

English summary

Violence against women in intimate relationships. An overview.

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The first objective of this study is to make a contribution towards increasing levels of knowledge on crimes of assault reported to the police where the victims are women involved in an intimate relationship with the assailant (i.e. a husband, cohabitee, boyfriend or 'ex').¹ Incidents of assault reported to the police where the victim is a woman acquainted with the assailant² have increased by about 40 per cent since the beginning of the 1990s, and thus the study also has the objective of attempting to explain what might lie behind this increase. A further objective is to develop an understanding of how common violence of this type is, i.e. of how large the dark figure is in relation to this type of crime.

Data have in part been collected from a sample of just over 850 police offence reports from the years 1990-1991 and 1998, and in part by means of a questionnaire survey of women's exposure to violence conducted at a random sample of workplaces (slightly over 3,300 women completed the questionnaire).³ The study has been restricted to four counties representing differing degrees of urbanisation and varying trends with regard to levels of

¹ The concept *in an intimate relationship* is used throughout this report.

² Two-thirds of which comprise cases of violence against women where the victim is or has been involved in an intimate relationship with the assailant.

³ Workplaces were used in order to avoid problems associated with sending questionnaires relating to violence against women in intimate relationships to the respondents' residential addresses, or conducting interviews with them in the home, since in the majority of cases the assailant lives together with the woman in question.

reported assaults against women. The four counties included in the study are: Stockholm, Gotland, Dalarna and Östergötland.

Of the women completing the questionnaires in the workplace survey, 0.9 per cent reported having been exposed to physical violence at the hands of a man with whom they had been or were currently involved with in an intimate relationship. None of these women had reported the assailant to the police. Weighting the results so that they correspond with conditions at the national level leads to an increase in the proportion exposed to such violence to one per cent.

In the population in general, then, it may be estimated that approximately one per cent of the country's working women are exposed to violence within an intimate relationship over the course of a given year. In numerical terms, this would involve about 25,000 working women per year.

Based on this finding, an estimation of the so-called dark figure would place it at around four to five, which is to say that between one-quarter and one-fifth of the crimes that actually take place are reported to the police.

The findings show that violence of this kind perpetrated against women exhibits a number of clear, distinguishing characteristics. Many women are exposed to violence repeatedly. This is true both for the violence that is reported to the police and for that which remains unreported. Approximately half of the victimised women, both in the workplace survey and in the police data, had been exposed to violence on more than one occasion. In addition, a little over 30 per cent of the women appearing in the police data who had been victimised repeatedly, had already reported the assailant to the police on at least one previous occasion.

One-quarter of the police reports show that the woman, when the incident had been reported to the police, was not willing to continue to assist with the investigation. Although an offence report cannot be withdrawn once it has been recorded by the police⁴, the victim's refusal to co-operate makes it very difficult for the police and prosecutor to continue the investigation. It is somewhat more common for a victim not to want to assist the police in their enquiries when the assault has been reported by a third party. Even when the victim herself has reported the incident⁵, however, as many as one-fifth show themselves to be unwilling to assist in the investigation at some later stage. There may be a number of explanations for this; the reason for contacting the police is not always to report the assailant, for example, but may rather constitute a means of quieting down a violent situation. It may also be because the woman is afraid of further violence if she continues to assist in the criminal investigation of a man who has already acted violently towards her. A further obstacle may be that the woman and the man have been involved in an intimate and emotional relationship, and may also have had children together.

A number of factors emerged from an examination of the possible motives underlying the assaults (in the police data) – these included feelings of

⁴ Since assaults taking place in private property fall within the remit of the public prosecutor.

⁵ As occurs in 80 per cent of cases.

jealousy on the part of the assailant and conflicts relating to a separation or divorce. These factors are present in a total of approximately one-quarter of the reported crimes (and in 38 per cent of incidents once those cases with missing data have been excluded). It is also evident that alcohol is often present when the assault takes place.

A little over 70 per cent of the women assaulted in the incidents reported to the police were involved in an intimate relationship with the assailant at the time of the assault. The majority of these women were cohabiting with the assailant. The remainder, amounting to slightly over 25 per cent, were thus assaulted by an ex-husband, ex-cohabitee or ex-boyfriend. In around half of the cases, at least, the family included children. The assault was most commonly reported to the police by the victim herself, with this having occurred in 80 per cent of the cases.

The assailants and victims are distinguishable from the population in general with respect to certain social factors, and this information is important in relation to the discussion of possible countermeasures. They present higher levels – and often very high levels – of previous criminal involvement, are more likely to be unemployed, and present lower levels of educational achievement than women and men in the general population. Thus among those involved in the violent incidents reported to the police, there are a large number of socially marginalised individuals.

The study also shows that the violence reported to the police appears to be more serious than that which is not reported. In addition, the findings indicate that the propensity to report the violence that takes place in intimate relationships is lower among more socially well-established women.

Persons born outside the country are over-represented among both perpetrators and victims by comparison with their proportion in the general population. The level of over-representation has fallen among the perpetrators however. There is a certain tendency towards more serious violence and more severe injuries when the perpetrator has been born in Sweden. There is also a small over-representation among both perpetrators and victims of persons with at least one parent born abroad.

On the basis of the study's findings, it is reasonably safe to assert that the 1990s have witnessed an increase in the propensity to report violence that takes place in intimate relationships to the police. This finding is perhaps to be expected given the increase in levels of attention focused on these crimes in society at large. The fact that more victimised women are reporting such incidents to the police must be regarded as a positive development.

The increase in the amount of attention focused on crimes of this kind has evidently also made it less difficult for women to talk about their victimisation. There are a number of factors which suggest that the propensity to report incidents of victimisation in the context of interview surveys has increased.

At least part of the increase in the number of reported offences ought thus to be the result of an increase in the propensity to report such crimes. No unequivocal answer can be given to the question of whether there has nonetheless been a real increase in violence against women in intimate rela-

tionships. Various findings from this study indicate however that on balance there has also been an actual increase in offences of this kind. There also appears to have been an increase in the exposure of women to violence perpetrated by acquaintances other than men with whom they are involved in intimate relationships, inter alia at the workplace.

As regards trends in violence against women in intimate relationships, it would thus be reasonable to conclude that there has been an increase over the course of the 1990s, but that this increase is of a lesser magnitude than is indicated by official crime statistics (which show trends in reported offences).