



WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE EUROPE

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WAVE Fact sheet

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

Survey on violence against women

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In 2014 the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) presented the results of the first European Union-wide survey on violence against women.¹ The survey is the biggest cross-country representative research on the subject ever carried out, and is based on 42,000 face-to-face interviews conducted by trained female interviewers, between April and September 2012 with women aged between 18 and 74 in all 28 EU Member States.

The interviews focused on women's personal experiences of physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence (partner and non-partner violence), stalking and sexual harassment, including cyber violence, since the age of 15 and in the last 12 months. It further included information about experiences of violence in childhood, prior to the age of 15.² The survey also provided evidence of the consequences of violence, needs of victims for protection and support, fear of victimization, reporting, attitudes towards violence against women and awareness of legal measures and support services, among other issues.

FRA 2014 EU-wide survey on Violence against Women

The survey contains a wealth of information and data on violence against women. It provides an excellent knowledge base for parliamentarians, policy makers, ministries, women's and other NGOs and institutions as well as professionals from various fields and other stakeholders.

The data is published in the form of fact sheets and various reports, including the 44-page summary 'Results at a glance', available in 22 EU languages. All data can be accessed for free on the FRA website. In addition, the online tool 'Survey Data Explorer' allows the reader to compare data between countries, and to generate answers to specific questions, i.e. what is the prevalence of stalking in my country compared with the EU average? What is the attitude towards violence against women in my country in comparison to our neighbour countries?³

Selected findings from the survey

The FRA survey findings show that, whilst violence against women is widespread and extensive, it still remains largely under-reported throughout the EU.

Main FRA results on the prevalence of physical and sexual violence

¹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2014). Violence against women: an EU-wide survey – Main results. (2014). Available at: http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf

² European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2014). Violence against women: An EU-wide survey – Results at a glance. p.39.

³ FRA survey data explorer: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/vaw-survey-results>, 15 Dec 2015

- *1 in 3 women* has experienced some form of physical and/or sexual assault since the age of 15, translating into 62 million women throughout the EU ('Main Results', p.21)
- *1 in 10 women* has experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 15 ('Main Results', p.21)
- *1 in 20 women* has been raped since the age of 15 ('Main Results', p.21)
- *About 13 million women* in the EU have experienced physical violence in the 12 months prior to the survey interviews, that is about 7% of women aged 18-74 in the EU ('Results at a glance', p.15)
- *About 3.7 million women* in the EU have experienced sexual violence in the 12 months prior to the survey interviews, that is about 2% of women aged 18-74 in the EU ('Results at a glance', p.15)

The FRA survey also uncovered a significant percentage of intimate partner violence and shows the repeat victimization pattern of this form of abuse:

Violence against women by a partner or previous partner

- *22% of women* have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse by a partner since the age of 15
- *One third of victims of physical violence by a previous partner* experienced *four or more different forms* of violence ('Main Results', p.21)
- Pregnant women are especially vulnerable to violence *42% experienced violence by their previous partner whilst pregnant* ('Main Results', p.22)
- After breaking up with a violent partner, *1 in 6 women (16%)* continued to be victimized by the previous partner ('Main Results', p.22)
- *43% of women* experienced some form of psychological violence by a current or former partner, including economic violence ('Results at a glance', p.23)
- *1 in 10 women* had been stalked by a previous partner ('Results at a glance', p.12)

The findings show a disparity among the 28 EU Member States, however, these differences between the Member States needs to be interpreted in context. For instance, different levels of gender equality or of cultural acceptability of talking about experiences of violence may explain some of the differences.⁴ Furthermore, it must be taken into account that despite differences, the level of violence against women is still high in all EU countries, with 1 in 5 women affected as the lowest rate.⁵ It is likely that the actual incidence is higher since many women hesitate to reveal the problem. Under-reporting is a serious problem in Europe, as many women do not talk to anybody about the violence they experience, as the next section shows.

Reporting of violence

In the FRA survey, women were asked if they had reported to the police or another agency. Some results:

Reporting rates to the police and other services

- *66% of women* did **not** report the most serious incident of partner violence to the police or another organization ('Main Results', p.60)
- *Only 1 in 3 victims of partner violence (33%), and 1 in 4 victims of non-partner violence (26%),* reported their most recent serious incident to the police or other services ('Main Results', p.60)
- *74% of stalking cases* are **never** reported to the police ('Main Results', p.81)

This indicates that official figures are likely to significantly underestimate the extent of the issue. There are several reasons why women do not report experiences of violence. These include resistance to disclosing private 'domestic' issues; feeling that the problem is not serious enough; shame and

⁴ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014). Violence against women: An EU-wide survey – Results at a glance. p.16.

⁵ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014). Violence against women: An EU-wide survey – Main results. p.28.

embarrassment; fear of the offender; not knowing where to turn to; feeling that nobody can help; fear of not being believed by the police or by other agencies; fear of negative outcomes that could result from inadequate reactions by authorities; and fear of being subjected to victim-blaming, judgmental or sexist attitudes by institutions.⁶

Needs of women victims of violence

The problem of underreporting of gender-based violence is severe and must be addressed. Women survivors of violence need to be encouraged to seek help and eventually to report violence, for instance through awareness raising campaigns carried out by specialist women's support services. This requires work to gain the trust of victims, which can be best done by low-threshold services such as women's helplines providing free of charge round the clock services. In this way victims can remain anonymous, receive emotional support and be informed without having to take immediate legal steps.

