



## RATE AND STRUCTURE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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**Introduction:** Nowadays, sexual violence is a severe violation of human rights and a major social problem faced by all countries all over the world. The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and combating violence against Women and domestic violence (2011), known as the Istanbul Convention, requires state parties to criminalize sexual violence, rape, and sexual harassment and to set up sexual violence referral centers for victims to provide them integrated services. The Republic of Moldova ratified the Istanbul Convention on 14.11.2021 and, by doing so, committed itself to protecting women against all forms of violence, including by adjusting its legal framework to the Convention provisions and adequately assisting victims and survivors. The health system and medico-legal investigation play a crucial role in the response provided by the state institutions.

**Purpose of the research:** To present the rate and structure of sexual violence in the Republic of Moldova during 2023.

**Materials and Methods:** The Centre of Forensic Medicine's annual report for 2023 was analysed and 4 criteria (victims' gender, age, residence, their relationship with perpetrator) related to sexual violence cases were studied.

**Results:** In 2023, 526 people were subjected to forensic medical examinations concerning cases of sexual violence within the Centre of Forensic Medicine regional units. This number included 426 victims and 100 perpetrators. Mostly, sexual violence occurred in Chișinău city (29.5%), followed by the northern region of the country (Eдинeț (9.7%) and Soroca (6.1%)). Both adults (53.8%) and minors (46.2%) were victims of sexual violence. Mainly, victims of sexual violence were women, especially minors (95.8%). In most cases (69.4%), the perpetrators were unknown to the victims.

**Discussion:** After ratifying the Istanbul Convention, the Republic of Moldova undertook real steps to meet its provisions. Thus, several centres for victims of sexual and domestic violence, such as Barnahus Centre (for children), Regional service for sexual violence victims in Ungheni district and Police Family Justice Centre were open in the last years (2022-2023). National legislation asks forensic medical experts to conduct medico-legal examinations of sexual violence victims together with gynaecologists and other relevant medical professionals. Nowadays, the Moldovan Criminal Code criminalises rape (art. 171), non-consensual sexual actions (art. 172), sexual harassment (art. 173), sexual intercourse with a person under the age of 16 (art. 174), sexual actions with a person under the age of 16 (art. 175) and luring a minor for sexual purposes (art. 175<sup>1</sup>). Nevertheless, it has recently (09.01.2023) been adjusted to the requirements of the Istanbul Convention by including a new article (132<sup>2</sup>) that explains the meaning of non-consensual sexual acts or actions. Moreover, the definition of sexual acts was enlarged to include not only vaginal penetration but anal and oral ones with any body part or object.

**Conclusions:** Sexual violence continues to be a global challenge, and forensic medical institutions play a key role in the state's response. National legislation requires professionals from different fields to act

in a coordinated way and provide the comprehensive services needed by victims of violence. According to the Centre of Forensic Medicine data, during 2023, mostly adult female victims were subjected to forensic medical examinations. The Republic of Moldova adjusted its national legislation to the Istanbul Convention in recent years and this is still an ongoing process.

**Keywords:** sexual violence, rape, medico-legal examination

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