

# Facts about men's violence against women

**RSK(Riksföreningen)National Association – Stop men's  
violence against women** and Maria Scheffer Lindgren

E-mail: [info@rskriksforeningen.se](mailto:info@rskriksforeningen.se)

Website: [www.rskriksforeningen.se](http://www.rskriksforeningen.se)

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## Introduction

Men's violence against women, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations (UN), is a global public health problem. Overall, men are over-represented both as victims and as perpetrators when it comes to violent crime. However, based on current knowledge women are over-represented as victims of various forms of violence committed by men in intimate relationships. Violence against women and men usually occurs in different places and in different contexts. There are various phenomena which partly may be explained and dealt with in different ways.

In 1864 the so-called "husagan" was abolished in Sweden and in the late 1970s, spanking children was also banned. In recent decades a variety of legislative measures have been implemented in this area. Yet it is still common with various forms of violence within family relationships. There is a connection between violence against women and child abuse. We do not know with certainty how many actually suffer, but we know that men's violence against women and children occurs in all cultures and in all social classes and social groups. It is very important to highlight the particularly vulnerable groups such as violence in same-sex relationships, honor-related violence, violence against people with disabilities, violence against abuse, violence against the elderly and those who are subjected to violence after being granted a temporary residence permit because of a connected party in Sweden . For these groups there is a particular problem, but the pattern is the same.

An important starting point is that all forms of violence against women is rooted in an imbalance of power between men and women on a structural level and thus becomes a gender issue. The violence, however, is complex and does not rule out individual and other collaborative underlying causes. Regardless of expression or the underlying cause, the purpose of violence is the same: to establish and exert power and control by inflicting hurt and intimidation.

Violence will bring into play numerous agencies and authorities such as police, health care, social services and thus creating synergy between them is important. To be able to work on violence prevention, in treatment and support to vulnerable women and children and in the legal handling of violence as well as in the treatment of men who perform such deeds, requires knowledge. There is still a great need for education and training in terms of its causes, mechanisms and consequences. Through an increased knowledge in the field, a change can be achieved.

RSK (Riksföreningen)- National Association to Stop men's Violence against Women is a non-profit, non political and non religious association who work with preventive measures. We work with the dissemination of knowledge and information to schools, government agencies and companies about men's violence against women and children, with a heavy emphasis on training and lectures. RSK can provide financial assistance to women and children in acute need. RSK's vision is zero tolerance for men's violence against women. The purpose of this paper is based on the body of knowledge available in the field to present and disseminate key and important facts in an effort to prevent and combat violence.

## What is violence?

There are various ways in which to define violence. Nowadays, most agree that it is important to use a broad definition and that violence includes all actions that are intended to damage and exercise control. The World Health Organization (WHO) has stated that violence against women is about all actions that result in mental, physical and/or sexual harm to a vulnerable woman<sup>1</sup>. The United Nations (UN) defines violence as any gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether in public or private life<sup>2</sup>. Another way to describe the violence content is to make a distinction between *psychological, physical, sexual, material, latent* and *economical* violence<sup>3</sup>:

- **Psychological violence** is offensive words or actions directed toward a close person, property or dignity. Psychological violence is also direct threats of physical violence and the violent consequences and indirect threats such as suicide or threats directed against other related parties, pets or property. Psychological violence is also a limitation on a persons freedom of movement.

- **Physical violence** is any form of unwanted physical contact and physical act that harms and causes physical pain.

- **Sexual violence** is about when a person is forced to participate in or watch sexual acts against their will. These actions are interpreted by such persons as sexually abusive or sexually violent.

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<sup>1</sup> WHO (2002).

<sup>2</sup> UN (1993).

<sup>3</sup> Isdal (2001).

-**Material violence** is the aggression directed against to destroy material things both in and outside the home, creating fear and apprehension.

