

# **Ending impunity for sexual abuse at university: The Flecha-CREA case**

## **Acabar con la impunidad del abuso sexual en la universidad: El caso Flecha-CREA**

### **Fim da impunidade dos abusos sexuais na universidade: o caso Flecha-CREA**

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#### **Abstract**

In July 2025, four media outlets revealed that fourteen women had filed an internal complaint, with the rector of the University of Barcelona, denouncing situations of abuse and sexual harassment, abuse of power, psychological violence, and labor exploitation perpetrated since the 1990s by Ramón Flecha, emeritus professor of Sociology. Founder of the research group CREA (Community of Research on Excellence for All), he describes himself as the “number 1 scientist (world ranking) in gender violence<sup>1</sup>.” In recent years, media reports on this type of behavior perpetrated by university professors and lecturers have proliferated. However, this case stands out because the complainants were women who had been students, scholarship recipients, and/or collaborators at CREA. They follow a pattern that has been repeated for more than three decades, and there were two previous internal complaints at the university regarding the group's alleged cult-like behavior in 2004 and 2016, which were taken to the Public Prosecutor's Office and ultimately dismissed. In July 2025, the university opened an internal investigation with a three-member commission to clarify the reported events. This case highlights the importance of breaking the silence in the university domain, where people seek to prepare for their future in a safe and violence-free environment, but where it is possible to encounter individuals higher up in the hierarchy who have other aims, such as dominating and abusing women.

**Keywords:** Sexual abuse, sexual harassment at university, university corruption, DARVO strategy, institutional impunity, CREA research group, oppression, sects, University of Barcelona, gender violence.

#### **Resumen**

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<sup>1</sup> This was his own description on the social network X when this news was published:  
<https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20250702/catorce-mujeres-denuncian-ante-universidad-barcelona-a-catedratico-por-mantener-relaciones-sexuales-con-becarias/16647067.shtml>

En julio de 2025 sale a la luz en cuatro medios de comunicación que catorce mujeres presentan una denuncia interna al rector de la Universidad de Barcelona para denunciar situaciones de abusos y acoso sexual, abuso de poder, violencia psicológica y explotación laboral, ejercidas desde los años 90 por el catedrático emérito de Sociología Ramón Flecha. Fundador del grupo de investigación CREA (Comunidad de Investigación sobre Excelencia para Todos, por sus siglas en inglés), se califica a sí mismo como el “científico número 1 (ranking mundial) en *gender violence*”<sup>2</sup>. En los últimos años, han proliferado en los medios informaciones sobre este tipo de comportamientos perpetrados por profesores y catedráticos universitarios. Sin embargo, este caso destaca por que denuncian mujeres que han sido estudiantes, becarias y/o colaboradoras en CREA; siguen un patrón que se reproduce desde hace más de tres décadas, y existían dos denuncias internas previas en la universidad por presunto funcionamiento sectario del grupo en 2004 y 2016, que se llevaron a la Fiscalía y acabaron archivadas. En julio de 2025, la universidad abrió una investigación interna con una comisión de tres miembros para esclarecer los hechos denunciados. Este caso pone de manifiesto la importancia de romper el silencio en un entorno como el universitario, al que acuden personas que pretenden prepararse para su futuro en un ambiente seguro y libre de violencia, pero en el que es posible cruzarse con personas de nivel superior en la jerarquía que tienen otros fines, como los de dominar y abusar de mujeres.

**Palabras clave:** Abuso sexual, acoso sexual en la universidad, corrupción universitaria, estrategia DARVO, impunidad institucional, grupo de investigación CREA, opresión, sectas, Universidad de Barcelona, violencia de género.

## Resumo

Em julho de 2025, quatro órgãos de comunicação social revelaram que catorze mulheres apresentaram uma queixa interna ao reitor da Universidade de Barcelona, dando conta de casos de abuso e assédio sexual, abuso de poder, violência psicológica e exploração laboral perpetrados desde a década de 1990 por Ramón Flecha, professor emérito de Sociologia. Fundador do grupo de investigação CREA (Comunidade de Investigação em Excelência para Todos), auto-intitula-se o “cientista número 1 (no ranking mundial) em violência de género”<sup>3</sup>. Nos últimos anos, têm proliferado as reportagens sobre este tipo de comportamento por parte de professores e conferencistas universitários. No entanto, este caso destaca-se porque as denunciadas eram mulheres que tinham sido alunas, bolsistas e/ou colaboradoras do CREA. Seguem um padrão que se repete há mais de três décadas, tendo havido duas queixas internas anteriores na universidade referentes ao alegado comportamento sectário do

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<sup>2</sup> Era su descripción en la red social X cuando se publicó esta noticia: <https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20250702/catorce-mujeres-denuncian-ante-universidad-barcelona-a-catedratico-por-mantener-relaciones-sexuales-con-becarias/16647067.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> Esta foi a descrição que o próprio fez na rede social X quando esta notícia foi publicada: <https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20250702/catorce-mujeres-denuncian-ante-universidad-barcelona-a-catedratico-por-mantener-relaciones-sexuales-con-becarias/16647067.shtml>

grupo, em 2004 e 2016, que foram levadas ao Ministério Público e, por fim, arquivadas. Em julho de 2025, a universidade abriu uma investigação interna com uma comissão de três membros para esclarecer os acontecimentos relatados. Este caso realça a importância de quebrar o silêncio num ambiente como o universitário, onde as pessoas procuram preparar-se para o futuro num local seguro e livre de violência, mas onde é possível encontrar indivíduos em posições hierárquicas superiores com outros objetivos, como dominar e abusar das mulheres.

**Palavras-chave:** Abuso sexual, assédio sexual na universidade, corrupção universitária, estratégia DARVO, impunidade institucional, grupo de investigação CREA, opressão, seitas, Universidade de Barcelona, violência de género.

## Introduction

Reports of abuse and sexual harassment by full professors and university lecturers have multiplied in recent years in the media and on social networks. As Gallego (2025) points out, “they have hardly had any consequences for those responsible” and occur in “institutions that present themselves as key to ensuring that social mobility is based on merit.” The case at hand involves José Ramón Flecha García (Bilbao, 1952), emeritus professor of Sociology at the University of Barcelona (UB), who recently described himself on the social network X as the “number 1 scientist (world ranking) in gender violence.”

In 1991, he founded CREA under the name “Center of Research for Education of Adults”. As its name suggests, it initially specialised in adult education. Later, almost at a decade-long pace, the name evolved toward more general definitions, first as “Centro Especial de Investigación en Teorías y Prácticas Superadoras de Desigualdades”<sup>4</sup>, before arriving at its current designation, again in English: “Community of Research on Excellence for All”<sup>5</sup>.

