

Women's Violence Taboo-Ridden in Norway



Worried: One of five children has experienced violence committed by their mother. The minister is worried.

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Seen in total, mothers beat their children more often than fathers do, says Svein Mossige. In cooperation with Kari Stefansen, the NOVA-researcher published a report on Friday on physical violence and violation against Norwegian children and youngsters. The findings are terrifying. <http://www.nova.no/?id=15747&subid=0&language=0> (In Norwegian)

- 20 percent have experienced violence committed by their mother
- Mothers are committing equally severe violence as fathers
- Violence committed by mothers are perceived as a lot worse for children

Mothers are most violent

20 % of the children had experienced violence committed by their mother, 14% by their fathers.

16 % of the girls and 14 of the boys said that they had been exposed to lenient violence committed by their mother. Numbers on fathers were 9 % both for boys and girls. 6 % of the girls had experienced severe violence, and the mother was equally often the perpetrator as the father. For the boys the numbers were 4 % by mothers and 5 % by fathers.

– The reasons for this might be diverse. One can be that women more often are alone with their children, and often the mother is more together with their children than their father, says Mossige.

Increase the risk of suicide

The research also shows that children get most severe problems when the violence is committed by their mother.

Severe violence committed by the father increased the risk of eating disorder, anxiety and dissociation, while severe violence from their mother increase the risk of suicide.

In violence researcher Ragnhild Bjornebekk's opinion these results are dramatic.

– We have a perception that the mother is the loving person who protect and see to that children get their needs covered. When mothers are hitting it is possibly perceived even more dramatic than when fathers do it, says Bjornebekk. She gets support from Ingeborg Veia in the organization Voksne for barn (Adults for Children).

– This is very surprising reading. But it might have a connection to that we don't want to know that mothers are beating children.

Adults for Children says that the issue is very unsayable in Norway.

– It is a lot of shame joined to that mothers are beating, and we see that it is difficult for people to tell about it, says Veia.

Stressed women

Bjornebekk says the findings are different from other research on family violence.

– In Sweden the findings are that fathers are beating children more often. But we need to see this in association with changes of social groups in society, she says.

Research from Sweden shows that women with higher education beats their children more often than they did in the past.

– It is possible that we can see a connection to that people have a more stressing daily life than before, she says.

The researcher also means that it can be some truth in the myth that father beats mother, and mother beats children.

– Long lasting pressure and stress on the mother can lower the threshold for committing violence, she says.

Womens violence is increasing

Simultaneously all research shows that more and more women are using physical violence.

– We have seen an increase in registered cases of violence among women from the 1980's until today. The share of women in prisons is increasing, and we see more anti-social women. I don't know if it is any connection between this and domestic violence, but we need to do more research on this, she says.

In 2004 Hilde Pape published a research report on violence in couple relations that shows that women are equally as much violent to men.

(Comments by AK: Prof. Hilde Pape's, University of Oslo, findings shows that 6 % of men had been exposed to violence from their spouse the last year, 4 % of women said they had been).

– **Women's Violence is very taboo-ridden and traumatized, and we experience some hidden figures. It has been very difficult to show the facts, because all research has until now focused on men, says Pape.**

Violence researcher Sidsel Natland has researched on girls. She is warning against that the tendency that girls become more violent, increases when their mother beats them.

– Violent girls often come from homes where the father is beating. But if young girls also learn from their mother that violence is legitimate, this is very serious, she says.

– **Not acceptable**

Svein Mossige means we have to work with attitude changes, especially on lenient violence against children.

– From the research we find that physical violence, either it is lenient or severe, is remembered by the child who experience it. And it is not always parents themselves are able to distinct what is lenient or severe violence, says the researcher. He reacts upon statements in the media recently, stating that slaps and beats on the rear is acceptable when raising children.

– Our research shows that lenient violence is relatively wide-spread, and that this kind of violence may have unfortunate outcomes for the one who is exposed to it, says Mossige.

The Child Ombudsman Reidar Hjermann says it is very unfortunate that violence against children is said to be legitimate.

– **When celebrities like Carl I. Hagen (Former right wing politician) and AP-politician (Social Democratic Party) Aslam Ahsan appears in media and defends spanking, they give signals that mistreatment of children can be justified. This is very serious, he says. Hjermann do not believe that increased domestic gender equality will solve the violence problem.**

– It might maybe decrease mothers beating, but we have to see if fathers will beat more. We need to educate parents to understand that violence against children gives the inverse result of what we want, children that make good decisions based on what they mean is right and wrong, he says.

– **No excuses**

Children and Gender Equality Minister Manuela Ramin-Osmundsen means that the findings from the NOVA-report should cause real concern.

– We see that mothers often get a lot of the responsibility to raise children, and in some cases they can feel it is too much. This is still no excuse for committing violence. One can never excuse violence against children, she says.

Now the Minister want to increase the competence in the family protection offices, and that teacher students and pedagogues learn more on how to detect when children are exposed to

violence.

– It is poor focus on violence against children in the educational programs, but it is crucial that people close to the child have knowledge in this field, says Osmundsen.

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