- **Latent violence** is such a strong anger and aggressiveness, manifested in posture and body expressions that creates fear, perceived as a threat of violent consequences and / or reminiscent of the past experiences of physical violence.

- **Economic violence** consists of a strong imbalance in terms of financial transparency and influence in a relationship, where the aim is to exercise power and control by withholding and / or control joint assets or debt without the consent of the partner.



## Violence in figures

UN compares men's violence against women as pandemic, ie a disease that has spread to large parts of the world and claims that every third woman in the world has been beaten by a man and one woman in five has been subjected to rape or sexual coercion.

Statistics from the National Crime Prevention Council (BRÅ) shows that the number of reported crimes of violence against women has increased over the past decade. In 2015 there was just over 29,000 complaints of abuse against women aged over 18 years, which means an average of 79 complaints per day. Eighty-five percent of those suspected of violence against women are men. Closer to 18,100 sexual offenses were reported in 2015 of which 5920 were classed as rape, which means an average of 16 reports per day. It is mostly men who are suspected of sex crimes, 98 percent according to BRÅ. The number of unrecorded cases also considered to be greater when it comes to men's different forms of violence against women and is stated in the various contexts to be 75-80 percent. Approximately 15 to 20 women in Sweden are killed each year by a man she knows<sup>4</sup>. A Swedish prevalence study showed that 46 percent of women surveyed had been victims of some form of violence by a man after their fifteenth birthday<sup>5</sup>. Of LGBT people who responded to a questionnaire about their experiences of domestic violence, around 25 per cent suffered psychological, physical and / or sexual violence in a current or former relationship<sup>6</sup>.

Save the Children has estimated that hundreds of thousands of children experience violence each year in Sweden. Ten percent of all children have at some point been

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<sup>4</sup> Brå, Council for Crime Prevention, (2015).

<sup>5</sup> Lundgren and others (2001).

<sup>6</sup> SOU (2015: 55).

exposed to sexual abuse<sup>7</sup>. The cost of violence in Sweden alone is up to 45 billion per year<sup>8</sup>.

### **Myths about violence**

What the causes of the violence are and what terms used have an impact on the measures that are deemed necessary, relevant and effective to prevent and combat violence against women in intimate relationships. There have been various concepts of domestic violence through the years and in different contexts, such as apartment fights, domestic violence and violence against women. It is these terms that risk obscuring what the violence is actually all about. It is now important to focus instead on the perpetrators when talking about men's different forms of violence against women. Therefore, it is important to use the expressions *Violence against women* and *men's violence against women in intimate relationships*.

What are the terms used related to a number of traditional beliefs and myths about gender violence, for example, that violent men have poor impulse control and can not control their aggression, it is the woman who provokes the violence of the man, that there are certain types of women that are exposed to violence, some women seek out violent men, or that the violence is practiced by men in lower social groups, migrants, men who are alcoholics, the mentally ill or unemployed. Unfortunately with the belief in such myths domestic violence is a problem within specific groups and is therefore not deemed a social/ public health and human rights problem.

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<sup>7</sup> Svedin & Bank (2002).

<sup>8</sup> SOU (2015: 55).

Regarding the claim that some men have poor impulse control and can not control their aggression is contrary to the violence that men practice against women in a intimate relationship which are often highly controlled: Violence occurs in a specific place (home), a fixed time (mostly evenings and nights), and when the woman and the man, apart from the children, are home alone. Physical violence occurs primarily on body parts that are able to be covered with clothes. Violent men know very well what they are doing when they use violence and that their purpose is to make the woman more and more docile and compliant.

That women would provoke violence in men is also a myth. Surveys show the contrary, that violence usually comes as a total surprise and incomprehensible to the woman, and that, in fact, often involves the woman exceeding the limit of what the man believes to be appropriate behaviour for a woman. There is also talk of certain women seeking violent men. However, surveys show that women who have experienced violence in a relationship will often not experience it in a new relationship. However perpetrators usually commit violence in a new relationship. There is a myth that it is psychologically weak women who are abused. It is a myth that has come to be that by examining women's condition after years of abuse and have interpreted it as the original cause of the violence rather than as a consequence of the violence<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Eliasson (1997).