The CREA research centre was established at the University of Barcelona and is composed mainly of individuals from the Faculties of Education and Sociology. In its early years, it published studies based on learning and ultimately developed what became known as “learning communities”—a pedagogical project inspired by Henry Levin’s “Accelerated Schools” and Robert Slavin’s “Success for All”. In later years, it incorporated new lines of research in areas such as romantic relationships, gender violence, harassment at university, school bullying, and the Roma community, among others (CREA, 2025a). Since 1985, he had signed another 91 articles on other topics, and it was not until 2013 that he published, as first author, an article on gender studies. After reviewing Flecha’s profile in several

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<sup>4</sup> Special Research Centre on Theories and Practices Overcoming Inequalities (own translation) <https://creaub.info/> (Date of consultation: 2025/11/27).

<sup>5</sup> <https://creacommunity.org/index/es/sobre-nosotros/> (Date of consultation: 2025/11/27).

academic repositories such as ORCID<sup>6</sup>, ResearchGate<sup>7</sup>, Academia<sup>8</sup>, and Google Scholar<sup>9</sup>, only in the latter does the label “gender violence”<sup>10</sup> appear as an interest or research line of the UB professor, while it is missing in all the rest of repositories.

Furthermore, over time, CREA has diversified the specialties of its research fellows, who come from disciplines such as Psychology, Anthropology, and History, and it maintains connections with various national and international universities and institutions<sup>11</sup>. Likewise, the CREA team participates in and coordinates research projects at the local, regional, national, and European levels. With regard to the UB, at present, members of CREA coordinate and form part of three consolidated research groups of the Government of Catalonia: SASIR<sup>12</sup>, TSIR<sup>13</sup>, and RCI-TS<sup>14</sup>.

At the time of writing this paper, the CREA website lists 45 members from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Universitat de Barcelona, Universidad de Granada, Universidade Federal de São Carlos (Brasil), Universidad de La Frontera (Chile), Universitat Ramon Llull, Universidad Veracruzana (Mexico), Universidad del País Vasco, Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Universitat de València and Universidad de Zaragoza. There are also members coming from areas such as early childhood education, secondary education, adult education, and the Latin American Network of Learning Communities. Consequently, CREA succeeds in taking charge of secondary socialisation for the entire life cycle of a person, from early childhood education to adult education, while also establishing itself as a producer of meaning for that time span from its higher education position (Maroy, 2010).

In the years when CREA operated at full capacity, such as 2016, the number of members exceeded 70 people<sup>15</sup>. However, since 2024, when the largest departure ever recorded from the group took place, 38 profiles have been removed from the CREA website, compared to the 15 members that have joined during that same period. Sociodemographically, it is a highly feminised group, historically well below the current 30% of male members, in which academic profiles appear alongside various professionals

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<sup>6</sup> Ramón Flecha's ORCID profile <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7230-516X> (Date of consultation: 2025/11/27).

<sup>7</sup> Ramón Flecha's ResearchGate profile <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ramon-Flecha> (Date of consultation: 2025/11/27).

<sup>8</sup> Ramón Flecha's Academia profile <https://independent.academia.edu/JoseRamonFlechaGarcia> (Date of consultation: 2025/11/27).

<sup>9</sup> Ramón Flecha's Google Scholar profile <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=8-CobkIAAAAJ&hl=ca> (Date of consultation: 2025/11/27).

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that a most appropriate English term is "gender-based violence"

<sup>11</sup> CREA members' website <https://creacommunity.org/index/es/miembros/> (Date of consultation: 2025/11/23).

<sup>12</sup> SASIR Web. Successful Actions on Social Impact Research. [https://webgrec.ub.edu/websGR/reports/SUACSOIR\\_CAT.html](https://webgrec.ub.edu/websGR/reports/SUACSOIR_CAT.html) (Date of consultation: 2025/11/27).

<sup>13</sup> TSIR. Teoría Sociológica e Impacto Social de la Investigación. <https://www.ub.edu/school-sociology/project-type/tsir/> (Date of consultation: 2025/11/27).

<sup>14</sup> RCI-TS. Recerca Científica Interdisciplinària en Treball Social. <https://www.ub.edu/rcits/membres/> (Date of consultation: 2025/11/27).

<sup>15</sup> CREA website in December 2016. <https://web.archive.org/web/20161221232107/http://crea.ub.edu/> (Date of consultation: 2025/11/27).

related to the societal network orbiting around CREA, such as consultants, administrators, teachers from other educational levels, and also unemployed individuals. Among the academic profiles, it is necessary to distinguish between consolidated and non-consolidated positions, depending on the completion of doctoral studies, with the latter amounting to twelve members, predominantly young women (around 84%).

During the journalistic investigation, it was observed that various members of CREA hold positions of responsibility, both in their universities and in other bodies. The director of CREA, Marta Soler, heads the Department of Sociology at the UB<sup>16</sup>. Her duties, according to the new Statute of the University of Barcelona: leading, managing, coordinating, and representing the department; “she chairs the meetings of the department council, is responsible for ensuring that the assigned teaching is carried out, and oversees the academic development and the well-being of the department’s staff” (Universitat de Barcelona, 2025e). Soler is also part of the executive committee of the International Sociological Association (ISA) in the term lasting until 2027, as she is Vice President for Publications<sup>17</sup>. Another member of CREA since its beginnings, Lidia Puigvert, is currently the coordinating professor of the UB Sociology Doctoral Programme<sup>18</sup>; she is the principal investigator of the aforementioned SASIR group and directs the “Centre de Recerca Social Interdisciplinària” (ISREC)<sup>19</sup>. In the European Sociological Association (ESA), CREA has one of its members on the executive committee, UB Sociology lecturer Elisabeth Torras-Gómez<sup>20</sup>, and in the ISA’s Women and Gender Studies Research Network, the coordinator is UB Sociology professor Esther Oliver Pérez<sup>21</sup>. UB Sociology professor Lena de Botton is also a member of the Advisory Council for Religious Diversity of the Government of Catalonia<sup>22</sup>, and retired UB Education professor and longstanding CREA member Rosa Valls has been part of the board of the Fundesplai foundation<sup>23</sup> for decades.

Likewise, CREA members from other universities hold institutional positions, such as Cristina Pulido, who holds a PhD in Communication from the UB and heads the Department of Journalism and

<sup>16</sup> Website of the Department of Sociology at the UB <https://web.ub.edu/es/web/departament-sociologia/organitzacio> (Date of consultation: 2025/12/1).

<sup>17</sup> ISA website <https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/about-isa/executive-committee/executive-committee-2023-2027> (Date of consultation: 2025/12/1).

<sup>18</sup> Website of the PhD in Sociology at the UB. <https://www.ub.edu/school-sociology/es/programmes/phd/> (Date of consultation: 2025/12/1).

