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Welcome to the Swedish Police website on domestic violence

If you are suffering domestic violence, this is where you can find out more about what your rights are and how the police can help you. If you suspect that someone you know is a victim, you can also find information about what you can do as a witness.

What counts as domestic violence?

Domestic violence is a crime where the victim is or has been married to, or in a relationship with the attacker, whether living together or not, or has children with the attacker.

Domestic violence can also include “honour” crimes. These are crimes against someone, often a relative, who the family, extended family or clan think has damaged or risks damaging the honour of the family or the clan. Domestic violence may involve physical, psychological or sexual violence. It may also include situations where one party forces or threatens the other, locks them in or visits the other person’s home without permission. Domestic violence is covered by public prosecution, which means that the police have a duty to investigate – and that the victim cannot prevent an investigation being started. The investigation is led by a public prosecutor.

Act on Violation of Integrity

In 1998 a law was introduced on gross violation of integrity and gross violation of a woman’s integrity. Read more about what this means here www.bra.se

What is a crime?

To start a police investigation there must be a suspicion that a crime covered by public prosecution has been committed. This may be someone suffering bruises, wounds or other injuries as a result of violence from someone close to them. It may also be someone saying that he or she has been the victim of violence or threats from someone close to them, e.g. threats by text or e-mail.

Has it happened to you?

This type of crime occurs in all types of relationships in all social groups in all parts of the country.

The crime most often takes place in the home, and this can make it difficult for the police and the rest of the legal system to discover. This also means that it can be difficult to intervene and help the victim. In many cases the reason for the crime is jealousy or conflict following separation or divorce. Alcohol is often involved. Often it is to do with one person wanting

power and control over the other. This type of crime may also involve “honour” crimes. These are crimes where a family monitors its members to ensure that they do not do something which may put the family’s honour at risk. They may also punish someone who has broken the rules of the family.

We don’t know how many victims there are

This type of crime is very common. No-one knows exactly how many victims there are, but according to the National Council for Crime Prevention, only 25 percent of victims report the crime. In 2011, 35,035 cases of abuse of men, women and children were reported to the police. 69 percent of these cases were reported by the victim who had suffered abuse by a current or former partner. In other words, if you are a victim, you are not alone.

Often downplayed

Many people who are subjected to domestic violence by their partner still stay in the relationship for a long time. There may be several reasons for this: they still love their partner, they are worried about what would happen to him/her if they left, or they are afraid of the consequences of leaving. It is also common for the victim themselves to downplay the violence and “brush off” everything that happens to them. This can be because after suffering psychological and physical violence for a long time, you feel you have less value as a person. Victims blame themselves and feel that they deserve the violence they are subjected to.

Warning signs

There are some common warning signs that things are not right in a relationship. RFSL has a list of questions on their website which can help you identify the most common warning signs. Here you can also find links to other organisations who can answer your questions and worries if you or someone you know is a victim of domestic violence.

More information

Hotline for victims of crime run by the Swedish Federation for Lesbian Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights, RFSL: www.rfsl.se/brottsoffer

Telephone helpline for women who have been subjected to threats or violence or sexual assault: www.kvinnofridslinjen.se

Should I report it?

To the police, there is no question about it: domestic violence must be reported.

Despite this, many victims are reluctant to report domestic violence to the police. Maybe they still have feelings for their partner, or maybe they are afraid of what their partner will do to them when they find out. Having children with the perpetrator can also be a reason for not reporting the crime. Another reason is that it feels too private or personal, or that they feel guilty, ashamed or blame themselves for what has been done to them.

They may also not think this kind of crime is serious enough to report to the police or that the police will not take it seriously. It can be difficult for people who are the victims of honour crimes to go against the norms and values of their entire family all by themselves.

It's important to report it

If you are the victim of this kind of crime, you must report it to the police. Reporting it to the police can be a way of putting an end to a violent and abusive situation.

Other people can report domestic violence too

It is usually the victim who goes to the police but it is also common for the crime to be reported by friends or neighbours. If you suspect that someone is the victim of domestic violence, you can contact the police who will decide whether to investigate further.

