

SUMMARY

English summary of Brå report No 2009:12

Partner Violence Against Women and Men

brå

brottsförebyggande rådet

Partner violence against women and men

A summary of report 2009:12

**The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet, Brå)
– centre for knowledge about crime and crime prevention measures.**

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention works to reduce crime and improve levels of safety in society by producing data and disseminating knowledge on crime and crime prevention work.

This report is a summary of the Swedish report *Våld mot kvinnor och män i nära relationer*, report no 2009:12, which can be ordered from Fritzes Kundservice, 106 47 Stockholm. Phone +46 (0)8-690 91 90, fax +46 (0)8-690 91 91, e-mail order.fritzes@nj.se

This English report can be downloaded from www.bra.se

Production: Brottsförebyggande rådet, Information och förlag, Box 1386, 111 93 Stockholm.
Phone +46 (0)8-401 87 00, fax +46 (0)8-411 90 75, e-mail info@bra.se
Brå on the Internet www.bra.se
Authors: Klara Hradilova-Selin
© Brottsförebyggande rådet 2009

Contents

Gaps in knowledge regarding partner violence	5
Varying conclusions about women's and men's exposure to partner violence	5
Few reports exposure to partner violence	6
Several explanations to partner violence	6
Different backgrounds to men's and women's fear of crime	7
Less confidence in the judicial system but positive experience of the police.....	7
Few offered support despite need	8
Differences, tendencies and correlations	9
Continued work on relationship violence	9

Gaps in knowledge regarding partner violence

For some time now, violence against women has attracted attention as being a major social problem – in particular, the violence men exert on their female partners. Studies based on various sources – criminal statistics, medical data and victim surveys – lead, in part, to different conclusions regarding the nature and extent of the violence, and its development over time. At the same time, knowledge is still lacking regarding the extent that men are exposed to violence in intimate relationships. Some studies indicate that this exposure may be relatively high. The question is important, particularly from a legal security point of view. Even those people exposed to violence who do not conform to the conventional image of a typical crime victim are entitled to be treated well by the judicial system.

The purpose of the report is to highlight two main issues:

1. The extent and nature of violence in intimate relationships. Who suffers? To what extent do people exposed to violence in intimate relationships experience feelings of fear and insecurity?
2. How strong is the confidence in the judicial system among people exposed to violence in partner relationships? How do these people regard their contacts with the judicial system (the police)? What support have they received?

Partner violence is defined here as incidences of *assault, sexual violence, harassment or threats by a partner or ex-partner*, as reported in Nationella Trygghetsundersökningen (NTU) [The Swedish Crime Survey] in 2006, 2007 and 2008. The NTU is a national survey which is produced every year and which deals with the general public's exposure to crime and its contact with, and confidence in, the judicial system. The first data was collected in 2006, and, so far, approximately 37,500 interviews have been carried out.

Varying conclusions about women's and men's exposure to partner violence

Most studies of violence in intimate relationships define violence as men's violence against women, although there are a small number of studies that also highlight men's exposure to partner violence. The results produced are dependent on the context and the manner in which the questions have been formulated; if the purpose is to study violence or crime, the results show that women are exposed to partner violence more often than men. Studies which focus more on conflicts, however, report that the difference between women's and men's exposure to partner violence is small. At the same time, it appears to be a question of two different types of violence. Violence directed towards women is more often repeated, and also tends to be more serious, with more negative consequences for the victim. Partner violence that is carried out by men on women continues thus to be a major social problem.

A number of Swedish studies have been carried out on the victims of partner violence and the contact they have had with the judicial system. Those studies focused exclusively on women. The studies have generally been of a qualitative nature, i.e. they provide an in-depth insight into the complexity of the problems by means of a limited number of interviewees rather than the more general picture of the victims' experiences of the judicial system produced by the NTU. The

results have shown, among other things, that the process of informing the victim, in connection with filing a police report and during the legal process, is important and not always satisfactory. Many who report partner violence to the police do not regard judicial assistance as the primary purpose of filing the report. Alternatives, or complements, to a police report, in the form of therapeutic support, are described as important.

Few reports exposure to partner violence

In total, 505 incidents of relationship violence were reported by 304 people in the NTU¹. One fifth of those exposed were men. There have been relatively few people, under 1% (1.2% among women and 0.3% among men) of all the interviewed, who in the NTU report being subjected to assault, sexual violence, harassment and/or threats by their present or ex-partner during the previous calendar year. While men primarily report exposure to harassment, more incidents of assault and threats were reported among women. At the same time, the results show that there are certain groups of the population who are at greater risk. It is mainly young people, women and single parents that report experiences of violence in close relationships significantly more often.

