
A public health issue

Domestic violence is very much a public health issue. Physical and mental ill health are substantially more common among people who have been victims of serious violence. Mental problems such as sleep disorders, anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder are much more common among women who have been victims of violence than others. Preventive measures are the key to permanently reducing violence. Domestic violence not only causes great human suffering, but also leads to considerable costs to society.

Society must work preventively, but also react quickly where there are signs that children or adults are victims of domestic violence. By asking questions about violence and offering help and support at an early stage, more people at risk will dare to seek help.



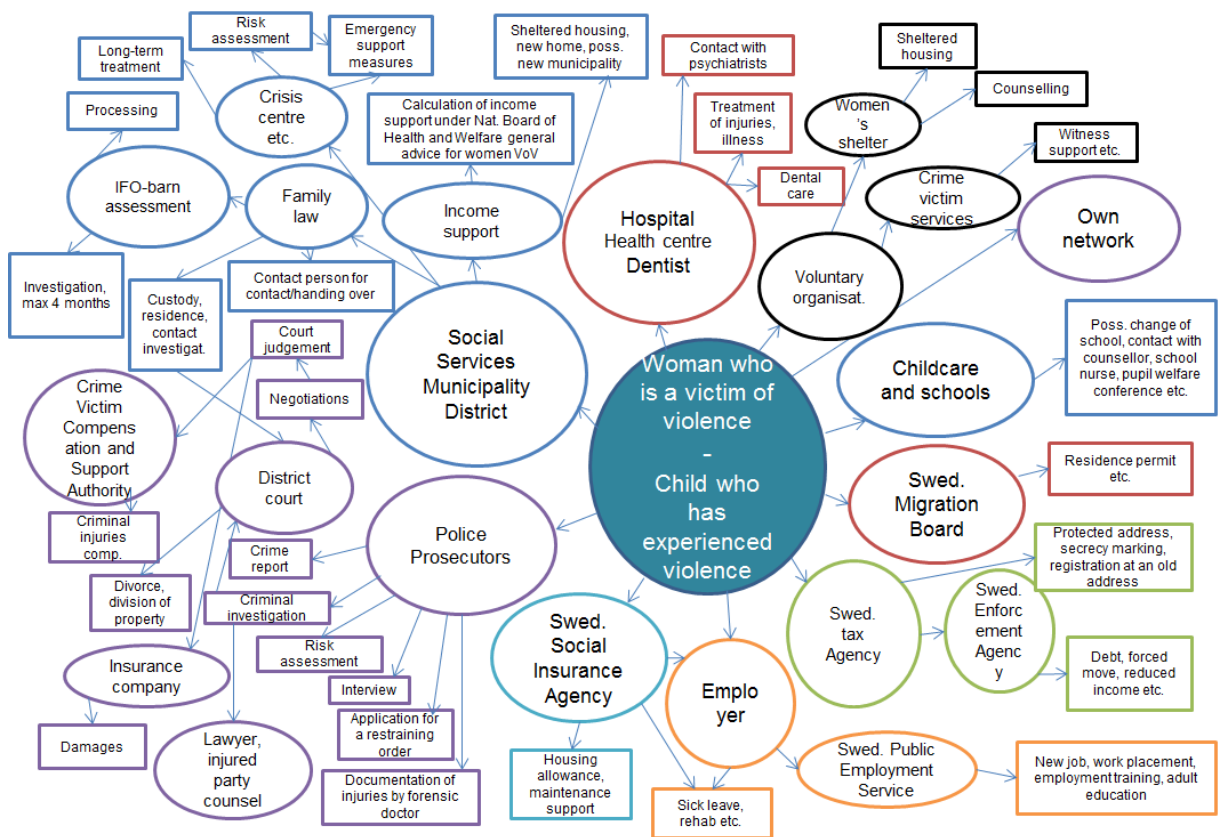
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Put the needs of victims of violence first...

Anyone seeking society's help to leave a violent relationship at present could easily form the impression that they are lost in a labyrinth of authorities and professional groups. It is clear that society's efforts to assist victims of violence need to be better coordinated. Children's need for support and help must be given far greater attention than at present.