Things to remember

There are some things that are good to remember if you are living in a relationship in which you are subjected to threats, violence or abuse:

- confide in friends you can rely on, tell them about your situation. They will be able to back up what you say in court if necessary.
- contact a women's or men's shelter or helpline. They will also be able to back up what you say in court if necessary.
- keep a diary documenting when and where you were abused, threatened or hit and how and where on your body you were hit.
- don't wash the clothes you were wearing when you were subjected to abuse or sexual assault
- document your injuries, take photographs of them if possible. Or have them documented by a doctor.
- save any threats you receive on the answerphone, by e-mail or by text. Forward them to friends who can save them for you. They may be important evidence.

Support and protection

Many people are worried about reporting domestic violence to the police because they are afraid of the person they are reporting. The police can make a threat and risk assessment to see if you need to be given protection.

There are different degrees of protection depending on the kind of threats involved. The police can provide advice, protection and various technical aids, e.g. a protection package with things like a GPS-enabled emergency phone and acoustic alarm. You may also be given your own contact person, and access to information and safety talks.

The police also work in partnership with other bodies in the community which can provide you with protection. For example, the municipality may provide you with safe accommodation and a victim support group can offer help. Help is also available from voluntary organisations.

The prosecution service can also impose a contact ban. This means that the person who is threatening you is not allowed to contact you in person, on the phone, by e-mail or such like. Most police authorities have a victim support officer who can give you more information.

You may also be entitled to victim compensation, but this requires a police report. If the crime has been reported to the police, you can also apply for compensation for your injuries from your insurance provider.

More information

The Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority: www.brottsoffermyndigheten.se
Telephone helpline for women who have been subjected to threats or violence or sexual assault: www.kvinnofridslinjen.se

How do I report a crime?

If you or someone you know has been the victim of a crime or been threatened, please report it to the Police.

You can either call the Police by phoning 114 14, or contact them via the emergency services' phone number 112 if the situation is urgent. You can also go straight to the police station in your local area. You can also ask someone you trust, such as a friend or a colleague from work, for help.

What happens then?

Once the Police have received your report, they will want to speak to you to find out more. During the interview, it is important that you give the most detailed account possible of what has happened. What kind of threat, violence or other crime have you been subjected to? By whom? How long has it been going on? Are there any witnesses? Has anyone injured you? How? This is the kind of question which it is important to answer, to ensure that the case can be taken further.

Preliminary Investigation

The purpose of the investigation of the crime, which is known as the preliminary investigation, is to collect information about the event. The preliminary investigation is led by the prosecutor. When it has been completed, the prosecutor will decide whether there is sufficient evidence to charge the person suspected of the crime. A charge leads to a verbal hearing in the District Court, known as a trial. During this process, you will be questioned, as will the accused (the person who is being prosecuted) and any witnesses. The court will then reach a verdict and impose a sentence. If you, or the defendant, are not satisfied with the District Court's verdict, it can be appealed to the Court of Appeal.

What happens if a case is dropped?

Cases can be dropped due to a lack of evidence. This does not mean that the police and the prosecution authorities do not believe what the victim is saying. It simply means that the person who committed the crime cannot be prosecuted because there is not enough evidence or witnesses to support the victim's account.

More information

Court introduction: www.rattengangsskolan.se

Do you know someone who is a victim of domestic violence?

If you have become a witness to domestic violence or suspect that someone you know is a victim of domestic violence, you can report it to the police yourself.

Reporting this kind of crime to the police can be a difficult thing to do. If you do not want to make a formal report, you can still contact the police and tell them about your suspicions anonymously. Then it will be the police's job to follow up and find out whether a police report should be made. If you work in the care sector, in some cases it is your duty to make a report to the police if you notice that someone is being subjected to domestic violence.

Do you suspect that a child is the victim of domestic violence?

If you suspect that a child is being harmed, you can make an anonymous report to social services in your municipality (you will find them on the municipality's website). They will carry out an investigation and report it to the police. If you work in the care sector, in a school or in childcare, it is your duty to report any suspicion you have that a child is being harmed.

Where to turn for support and help

Children's Rights in Society: www.bris.se

Save the Children: www.raddabarnen.se

The Swedish Police service takes domestic violence seriously

The police take domestic violence very seriously.

A large group in society being subjected to threats and violence within the home is a major problem for society. It is also a crime which is not only against the law in Sweden, it also contravenes the UN Declaration on Human Rights.

