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**SUMMARY**

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## **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN FINLAND**

This report draws on a nationally representative victimisation survey of Finnish women. It contains information about the prevalence, patterns and trends of violence committed by men against women. There are also separate chapters about fear of violence and how victims have sought and received help from different agencies.

### **Research material**

The sample consists of 7,213 randomly chosen Finnish and Swedish speaking women aged 18–74. Statistics Finland gathered the material through a postal survey during the period 27.9.2005–5.2.2006. 4,464 answers were qualified, making the response rate 62 percent.

In an equivalent survey carried out in 1997 the response rate was 70 percent. One reason for this decrease in the response rate might be that the questionnaire was made more extensive. Compared to 1997, a decrease in the response rate was particularly visible among young women. In the 2005 survey the share of 65–74 year old women respondents was somewhat higher than in 1997. In the new survey there was less variation in the share of respondents in the different age groups, when compared to 1997.

## Survey questions

The questions on which this study is based include among others:

- How frequently are women exposed to men's physical or sexual violence, or threat of violence? Have there been any changes in regard to violence or the threat of it since 1997? How has the situation changed in a short term (one year) and a long term (since the age of 15) perspective?
- How frequent is violence against women in a partner relationship and how has it changed since 1997? By violence in a partner relationship is meant violent behaviour by a spouse or male partner involving physical or sexual violence or threat of violence. Partner violence is addressed both in present marriages or cohabiting relationships and also in previous ones, where applicable.
- How frequent is violence outside a partner relationship? By violence outside a partner relationship (non-partner violence) is meant physical or sexual violence or physical threat by another man than the present or ex partner.
- Women who have been exposed to violence, what kind of help are they in need of, and from whom have they sought help? What experiences do women have of the agencies offering help?
- How concerned are women about becoming the target of violence in different situations in their daily life? How has this concern changed since 1997?

## The frequency of exposure to violence

Violence was in the questionnaire defined by listing different forms of violent behaviour that different types of perpetrators might resort to. These types of perpetrators were 1) the present spouse or partner, 2) the ex spouse or partner, or 3) a man outside the partner relationship (a stranger, an acquaintance, a dating partner, a colleague, etc.).

Violence involved the threat of violence, physical violence and also sexual violence and intimidation. In a comparison between the results of the 1997 and 2005 surveys physical violence outside the partner relationship covered physical assaults, such as hitting, kicking or using a weapon.

Physical assaults committed by the present or ex partner included behaviour such as preventing the woman from moving freely, grabbing her,

slapping her, throwing hard objects, hitting with the fist or a hard object, kicking, strangling, strangling attempts, shooting and hitting with an edged weapon. Sexual assaults outside a partnership involved a way of behaviour that the woman perceived as sexually threatening, forcing her into sexual intercourse and its attempt. Sexual violence in a partner relationship was defined as putting pressure, forcing or trying to force the woman into sexual intercourse.

According to the 2005 survey, 43.5 percent of the women had at least once experienced a man's physical or sexual violence or the threat of it after having reached 15 years of age. In the 1997 survey the corresponding share was 40 percent. Thereby there has been a slight increase in women's experience of violence.

**Table 1** Women aged 18–74, who at least once have been exposed to men's violence or threats since the age of 15, according to type of perpetrator, and violence experienced before the age of 15, 1997 and 2005 (%)

	1997	2005
<i>All women</i> (n=sample size)	100.0 (4,955)	100.0 (4,464)
<i>Victim of at least one form of violence or threat</i>	40.0	43.5*
<i>Violence outside the partnership</i>		
Total	24.4	29.1*
Threats	11.1	14.4*
Physical violence	10.4	10.6
Sexual violence and threatening behaviour	16.7	21.2*
<i>Violence in a current partnership</i>		
Total	22.2	19.6*
Threats	9.0	7.6
Physical violence	20.0	17.6
Sexual violence and threatening behaviour	5.9	4.3*
(n=women in a partnership)	(3,495)	(3,172)
<i>Violence in a previous partnership</i>		
Total	49.9	49.0
Threats	33.8	31.5
Physical violence	46.1	44.7
Sexual violence and threatening behaviour	18.7	17.3
(n=women with previous partnership)	(1,365)	(1,497)

\* The results in the 1997 and the 2005 surveys differ at 95 % confidence level

Women's exposure to violence and threats has increased in the case of threats as well as sexual violence and harassment occurring outside a

partner relationship. There has not been any increase in exposure to physical violence outside a partnership (see Table 1).

