, otherwise for me it's not consent.

Young woman, age 24

3.2. Concrete Examples to Better Understand and Help to Identify the Elements of Coercive Discourse

The second finding emphasizes the significance of incorporating concrete examples of coercive discourse situations mentioned in the scientific evidence, as highlighted by various participants. These examples could enhance young people's awareness of coercion elements through interactive power, potentially helping them avoid such situations in the future.

PM57: *What influences them a lot is seeing testimonies. People who have had it happen to them. Because they see themselves identified (. . .)*

Female, other professionals (health and care centers for victims of sexual aggression)

MJ23: *I think it is essential to transmit everything with examples. Because it sometimes happens to us when we talk about sexual harassment at university (. . .) until we start giving examples or incorporating more experiential stories, people don't really know what we're talking about, and they don't get an idea of what's behind it. (. . .) When we start to include a story, many people can relate with it. And I think it is essential to transmit messages based on stories or on examples.*

Female, member of women's organization

MA04: *Examples always help a lot to clarify but as examples that reproduce reality, a reality that they often live, I think they would quickly identify it (. . .) I've seen, for example, in relation to the attraction and violence of the bad guy. . . that you see in all the media. . . how just seeing that this exists in the same dialogic gathering, when you leave the dialogic gathering, they come out saying: "I think that I am influenced by this". It's an immediate reflection! So, the examples of this type in relation to this, I think they would identify them among things that have happened to them or that happen to their friends, sisters, or mothers. . .*

Male, secondary education professional

Participants concurred on the value of providing examples of such coercive situations for both identification and prevention. They also noted that discussions on sexual violence involving interactive power often failed to resonate with young people until concrete examples or personal testimonies were shared, which significantly improved engagement. Participants explained that if SCACs included these challenging-to-identify coercion scenarios alongside scientifically grounded definitions, it would likely resonate more with and challenge young individuals.

Moreover, it was young participants themselves who acknowledged the need for easier identification of coercion elements extending beyond verbal acts or direct relationship partners. They recognized that coercion could stem from their environment, leading them to engage in sexual relationships due to this coercive discourse. Some participants explain how they are now able to identify it and emphasize the negative consequences of those who fall into this discourse without identifying it.

AZ19: *First-person accounts would help a lot. . . very short videos explaining or seeing how their life has changed because of relationships that didn't go well. . . And to see a bit of that trauma, because often, well, we know that "no means no" and people know that it can have terrible psychological consequences, no? but you stay there. (. . .) I think that with "no means no" repeated many times, it just doesn't work.*

Young man, age 22

LU99: *When we were 16 years old, we weren't taught much about. . . because we did receive sex education but not on consent. . . So, I don't think we were very aware. . . . (. . .) For example, when I was 16, I was with a boy, and he was a boy who didn't care much*

about what I wanted and what I didn't. But of course, as he was a bit older, and I didn't know anything, so I said: "well, this is because this is... that's how relationships are", I thought. (...) And now I see it with the perspective I have now, and I say: What a fool.

Young woman, age 22

3.3. Messages Targeting New Alternative Masculinities as Upstanders

Finally, the participants suggested expanding the target audience beyond victims or potential victims to include those who can intervene and prevent sexual violence. Particularly, they highlighted the need to address upstanders, specifically new alternative masculinities (NAM), by making their anti-violence stance visible and appealing in society. These NAMs were seen as crucial in recognizing and intervening in situations of coerced consent.

LR43: *Even people from your peer group might go and also say: "Dude, what are you doing?" From... who is also an equal, an ally. (...) That someone is also capable of, well, what we say in bullying, right? Because he doesn't defend him so that they don't say: what a faggot you are. But if the straight guy in the class says: "you're going three times too far..." (...) I think it's great that these people are aligning themselves and that they are even from the male collective. That is other guys who are empowering themselves...*

Male, social worker

MC11: *We lack the kind of discourse for boys, you know? (...) It would be really cool if they had their own spaces. And I think that on the other hand, it would be cool if there were girls telling boys: "Guys, this is what we like".*

Male, primary teacher

Several quotes explicitly mentioned peer intervention, drawing parallels with bullying scenarios, where peer involvement has already been established as pivotal [60,61].