Police response vital

The work of the police is to be "committed, effective and accessible." This is important in every context but it is possibly extra important when dealing with domestic violence.

We know that the way we treat victims of crime is crucial to the victim having the courage to report the crime – and see the case through. In the same way, the first stages of the investigation are very important to the success of the investigation. This can involve interviewing witnesses and documenting the victim's injuries. It is important to emphasise that the police are obliged to be objective during the investigation and take into account and ask about things which are to the advantage of and to the disadvantage of the suspect.

National strategy

The police work continuously to improve the way they investigate this type of crime. The aim is to get more people to report domestic violence, reduce the number of hidden cases, improve efficiency and increase the number of cases which are prosecuted. New, improved training has increased the expertise of police officers and domestic violence has moved higher up the agenda thanks to information and exchanging experiences within the police force and with the prosecution service and other agencies and voluntary organisations. Training for investigators dealing with children and honour-related crimes has also been extended and improved.

How are children affected?

Children who experience abuse, threats and violence in the home suffer physical and mental damage.

Research shows that these children display more signs of worry, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress syndrome and aggression than other children. It is therefore important not to forget the children, even if the parents think that the children have not seen or noticed the violence or the threats. There are also studies which show that the more the woman is abused, the greater the risk that the child will be abused by both the mother and the father.

How do the police work with children?

The police service has officers specially trained in interviewing children. These officers are used to meeting and talking to children who have been subjected to all types of crime. Children who have witnessed domestic violence are seen as victims of crime and are entitled to compensation for crime victims. For the children to be able to obtain this compensation the crime must have been reported to the police.

Special children's centres

In many places in Sweden there are special children's centres where the police, prosecutors, doctors and social services are gathered under one roof. This means that the child does not have to be moved from place to place and from one agency to another, which makes the process easier for the child. It also makes it easier for the different agencies involved to work together, resulting in a higher quality investigation.

More information

Children's Rights in Society: www.bris.se

Save the Children: www.raddabarnen.se

Are you the victim of an honour crime?

Find out more about the support and help available to you if you are the victim of an honour crime.

Are you living in a situation where you yourself are not able to decide what to wear, who you can meet or where you are subjected to violence to teach you to obey? Do you feel watched, controlled and threatened by parents or relatives? Are you forced to hide your sexual orientation? If so, you may be the victim of one or more crimes which fall under the term honour crime.

Both girls and boys can be victims

Many people still believe that only girls and women are the victims of honour-related violence and oppression, but boys and men can also be affected. They often enjoy greater freedom than girls and women, but they are still the victims of arranged marriages and forced marriages. They are also given the task of watching and controlling their sisters and cousins. If the sons do not fulfil these expectations, they can themselves become the victims of violence and oppression. There are known cases of boys and young men being killed because they chose the wrong partner or exhibited sexual behaviours which were regarded as abnormal.

Honour crimes against homosexuals, bisexuals and transsexuals

Homosexuals, bisexuals and transsexuals living in an honour-based culture are particularly vulnerable. Homosexuality, bisexuality and transsexuality are taboo in many societies, and are regarded as illegal acts. This increases the risk of individuals being persecuted or frozen out, becoming the victims of violence or killed. A homosexual, bisexual or transsexual son or daughter may become a burden to the family since they affect the family's reputation and this has a negative impact on the family's honour. The sexual orientation of a child affects not only their own chances of getting married, but also that of their siblings.

What does the law say?

In legal terms, the “control” and “coercion” you are subjected to may involve deprivation of liberty, force, threats, molestation or abuse. These are serious crimes. If you or someone you know has been subjected to one or more of these crimes, you should report it to the police. If you have any questions about honour-related violence, contact the police or a girls’ or women’s shelter.

Frequently Asked Questions

Question: My family are going to our home country in the summer and I’m afraid they will marry me off against my will. What can I do?

Answer: Contact the police, a women’s shelter or social services and tell them your suspicions. It is important to prevent the trip at any price if there are grounds to suspect that you will be married against your will. Once you are abroad it will be more difficult for the Swedish authorities to help you.

Question: Where can I get help if I feel threatened?

Answer: If you have been abused or threatened, you can turn to the police, social services or to a women’s shelter if there is one near where you live. Women’s shelters (kvinnojour) are usually in contact with social services and in an emergency can help you find somewhere safe to stay and put you in contact with other agencies. In several places in Sweden there are refuges, safe places to stay, where the staff are specialised in helping people who have been the victim of honour-related crime. Many of these places also take children, even in emergencies.