Table 1. Incidents of different types of partner violence and the number of women and men, respectively, exposed to these types of partner violence. N = 37,605.

	Assault		Sexual violence		Harassment		Threats		Some exposure 2006–2008	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number ²⁾	%
<i>Persons exposed to partner violence</i>										
Men	6	0	3	0	43	0.2	7	0	56	0.3
Women	85	0.4	25	0.1	107	0.5	105	0.5	248	1.2
Total	91	0.2	28	0.1	150	0.4	112	0.3	304	0.7
<i>Persons exposed to repeated incidents</i>										
Total	53	0.1	22	0	150 ¹⁾	0.4	63	0.2	241	0.6
<i>Incidents of exposure to partner violence (number)</i>										
Men	8		5		43		11		67	
Women	138		41		107		152		438	
Total	146		46		150		163		505	

1) With regard to harassment, respondents were not required to report the circumstances regarding up to three incidents; harassment is defined as a chain of events. The number of people exposed in this case, therefore, relates to the number of incidents.

2) The number is not a direct total of exposure for the four types of partner violence, since some people have been exposed to violence in several ways.

Several explanations to partner violence

The reason why the estimated prevalence of partner violence during a given year is relatively low among both men and women can partly be explained by the fact that the NTU is a study of crime and is based on a narrow definition of violence, more in-line with criminal statistics. In each case, the results do not confirm the

¹ Each person exposed to several crimes was asked to describe the circumstances surrounding those crimes, in relation to a maximum of three incidences.

picture of partner violence as a very widespread phenomenon which can affect all population groups, as claimed by some of those who ascribe partner violence a structural explanation. An unequal division of power between men and women is mentioned, both in public debate and in other research, as an important explanation for the violence that occurs in intimate relationships. According to our results, women and single parents are two groups that are particularly exposed, which certainly indicates that the unequal power division between the sexes really does have a value in providing an explanation of partner violence. At the same time, however, exposure to violence among young people could also be a manifestation of other conditions. The importance of not limiting explanations of violence in intimate relationships to purely structural level, but to also include individual and lifestyle-related circumstances, is also emphasised by the findings. Brå concludes that violence in intimate relationships should be regarded as behaviour in which both structural and individual circumstances interact and where gender power is one of several dimensions. In particular, with regard to the practical prevention and counteraction of partner violence, it is important to identify specific risk factors.

Different backgrounds to men's and women's fear of crime

A number of circumstances characterise the violence that is committed in intimate relationships. Most incidents took place indoors, often in the victim's home. In 50% of all incidents of violence the aggressor is drunk. Alcohol is thus a significant factor, but it is less frequently involved with a partner than when a stranger commits violence. Almost three quarters of incidents of assault led to visible marks and one fifth to injuries that required medical attention. In a little more than one third of incidents, the aggressor was a current partner. The interviewees more often reported incidents of violence that had been committed by a previous partner. Two out of five people exposed to violence have children who live at home. It is not reported whether or not they witnessed the violence.

In addition, female victims of partner violence have a greater fear of a crime being committed compared with women exposed to other forms of violence. Among men, the relationship is the opposite. Women exposed to violence within a relationship also report, more frequently than women exposed to other forms of violence, that they refrain from certain activities because of their fear of crime.

Less confidence in the judicial system but positive experience of the police

All in all, confidence in the judicial system among people exposed to partner violence is lower compared with that stated by people affected by other forms of violence. The results, at the same time, suggest a gender difference in this issue. While confidence is roughly the same among women, irrespective of the type of violence they have encountered, men with experience of relationship violence reveal a more negative attitude to the judicial system (Diagram 1). On the other hand, the low number of men exposed to violence calls for a cautious interpretation of these results.

Slightly more than one quarter (27%) of the reported incidents of partner violence have been reported to the police, which is a somewhat higher proportion than concerning other forms of violence. The highest reporting frequency relates to assault (31% of incidents). Some people who have been exposed to partner violence have also had contact with the police in connection with the violence

without a police report being submitted. Of all those who have had some form of contact with the police due to partner violence, most have had a positive experience (60% compared with 52% for incidents of other forms of violence). The most common reasons for not submitting a report were because the interviewee knew the perpetrator of the crime, that they did not dare, and that the police would not be able to do anything anyway. A lack of confidence in the judicial system was an unusual reason for not submitting a police report. It is also very rare that those exposed to partner violence report that the incident was a mere triviality, which, on the other hand, is the most common reason for not submitting a report concerning other forms of violence.