EL96: *I like these campaigns but what I don't know is if they are useful for people who are consciously maintaining relationships knowing that the other person is not consenting... I mean... like, they won't see themselves reflected...*

EL96: *I don't know if they exist: campaigns aimed at changing the stigma of: "if you are so respectful, you are a sucker". Like the idea is precisely that it's better to be too respectful than to be the opposite. I don't know how to change that stigma, but to focus on not feeling bad for being respectful, it's just that that's appreciated, you know?*

EB24: *Dare to say to your colleague: "hey, you're going four times too far with this girl".*

Young women's communicative focus group (aged 24 and 25)

The first intervention reflected a recurring observation: those who coerce are aware of their actions, rendering SCACs targeting aggressors ineffective. Coercion is not born of ignorance but persists because these "strategies" yield results.

Another relevant aspect that young women in the focus group brought to the SCACs is the need to redirect the appeal to those who reject coercive strategies and are respectful. They stated that respectful young men are sometimes stigmatized within peer groups. The focus should shift towards young men who intercede in sexually coercive situations, aligning with the concept of new alternative masculinities. This model of masculinity possesses a unique potential for deterring sexual coercion due to its perceived appeal and capacity to promote self-confidence, making it effective in reducing situations of sexual coercion.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This study demonstrates the significance of involving the public in scientific processes, impacting both participants and the advancement and communication of science. This approach combined campaign content analysis with scientific evidence and advisory board insights to generate new knowledge and contributions. The goal was to use these combined

elements to focus on how young people's input after an evidence-based dialogue on sexual consent can shape and improve future campaigns.

While other studies have involved participants directly in content analysis, the content analysis of the present research was conducted by the researchers and reviewed by the Advisory Committee, which included young people. Their perspectives were given priority in the discussion of the campaign content analysis results. The results of this analysis and insights from scientific literature were discussed first with young participants, who included their insights on what campaigns should include to be more effective, and later, with professionals from the field of education and society (including campaign managers). This process was conducted through an egalitarian dialogue between researchers and participants to enhance future campaigns.

The results point out the incorporation of three key guidelines—latest scientific evidence, coercive discourse and interactive power examples, and new alternative masculinities—identified through SCACs and protocols analysis and fieldwork with young adults and experts. Research participants were able to identify numerous situations they had experienced where consent from communicative acts covered many scenarios, regardless of explicit verbal confirmation. Thus, helping to identify coercive elements and situations, particularly those influenced by interactive power, could avoid many harmful scenarios and promote affective-sexual relationships of all types and durations. The dissemination of this evidence to more young people can be an important aspect of prevention by generating dialogue on the subject.

One limitation of the study is its qualitative nature, which involves a non-representative sample and lacks guarantees of replicability. This inherent limitation means that the findings may not be generalizable to broader populations. Additionally, the study focused on campaigns that met predefined criteria rather than aiming to obtain a representative sample of SCACs, which limits the diversity of international campaigns analyzed. This limitation has been acknowledged, and expanding the analysis in future research to include campaigns from regions with different cultural and social contexts would enhance the robustness of the findings.

For future research, obtaining a more representative and gender-balanced sample, including more diverse age groups such as those under 18 and over 25, could enhance the applicability of the findings. Additionally, considering one of the keys obtained, the incorporation of the most relevant scientific evidence of social impact, a need emerges for continuous strategies and partnerships to keep this information updated and rigorous, as new scientific developments can influence the campaign's effectiveness and social impact.

Finally, when new campaigns incorporate the three guidelines pointed out by the research results, it would be essential to assess the social impact in the short and long term according to criteria established by the European Commission [62] on affective-sexual relations. This evaluation would determine their genuine impact on people and the way they relate to each other.

CONSENTNET (RED2022-134866-T), a thematic research network focused on enhancing and extending the outcomes of the CONSENT, will contribute to sharing these findings with the experts interviewed and SCAC stakeholders for future integration, bringing scientific evidence on sexual consent closer to young people's lives and eventually into their discussions and reflections.

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