Figure 1: Diagram showing contacts between victims of violence and public authorities



Source: Hässleholm Municipality (2013)

By creating better opportunities for various professional groups to cooperate in new ways based on clear guidelines, it will be easier to meet the individual needs of victims of violence.

...but don't forget the perpetrators

Domestic violence is a serious crime that must have consequences for the perpetrator. Gross and repeated acts of violence are particularly serious. The judicial system would have better reach with more proactive working methods, more efficient legal proceedings and better coordination of public authorities' interventions. More perpetrators must be called to account for their actions and made, forcibly or via support, to desist from beating and in other criminal ways controlling the lives of those close to them.

Measures to prevent repeat violence must be improved. Perpetrators of violence must be more easily able to seek support and treatment to change their violent behaviour. The police need to reinforce their efforts to prevent continued violence. Knowledge of the personal and social factors that magnify the risk of certain people developing violent behaviour towards those close to them must be translated into practice. For this reason, initiatives for perpetrators of violence must also address problems such as alcohol dependence, unemployment and mental health problems.

Main proposals in brief

The report presents proposals to the Government concerning legislative amendments and remits. But it also contains a great range of proposals, advice and calls to decision-makers and everyone else involved in the various relevant public activities. All of these could at any time step up their efforts against domestic violence. The national coordinator has produced a special guidance document for anyone seeking support on how continued development in collaboration with other public authorities could be achieved.

Making things easier for victims of violence

Many victims of violence have lived with violence around them for a long time and have waited as long as possible before seeking help. Violence is often not discovered until it reaches a certain level of seriousness or can no longer be concealed – when someone calls the police or school staff discover a child's bruises.

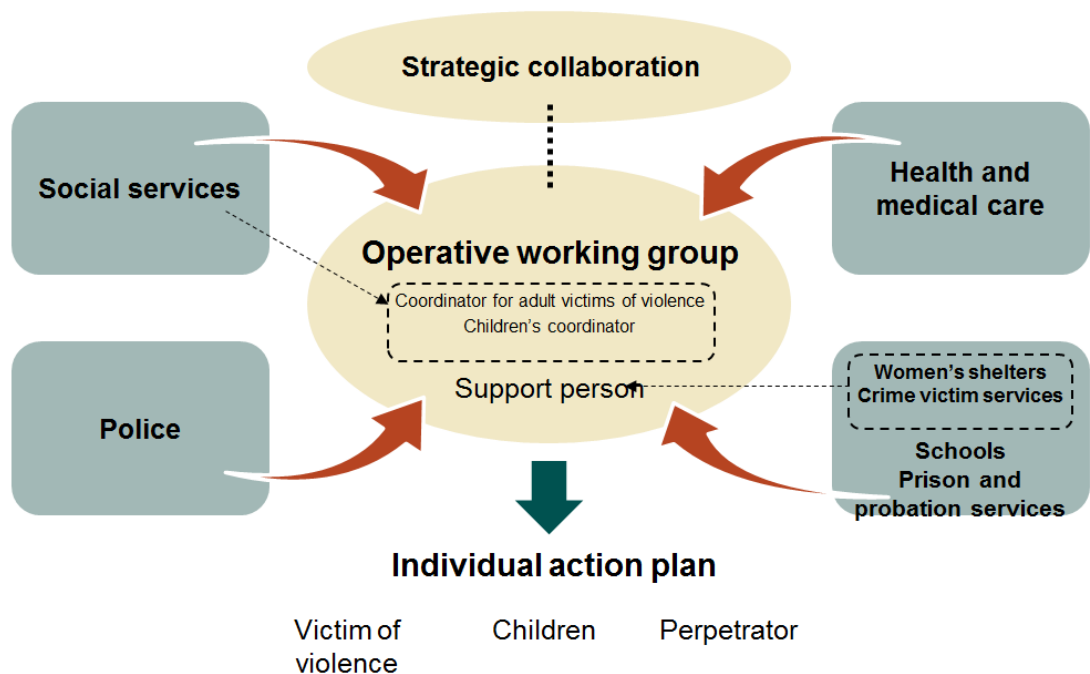
There must be a clear chain of measures and established routines in place when this happens. This is particularly important in urgent situations, or in situations where it may feel difficult to take a stand and report someone, as in the case of a preschool or school teacher hesitating to report a parent.