<sup>19</sup> Interdisciplinary Social Research Centre (own translation). Proclamation of the elected candidate to ISREC. [https://www.ub.edu/seu-electoral/sites/default/files/2023-03/models%20candidat%20electe%20dega%26%23768%3B%20o%20degana\\_o\\_directora%20o%20director%20institut\\_o\\_altr es%20estructures\\_ISREC%20%28SIGNAT%29.pdf](https://www.ub.edu/seu-electoral/sites/default/files/2023-03/models%20candidat%20electe%20dega%26%23768%3B%20o%20degana_o_directora%20o%20director%20institut_o_altr es%20estructures_ISREC%20%28SIGNAT%29.pdf) (Date of consultation: 2025/12/1).

<sup>20</sup> ESA Executive Committee website. <https://europeansociology.org/ballot/e426faa7-2994-47b7-9560-537f27a9a7e4> (Date of consultation: 2025/12/1).

<sup>21</sup> Web Network of Women and Gender Studies ESA. <https://www.europeansociology.org/research-networks/rn33-womens-and-gender-studies> (Date of consultation: 2025/12/1).

<sup>22</sup> Website of the Consell Assessor for Religious Diversity. <https://web.gencat.cat/ca/adreces-i-telefon/detall/?codInf=18229#Composicio> (Date of consultation: 2025/12/1).

<sup>23</sup> Fundesplai team website. <https://fundesplai.org/es/conoce/nuestro-equipo/> (Date of consultation: 2025/12/1).

Communication Sciences at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona<sup>24</sup>. Her brother, professor and coordinator of the Faith and Spirituality area at the Universitat Ramon Llull, Miguel Ángel Pulido, is coordinator of the Curriculum Identity Experts Group of the “Fundació Escola Cristiana de Catalunya”<sup>25</sup>. Professor of Education at the Universitat de València, Esther Roca served as Vice-Dean for Equality, Diversity and Social Impact of the Faculty of Philosophy and Education Sciences<sup>26</sup>, as she herself announced on X (Roca, 2024), between March 2024 and the second half of 2025, when she disappeared from the dean's team website and so far no one has replaced her in that position<sup>27</sup>. Universidad de Zaragoza Sociology professor Carmen Elboj is Academic Secretary of the University Research Institute on Employment, Digital Society and Sustainability (IEDIS)<sup>28</sup>.

Likewise, several CREA members hold the main board positions of the Associació Catalana de Sociologia (ACS), an organisation dependent on the Institut d'Estudis Catalans: the acting President is Olga Serradell; the Vice President, Josep Maria Pascual; the Secretary, Lidia Bordanoba; and the Treasurer, Lena de Botton<sup>29</sup>.

On the other hand, Ramón Flecha, together with other members and collaborators of CREA, have founded associations, educational projects<sup>30</sup> and even a company<sup>31</sup>, not only in Catalonia, but also in other Spanish provinces and in Latin America.

- Educational, social and cultural associations:

- Catalonia: Associació Àgora -it manages projects in the neighbourhood of La Verneda-Sant Martí such as the Escola d'Adults-, Associació de Dones Heura, Associació de Dones per la Ciència, Associació Gitana de Dones Drom Kotar Mestipen (grouped within the Coordinadora d'Associacions de Dones de Sant Martí de Provençals, Verneda i la Pau), Associació de Professorat ODISSEA, FACEPA (Federació d'Associacions Culturals i Educatives de Persones Adultes), Fundación Jesús Gómez, Grup de Dones CREA-Safo, Grup de Diàleg Interreligiós, Grup Tagore d'Homes en Diàleg.

<sup>24</sup> Website of the Department of Journalism and Communication Sciences at the UAB. <https://portalrecerca.uab.cat/es/organisations/departament-de-periodisme-i-ci%C3%A8ncies-de-la-comunicaci%C3%B3> (Date of consultation: 2025/12/1).

<sup>25</sup> Catalanian Christian School Foundation (own translation). FECC website. <https://www.fecc.cat/grups-experts-area-identitat-i-missio/> (Date of consultation: 2025/12/1).

<sup>26</sup> Roca no longer appears on the CREA members' website, but this affiliation is included in her ORCID profile. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4500-8666> (Date of consultation: 2025/12/1).

<sup>27</sup> Website of the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Philosophy and Educational Sciences. <https://www.uv.es/uvweb/filosofia-educacio/es/facultad/equipo-decanal-1285848711366.html> (Date of consultation: 2025/12/1).

<sup>28</sup> IEDIS Management Team. <https://iedis.unizar.es/node/44> (Date of consultation: 2025/12/1).

<sup>29</sup> ACS website. <https://acs.iec.cat/junta-directiva/junta-actual/> (Date of consultation: 2025/12/1).

<sup>30</sup> Website for people affected by CREA. <http://afectadoscrea.org/> (Date of consultation: 2025/12/1).

<sup>31</sup> Social Impact S.L. company page on LibreBorme. <https://libreborme.me/borme/empresa/social-impact/> (Date of consultation: 2025/12/1).



- Valencian Community: Iris AEBE (Asociación por la Educación Basada en Evidencias), the research groups Gen-te-fem and White Rose Research Center (affiliated with the Universitat de València), Grup de Dones Sherezade.
- Basque Country: Colectivo Pedagógico Adarra Pedagogi Erakundea, Giltzarri Hezkuntza.
- National level: AMIE (Asociación Multidisciplinar de Investigación Educativa); Asociación Universitaria de Ciencia, Feminismo y Masculinidades (AUCFEM); Children Sexual Abuse Survivors (CSAS) Science and Friendship; Comunidades de Aprendizaje and Red Latinoamericana de Comunidades de Aprendizaje.
- Publishing house/websites: Daily 27, Diario Feminista, Hipatia Press, Periódico Educación, Social Impact Science.
- Limited Company: Social Impact S.L.

On July, 2, 2025, three reports published by *RTVE Noticias*, *elDiario.es*, and *InfoLibre*, and a radio report broadcast on the programme *L'Entrellat* of *Ràdio 4-RNE*, revealed that fourteen women, , had submitted an official complaint through their legal representatives to the rector of the UB (Bolaños, 2025a; Jaenes, 2025; RNE, 2025a; Requena, 2025a). They included testimonies from several women who described situations of abuse and sexual harassment, abuse of power, psychological violence and labour exploitation suffered for more than three decades at the hands of Ramón Flecha, with the collaboration of people from the CREA group. The accused professor, who gave his version of the events, denied everything, as did the director of the CREA group, Marta Soler.