## The health consequences of violence

The violence has far reaching implications for those women who are caught up in it and involves a multi-trauma, which means that it causes physical, psychological, economic and social consequences. A variety of studies show that women's physical and / or mental health is strongly associated with having been subjected to various forms of gender-based violence in childhood or adulthood. This can include physical damage, psychosomatic disorders and mental stress symptoms. Many suffer from a so-called *Posttraumatic stress disorder PTSD*. PTSD is about having been exposed to a short- or long-term event or situation by threatening or catastrophic nature that cause severe stress, with symptoms that deal with anguished re-experiences of the event, avoidance of similar situations, memory loss and a heightened stress level but can also be seen as a healthy reaction to and processing that of what you've been through. PTSD was originally a diagnosis after the Vietnam War when studying the far-reaching psychological effects of US soldiers who had experienced war trauma<sup>10</sup>.

Whether the violence is criminalized or not it is considered to have a negative effect on women's health. The home is statistically the most dangerous place for women to stay in. The National Board of Health has estimated that between 12,000 and 14,000 women each year in Sweden are visiting outpatient departments because of violence from a partner<sup>11</sup>.

Children who experience violence also go through severe traumatic experiences, whether they are directly or indirectly affected, and can be just as vulnerable as women to suffer from various mental stress reactions and post-traumatic stress disorder. Children, however (just like women) are unique and may react in different ways and use different strategies to cope with their experiences. The experiences can show itself through stomach aches, sleep problems, worry, anxiety, extroverted or introverted behaviour. There is a risk that vulnerable children will eventually go into the various forms of abuse and self harm.

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<sup>10</sup> Herman (2001), Flouri (2005).

<sup>11</sup> Welfare (2009).



## Warning signals

It is not visible on the outside if a man has a propensity to behave violently in a intimate relationship. But we know that violence occurs in all cultures, ages and social groups. Through the collective knowledge available in this field, we also know that early in a relationship there can be some warning signs indicating that a relationship can become violent, a behaviour of the husband that the woman is instead likely to perceive as that of love and care. Physical violence usually under a shorter or longer period is preceded by these warning signals that very much can be termed as various forms of psychological violence. A typical man who exercises violence against women tends to be excessively charming, courting and helpful at first, and puts the woman in a state of being indebted towards him. A typical man who use violence against women raises the woman to the heavens, putting her on a pedestal, often says how much he loves her and would often move in together or get married early in the relationship. Below is a list of other typical warning signs:

**He is jealous.** He does not like her talking to other men and exposes her to unfounded allegations of infidelity. He calls her "whore" or "cunt".

**He uses a controlling behaviour.** He speaks ill of her friends and relatives. He would prefer to have her for himself and wants to decide whom she should hang out with, successively leading to a gradual isolation. He wants to forbid her to decide about money. He remarks on her appearance, her manner of dress, talk and behaviour. He wants to know where she goes, and when she comes home. He might even transport her to and from work and other activities to be in control. In this way he gradually restricts her living space and shields her from the outside world increasingly.

**He speaks ill of his former partners**

**He has a disparaging view of women**

**He presses her to have sex or get her to perform sexual acts against her will**

**He scares her and break things when he's angry**

**He is violent towards animals**

These are typical signs of a typical abusive relationship. If a woman is vigilant about these signs, she can at best leave the relationship before the first episode of physical violence occurs. Having this knowledge can be life-changing.

## The normalization process

There are several distinctive and unique characteristics of the violence that occurs within intimate relationships. We tend to talk about *violence normalization process*, a deadly process of breaking down a vulnerable woman who, amongst other things, explains why it can be difficult for her to leave a violent man, a theory which in Sweden was developed by Eva Lundgren <sup>12</sup>. It is important to remember that it is basically about a love relationship, at least from the woman's side. She will initially be wooed and feel happy, flattered and loved.