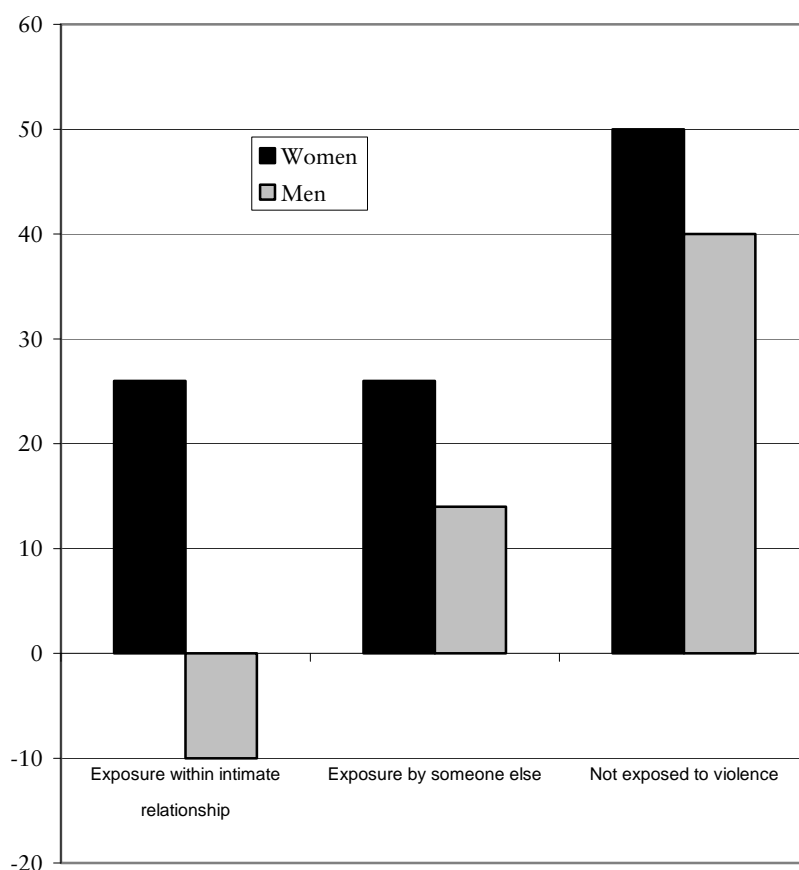


Diagram 1. Confidence in the judicial system as a whole. Balance measure (Proportion with very/quite high levels of confidence – proportion with little/very little confidence).

Few offered support despite need

In total, 40% of those interviewed who had been affected by partner violence reported that they needed support but that it was not available. On the issue regarding whether they were offered any help – from a non-profit organisation, a women’s crisis centre or a victim support centre – almost four out of five people gave a negative response, and the proportion was even greater among men. Those who were exposed to partner violence were also requested to describe whether the crime had any impact on their quality of life. Women, to a greater degree than men, felt that their quality of life had been negatively affected. These results, as with some other results, can partly be seen in light of the fact that

men, first and foremost, suffer harassment, while women more often report that they have been subjected to assault and threats. At the same time, the results also reflect shortcomings in society's readiness to treat all victims of crimes equally.

Differences, tendencies and correlations

Figure 1 provides a summary of the results which describe possible correlations between the various parts. Even if the figures suggest a degree of chronology and causality, it has primarily been used as a cognitive tool to structure analyses of victims' encounters with the judicial system. In certain instances, it concerns statistically established correlations, in some cases closer to tendencies, but no definite causal conclusions can be drawn. For example, it is difficult to comment on whether less confidence in the judicial system among those who have been exposed to relationship violence is a consequence of this particular exposure. In a cross-sectional survey of this kind, it is not possible to study the chronology of events, but the hypothetical model can serve as a basis for discussing the causes and effects.

The present report is a sub-study within the framework of the project *Victims' contacts with the judicial system*. The main report, which concerns victims' experiences of the judicial system, will include a more detailed chapter on violence in intimate relationships based on interviews with focus groups of the victims. The main study's qualitative section will provide an increased understanding of the conditions which the figure and results from NTU indicate.

Continued work on partner violence

The debate about violence against women has been intense, and much has been done to prevent this violence and to support the victims. An expected consequence of this would be that at least men's violence on women would decrease. Most of this violence takes place in intimate relationships. Over the past few years, developments of this kind have been reported in some other Nordic countries, such as Finland and Denmark. Although such time series are not available in Sweden, it is not impossible that similar developments have also taken place here. Certainly, the number of reports that have been submitted to the police concerning violence on women is increasing, but no other sources, for example data on lethal violence, information from patient records or self-reported violence in the home on women from the Statistics Sweden SCB (2004), point to an increase during the 2000s. It is therefore improbable that partner violence on women has increased in Sweden over the past few years.

