



Offences in close relationships

A national survey

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Summary

This report presents the results of a national survey commissioned by the Government and conducted by Brå, the National Council for Crime Prevention, regarding offences in close relationships. The survey was conducted within the framework of the Swedish Crime Survey (NTU), an annual survey concerning people's safety and victimisation, carried out by Brå in the form of telephone interviews.

A close relationship is defined as a person having, or having had, a partner relationship with a girlfriend, boyfriend, wife or husband, regardless of whether they have been cohabiting or not. The offences mapped out by the survey include systematic violations and humiliations, attempts at limiting a person's freedom, threats, harassment, assault, aggravated assault¹, sexual offences and aggravated sexual offences².

The purpose of the survey is to gain more knowledge of how widespread these types of offences are and to investigate their characteristics. The two main questions posed by the survey are

- what portion of the population (16–79 years) have been subjected to offences in a close relationship during the past year (2012), or at some other point in life
- to what extent have these victimisations been recurring³.

Other issues investigated include

- how common it is for incidents to be reported to the Police
- why victims choose not to file a police report
- how common it is for victims to have children living in the same household as them
- how many of the victims have been in contact with medical services, social services, or women's or men's hotlines due to their victimisation
- how common it is for victims not to receive sufficient care, support, aid or protection.

The levels of victimisation noted among people appearing in this survey should be considered as minimum levels, as there is no doubt a large portion of cases that go unreported.

¹ Aggravated assault is defined in this survey as a current or previous partner having hurt the victim with an object, hit them with a fist, kicked them or similar. In other words, this definition does not match the legal definition of aggravated assault.

² Aggravated sexual offence is defined in this survey as a current or former partner forcing the victim to perform some sort of sexual act through threatening, pinning them down, taking advantage of the victim being drunk, or similar. This definition does not match the legal definition of aggravated sexual offence.

³ Repeated victimisation is defined here as having been subjected to incidents at least once a month during the last year.

In 2012, 7 per cent were victimised in a close relationship

The share of women victimised in close relationships in 2012 was almost equal to the share of men victimised (7.0 per cent among women and 6.7 per cent among men). The numbers remain similar after separating psychological and physical violence – 6.8 per cent of women and 6.2 per cent of men were subjected to psychological violence, while 2.2 per cent of women and 2.0 per cent of men were subjected to physical violence. The two most common forms of offences are systematic violations and attempts to limit a person's freedom. Some are subjected to both psychological and physical violence in a close relationship. Of those subjected to physical violence in 2012, almost 85 per cent were also subjected to psychological violence, while almost 28 per cent of those subjected to psychological violence were also subjected to physical violence.

While the victimisation in 2012 seems evenly distributed between women and men, it is more common for women to be subjected to more serious violence and to have a greater need of help and aid, primarily in the form of medical care. Among the persons subjected to aggravated assault, around 29 per cent of the women and 2.4 per cent of the men stated that they had sought or had needed to seek a doctor, nurse or dentist.

The underlying factors that appear to be most relevant are age, family relations, education, living conditions, and financial conditions. The victimisation is highest among persons between 16 and 34 years of age, single parents, persons without education beyond upper secondary school (gymnasium), and persons living in multi-family residential houses. Victimised women often have worse financial conditions than non-victimised women. There are no clear differences in victimisation between persons born in Sweden and those born abroad.

Repeated victimisation is more common among women

Almost half of the persons subjected to psychological violence in 2012 state that the violence has been recurring throughout the year. Women state to a greater extent that they have been subjected to recurring offences (56 per cent of the victimised women compared to 40 per cent of the victimised men). Out of the whole population, 3.8 per cent of women and 2.5 per cent of men are estimated to have been subjected to recurring psychological violence in 2012.

Of those subjected to recurring physical violence in 2012, almost one in four were victimised several times. Recurring victimisation is more common among women here as well – more than 26 per cent of the victimised women and 20 per cent of the victimised men were subjected to recurring physical violence in the past year. This corresponds to 0.6 per cent of the women and 0.4 per cent of the men in the entire population.

Of the persons subjected to recurring physical violence in 2012, almost 90 per cent were also subjected to recurring psychological violence during the same period, while 14 per cent of the persons subjected to recurring psychological violence were also subjected to recurring physical violence.

As with victimisation in general, recurring victimisation is affected by the factors mentioned above: age, family relations, living conditions, education and financial conditions. Being subjected to recurring offences is most common among persons between 16 and 34 years of age, single parents, persons living in multi-family residential houses and persons with no education beyond upper secondary school. It is also more common here for women subjected to recurring offences to have worse financial conditions. The same is true among men subjected to recurring physical violence. Being repeatedly victimised in a close relationship seems to occur to the same extent among persons born in Sweden and persons born abroad.