The violence normalization process means that the man in the relationship gradually reduces a woman's actions and living space, through jealousy and various forms of controlling behaviour and other behaviour which is included in the various warning signals. When the physical violence occurs the man often has usually already succeeded in making the woman very attached to him. After each violent incident the man most often asks for forgiveness, saying it should never happen again and that he loves her so much. The man often wishes to unify the bond with sex after a violent incident has occurred. The first physical violence usually comes as a shock to the woman. But because the man gets her to accept his explanations for the violence, that she and her behavior is the actual cause of it the woman sees his reaction as something that is wrong with her and that if she simply changes the violence will cease. His reality becomes hers. Interview studies show that it is often difficult for the woman to understand and express in words what happens. It is a gradual process in which the woman is constantly trying to adapt to the man's unpredictability so that she can avoid being hit, which does not exclude that she also tries to use different strategies of resistance. The man's constant switching between violence and affection is a roller coaster ride for the woman who makes the boundaries between violence and love eventually blur and creates a chaos in both the thoughts and feelings of the woman. The man presents himself

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<sup>12</sup> Lundgren (2004).



as invaluable to the woman and says that no one will want her. The violence eventually becomes a normal part of everyday life that is accepted and defended by both the woman and the man. Abused women use different strategies to begin with in order to get the violence to end and then later in the process move onto strategies to survive.

An important concept in this context is the so-called "*Stockholm syndrome*", A term that came into being in connection with the so-called Norrmalmstorg drama, a bank robbery in Stockholm in the 1970s when the bank staff were taken hostage by bank robbers. It describes the emotional bond (in English "*traumatic bonding*") that may arise between, say, kidnappers and their hostages, cult leader and sect members, abusive parents and abused children and the positive feelings that develop for the actual perpetrator. The prospects of a traumatic emotional bonding occurring is aided by the fact that there is a *power imbalance* between the parties, that there is *repeatedly psychological and / or physical violence* and a *switching between violence and affection* from the offender. In recent years this phenomenon has been adopted even in the context of domestic violence, and that explains why it may be difficult for a victim of violence to leave the relationship, save for the sake of placing her in the role of a paralyzed victim<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Dutton & Painter (1981).

## The leaving process

In recent years, attention has been paid to how women actually use different strategies to cope with the violence they are subjected to, they use different strategies of resistance and often make several attempts to leave the relationship before they finally succeed. Even a woman's right to choose to actually stay in a relationship, despite the existence of violence, have been discussed. They believe that it is important to also consider the women choosing to stay in a violent relationship as active and energetic subjects, as a counterpart to the usual notion of women who remain as weak, incompetent and powerless. One would think that it's the woman's desire to break up from a relationship that causes the men's violence. However research shows that if violence occurs during a separation, it has also been present in the relationship<sup>14</sup>.

The accumulated knowledge regarding battered women breaking away from a violent relationship shows that it involves several processes occurring gradually and being quite complex<sup>15</sup>. A woman will be physically abused an average of 30 times before she comes in contact with the police. An important step in the leaving process will be several temporary break-ups, on average 3-5. Other important steps are economic opportunities and support from those around her. Interviewed women have described how they eventually come to a turning point that allows a definitive breakup. Four key factors that are influencing the final breakup: Violence escalates, fear for the children, others or their own safety, personal strength and power to act as well as the woman begins to realize that she is living in an abusive relationship.

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<sup>14</sup> Ekbrand (2006).

<sup>15</sup> See for example Dobash & Dobash (1980) Enander al (2011), & Enander Holmberg (2004), Hyden (1999), Häggblom & Moller (2007), Laycock (1997) Scheffer Lindgren & Renck (2008).