Following the publication in the media, the UB released an initial internal statement on July, 2, 2025 stating that it “will pursue to the end any case of violence, harassment or labour, psychological or sexual mistreatment”. The statement also mentions previous internal complaints against CREA about “conflicts relating to the internal functioning of the group, financial and grant management, and others” in 2004, plus an internal complaint for psychological abuse and sectarian behaviour in 2016. Both cases were taken to the Catalan Prosecutor’s Office and subsequently dropped, probably because the current Spanish Penal Code lacks provisions to which the justice system can resort when a victim reports psychological manipulation by a group, a leader, or any person (Bolaños, 2024).

In the same statement, the UB revealed that the CREA group ceased to be affiliated with the university in 2020 (Universitat de Barcelona, 2025a), although various evidence shows that the research group continued to be linked to the UB. For example, the website *crea.ub.edu* remained hosted under the university’s domain until the latest complaints were received. Events have also been held on University

of Barcelona campus premises, such as the final conference of the I+D+i ALL WOMEN project, held on November, 15, 2024 in the auditorium of the Palau de les Heures, at the Mundet Campus of the UB (CREA, 2024a), and the UB logo and domain were used as a promotional element in conferences organised by CREA, such as the Dive-In Dialogue Final Conference<sup>32</sup>, which took place on December, 11, 2024.

After July, 2, 2025, more reports were published, the news was echoed by more media outlets, and there were political, institutional and civil society reactions. Meanwhile, both the accused professor and members of CREA began using the social networks and websites they control -mentioned earlier, mainly *Diario Feminista* and *Periódico Educación*- to question the complainants and the media. Thus, a certain tendency was observed to label the reported events as “false”, showing support for Ramón Flecha, accusing journalists of spreading hoaxes, and proposing a series of alternative complaints to divert attention from the accusations against the professor (Bolaños, 2025d).

On July, 15, 2025, the UB announced the precautionary suspension of Ramón Flecha’s functions as emeritus professor and the opening of an internal investigation with a commission of three specialists internal or external to the University of Barcelona, with specific training in gender violence and institutional harassment (Bolaños, 2025e; Universitat de Barcelona, 2025c). In view of the UB’s warning in this statement that it was monitoring the social networks of the individuals involved, most members of CREA stopped publishing messages. However, they continued to repost content from certain members of the group and from others within the CREA sphere and articles continued to be disseminated on the group’s websites. Despite demands such as that of the *Oficina Española de Integridad en Investigación, OEII* (Spanish Office for Research Integrity), which delivered 326 signatures to the UB in support of the complainants, journalists and others who published the accusations against Flecha (OEII, 2025), no precautionary measure has been taken either by the University of Barcelona, or by the research group itself, led by Marta Soler. CREA has not announced any internal investigation, follow-up or reparative measures of any kind for the complainants. The internal investigation by the UB continues at the end of 2025, and is expected to announce its conclusions at some point in 2026.

This is not the first time that CREA has faced internal complaints regarding the behaviour of Ramón Flecha and/or the group. In 2004, following reports from around fifteen people, an internal investigation was carried out under UB rector Joan Tugores Ques. The investigation concluded with a report summarising the situations experienced in CREA, stating that the group operated under the “personal leadership of Dr. Flecha” and that it “exceeded the strictly academic sphere,” since there were “very intense intrusions into the private lives of its members, as well as practices and behaviours of a sectarian nature.” It also stated that there were “sexual insinuations” and, in some cases, “behaviours that those

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<sup>32</sup> <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/content/dive-dialogue-final-conference>



affected experienced as sexual harassment”<sup>33</sup> (Bolaños, 2025a). It also included recommendations for modifying the situations described. The UB, among other actions, conducted an audit in 2005 (Universitat de Barcelona, 2025a) and referred the case to the Prosecutor’s Office, which filed it in 2006. It ruled out possible sexual harassment and argued only that workplace discrimination might constitute an offence.

After the case got filed, in July 2006, the then rector Màrius Rubiralta demanded in a letter that Ramón Flecha cease discriminating against workers in the workplace by modifying behaviours involving invasion of private life and interference in personal matters. He also warned him that if these situations persisted, the case would be referred again to the Prosecutor’s Office. On September, 1, 2006, Flecha resigned as director of CREA, although various testimonies confirm that he continued to exercise leadership within the group.

In 2016, former members of CREA and its associated entities, who on this occasion received the support of the anti-sectarianism network RedUNE, again reported the alleged sectarian functioning of the group to the University of Barcelona. The issue reached public opinion through reports in various Catalan media outlets. The UB once again referred the events to the Prosecutor’s Office. The individuals involved made their statements and the case was dropped, as there were not sufficient elements to consider that the events could be classified as a crime, as the individuals were free to enter and leave CREA (Requena, 2025a). The Prosecutor’s Office did not clarify whether harassment or sexual relations had taken place. In this second wave of complaints, the blog *Afectados por CREA* (2016) started to inform the public, including testimonies, scientific critique and a map of the network of entities dependent on the research group.

From that moment on, Ramón Flecha initiated a series of legal actions, filing complaints against RedUNE and the first media outlets that had reported on the case: *Catalunya Ràdio*, *Diari Ara*, *El Confidencial* and *TV3*. Between 2021 and 2025, most of the cases were resolved: RedUNE received a final acquittal ruling stating that it had not committed the alleged offences of libel and slander with publicity against the CREA group (RedUNE, 2021), having published information that was truthful and of general interest, and therefore not in violation of the right to honour. The newspaper *Diari Ara* still faces two cases pending resolution (Bolaños, 2025d).

Furthermore, the journalistic investigation reveals that all rectors have been aware of Flecha’s practices within CREA at the UB since 2004, as meetings were held with all of them, including the current rector, as well as members of the rector’s office (Bolaños, 2025e), although no institutional action was taken until the investigation was opened. Nor is there any record of further institutional statements from 2016

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<sup>33</sup> Own translation.

onwards.

In contrast, a reflection inspired by Martín Peláez (2024) becomes relevant here, regarding the silence and impunity surrounding cases of abuse and sexual harassment in universities, which create an environment conducive to such inappropriate behaviour. In her doctoral thesis, the scholar in gender studies interviews people who have experienced these situations and they express the perception that reporting “is pointless,” since the university as an institution does not become involved; they also note that harassment usually remains silenced within the institution. It is a taboo subject, everyone knows, but no one talks about. When experiencing a situation of harassment, one feels a sense of powerlessness and impunity. Likewise, the individuals interviewed in the doctoral thesis stress that the university fails to fulfil its responsibility to prevent harassment; in this regard, they state that there are “hardly any” talks or information on what harassment is or where to seek help when facing such a situation. They report a state of abandonment and confusion in which one does not know what to do when experiencing violence within the university environment.

### **Journalistic investigation**

We draw on journalistic interviews conducted with eight women with whom Ramón Flecha has had relationships and/or intimate contact, with 22 people who corroborate various aspects of their accounts, including former members and individuals connected to CREA and its associations, as well as UB staff; a psychologist specialising in cults and a psychologist specialising in abusive and manipulative relationships. In addition, correspondence, messages, the UB's 2004 internal report, judicial documentation from the two cases filed by the Prosecutor's Office in 2006 and 2016, articles on the CREA website, *Diario Feminista*, and posts on the social network X have been analysed.