- There should be an *operative working group* against domestic violence in every municipality. In the working group, the authorities should work together on measures for children and adults who are, or risk becoming, victims of serious violence.
- *Special coordinators* within social services should hold measures together for victims of domestic violence. Social services should have *separate children's coordinators* for children who are victims of violence.

- The municipalities' responsibility for the *sheltered housing for victims of violence initiative should be regulated* in the Social Services Act. A *permit should be required* to run sheltered housing.

The authorities that become involved when violence is discovered must cooperate more. There is also a need for measures to ensure that violence is discovered earlier. The authorities that come into contact with groups at substantial risk of becoming victims of domestic violence should begin to ask questions about exposure to violence. This applies, for example, to authorities working with people in need of treatment for substance abuse or mental health problems. It is therefore proposed that the National Board of Health and Welfare conduct a pilot scheme to support *routine questions about exposure to violence being asked* of health care patients and social services clients.

Figure 2: Diagram of operative working groups



Listen to children

It is disheartening to observe the extreme vulnerability of children in cases of domestic violence. Even when children try to show that something is wrong, it can be difficult for them to get help – adults sometimes do not dare to ask, they sometimes refuse to listen and they often ask the wrong questions.

Even when an adult sees, understands or attempts to help, the situation can be difficult for the child. The child can end up in a drawn-out bureaucratic process in which they do not always know what is happening, why something is happening or what will happen next. At the same time, they may have to live with their parents' blame.

There are a number of fundamental problems with how society deals with children living with violence. It has not been possible to research in enough depth to make proposals on all of these issues. But it is clear that a separate inquiry into the *situation of children in sheltered housing* is needed to clarify the legal status of children, the rights of custodial parents and the responsibilities of the social welfare committee.

The national coordinator puts forward several concrete proposals on how society's measures for children who are victims of violence or who live in families where domestic violence occurs can be improved:

- In legal terms, the social welfare committee should be *obliged to immediately open an investigation* when it becomes aware that a child may have been a victim of violence or have witnessed violence against a close relative.
- Health and medical services should be obliged to *give special consideration to children's need for information, advice and support* when they or someone close to them have been victims of violence or abuse.
- When a social welfare committee has completed an investigation into the need for measures, it should be entitled to follow up the child's situation for *up to six months*.
- Municipal mobile resource teams are proposed as proactive support in day-to-day work in preschools, for families in need of this. Measures should be early and preventive.

There is a great need to develop knowledge, working methods, follow-up and supervision in the area of children who are victims of violence. Examples of proposals in this area include:

- Establish a *national knowledge centre* on violence against children and child abuse at the National Board of Health and Welfare.
- The Health and Social Care Inspectorate should be tasked with *exercising continuous supervision* of the work of social services and health and medical services with children who have suffered or witnessed violence.
- The National Police Board should be tasked with producing a *threat and risk assessment manual for children* living with violence and should develop a *model for child impact assessments for use by the police*.

Measures against honour-related violence and oppression

Honour-related violence and oppression are the aspects of domestic violence on which society has had the greatest difficulty agreeing what should be done. The term is controversial, measures are erratic and the extent of this type of violence is unclear. For this reason, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention should *survey the extent of honour-related violence and oppression*. Society's various initiatives should also be thoroughly evaluated.

In order to develop early measures and strengthen preventive efforts, the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society should create a *model for intercultural counsellors* that can be used in schools where there are special needs. Preventing domestic violence should also be considered a goal of the *civic orientation for newly arrived immigrants*.

Focus on the perpetrators of violence

There are different types of perpetrators of violence, who need different types of treatment to stop perpetrating violence. In the view of the national coordinator, there is potential to develop efforts in this area.