In the figure on page 22 illustrated below, based on an interview of fourteen abused women, there's a model of the leaving process<sup>16</sup>. The Break-up process consists of three phases; the first dealing with different restraining factors, the second is about a balance between staying and leaving, and the third phase, which involves the definitive turning point. Throughout this process there are factors that can be related to fear in different ways. The figure shows the complexity of the women's departure from a violent relationship and that the leaving process does not proceed in a straight line but rather by two steps forward and one step back and then forward again, which is visualized by the coil shape. The fear in the whole leaving process is the central theme, a fear which initially acts as a barrier to leave and eventually moving on to become a driving force out of the relationship. Fear was described by a woman interviewed like this:

*"It sits so deep, the fear of what he will do, because you have no chance to parry, you do not know what he'll react on because you get in trouble for everything. The daily terror ever present, not being safe in your own home, it makes me sit here now and shake ... ..it was like falling from the heavens straight down to into hell "*

A woman has said: *"To be so tense, so that it felt as if you were standing up though you were lying down in bed."* Another woman said: *"How long would it be (calm), two days, three, a week, you never knew."*

When fear becomes stronger than the emotional ties then it becomes possible for a woman to leave the man. The strong emotional bonds (*traumatic bonding*) that women develop to the men in these relationships have been described as follows by women interviewed:

*"In some way, it feels like the more he hit, the more I loved him, in some sick way, it became so ..... (Later in the interview), it is so difficult to explain but they have such power, one of those cravings in that it just kind of is... I DO NOT WANT to but I might HAVE TO, that kind of feeling. "*

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<sup>16</sup> Scheffer Lindgren. (2009).

The first phase of the leaving process is characterized by several factors preventing women from breaking up, such as the passionate love shown by the man, insidious violence, an oscillation between violence and affection, her adapting to the man and the hope of change, the focus on the children as well as feelings of guilt and shame. One woman described: *"I had to balance him and the kids all the time ... .. to ensure that the children had peace and quiet."* Regarding feelings of guilt and shame, one woman interviewed said the following:

*"I changed the phone number, because I could not answer, what would I say ... everything had gone to hell. There was this enormous shame ... I felt a terrible guilt ... I saw no way out you understand ... I did not know what I would do. "*

In the next phase of the process, women make different attempts to leave the man because of the escalating violence. However, the man's refusal to let go through the pursuit of the woman and the increased threats causes increased fear and ambivalent feelings within her, and the process is now a balance between leaving or staying. The violence gradually increases is a typical pattern in these relations. One woman told me during an interview how shortly after having had a late abortion she was the victim of a rape by the man:

*"... I asked him to stop while he was doing as it was hurting me. Then I went up and tried to go to the bathroom, then started torrential bleeding and had a lot of pain and just like, you are just in a state of shock then. What, you have to do something, you have to call an ambulance or something because I was in so much pain, I was doubled over and the blood just ran. And I got myself to (the bathroom) and you just tried like, oh my God what should I do. And all he did was to come in and then throw him a damn floor cloth at me and then shouted that you damn better well clean up what you have bled .... "*

One woman interviewed described how the man reacted when she brought the topic of divorce up:

*"It depends on, because sometimes it was like this then ... .that he would die, he sometimes abused me. And sometimes he threatened me to go do it but then you'll end up never seeing your XXX*