If the number of police reports are regarded as reactions to crime rather than a direct measure of the actual extent of criminality, the observed increase in the number of police reports is a desirable trend. In addition, the predominantly positive experiences of contact with the police described in this report provide a somewhat encouraging picture of the work that is being done with violence in intimate relationships. Despite this, there is a lot of work that still remains to be done. Most incidents of partner violence are never reported to the police, and the survey also shows that there are clear gaps in the treatment of victims of violence regarding the help and support they need. This can be linked to the results found in other studies – that the legal process is not always regarded as the solution for the person who has been exposed to partner violence – and that there ought to be alternatives in the form of more therapeutic help.

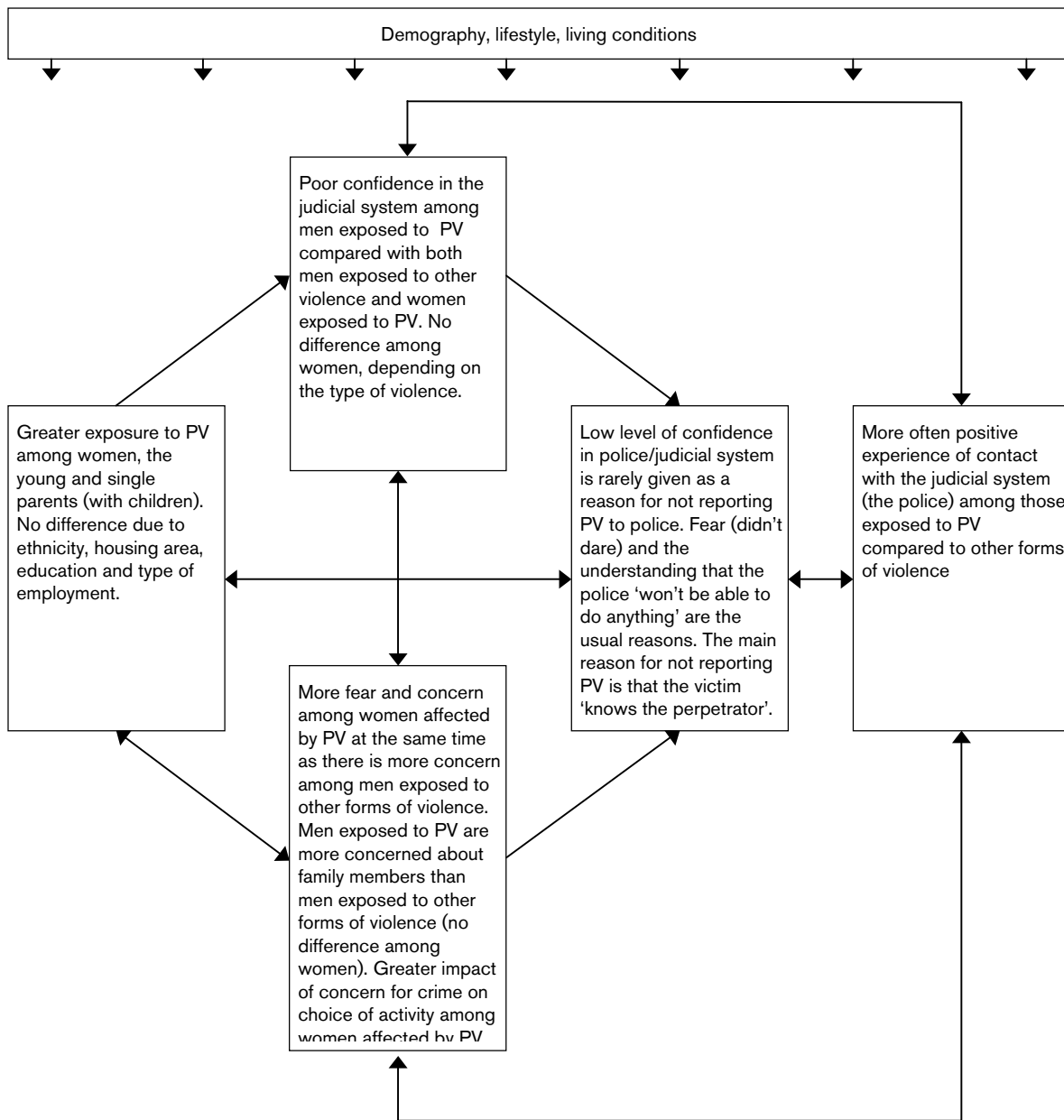


Figure 1. Exposure to partner violence (PV), fear of crime, propensity to report a crime and contacts with the police, according to NTU 2006–2008.