Direct referral from police or the health services to specialist women's support services is important to avoid secondary traumatization by having to repeatedly talk about the experiences of violence. The health sector has an important role in referring victims to specialist services since victims often turn to them first to seek medical assistance.

Specialist women's support services run by independent NGOs who work in the interest of the victim, are best equipped to meet the needs of women survivors of violence. These services are often engaged in awareness raising activities and campaigning and can, provided they receive adequate funding, inform victims about specific policies and laws for their protection.

The survey demonstrates the urgent need to improve victims' knowledge of their rights and of existing legislation, since 36% of women are not aware of specific laws or initiatives for preventing domestic violence against women.⁷

High-risk populations of victims

The survey reveals that specific groups are especially vulnerable to victimization in general, and to specific forms of violence. The „Results at a glance report“ identifies the following high-risk population:

- *Young women* Young women are particularly at risk of victimization (p. 9)
- *Pregnant women* 42% of women experienced violence by a former partner while pregnant, while 20% experienced violence by their current partner while pregnant (p. 21)
- *Victims of childhood abuse* – 30% of women who have experienced sexual victimization by a former or current partner also experienced sexual violence in childhood (p. 13).

Also supporting children who have witnessed domestic violence is crucial for prevention, since the FRA survey demonstrates that children are often aware of the violence against their mother. 73% of mothers who have been victims of physical and/or sexual violence by a partner indicate that at least one of their children has become aware of such violence taking place. Women's shelters have recognized the need for protection and support for children and developed standards for their support.⁸ Unfortunately, non-residential women's support services often do not receive adequate means to provide the necessary support for children.

- *Minority ethnic, refugee, migrant and undocumented migrant women* It is known that minority ethnic, refugee and migrant women, and specifically undocumented migrant women, are especially at risk of victimization, particularly if they are dependent on the perpetrator either financially or for a residency permit. The FRA survey indicates that women who are not citizens in

⁶ ib. p.66.

⁷ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2014). Violence against women: An EU-wide survey – Main results. p.28.

⁸ Women against Violence Europe (WAVE). (2004). Away from Violence: European Guidelines for Setting up and Running a Women's Refuge.

their current country of residence have higher rates of physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15 by partners and non-partners. Women's NGOs have responded to this particular vulnerability by providing specialist support services to the women and children concerned.⁹

- *Violence after separation* A significant number of women continue to be vulnerable to abuse in the aftermath of violent relationships. In addition, 1 woman in 10 has been stalked by a previous partner. Authorities and agencies must be made aware of the realities of stalking and abuse in the aftermath of relationships, and take these consequences seriously. (p.10-12)
- *Heavy alcohol consumption by perpetrators* The research uncovered a strong correlation between heavy alcohol consumption and the severity of violence. This is not to suggest that the problem is alcohol, rather perpetrators who use alcohol as an excuse for their violence. This particular finding must be highlighted and addressed in interventions with perpetrators. (p.10)
- *Controlling behavior* The impact of some men's controlling behavior in a relationship is detrimental on the woman's behavior and life, and can place barriers on her daily routine, such as the perpetrator placing restrictions on a women's use of finances or in seeing friends and family. The behavior of perpetrators must be analyzed by practitioners and addressed when exploring possible risk factors in violent intimate partnerships. (p.10)

FRA recommendations on protection and support of victims

Based on the survey findings, FRA suggests courses of action in different areas, and for different forms of violence and groups of victims. FRA recommendations address the areas of service provision and law enforcement as well as the health sector, employment, new technologies, and the media.

Selected FRA recommendations for the protection and support of survivors (FRA Survey, 'Results at a glance')

"The scale of intimate partner violence requires a renewed policy focus at the level of the EU and its Member States" (p. 9). Violence against women by a partner or former partner should not be treated as private or 'domestic', but as a human rights violation which requires effective interventions on the national and EU level.

Many women victims of intimate partner violence experience violence repeatedly. EU Member States should therefore "be encouraged to review their legislation for its capacity to recognize and effectively respond to the impact of repeat victimization on many women's lives, with repeat victimization being a particular characteristic of intimate partner violence." (p. 10)

The emotional and psychological consequences of stalking can be long-lasting, similar to the emotional and psychological consequences of physical and sexual violence. Therefore, specialist support services must be available for victims of stalking, and sensitive to the long-term impacts of this particular form of violence, including with regards to women's overall feeling of safety and well-being. (p. 12)

Cultural, societal, and institutional responses to women's victimization which reinforce victim blaming must be counteracted. Therefore, specialist support services are required to address the needs of victims who suffer from negative feelings after victimization. (p. 11)

"The EU should ensure that funding mechanisms that continue the work of DAPHNE and other programmes, which variously contribute to the protection of children, young people and women against all forms of violence, can be used to further support research and work by civil society organizations addressing violence against women. In particular, funding is needed for the work of targeted victim support services in the field of violence against women." (p. 37)

⁹ Thiara, Ravi. K., Monika Schröttle, Stephanie Condon (Eds). (2011). Violence against Women and Ethnicity. Commonalities and Differences across Europe.

“A victim-centered and rights-centered approach to women as victims of violence needs to be reinforced at the EU and Member State level.” (p. 37) This includes the development of EU and Member States policies and national action plans to combat violence against women which are grounded on women’s experiences of violence.

Conclusions

Given the scale of violence against women reported in the survey, increased efforts are necessary in all European countries, EU as well as other countries, since it can be assumed that the level of violence against women is similar everywhere in Europe. WAVE calls upon heads of state in Europe to step up their efforts to prevent violence against women and to protect and provide adequate specialist support to victims.

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