Question: How long can I stay in a refuge?

Answer: You have the right to stay in a refuge as long as it is necessary and until you have been given help to find a place of your own to live in.

Question: What happens if I go to the police?

Answer: The police will investigate what has happened and whether there are grounds to continue the investigation. Because you have been the victim of a crime, you will be called for interview. The police will also interview the suspected perpetrator and witnesses, such as family members and others involved. Eventually the investigation may lead to prosecution of one or more perpetrators.

Question: How can I protect myself?

Answer: The police usually carry out a threat and risk assessment and where necessary can help you with different forms of protection, e.g. an attack alarm. See the links on the right for more information about the protection available and where you can apply for it. The police also have victim support officers or similar specialised in victim support. Many police authorities also work together with voluntary organisations such as girls’ or women’s shelters.

Question: Can I get any support in court?

Answer: You can be given support by a legal advisor (målsägandebitråde), your own lawyer who helps you, the victim. You can also obtain witness support from a person who provides practical information and help in conjunction with a trial. This is free of charge.

More information

The Swedish Association for Victim Support: www.boj.se

Hedersförtryck.se

Your rights: www.dinarattigheter.se

www.flicka.nu

The Swedish Association of Women's Shelters: www.kvinnojouren.se

www.rattgangsskolan.se

The National Organisation for Women's and Girls' Shelters: www.roks.se

Disabled?

Domestic violence can affect all types of relationships, even relationships where one party is dependent on the other, for example as a result of a disability. This may be a physical disability, such as limited mobility or reduced vision or hearing, but it may also be a mental or intellectual disability.

This group suffers particularly badly, since they are dependent on a person who is both their partner and the perpetrator. This makes the crimes even more difficult to discover. This is where anyone who witnesses or suspects a crime committed against a disabled person becomes extremely important. If you come into contact with someone you believe is a victim, either through your work or in some other way, please report it to the police.

Things to remember

There are a few things which you should remember before filing a report with the police. These things may be very significant for the success of the investigation and whether the case can proceed to trial.

- confide in friends you can rely on, tell them about your situation. They will be able to back up what you say in court if necessary.
- contact a women's or men's shelter or helpline. They will also be able to back up what you say in court if necessary.
- keep a diary documenting when and where you were abused, threatened or hit and how and where on your body you were hit.
- don't wash the clothes you were wearing when you were subjected to abuse or sexual assault
- document your injuries, take photographs of them if possible. Or have them documented by a doctor.
- save any threats you receive on the answerphone, by e-mail or by text. Forward them to friends who can save them for you. They may be important evidence.

Where to turn for support and help

Help is available if you are a victim of domestic violence. Many municipalities run aid programmes for both women and men victims. You can also contact any of the national organisations. Please see below for links to various organisations.

Help is also available for anyone who wants to change their violent behaviour. Experience has shown that this is something that most perpetrators would like to do. The people who seek help to stop using violence are almost always concerned about or frightened by their violent behaviour. They often feel ashamed and guilty. Most municipalities have centres and special clinics staffed by people who are used to dealing with this type of issue and they can provide help.

More information

Children's Rights in Society: www.bris.se

The Ombudsman for Children in Sweden www.barnombudsmannen.se

The National Council for Crime Prevention: www.bra.se

The Swedish Association for Victim Support: www.boj.se

The Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority: www.brottsoffermyndigheten.se

The Parliamentary Ombudsman: www.jo.se

Women's helpline: www.kvinnofridslinjen.se

The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights: www.rfsl.se

The National Association of Swedish Crisis Centres for Men: www.rikskriscentrum.se

The National Organisation for Women's and Girls' Shelters: www.roks.se

The Swedish Association of Women's Shelters: www.kvinnojouren.se

We can help you!

Domestic violence is found in all kinds of relationships, throughout Sweden. We know that many thousands of people are subjected to domestic violence each year, maybe up to 100,000.

Are you living in a situation involving abuse, threats and violence? If so, tell the police. You may be the victim of a serious crime which can be reported to the police.

Phone 114 14 or contact your nearest police station. In an emergency, ring 112.