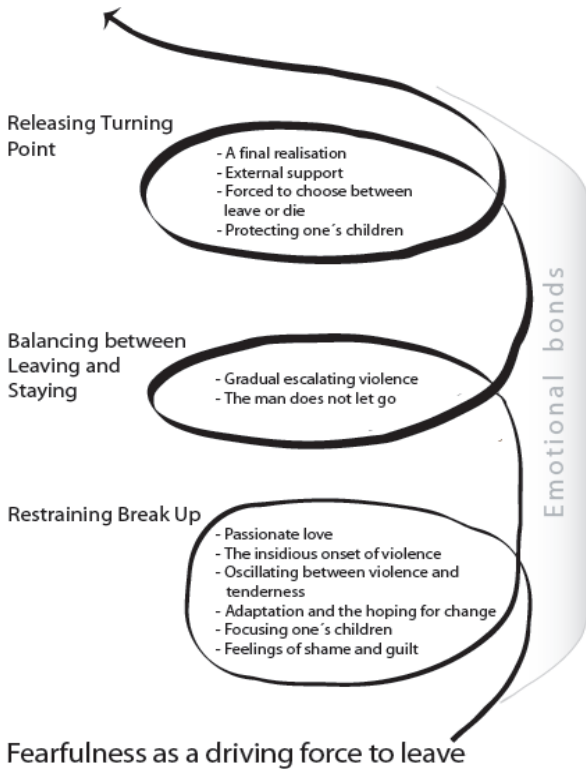
*(son) anymore. So it was like one of those solutions. And I just felt, no, I can't go through with this. And so back with that attitude again, now its going to be fine here again. "*

Another woman expressed how difficult it had been to take the final step to break up: *"It was short-sighted, short-sighted, it was always easier to go back because I knew that when the day comes and its for real, then I have to be mentally prepared and as well know that I'm strong so I can do it, and I wasn't that way then. "*

In the last phase of the breakup process the whole situation changes into a liberating turning point and the ultimate (physical) breakup, in many cases due to external support, the woman realizes that the violence will never cease, that her feelings for the man have subsided or she realizes that children are indirectly or directly affected. The situation can be so intimidating that she simply feels compelled to choose between living or dying. How a violent situation made the womans feelings for the man disappear and led to a definite turnaround was described in an interview as follows: *"And then I feel no, this is where he broke the last of what was remaining".* A woman has described her fear of dying: *"And I felt that the situation was that I dared not fall asleep before him because I was afraid he would kill me in my sleep."*

The children's vulnerability may be what gives a woman the strength to finally leave the man described by one woman as follows:

*"And then I know at one point then ... ..he got angry at me, and why, I do not actually know. I think it was because she (the baby) cried, and then he threw himself over me and grabbed the hair on the back of my neck, like this, and just turns me because I was standing (shows arms) like so with xxx (baby), turns me against the wall and then begins to stand there thumping both her and me into the wall. And I try as much as possible to resist, but it's not as easy as she and I aren't heavy, so both her and I bang into the wall ... and I screamed and begged, what are you doing, what are you doing ... and I thought of her and she is screaming hysterically . He done this ten to fifteen times, then he left. And then you know, it hurt, and I was just scared for her and everything ... but above all the shock ... I did not think he would ever do anything to her. I think it that it was then when the coin dropped, I must get out of here ... by any means possible. "*



Model describing the leaving process for abused women (Scheffer Lindgren & Renck, 2008)

## **Finally**

Being a victim of violence leaves its mark. But it is possible to get out of the crisis of being abused and to have a normal, happy and meaningful life again. Dare to notify if you or someone around you is affected, contact your nearest shelter or police. The violence is a crime, a social problem, a health problem, a gender issue and a human rights issue that can never be tolerated.

## Important Links:

[www.bra.se](http://www.bra.se) (Brå - National Council for Crime Prevention)

[www.kvinnofridslinjen.se](http://www.kvinnofridslinjen.se) (Domestic Abuse hotline)

[www.amnesty.se](http://www.amnesty.se) (Amnesty International)

[www.nck.uu.se](http://www.nck.uu.se) (NCK, the National Centre for Protection of Women)

[www.roks.se](http://www.roks.se) (National Organization for Women's and Girls' Shelters in Sweden)

[www.rskriksforeningen.se](http://www.rskriksforeningen.se) (National Society - Stop domestic violence)

[www.kvinnojouren.se](http://www.kvinnojouren.se) (Swedish women's and girls shelters Association SKR)

[www.who.int/en](http://www.who.int/en) (WHO - World Health Organization)



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