One in five is victimised at some point in their lives

Around one in five people have at some point in their lives been victimised in a close relationship. It is more common for women to have been victimised – more than one in four women and one in six men have at some point been victimised. When studying psychological and physical violence separately, it can be noted that it is more common to have been subjected to psychological violence than physical violence. Almost 24 per cent of women and 15 per cent of men have been subjected to psychological violence by a current or previous partner at some point in their lives, while the corresponding numbers for physical violence are 15 per cent among women and 8.1 per cent among men. It is most common among women and men alike to have been subjected to systematic violations and humiliation, as well as assault.

More than 81 per cent of the persons who had been subjected to physical violence at some point have also been subjected to psychological violence, while almost 50 per cent of the persons who at some point have been subjected to psychological violence have also been subjected to physical violence.

Among women, the victimisation is most frequent between ages 25 and 34, while victimisation among men is most frequent between 35 and 44. There is no statistically confirmed difference between persons born in Sweden and abroad.

Few worry about being victimised

Among those who have not been subjected to any offences by a current or former partner in 2012, a small proportion state that they have still worried about being victimised (0.9 per cent of women and 0.2 per cent of men). Among those feeling worried, about half state that they have worried on a small number of occasions. However, persons who have been victimised earlier in life have worried more than those who have not.

At least 150,000 children live in households where violence occurs

About one third of the victimised women and one quarter of the victimised men in the survey state that they have children living in their household. When applied to the population, this corresponds to almost 83,000 women and 67,000 men. If there is a child living in each of these person's households this means that an equal number of children live in households where violence has occurred in 2012.

When examining recurring victimisation on an overall population level, this amounts to over 48,000 women and 17,000 men who, in 2012, were subjected to recurring psychological and/or physical violence and who have children living in their household. Here too, there is probably at least as many children, around 65,000, experiencing violence in their home.

However, these estimates are based on the women and men stating that they are victimised not living in the same household, meaning that the number of households are equal to the number of persons. The estimates can probably still be considered as minimum estimates, as most households with children have more than one child (in 2012 the average family in Sweden had 1.8 children).

Most victims do not file police reports

Among the persons victimised in 2012, 7.9 per cent stated that they had been in contact with the Police. Of these, more than half (56 per cent) stated that the incident or one of the incidents resulted in a police report. When applying this to all persons who were subject to offences in close relationships in the past year, 3.9 per cent have stated that the incident or one of the incidents resulted in a police report. A slightly larger proportion of women file police reports compared to men. However, the survey does not tell us if the report is filed by the victim or by someone else.

By far the most common reason for not filing a report is that the victim considers the offence too insignificant to warrant a report. These persons also often state that they sorted out the incident by themselves. This is not surprising, as it may seem logical to choose to sort out minor incidents on your own, without involving the Police.

In cases where incidents are not reported to the Police, the reason is rarely that the persons have little faith in the police force and legal system, do not want to go through a legal process, or do not dare file a report.

Few have contacted support services

Around 12 per cent of women and 2.7 per cent of men who have stated that they were victimised in 2012 have had some form of contact with healthcare services. For women subjected to aggravated assault by a current or former partner, the number is significantly higher. Around 29 per cent of these women stated that they contacted or had needed to contact a doctor, nurse or dentist. Among men subjected to aggravated assault by a current or former partner, 2.4 per cent stated that they had sought or had needed to seek a doctor, nurse or dentist.

7.0 per cent of women and 3.5 per cent of men state that they have been in contact with social services. The survey does not show if the persons contacting social services do so for their own sake or for the sake of their children. 5.6 per cent of the victimised women and 0.6 per cent of the victimised men have

had contact with a women's or men's hotline, or victim's hotline due to what they have been subjected to by their current or former partners. Finally, the proportion of women and men who have been in contact with another government agency or volunteer organisation due to their victimisation is almost equal (4.2 per cent and 4.3 per cent respectively).

The proportion of people who feel that they did not receive the help and support they needed is 11 and 4.4 per cent respectively. There is a greater proportion who feel this way among persons who have been subjected to physical violence than among those subjected to psychological violence (around 12 per cent compared to 8.3 per cent).

The proportion of persons who feel that their need for help and support has not been met is greater among those subjected to recurring violence, and primarily among those subjected to recurring physical violence.