- *Police measures against repeat violence should be developed*. Police should chart who is exposed to repeat offences, increase support to the victims of crime, prompt perpetrators to change their ways and follow up on reported cases.
 - A *national support line* should be established for those who need to seek help in dealing with their aggression.
 - The Social Welfare Committee should *offer temporary housing* for perpetrators where appropriate, and give support and assistance to ensure that people who commit violent acts against those close to them *change their criminal behaviour*.
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The national coordinator also proposes stricter legislation for cases when people subject those close to them to gross or repeated acts of violence. Social services and health and medical services should be able to *breach confidentiality in order to prevent serious offences* in close relationships. The period of validity for *non-contact orders when there is a shared home* should be extended to a maximum of three months. The scale of penalties for breaching non-contact orders should be increased.

Ensure better conditions for voluntary activities

Women's shelters, crime victim services and other voluntary organisations are a very important complement in municipalities' responsibility to provide support to victims of violence. The current system of government grants to these organisations is overly bureaucratic. It leads to short-term initiatives and follow-up obligations that are unreasonable in the context of voluntary work. Women's shelters and crime victim services should therefore be strengthened through a shift from the current form of government grants to *long-term organisation grants*.

Clarify the national structure

The national coordination of efforts against domestic violence requires clarification. Effective coordination is needed, both between government agencies and in relations between the Government Offices and other authorities. A special *ministerial group* against domestic violence is therefore proposed. In addition, domestic violence should be included as *part of alcohol, narcotics, doping and tobacco (ANDT) efforts*.

Efforts at national level should also be integrated with local efforts at municipal level and regional efforts at county level. For this reason, the *mandate of county administrative boards* in the area of domestic violence should be developed and clarified. The county administrative boards should, for example, be given an important role in building up the operative working groups.

It is also important to follow up ongoing efforts:

- Freedom from domestic violence should be a *national public health objective*.
- There should be a *national analysis of trends* in domestic violence every three years.
- A model for *local breakdown inquiries* in cases of domestic violence should be developed. These investigations should show more quickly what experience can be gained from individual cases.
- The *socio-economic effectiveness* of the area domestic violence should be analysed in regional pilot schemes.

A matter for everyone

A complex social problem

Over the last 15 years, society has invested heavily in reducing domestic violence. It is difficult to assess the effects of these measures. However, there is much to suggest progress in several areas. From an international perspective, Sweden has worked successfully against domestic violence.

If results are to continue to improve, more fundamental reforms may be necessary. Initiatives against domestic violence cut across several policy areas, including crime, gender equality, integration, children's and public health policy. Many changes, both small and large, are needed in all of these areas to reduce domestic violence. There are no simple overall solutions. Rather, what is needed is long-term, differentiated and sustained cooperation throughout society: efforts with a clear public health perspective.

Domestic violence stems, among other things, from the unequal balance of power between the sexes: men who control women's living conditions and use violence to impose their will. It is important to address these systematic power differences between women and men in society. This requires even more active efforts for increased gender equality, e.g. preschools and schools consciously working on gender roles and norms.

Efforts for increased gender equality are a fundamental part of society's long-term measures against domestic violence.

Everyday efforts

In the view of the national coordinator, many improvements can be made in efforts against domestic violence without any major legislative amendments, extensive reforms or detailed follow-up. Efforts can be made in everyday contexts. This could mean in health centres, school staff rooms, social services offices, preschools, local trade union branches, tenant-owner associations, Swedish for Immigrants classrooms, football clubs or local police stations, or at municipal executive board meetings.

One important finding is the importance of giving those working against violence time and space to develop new solutions and try new methods. The local authorities that deal with victims of violence must also cooperate more closely in everyday, continuous development.

The national coordinator has encountered enormous engagement among many working against domestic violence. They have a curiosity and a wealth of ideas that should be utilised more. The relevant managers within the police, social services and health and medical services, for example, have a great responsibility in this respect. They must allow creative colleagues greater scope for their ideas. The government agencies can also help in this respect by sharing concrete tips and successful working methods.

For most people, being beaten by, or beating, someone close to them is associated with a great deal of guilt. The proportion of violent incidents that come to the attention of the authorities is still very small. More conscious everyday efforts, for example with parents and children in preschools and schools, or in occupational health services, are the most sustainable aspect of efforts against domestic violence in the long term.

Everyone should therefore talk more about violence in everyday life. This will mean that more people dare to ask for help.