There has been a slight decrease in partnership violence in threats, physical violence and sexual violence since the 1997 study, but this decrease exceeds the confidence interval only in regard to sexual violence. An examination of the different forms of physical violence reveals that there has been a significant decrease particularly in the case of slapping.

According to Table 1, the total share of those who have experienced violence at least once in a previous partnership is approximately as large as in the previous survey. Notwithstanding, the trend for different forms of violence appears to be decreasing slightly. Half the women who have put an end to a partnership have experienced different forms of violence or threats by the ex partner. This has almost as frequently involved physical violence.

In eight years there has not been any change in the frequency of women's exposure to violence in the last 12 months preceding the survey. About every ninth woman had experienced such violence (Table 2).

**Table 2** Women aged 18–74, who during the last 12 months have been exposed to different forms of violence or threats according to type of perpetrator 1997 and 2005 (%; the percentage of the victims is calculated within the group)

During the last 12 months	1997	2005
<i>Women total</i>	100.0	100.0
(n)	(4,955)	(4,464)
<i>Victim of at least one form of violence or threat</i>	11.3	11.6
<i>Violence outside a partnership</i>		
Total	4.5	5.3
Threats	2.2	2.9
Physical violence	1.4	1.3
Sexual violence and threatening behaviour	2.3	2.8
<i>Violence in a partnership</i>		
Total	8.6	7.9
Threats	3.6	3.0
Physical violence	7.0	6.3
Sexual violence and threatening behaviour	2.5	2.0
(n=women in a partnership)	(3,495)	(3,172)
<i>Violence in an ex partnership</i>		
Total	7.0	6.1
Threats	4.2	3.2
Physical violence	4.9	4.7
Sexual violence and threatening behaviour	2.5	1.6
(n=women with previous partnership)	(1,365)	(1,497)

## Partner violence

Partner violence resulted in physical injuries in about half the most severe instances of physical violence. Among the most severe cases of partner violence, there were some psychological consequences in two cases out of three. The most frequent psychological effects were hate, fear, depression, loss of self-esteem and shame. There have not been any changes since 1997, neither in physical nor in psychological effects. One tenth of the women who had experienced violence in their partner setting had endured violence for a long time; it had continued for at least seven years and the partner had still been violent during the last year.

Among women who had left their partners, somewhat less than a third of them did in 2005 continue to experience violence or disturbing behaviour after they had split up. The most common forms of harassment after the end of their relationship were telephone calls, text messages, e-mails or letters.

## Violence outside a partner setting

The form of violence that women experience outside a partner setting can be distinguished into three main types: occasional violence (unknown perpetrator), work-related violence (the perpetrator is a client, patient or colleague) and violence in a close relationship (the perpetrator is a family member, dating partner or male acquaintance). The perpetrator is often a man that the women already knows; out of violent incidents more than half of them are committed by a close-by person whereas merely short of one third is committed by a stranger. Compared to 1997, there appears to be an increase in work-related violence facing women. The share of other forms of violence has decreased.

Among women who were the target of violent acts outside the family, more than half of them told that they managed without physical injury. Every third had at least got a bruise or a wound. Eight percent of the women who had been exposed to violence had sought medical care.

Three women out of four told that they, during the past five years, had felt hate because of the violence they had experienced outside the partnership. More than half of them had become fearful. A feeling of guilt and shame was twice as common after sexual violence than was the case because of other forms of violence.

Youth, civil status (single) and level of education (matriculation examination) were factors that on average involved greater risk of violence, as did also drunkenness.

In addition to threats and violence the survey also addressed women's experiences of sexual harassment and stalking. During the last year, one fifth of the women had at least once experienced some of the forms of harassment listed in the questionnaire. In the 1997 survey the share was approximately the same. In 2005 insulting and ambiguous jokes or offensive speech were the most general forms of harassment (experienced by 12 % of the women). Every tenth woman had heard inappropriate remarks about her body or sexuality. There were more frequent mentions about these two forms of harassment in 2005 than in 1997.

## Violence and resort to help

In the chapter dealing with support and the search for help a picture is given of the kind of help women felt they needed, how they have sought it, as well as their experience of agencies providing different forms of support and help. The empirical analysis is mainly based on the findings of the present new survey; comparisons with the findings of the previous survey are made to the extent that there are corresponding findings in a report made by Heiskanen and Piispa (1998). Help and support are looked at separately in the case of violence outside the partnership and partner violence, respectively.

