



Country report Sweden

Responding to Child to Parent Violence:
European Perspectives

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Country Reports on Child to Parent Violence - Sweden

compiled by Ulla Mortensen - covering time period 1 Feb 2013 to 12th January 2015.



Source of Map: BBC News Online <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17955808>

Introduction

There are about 9.7 million people living in Sweden, of whom about 2 million are under the age of 18. Eighty five per cents of the population live in cities. About one in five children has a family with roots in another country. According to the European Platform for Investing in Children (http://europa.eu/epic/countries/sweden/index_en.htm) "Swedish parents are among the EU's most successful in balancing work and family responsibilities. Female and maternal employment rates are among the highest in the EU, and child poverty is the lowest. The country's family policy is aimed at supporting the dual-earner family model and ensuring the same rights and obligations regarding family and work for both women and men".

When it comes to young people and domestic violence there are no specific policies in Sweden. We often see children as victims of domestic violence and it is quite recently that we have started talking about young people as potential instigators. Perhaps for these reasons it came as a surprise that the issue of child to parent violence was found to exist in Sweden although it is a hidden and largely unacknowledged issue. As a result there are no official policies or legal definitions of Child to Parent Violence (CPV) in Sweden. The definition that we use is child to parent violence is a harmful act carried out by a child with the intention to cause physical, psychological, or financial pain or to exert power and control over a parent (Cottrell 2001; Calvete et al 2013).

Political, Social and Cultural Context

Sweden has a wealthy and largely middle class population with a traditionally excellent welfare state. State welfare provision has been undermined by neo-liberal policies and cuts in funding for services. As a result of these policies the gap between rich and poor in Sweden has increased. Young people in particular have high levels of unemployment and poverty and many cannot see a future in the country and so leave to work elsewhere.

In Sweden it is mostly the case that both parents are working but there is relatively generous parental leave as compared with other European countries. In relation to family policy, family centres were established in the 1970s. "The first model, the Gothenburg Model, presupposed universality and the objective was to reach all parents. During the course of the years, the model has been modified in different ways" (Kouvonen 2012, 8). All. All parents are invited to positive parental programmes during pregnancy and most parents attend, both mothers and fathers. During pregnancy and during the child's first 6 months there is a screening test for parents with questions about drug use and domestic violence. Parents who are believed to be at risk are offered special support. When the children grow older there are many opportunities for parents to attend other training, for example how to understand and deal with teenagers. Many parents take the opportunity to attend. However, from anecdotal evidence parent/s tend to focus on making things easier for children, 'curling parents', they do everything for them and children as a result often do not take responsibility at home. Children can become very dependent and demanding of parents for material goods but also for services. It is a paradox that whilst children are more independent and entitled they are yet in some ways more dependent

Statistics on CPV

CPV is a hidden issue in Sweden and not measured explicitly by any agency hence we have had to look at violence in the family and society more generally.

The Brå survey in the form of telephone interviews was conducted within the framework of the Swedish Crime Survey (STU), an annual survey concerning people's safety and victimization. The levels of victimization noted among people appearing in this survey should be considered as minimum levels, as there is no doubt a large portion of cases that go unreported. The two main questions posed by the survey are:

- *What proportion of the population (16 - 79 years old) has been subjected to offences in a close relationship during the past year (2012) or at some other point in life?*
- *To what extent have these victimizations been reoccurring?*

In total, 6.8 per cent of the population stated that they were victimized in close relationship in 2012. The share of women victimized in close relationships was almost equal to the share of men victimized (7.0 per cent among women and 6.7 per cent among men). The numbers remain similar after separating psychological and physical violence – 6,8 per cent of women and 6,2 per cent of men were subjected to psychological violence, while 2.2 per cent of woman and 2.0 per cent of men were subjected to physical violence. The two most common forms of offences are systematic violations and attempts to limit a person's freedom. It is more common for women to be subjected to more serious violence and to have a greater need of help and aid, primarily in the form of medical care. Among the persons subjected to aggravated assault, around 29 per cent of the women and 2.4 per cent of the men stated that they had sought or had needed to seek a doctor, nurse or dentist.

Repeated victimization is more common among women. Women state to a greater extent that they have been subjected to recurring offences (56 per cent of the victimized women compared to 40 per cent of the victimized men). Out of the whole population, 3.8 per cent of women and 2.5 per cent of men are estimated to have been subjected to recurring psychological violence in 2012.