### **Accounts of the reported events**

In the journalistic investigation, journalists from the four aforementioned media outlets conducted group interviews<sup>34</sup>, through which individual and anonymised testimonies were obtained due to fears of harassment and reprisals. The interviewees describe events that took place from the early 1990s up to the present year, 2025. They are individuals who left CREA at different times, some more than 20 years ago and others more recently. Each recalls their personal experiences, making an effort to remember dates and situations they lived through. It is worth noting that these are different accounts, yet they describe a recurring pattern of behaviour by Ramón Flecha dating back to the 1990s.

The most intimate situations, in the vast majority of cases, did not occur at the beginning of their contact with him. There was a period of “love bombing, the creation of an environment in which the whole group

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<sup>34</sup> All interviews were in Spanish and have been translated for this article.

makes you feel special and loved” (Perlado, 2020, p. 74). Most of them describe that the approach began in their second year of university, when they were students, grant holders, and/or collaborators of Ramón Flecha, who was their professor and/or director of the CREA group; that is, in a position of hierarchical superiority. They recount holding tutorials at the professor’s home or in cafés, receiving phone calls and having social outings organised off campus. Some received unexpected visits of from Ramón Flecha at their workplaces.

Perlado (2020) explains that after the initial courtship, a process of promises and group activities follows, which makes the person feel complete. In the case of CREA, situations arise in which members feel part of a group that claims to be transforming society through “scientific evidence with social impact.” Members holding various collaboration contracts linked to the UB or to different national and international calls are encouraged to take part in all kinds of academic and leisure activities with Ramón Flecha and others: pursuing a PhD, writing papers and participating in scientific projects. Sometimes, the testimonies recount, without signing their own work and working instead for other group members, depending on who needs to advance at any given time; academic trips, film forums, dialogic gatherings, weekend retreats, dinners, etc. Sometimes, under the promise of applying for scholarships at prestigious foreign universities. According to the interviewees, CREA fosters an all-encompassing work and leisure environment in which members must demonstrate their engagement, “making it visible to the rest that one is committed to the established programme” (Perlado, 2020, p. 75).

Below are statements from those first contacts:

“He makes you feel special because he pays attention to you, but on the other hand, it was a bit strange.” Interview with former member number 1, June 2025. (Bolaños, 2025a).

“When he got in touch with me I was 19 years old. I was legally an adult, but in my view, I was still very immature. I really wanted to change the world.” Interview with former member number 2, June 2025.

“He came to pick me up from work on a couple or three occasions. He invited me for a drink afterwards to talk about transforming the world.” Interview with former member number 2, June 2025. (Bolaños, 2025a).

“He made me feel special by telling me that I was very intelligent and emphasising my humble origins. When he came to see me at work, I was shaking all over.” Interview with former member number 4, June 2025. (Jaenes, 2025).

The interviewees explain that for years there were situations of abuse of power and pressure in the CREA research group exerted by emeritus professor Ramón Flecha. In the interview held with psychologist and expert on sectarian organisations Miguel Perlado, he points out that power and

authority are essential pieces in a phase of seduction that involves promises and proposals. He adds that superiors tend to be people with charisma, who have a discursive style, an elaborate narrative, and a credible performance in a context that validates authority: "This makes things more difficult, because you can't imagine that in such a context an abuse of power could take place."

According to psychologist and expert in abusive and manipulative relationships Deborah Murcia, those in positions of power "know perfectly well how to manipulate these people who have less experience. They use it to achieve their goal." She emphasises that a superior may make the victim believe that they will go far in their career if they give what is proposed or promised, but clarifies: "They don't do it with the intention of helping the person. The intention is selfish, to obtain something from them" (Bolaños, 2025c).

The reports illustrate with examples the situations experienced of emotional control, group pressure, punishments, and anger.

"He approached me introducing himself as a special guy and told me that I could join his cause. That was going to give me opportunities, professionally and personally. I was working on my PhD, so I could get a scholarship and become a professor. On the personal side, he opened the door to super alternative relationships." Interview with former member number 2, June 2025. (Jaenes, 2025).

"You find a professor who offers you the chance to work at the university and study in the United States. For many of us it was unreachable, with family situations that were not particularly well-off. It's a candy, and the day you take it you're already trapped, the promises are constant." Interview with former member number 9, June 2025. (Bolaños, 2025c).

"You're at university and he puts on the table the possibility of quitting your other jobs and focusing on the university, publishing, researching. The promises are constant and academic promotion depends on having publications, projects... You get into a cycle in which if you slow down, you're pushed aside and lose your promotion opportunities and your most meaningful personal relationships, because he has managed to make you do everything with him and with his circle: New Year's Eve, Sant Joan, watching a football match... In general, what happened to many women was that when they looked outside that circle there was nothing left." Interview with former member number 9, June 2025. (Requena, 2025b).

"There was no context to say no, we couldn't refuse, he would get angry and punish you. You saw it happening to other people, that suddenly he would push them aside, could go days without inviting you to anything, he would reject things for you, decide not to send you to a talk requested by a university. You were risking your reputation and whether people at CREA

spoke well of you. In academia grades matter, you want scholarships, you want a position. You have to find your way and if someone promises you a career and includes you in projects, you tie yourself to that.” Interview with former member number 7, June 2025. (Requena, 2025b).

“It had the component of generating jealousy. You leave and the other one stays. And when he fell asleep, you would tiptoe out so he wouldn’t wake up.” Interview with former member number 8, June 2025. (Jaenes, 2025).

“He would give you a monumental telling-off in front of many people and push you aside for a week or a month. Then he would give you a little candy again, like ‘I’ve been thinking you could give this talk.’” Interview with former member number 9, June 2025. (Bolaños, 2025c).

Several of the interviewees state that Ramón Flecha’s intimate approach was gradual, unwanted by them, and that there was a tacit rule not to reveal the relationship with him.

Mónica did her thesis linked to a CREA project and her professional relationship with Flecha became closer. Finally, during a work trip, the woman states that Ramón Flecha took advantage of a silence during a conversation to hug her ‘very tightly’: “He shows me that he is having an erection. I was in shock. I didn’t process it, it wasn’t a mutual or consensual hug. I didn’t move. He was my boss, my scholarship depended on him, I worked full time for him.” Interview with former member number 6, June 2025. (Requena, 2025a).

“In the summer, he told me to go have a drink with him and his friends. When I arrived at his house, with the excuse of showing me something, we went to the living room, he jumped on top of me and I don’t remember anything else. My intention was not to have sex with him. After the encounter, he asked me to write him an email explaining how I had felt.” Interview with former member number 3, June 2025. (Bolaños, 2025a).