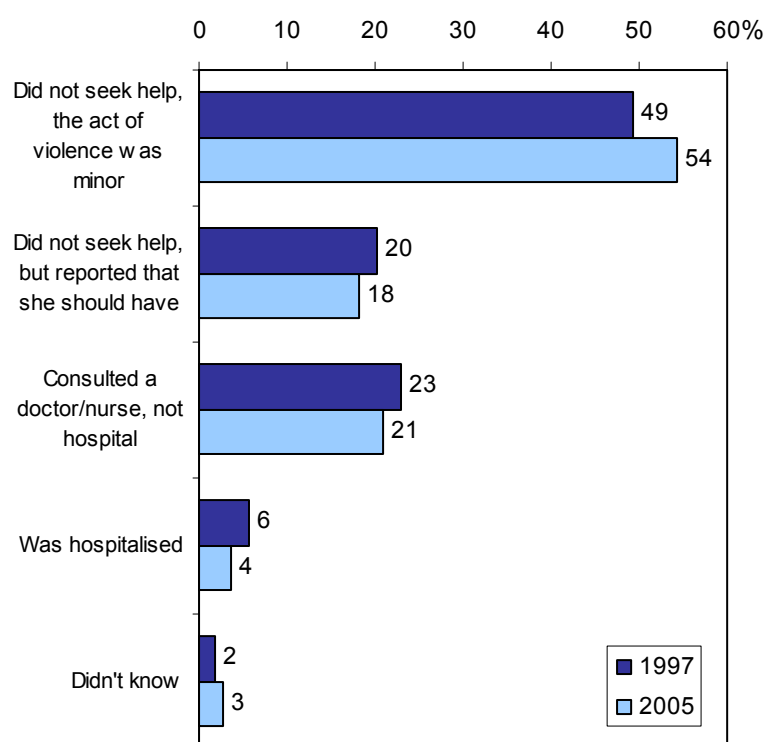
Social support can mean many things. It is common to distinguish between informal and formal social support. With informal social support is meant the kind of support a person gets in her close community, from others than public authorities or organisations providing services on a commercial basis. Informal social support is generally given by the family, relatives, friends, colleagues and the near-by community. Different kinds of service agencies offer formal social support to victims of violence. Central among them are, in the present context, at least the police and many social and health service providers.

Women who have become the victim of violence normally rely on informal social support: more than half the respondents mentioned that they had talked about the violence with a close friend, both when it comes to partner violence and also violence outside a partnership.

To resort to official support and help is considerably less common than relying on informal support: about two thirds mentioned that they had not

sought help from any official body, both in the case of partner violence and also other violence. When official help is sought, it is most frequently sought from the police and health service providers.

The study also indicated that it has become somewhat more common to rely on official help and treatment. On this point rough comparisons can be made between the findings of the 1997 and the present study. According to the new research material, 31 percent of those who had sometimes experienced partner violence had sought help from some agency, whereas the percentage was 26 in 1997 (Heiskanen & Piispa 1998, 142). The difference is statistically significant.



**Figure 1** Resort to treatment for partner violence in the most severe cases (%), those reporting physical injury in 2005 (n=609) and 1997 (source: Heiskanen & Piispa 1998, 139)

If we, in the figure, further look at those who have sought treatment for a serious physical injury because of partner violence, we can see the same phenomenon: it would appear that it has become somewhat more common to seek treatment, compared to the findings of the previous study. The share of those who have not sought treatment because they considered the injury as slight has decreased to a statistically significant degree. Additional research is required to further investigate the reasons for this change. First, it might be the case that the threshold for seeking support has

lowered. During past years, more attention has been paid to partner violence than before, and women have become increasingly aware of their position as victims of violence. Second, this could be explained by increased availability of treatment and support. Third, the form violence takes might have become more severe, increasing thereby the need of treatment. The last alternative is, however, not supported by the findings of this study: on the contrary, it would appear that violence is decreasing (see chapters 3 and 4 in this publication).

## Fear of violence

Compared to the findings of the 1997 study, there has been a decrease in women's concern about their safety in their residential area at night, and equally so in their fear of being raped by a stranger. Concern for work-related violence has increased somewhat. In 2005, 46 percent of the respondents were concerned about their safety at night in their residential area. 38 percent feared that they would be raped by a stranger, whereas 18 percent feared violence at the work place (26 % when counted of women at work at the time of the survey). 8 percent of those living in a partner relationship were concerned about the violent nature of their partner.