At least 150,000 children live in households where violence occur. About one third of the victimized women and one quarter of the victimized men in the survey state that they have children living in their household. When applied to the population, this corresponds to almost 83.000 women and 67.000 men. If there is a child living in each of these person's households this means that an equal number of children live in households where violence has occurred in 2012.

Legislation and Policies

Sweden has for many years law, legislations and plans which regulate how to act when children are violated or abused. The oldest regulations have been used for about 30 years, some have been changed over the years and many new have been added. Many different campaigns and training courses have been held over the years and these documents are now well known to both professionals and general public.

You can find law in for example the Penalty Code, Parental Code, Social Services Act. The message in all these regulations is that it is absolutely forbidden to use violence or abuse against children. Parents, teachers, other professionals or caretakers who are violent or abusive to children may be sentenced to jail. Teachers, for example, can be fired and children may be taken away from their parents and placed in foster care.

There are also authorities that work for children's rights, eg the Children's ombudsman, the Public Health Agency, BRIS(Children's Rights in Society), Red Cross and a lot of NGO's

There are helplines that both children and parents can call for advice and support and for some years now also many forums for discussion are available on the internet.

All programmes and good practice are gathered by the Public Health Agency of Sweden. They make scientific studies on programmes and can give advice.

There is also a lot of practical work being done concerning Domestic Violence. Collaborative groups between social services and police and sometimes prosecutors meet on regular basis to discuss the best ways to prevent domestic violence and also what to do when it occurs.

When we started this project – Responding to Child to Parent Violence, we did not know what kind of rules and regulations and programmes are available for violence against parents. We felt that this kind of problem should be included in domestic violence as the victims, parents and siblings are part of the family. We found that there is no research in this field and there are no specialised programmes that can be of help for parents and teenagers who find themselves in such a situation.

At the age of 15, young people can be sentenced to different kind of punishment according to law. But there are a lot of feelings of shame and blame that makes it hard for parents to report their own children. Very few parents want to send their children to prison.

Parents are ashamed of not being able to handle the situation with their teenager and they often blame themselves for not being good enough parents.

Legislation

The most important laws in Sweden concerning domestic violence are

Discrimination Act

Children and Parents Act

Swedish penal Code

There is also the Children´s Ombudsman who represents the rights and interests of children and young people based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

And the Equality Ombudsman who ensures compliance with the Discrimination Act.

The National Council for Crime prevention (BRÅ) has published a policy “How to prevent domestic violence”. For our project the last part of the policy is the most interesting. It talks about how to work preventative with young people and domestic violence.

BRÅ means that it is important for young people with early interventions where you can talk about attitudes and values regarding gender and violence. BRÅ has published several teaching manuals about preventative work. There is also a National Coordinator on Domestic Violence, Carin Götblad, who is former National Chief of Police.

Institutional Stakeholders

Social Services

The Social Services are ultimately responsible for providing support and help to the children, women and men who live with domestic violence and reside in their municipality. Every municipality in Sweden has a Social Services Department. The Social Emergency Service is responsible for taking measures in acute social situations that arise outside office hours.

On July 1st 2007, legislation concerning the responsibility of the Social Services with respect to women and children subjected to violence or who had witnessed violence was strengthened. A result of this is that Social Services shall now provide support and help as required to women and children who are subjected to violence or who have witnessed violence.

Health and medical care

Persons subjected to violence can be in need of different kinds of medical care.

- -Medical care if you have received physical injuries
- Support and Crisis counseling
- Guidance and reference to other help organizations
- Documentations of injuries.

Police

The police shall, among other things, monitor general order and security, carry out detective work and crime investigation. The Police have to intervene if they gain knowledge of an act of violence. Domestic violence falls within the category of general prosecution, which means that the Police do not need to wait for the victim to report the offence before they start investigating.

NGOs and Helplines

There are helplines for women, men and children where you can talk to someone anonymously and parent lines, where you can get support and advice as a parent. Save the Children and BRIS (Children's rights in Society) are two organizations that actively are working with family relations. There are also shelters and safe houses for both women and children where they can stay for a shorter or longer period. Support for Crime victims (Brottsofferjouren).

Participation in other Daphne projects

Ulla Mortensen has participated in a previous Daphne project called "Be Supportive, Not Violent. Positive Parenting for Happy children". The project developed a new model of parenting education that promotes positive and non-violent parenting. You can read more about the project on the homepage Be Supportive Not Violent.

<http://www.centrsdardedze.lv/en/home-page>.

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