“I clearly felt that I didn’t want to, that this wasn’t right, but I also wanted to believe that nothing was happening. In those encounters I wasn’t a subject, I was an object; I came to think that the only way to survive in academia was to keep hooking up with him.” Interview with former member number 5, June 2025. (Requena, 2025a).

“I felt like I didn’t understand anything and that I couldn’t tell anyone. Something I didn’t do until many years later.” Interview with former member number 3, June 2025. (Jaenes, 2025).

“There were unwritten rules in the relationship. It was forbidden to talk about it with other people, although with him you had to tell him everything. I had to get his permission to hook up with other men.” Interview with former member number 4, June 2025. (Jaenes, 2025).

Some interviewees state that Ramón Flecha publicly said that he had open relationships with other women, without specifying who. They also say that both he and third parties questioned them about their past and present romantic and intimate relationships to gather information about them.

Likewise, the professor repeatedly explains his theory of relationships. Ramón Flecha starts from the theory that there are three types of men: A, the good ones who want to transform the world; B, those who are in transition; and C, the bad ones, who attract women because their way of socialising is based on violence. Often, he convinced women that they had made the mistake of choosing “C men” (Bolaños, 2025a). His objective, the interviewees explain, is that Ramón Flecha presents intimate relationships with him as a way of redemption. In other words, and as summarised by the professor himself in a panel presentation for the CIMIE 2021 conference (Flecha, 2021): “There are people who have let themselves be deceived and who have believed that the most exciting relationships are with the bad ones, and of course, that means they have submitted to the coercive discourse. And then, they keep filling their sexuality and relationships with more ugliness, and they also lose their attractiveness.”

“It was known that he had them [open relationships]. He justified it by saying that if it surprised us, it was because we were poorly socialized in love. If we didn’t understand it, it was our problem and society’s as a whole, which is competitive and possessive.” Interview with former member number 4, June 2025. (Jaenes, 2025).

“I remember he asked me personal questions, about my partner, my family; I told him many intimate stories that somehow showed my vulnerability. I trusted him. That’s how he starts winning you over, because you’ve already shared those kinds of things.” Interview with former member number 6, June 2025. (Requena, 2025a).

“He tore me apart for having been with a boy, he made me feel guilty, he said that this almost destroyed CREA. I ended the relationship and had a terrible time.” Interview with former member number 6, June 2025. (Jaenes, 2025).

“He tells you that having relations with him is what will redeem you and make your life better.” Interview with former member number 5, June 2025. (Requena, 2025a).

“Every day of sex with him he psychoanalysed me about the relationships I had had. He makes you feel guilty about your past and your way of being, and in order to gain his approval, subordinating yourself feels justified. I learned to keep quiet.” Interview with former member number 5, June 2025. (Bolaños, 2025a).

They also describe behaviours that, by noting them day after day, they internalised and viewed as normal, such as Ramón Flecha’s requests for massages at his home, doing household chores for him,



or preparing his suitcases, academic work and personal belongings for his trips.

“Since I had seen it before, when he asked me, it seemed natural. Sometimes there were other people in the flat, and at that time I saw them as my family; we spent the whole day together. Other times I was alone with him. Some massages he asked for in the living room, others in his bedroom, with another girl or just me with him... There were several massages on the back; at one point he took off his trousers so we could give him massages on his legs. On at least a couple of occasions he was completely naked.” Interview with former member number 8, June 2025. (Requena, 2025a).

“After a dinner with him and another colleague, she dropped us off with the car at Ramón’s house; there he suddenly took off his shirt and asked me for a massage. I went into shock. I had wanted to leave that chapter in the corner of my memory. The fear I had that day, and the feeling of ‘this isn’t right,’ ‘I don’t want this’...” Interview with former member number 5, June 2025. (Requena, 2025a).

“You knew that if you went on a trip with him, you were his maid: you packed his suitcase, made the PowerPoint presentation, ironed his T-shirts... Each day it was someone else’s turn, and it was something you normalised. You knew that if you went with him, you were at his service.” Interview with former member number 7, June 2025. (Requena, 2025b).

“He travelled a lot. Maybe there were five of us girls there, and he would come with a shirt asking if he should wear it. We ironed his shirts, put them in the suitcase.” Interview with former member number 8, June 2025. (Bolaños, 2025a).

“He would call me to go to his house to do chores. I had to cook, iron and shop. Pack his suitcase or be his ‘palm tree’ at conferences.” Interview with former member number 6, June 2025. (Jaenes, 2025).

### **The response of Ramón Flecha and Marta Soler**

In a telephone conversation with the four media outlets before the publication of the reports on July, 2, 2025, emeritus professor Ramón Flecha said he holds no position in CREA and denied all the allegations made against him. In addition to considering that asking him questions about his relationships is “sexual harassment,” he specifies that he has never had sexual relations “with subordinates,” and clarifies that for him subordinates are people who depend on him contractually or academically, such as female students, for example. “I am not criticising those who have a sexual relationship when there is an employment relationship. I am not against others doing it.” He also states that, since the 1980s, he has held tutoring sessions “with another person present.” “I have always been

careful about that” (Bolaños, 2025a).

For her part, Marta Soler, director of CREA since 2006, answered the journalists’ questions individually via email. In her responses, which can be read in full on elDiario.es (Requena, 2025a), she suggested that the women were making “false accusations.” She bases her stance on a premise that contradicts the UN Declaration of Victims’ Rights, which states that victims have the right to be treated with respect: “with courtesy, compassion, professionalism and impartiality” (UN, 2023).

The director of CREA argued that no one from CREA has ever held tutoring sessions at their home with female students and that it is false that there are reprisals for dissociating from the group. Asked whether she is aware that Flecha coerced women -who collaborated with the group- into giving him massages and having sex, and that these women sometimes took on tasks such as preparing his suitcase, handling shopping, and chores such as doing the dishes or ironing his shirts, Soler replies that:

“The question conveys yet another falsehood that reproduces the worst coercive and backward sexism, which develops paternalistic attitudes towards adult women who exercise their freedom. This is a discourse typical of anti-democratic contexts in which women are infantilised as if we were not capable of choosing our personal or friendship relationships with judgment, or even of managing our own lives” (Requena, 2025a).

In the same interview, Soler argues that the complaint filed with the University of Barcelona, and all the testimonies gathered in the journalistic investigation -describing situations of sexual abuse and harassment, abuse of power, psychological violence and labor exploitation, by Ramón Flecha-, correspond to campaigns designed by “an abuser of minors, since CREA supported one of his victims, who had been sexually forced by him when she was a minor.” She adds that this person, who allegedly designed the campaigns, would have found “the complicity of several people from CREA, who had been accused of mistreatment in 2004 by a CREA scholarship holder.”

