



Trigger warning!

The document contains testimonies of victims of physical and sexual assault.

Content warning!

Reader discretion is advised due to distressing material.



1) "You asked for it!"

My first sexual experience was around the age of 5-6. My mother's boyfriend was about 35-40 years old. Every time I was alone with him he would start playing with me, tickling me, touching me. This went on until I was 12. That's when I realised that he wasn't playing with me but touching me in my intimate areas every chance he got. It all ended at the age of 12 when my mother broke up with him.

I was ashamed to talk about it even though I was asked by my grandparents.

At the age of 20, I think I had the most painful experience. I was in Italy, visiting my father, and was about to return to Romania. One night, before my departure, he came to my bed, noticeably drunk, and lay beside me. He began expressing how much he would miss me, accompanying his words with tickling, reminiscent of my childhood interactions with him. He started stroking my back and then asked, "Aren't you wearing a bra?". I was only wearing a sweatshirt and confirmed I wasn't wearing one. He started to tickle me even harder and grabbed my breast, under my sweatshirt, then started to grab my buttocks.

I managed to escape from the situation, and that marked the end of our interaction. Since then I've cut all contact with him.

21 years old, Râmnicu Vâlcea

2) "Maybe you die first."

I am an only child and grew up mostly with my grandparents. My father used to beat me all the time for no reason. Since I was little, he'd been telling me that I was not beautiful, smart nor talented and that I would only succeed through hard work. He'd also say he was the only one who really loved me, (even though he'd beat me, insult me) and everyone else hated me. **It created chaos in my head because I couldn't understand how a man who claimed to love me so much could at the same time be so violent with me.**

Because of him, all men seemed the same to me, I had no self-confidence and saw the world only in shades of grey. The beatings stopped sometime around high school when he noticed it wasn't affecting me anymore.

The most frustrating thing is that in front of everyone, he posed as a perfect father caring for a problematic daughter. **I struggle every day not to be like him.**

26 years old, Iași



3) **"I should have pierced the condom to get you pregnant and then dump you, let you be a stupid woman with a baby."**

I ended a relationship with my ex-boyfriend due to his excessive jealousy. Although he never physically harmed me while we were together, the situation drastically worsened after we broke up, continuing for over a year. He would assault me in public places, and distressingly, bystanders never intervened. A notable incident occurred in front of the National Theatre, where fortunately, two women came to my aid and stayed with me until my friends could arrive to ensure my safety.

Additionally, he violated my privacy by taking photos of me while I was asleep and without any clothes on, and then disseminated these images throughout our college. When I brought this up with the dean, I was disheartened by his response; he suggested I remain silent on the matter to prevent the boy from facing any repercussions, citing it would be regrettable for him to have a record.

26 years old, Bucharest

4) **"You're good for nothing."**

For as long as I can remember, my family life has been marked by dysfunction, characterised by physical and emotional abuse. This included beatings, verbal abuse, humiliation, and consistent neglect.

Despite achieving good academic results, there were times I was denied food as a punishment for what was deemed 'impertinence' towards my mother. At other times, I was expected to pay for my meals, even though all my finances were allocated to my college expenses.

In one particularly harsh instance during my childhood, a poor grade led to a severe altercation with my father. He threw me out of the house, like a piece of furniture. **I got punched, slapped, kicked.**

Now, even though I no longer live under their roof, they still remain abusive to me.

27 years old, Constanta



5) **"I'll give you a 7 even if the paper is a 10. Maybe that'll teach you to stay in school."**

A few months following my father's passing, I underwent a significant change in behaviour. Previously, I hadn't faced any issues at school, but suddenly, I found myself being marginalised by my teachers. My absence from school, a result of battling depression for which I was taking medication and attending regular psychiatric sessions, seemed to exacerbate the situation.

Shockingly, some teachers went as far as to incite my peers against me, encouraging them to physically and verbally abuse me due to my fatherless status. The dread of attending high school became overwhelming. One teacher derogatorily nicknamed me 'Morticia,' mocking my mourning attire of dark clothes, my dark hair, and pale skin. She would reproach me for her coming to work even though her father had died two years before. Many times teachers wouldn't give me passing grades or the grades I deserved.

When a girl in high school killed herself, they made jokes and mocked her. What could be so hard about her life to justify killing herself?

27 years old, Bucharest

6) **"Everyone has sex, and we should too if we're a couple, otherwise we're no different than a friendship."**

When I was 12, I met a boy my age. We were from different towns, but occasionally went to visit relatives in the same town. After 2 years we started a relationship. At that age, I knew nothing about sex. He had sent me a picture of his genitals and I was very scared. Then gradually **he tried to convince me to have sex with him. He kept telling me it would feel good, that's what people who love each other do.**

I finally gave in, hoping he would leave me in peace if I accepted. It was the longest moment of my life. It felt like it would never end. I was scared, I wanted to run away and escape. After sex, I felt dirty and guilty. I didn't understand why I let him do this to me.

After that, I hoped we would never go to those relatives again and I could escape from him.

21 years old, Satu Mare



7) "I'll kill myself if you try to leave me."

I lived in an abusive family with a narcissistic and aggressive father. My father used his fists to solve his problems. That's why I thought love was abusive.

I had my first relationship at 16, when I was forced to start my sex life without wanting to. It hurt like hell, it was a nightmare everything he did to me. **He constantly insulted me, isolated me from my friends and people who loved me. He would frequently tell me that no one would love me and convinced me that he was doing me a favour by being with me.**

As time passed, I considered ending the relationship, but he countered with threats of taking his own life if I left. This left me feeling trapped, staying with him for an additional year and a half, burdened by low self-esteem and the belief that I couldn't be on my own. My fear of what might happen to him if I left only compounded my dilemma, leaving me torn between the need for my own well-being and concern for his safety.