Annex 1 – Proposals in SOU 2014:49

Understand the complexity and try new approaches together

- Pursue joint operational development at local and regional level.
- Analyse the socio-economic effectiveness of regional pilot schemes.

Focus on the perpetrators of violence

- Develop police efforts to prevent repeat victimisation with respect to domestic violence.
- Municipalities should offer perpetrators of violence temporary housing.
- Develop treatment for perpetrators of violence.
- Establish a national telephone line for perpetrators of violence.
- Offer public employees treatment for aggression problems.
- Legislate on the responsibility of social welfare committees to offer perpetrators of violence help to change their behaviour.
- New rules on breaching confidentiality to prevent serious domestic violence.
- Increase the scale of penalties for breaches of non-contact orders.
- Longer periods of validity for non-contact orders concerning shared homes.
- Increase the possibilities to seize written messages in cases of crimes against close relatives.

Making things easier for victims of violence

- Establish local cooperation agreements on domestic violence.
- Establish operative working groups against domestic violence in every municipality.
- Coordinators within social services should be responsible for coordinating measures for victims of violence
- Establish special children’s coordinators within social services.
- Offer victims of violence an external support person to provide support outside the authorities’ mandates.
- Ask questions about exposure to violence as a matter of routine within health and medical services and social services.
- Legislate on the responsibility of municipalities for sheltered housing and make permits obligatory in the sheltered housing sector.

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- Expand the possibilities for social services and health and medical services to submit information to the police when a crime is suspected.
 - It should be possible to issue forensic medical certificates without injured parties' consent in cases of suspected offences with a scale of penalties that includes at least nine months' imprisonment.
 - Injured party counsels in cases of offences committed in close relationships should be well suited to the task.
 - Police and social services should assist victims of violence in collecting personal possessions.
 - Special offence codes for violent crimes against people with disabilities should be investigated.
 - Provide better conditions for women's shelters and other voluntary organisations working for victims of violence through long-term organisation grants.

Listen to children and take measures

- Establish a national knowledge centre on violence against children and child abuse.
- Train teachers and preschool teachers on the subject of domestic violence.
- Violence prevention perspectives should be brought up in induction dialogues in preschools.
- Mobile teams should offer targeted support to preschool-age children. The mobile teams should be a source of support for preschool staff, parents and children.
- Children living with domestic violence should always be investigated by the social welfare committee.
- Developed supervision of social services' and health and medical services' work with children who have been victims of violence.
- Social services should convene meetings when legal proceedings are complete to provide information to custodial parents and offer support and help.
- Expand social welfare committees' possibilities to follow-up on children who have been victims of violence.
- The situation of children in sheltered housing should be investigated separately and more closely.
- Health and medical services should give special consideration to children's need for information advice and support when they have been victims of violence.
- Police should produce a threat and risk assessment manual for children living with violence, and develop a model for child impact assessments within police activities.
- Special representatives should explain the outcome of legal proceedings to

children.

- Social welfare committees should be notified of non-contact orders where children are involved.

Special measures on honour-related violence and oppression

- Survey the extent of honour-related violence and oppression at national level.
- Develop a model with intercultural guides for schools with special needs.
- Police routines for honour-related matters with an international dimension should be developed.
- Methods used in efforts against honour-related violence or oppression should be evaluated.
- The Swedish Agency for Public Management should evaluate the measures against honour-related violence and oppression being pursued by the Östergötland County Administrative Board.

Clarify the national structure for coordination and follow-up

- Freedom from domestic violence should be a national public health objective.
- Measures against domestic violence should be included as part of efforts on alcohol, narcotics, doping and tobacco (ANDT) issues.
- Children's exposure and preventive measures should be set out clearly in national strategies.
- Establish a ministerial group against domestic violence.
- A regular national analysis of trends in the area of domestic violence should be undertaken every three years.
- The mandate of county administrative boards in the area of domestic violence should be developed and clarified.
- The National Board of Health and Welfare should be tasked with producing a long-term development strategy for continued method development on domestic violence.
- The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention should compile information on effective police methods to prevent repeat violence against children and adults in close relationships.
- Local and regional investigations of serious domestic violence should be tested.