There is no record of any official complaint or judicial process regarding the abuse of a minor in relation to the research group either before July, 2, 2025, or in the following days when the director of CREA was asked. As for the event that occurred in 2004, Soler refers to a judicial process that concluded with a conviction of three CREA members by the Spanish Supreme Court. According to a former CREA member who left the group, she and two other people received false accusations of mistreatment from three people who remained in the group in 2004. The people who left took the situation to court and won in three judicial instances, until the Supreme Court confirmed the conviction for unlawful interference with honor in 2009 (Spanish Supreme Court, 2009). As one of the affected women described on *Ràdio 4-RNE*: “I was forced to file a complaint because they were slandering me and spreading falsehoods” (RNE, 2025b). As will be seen, this is not the first conviction of CREA members for defamation. In January 2025, the Supreme Court convicted three CREA members who manage and

collaborate on the group's website *Diario Feminista* (Cristina Pulido Rodríguez, Beatriz Villarejo Carballido and Garazi López de Aguilera Jaussi) for a serious violation of the right to honor of UB emeritus professor Jaume Trilla (*Diario Feminista*, 2025). According to the ruling, the guilty had published an article on that site originally titled "La envidia de un catedrático acosador" (The envy of a harassing professor) and currently titled "La envidia de un catedrático" (The Envy of a Professor).

### **The DARVO strategy in the Flecha-CREA case**

Numerous authors, such as Scotto di Carlo (2025), have recently identified the DARVO strategy (Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender) with sexual and interpersonal violence, involving resorting to denial or personal attacks against the victim's credibility, as well as publicly presenting oneself as the victim by reversing the roles. Observing this concept in the university sphere is also not new: Harsey and Freyd (2020) conducted two experiments with samples of 316 and 360 students respectively, after which they confirmed both the loss of credibility of the victim and the widespread displacement of responsibility onto them. At the same time, the perpetrator was perceived as less abusive and less responsible.

One of the particularities of the Flecha-CREA case is that the exculpatory messages go far beyond institutional walls. Since Ramón Flecha learned of the forthcoming publication of the reports, both from his personal social media account, and from those associated with CREA members, and/or people in his circle -mostly women-, he began to disseminate messages and articles on the group's websites, putting forward three alternative narratives. The objective, one could say, seems to correspond to an attempt to divert attention and make public opinion stop talking about the matter under investigation, i.e. the accusations against the professor for sexual harassment and abuse, abuse of power, psychological violence and labor exploitation. This article analyses several texts from the website *Diario Feminista*, one of the group's most frequently used media platforms. However, CREA also uses other websites such as *Periódico Educación*, and *Daily 27*, as well as the social networks X, Facebook and Instagram.

The first situation presented by a CREA member corresponds to the DARVO stages of denying the reported facts and discrediting the complainants. CREA member Cristina Pulido (2025), one day before the reports are published in the media, states that there is a person she does not identify, whom she calls an "abuser of minors," who would have convinced these women to invent the events and file "false complaints with the University of Barcelona, attempting to have them forwarded to the prosecutor's office;" her CREA colleague, Ana Burgués (2025), argues in an article, the day after that the complainants, "that they lie in their interviews," because she has "many times heard aggressors say that they would do whatever it took to destroy him [Ramón Flecha]."

The second situation corresponds to the DARVO stage of role reversal and shifting responsibility onto the victim. On the very day the news breaks, Alba Crespo (2025) argues that the complainants against

Flecha would be responsible for alleged situations of workplace abuse against other CREA members. An article by Mar Joanpere (2025) attempted to support the facts described by Crespo, chastising the media for not publishing these counter-complaints, and launching a third argument that tried to divert attention to another issue unrelated to the accusations against the UB emeritus professor Ramón Flecha. Joanpere states that there is another person she identifies as a “non-Catholic Christian religious figure” who would have committed “very serious acts.” Ramón Flecha supports this last theory in a post on X (Flecha, 2025a), claiming that the reports arise because he refused to “collaborate in covering up an Orthodox priest.” Likewise, the emeritus professor releases a statement on X on July, 5, 2025 (Flecha, 2025b), in which he denies the accusations from the complainants and makes a statement that reflects the tactic of reversing the accusation, declaring: “I never call victims those who assault victims.” Among the comments on this message made by CREA members, academics from the UB and other universities, some responses reinforce the professor’s message, describing the reported facts as “revenge,” a “campaign” and “horrible attacks.”

These examples are evidence of the previously mentioned DARVO tactic, which “describes the way perpetrators of interpersonal violence deflect blame and responsibility when confronted about their abusive conduct” (Freyd, 1997). As Harsey and Freyd (2020) explain, when the perpetrator denies the harm “of any wrongdoing, attacks the victim’s credibility, and reverses the roles of victim and aggressor such that the perpetrator adopts a victim position and declares that the true perpetrator is the victim.” These researchers emphasize that for the perpetrator it is essential “to be able to influence how others perceive them and their victims.” Thus, convincing others “that the victim is not trustworthy provides the perpetrator with a clear advantage both in social networks and in the legal system.” According to research cited in this paper, it is possible to manipulate “perceptions of victims and perpetrators,” and there are “numerous factors that influence observers’ attributions of blame, credibility, and responsibility” (Harsey & Freyd, 2020).

At the end of 2024, in the trial of Dominique Pelicot and 50 other aggressors -Pelicot is the man who offered his drugged wife so that other men could rape her- it was observed that in the defense of several of them, women linked to the accused testified, describing them as good people, husbands, and fathers. As Villaécija (2025) notes, dozens of ‘unofficial’ victims who probably did not know they were victims came forward to testify. This is what pedagogue and gender-studies researcher, and member of the Feminist Assembly of the University of Barcelona, Trinidad Donoso, has described as the tactic of creating a “wall of women” (RNE, 2025c). She explains that the women who collaborate with Ramón Flecha attack the complainants and “defend the accused man.” The pedagogue, who was also the Rector’s Delegate for Equality Issues at the University of Barcelona from 2014 to 2016, explains that the CREA group began its line of gender-based violence research in 2004, when they were notified of their first lawsuit.

## The institutional and academic response

At the institutional level, the main consequence following the joint complaint and its publication in the media is the aforementioned investigation committee of the University of Barcelona. Prior to this announcement, one of the most significant developments came on July, 12, when the Department of Research and Universities of the Government of Catalonia temporarily suspended the Serra Húnter Programme's Excellence Trajectory recognition awarded to CREA's director Marta Soler (RTVE.es, 2025).