23 years old, Timișoara

8) "Get used to it."

Just as I was turning 14, I met a boy. He wasn't a good influence. People warned me to stay away from him because of his vices that started at a young age, but he was my only friend then. He invited me to go on holiday to his grandparents in the countryside and I accepted. I thought it would be fun.

A few days went by, and he started to kiss me, touch me, and do things I agreed with and didn't agree with. One day he suggested we have anal sex, however, I avoided the discussion...I was scared and didn't want to. He kept going on; I froze; I didn't know how to say no to him anymore.

Eventually, I did. I tearfully told him that it hurt and that I wanted him to leave me alone. I started pushing him. All he said was: "Never mind, you'll get used to it."

I didn't realise I was raped until I told someone. I had the courage to tell my mother what happened and a teacher. In the meantime, he spread rumours that I was a "slut" and that I was lying about being raped. No one believed me... I was ridiculed.

21 years old, Bucharest



9) "What were you looking for in there with him? What did you think was going to happen?"

I was 16 years old and a student at one of the best high schools in my town. I was introverted and had few friends, so I was close to teachers and professors, even those who only taught my sister, not me. One of them would often stop me in the school hallways to ask how I was doing, how we were doing in history, and how my sister was doing.

One day, he called me into his office and said he wanted me to tell him how my sister was doing in college. I went... I didn't dwell long on the fact that it's not a brilliant idea to be alone with a man in an enclosed space; he was a professor, after all.

He locked the door twice. Then he came up to me and kissed me on the cheek. He told me I was very sweet, then kissed me on the mouth. I flinched, at which point he grabbed my head with one hand so I couldn't escape. I completely froze. He stuck his tongue in my mouth, and continued kissing me for what felt like an eternity. After that, he let me go. I reached for the door, and unlocked it. He didn't stop me. When I told my mother, she told me it was my fault. She asked me, "What were you doing in there with him? What did you think was going to happen?". I talked to several teachers, hoping they would do something to help me. Instead, I was silenced.

I later learned from other former students that he was known for kissing and groping his female students. That it was known, but he "had a PhD", so the management was on his side.

It's been 9 years since then, but I still think it was my fault I went there. But then I remember that I was only a kid at the time.

25 years old, Râmnicu Vâlcea.

10) "During the 10 years this person has been in my life, I did not exist."

I was 14 at the time a 21-year-old family friend started texting me. He was a handsome, tall, charismatic and mysterious man. I thought having such an interesting guy paying attention to me was a privilege! I had been talking and flirting with him for about a year before we started what I considered a relationship. I was 15 when I lost my virginity to him. He was already on his third serious relationship, for me it was my first.



When I was doing my math and language homework, he already had a job. When I was taking my bacalaureate, he was already building his own house.

During the 10 years this person had been in my life, I did not exist. **My desires, thoughts, expectations were systematically pushed aside, disapproved of, denied through manipulation.** At first, his desires were always imposed through arguments I didn't know how to dismantle. Later, he employed anger or emotional withdrawal as tools of control, and eventually, he acted on his whims without regard for my consent, making it clear that my agreement was superfluous to him.

It took me years of therapy to understand I am not an object, and that in a relationship, partners are equals. Some scars - like anxiety and fear of intimacy - will stay with me forever.

30 years old, București

11) "It's your fault!"

We lived in a neighbourhood where violence was all too familiar. One afternoon, I went out with my neighbours from the block across the street - six boys. We were all friends, we played football together, and I thought they saw me as an equal. One day, we all went to one of the boys' houses and had a glass of wine. Moments later, one of the boys approached me with a black condom. I felt like I was going to be sick, so I ran to the elevator to go home.

A boy followed me and started kissing me. I pushed him away, and then he violently banged my head against the elevator door.

I woke up in a clinic, covered in blood, smelling of vinegar, with no money, and my phone broken. I had been raped by the six boys, anally. I was a virgin. One of the boys spread lies to his parents and mine.

My parents didn't even believe that I was raped. They blamed me, beating me for what had happened. I learned about the rape through the hurtful words spoken about me. I suffered from frequent bleeding for years afterward. Yet, nobody believed me. I was unheard.

29 years old, Bucharest



12) "You're crazy! What do you mean it hurts? Come on, stop pretending!"

He was my first sexual partner. He had a passion for anal sex, even though we were both virgins when we met. He kept insisting on penetrating me anally, either by hand or "accidentally" during sex. My answer was no, and his reactions when I refused him were out of line. He would reproach me: "You don't love me", "You're crazy", etc. Exhausted by his constant pressure, I eventually gave in and purchased lubricant, but the experience remained excruciatingly painful.

I started crying in pain, he wanted to go on and he scolded me that I didn't want it anymore. He kept saying "it's not that bad", "you'll see, it gets better", that I'm "crazy, it doesn't hurt", I'm "just pretending".

On the third and final attempt, the pattern repeated, except he laid back down and to shut him up I climbed on top of him and continued. I was crying, I don't even remember if penetration occurred or he just rubbed himself against my back.

After he finished, he laughed, saying again that "it mustn't be so bad since I kept going".

He told me he should maybe go to the police and claim that I raped him, because "I didn't want to go on anymore".

22 years old, Sibiu