Within the UB, the Asamblea Feminista collective (feminist assembly) published a letter addressed to the rectorate and several departments (Asamblea Feminista, 2025), gathering 447 individual and collective signatures, most of them from the academia, and calling for an "independent and guaranteed" investigation of the case, as well as the temporary suspension of CREA members holding university positions. The UB Sociology research group *COPOLIS. Bienestar, Comunidad y Control social* (Welfare, Community and Social Control) also demanded an investigation into the current allegations and past incidents dating back to 2004, as well as the temporary removal of the "directors of CREA and TSIR from their managerial and governing functions" (COPOLIS, 2025). The UB Faculty of Education (Universitat de Barcelona, 2025b) issued a statement supporting the manifesto of the Asamblea Feminista, and a letter by the faculty's emeritus professor, Jaume Trilla (2025), who published several considerations regarding the first internal UB statement, in his capacity as a professor of the university, and as a person who suffered harassment by members of CREA, a situation that ended in a conviction by the Spanish Supreme Court, as previously mentioned. He argued that, based on the information published in the media, "there is more than enough for the university authorities to undertake [...] the necessary actions to clarify the facts and act accordingly." For its part, the Comuns party in the Parliament of Catalonia requested the appearance of UB rector Joan Guàrdia (Bolaños, 2025b), although at the time of writing this article it had not yet been scheduled.

In the weeks following the announcement of the opening of the investigation, various institutional statements were issued, such as that of the Spanish Federation of Sociology, which released a statement on the accusations surrounding the CREA group (FES, 2025), expressing its "concern and deep distress," and condemning the alleged events. The UB Teaching and Research Staff Board -the union representation body for civil servant staff, of which Flecha was a member- issued a statement calling for "clarification of what has happened over the years and accountability," arguing that "the University of Barcelona, far from acting decisively, has too often remained on the sidelines. This institutional silence or passivity cannot continue" (Bolaños, 2025f).

The Equality Committee of the UB Faculty of Economics and Business (Universitat de Barcelona, 2025d), the same faculty that houses the Sociology Department, expressed its deep concern over the

extreme seriousness of the allegations, urging the UB to comply with its anti-sexual harassment protocol and ensure the safety, integrity, and dignity of the affected individuals. It also called for additional measures to protect those who have suffered harassment and to put an end to harassment taking into account the specific needs of each case. The CCOO Universities union section expressed its support for the “collective reporting process” and called on the institution to prioritise listening, respect and reparation for the affected women; it also requested that “any attempt at concealment be avoided and that the investigations be carried through to the end” (CCOO UB, 2025).

At the start of the new academic year, September, 3-5, 2025, the European Conference on Domestic Violence (ECDV) was scheduled to take place at the University of Barcelona, initially organised by CREA. Following the news that broke last July, the organisers decided to remove Flecha as a speaker, and the UB announced that the research group could not host any events on its campus until the situation could be “clarified” (Bolaños, 2025b). In response to journalistic inquiries, the ECDV stated that the AUCFEM association, linked to CREA, was still organising the event, which was moved to the Catalonia Conference Centre. In July 2025, the UB Asamblea Feminista (2025) urged attendees to refrain from attending the conference, arguing that “it is alarming that people who have discredited or directly threatened and publicly insulted women who have dared to report abuses of power, emotional and sexual coercion are being given a prominent role as experts in gender-based and sexual violence.” Meanwhile, it emerged that the ECDV organisers had asked participants to “refrain from making any comments on social media” about the allegations against the emeritus professor (Bolaños, 2025g). The conference opened on September, 3, 2025, with the Spanish Government Delegate for Gender Violence, Carmen Martínez Perza, and University of Valencia professor Esther Roca -who had recently been removed from the CREA website- among those present at the inauguration. According to Villar (2025), those endorsing the conference, “whether knowingly or not, are failing the victims. It is necessary to examine how certain figures are legitimised, how networks of academic power are built, and how critical voices are silenced even within spaces that define themselves as feminist.”

In September, 30, 2025, the independent collective Spanish Office for Research Integrity (OEII) issued a statement and launched a signature drive calling on the UB to halt the public, organised campaign to attack and intimidate both the victims who have reported and the journalists conducting the investigation, as well as anyone else who publicly defends the victims. After sending the letter to the UB Ethics Committee with 326 endorsements, the collective received an institutional response explaining the UB’s Code of Ethics on Integrity and Good Practices, which urged both university staff and external actors to maintain “responsibility and respect” on social media (OEII, 2025).

Finally, on 17 November 2025, the Department of Sociology at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, supported by its seven research groups and the IGOP, issued a statement drawing attention to the connection between the CREA research group and the executive board of the *Associació Catalana de*



*Sociologia*, ACS (Catalan Sociology Association). The statement called for the ACS to be “free from abusive practices” in its upcoming board elections and to once again become “a plural, open and critical space for sociological reflection and social research” (UAB, 2025).

## Conclusions

Pending the outcome of the University of Barcelona’s internal investigation into the allegations against emeritus professor of Sociology Ramón Flecha, and following the months of journalistic work carried out, the surprising fact that the Flecha-CREA case unfolded over more than three decades, with two previous waves of complaints, without measures being taken to thoroughly investigate, and monitor these behaviours at the highest institutional level, should be highlighted.

The first question that arises from the testimonies collected is: What are the real reasons that led to the failure to protect young women from the alleged assaults by their superior within CREA at the University of Barcelona? For more than 30 years, it has been the affected individuals themselves who have broken the silence, and sought institutional and social responses to try to put an end to the alleged abuse, harassment, mistreatment and labour exploitation.

Equally striking is the lack of precautionary measures, which created opportunities to further victimise and silence the complainants, leaving behind a trail of impunity. Those who supported these women, both individuals and organisations, were also attacked and targeted, allowing the alleged aggressor to stage himself as a victim at the expense of the university institution. Protection and redress for the complainants in the face of the digital harassment perpetrated by CREA and its circles has likewise been absent. It should also be noted that members of CREA, holding responsibilities within the UB, still remain in their positions at the time this paper is written. Yet there is another side to this story: the social response and a degree of institutional reaction that has emerged.

On the one hand, there is the investigation initiated by the University of Barcelona, as well as the organisations that have taken a stand against the alleged abuses and sexual harassment in the Flecha-CREA case. There are also the 773 individuals and collectives who have signed the statements issued by the UB Asamblea Feminista and the OEII (Spanish Office for Research Integrity), demanding measures to investigate the facts and protect the complainants. On the other hand, from a journalistic standpoint, this investigation demonstrates the value of collaboration between media outlets in cases of alleged sexual violence. Joint interviews prevent the re-victimisation of the women who come forward, ensure consistency and cross-verification of the accounts provided, and help inform the public in ways that may prevent similar situations from recurring. Other aspects that have emerged in the wake of the complaints -such as academic dynamics and CREA’s influence on public education- lie beyond the scope of this article, and future contributions may help complement the present study.

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