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Violence against Women:

An EU-wide survey

1. Why was the Violence against Women survey carried out?

Despite the significant impact of violence against women, policy makers and practitioners in many EU Member States are still struggling with a lack of data that obscures the scale and nature of the problem. As most women do not report acts of violence against them, policy and practical responses to address violence against women are not always informed by comprehensive evidence.

There have been repeated calls over recent years from different quarters for comprehensive data on violence against women, including by a number of presidencies of the Council of the EU, monitoring bodies such as the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and the Council of Europe.

FRA's EU-wide survey responds to a request for data on violence against women from the European Parliament, which was reiterated by the Council of the EU in its Conclusions on the Eradication of Violence against Women in the European Union.

2. How was the survey conducted?

The FRA survey on violence against women, which is based on face-to-face interviews with 42,000 women, presents the most comprehensive survey worldwide on women's experiences of violence.

- Women aged 18-74 who live in the EU and speak at least one of the official languages of their country of residence were interviewed for the survey. The interviews were conducted face-to-face by female interviewers in interviewees' homes using standardised survey questions across all Member States, and took place between March and September 2012.
- All respondents were selected randomly and the survey results are representative both at EU and national level.

3. How does the FRA survey differ from other surveys on violence against women?

Before the FRA survey on violence against women, there was no comparable data available on the issue at EU level. Since the mid-1990s, surveys which address violence against women have been carried out in many European countries, but the results of these surveys are not comparable. For example:

- The focus of the surveys has varied from domestic violence to intimate partner violence to violence against women more broadly, and even terms such as domestic violence have been defined in different ways in different countries.
- Sampling and interviewing methods have differed (e.g. telephone interviews vs. face-to-face interviews vs. self-completion questionnaires)
- Surveys have been carried out at different points in time, making it difficult to assess whether there are real differences between countries or whether they are due to developments over time.
- The questions asked differ from survey to survey, making it difficult to compare their findings directly.

4. What questions did the survey ask?

The survey asked women about their experiences of physical, sexual and psychological violence, including domestic violence, since the age of 15 and over the 12 months preceding the interview. Questions were also asked about incidents of stalking, sexual harassment, and the role played by new technologies in women's experiences of abuse. In addition, the survey asked about respondents' experiences of violence in childhood.

5. What is the prevalence of physical and sexual violence against women?

- 33% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15, while 5% has been raped since the age of 15.
- Out of all women who have a (current or previous) partner, 22% have experienced physical and/or sexual partner violence by a partner since the age of 15.
- 20% have experienced physical violence by someone other than their partner since the age of 15.
- Just 33% of victims of partner violence and 26% of victims of non-partner violence either contacted the police or some other organisation (such as victim support) following the most serious incident of violence.

6. What are the consequences of physical and sexual violence?

- The survey shows that emotional and psychological consequences of physical and sexual violence can be long-lasting and deep-seated.
- 21% of victims of sexual violence suffered from panic attacks after the event.
- 35% became depressed as a result of sexual violence.
- 43% had difficulty in subsequent relationships as a result.

7. How big a problem is stalking?

- 18% of women in the EU-28 have experienced stalking since the age of 15.
- 5% of women have experienced stalking in the 12 months prior to the interview. This would correspond to 9 million women in the EU-28 experiencing stalking within a period of 12 months.
- Out of all women victims of stalking, one in five (21%) had experienced stalking that had lasted over two years.
- 23% of victims of stalking indicated in the survey that they had to change their email address or phone number in response to the most serious case of stalking.

8. How many women have suffered sexual harassment?

- 55% of women have experienced sexual harassment in some form, such as unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing since the age of 15.
- 32% of all victims of sexual harassment said the perpetrator was a boss, colleague or customer.
- 75% of women in qualified professions or top management jobs have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime.

9. How many women have suffered cyber harassment?

- 11% have experienced inappropriate advances on social websites or have been subjected to sexually explicit emails or SMS messages.
- 20% of young women (18-29) have experienced cyber harassment.

10. What are women's experiences of violence in childhood?

- 12% of women indicated that they had experienced some form of sexual abuse or incident by an adult before the age of 15, which would correspond to 21 million women in the European Union.
- 97% of women who had experienced sexual violence in childhood said the perpetrator was male.

11. Do women report incidents of violence or harassment?

- 67% did not report the most serious incident of violence by a partner to the police or any other organisation.
- 74% of victims of stalking indicated that the most serious case never came to the attention of police.

12. How can differences between country findings be explained?

Women's perception of whether violence against women is common in their country is closely connected to their personal experiences of domestic or non-partner violence, their awareness of other women who are victims of violence, and their awareness of campaigns addressing violence against women. The interplay between these factors needs to be taken into account when interpreting data and in developing policies to raise awareness of violence against women in different settings.

Variations between countries in the prevalence of violence reported in the FRA survey need to be looked at in relation to a number of factors. It should also be noted that a 10-country survey by the World Health Organisation also found large differences between rates of domestic violence against women in different countries. FRA puts forward five possible explanations for observed differences between countries in prevalence rates for violence against women, which require further exploration:

- 1) The extent to which it is culturally acceptable to talk to other people about experiences of violence against women, including to survey interviewers.
- 2) Higher levels of gender equality could lead to higher levels of disclosure about violence against women, as incidents of violence against women are more likely to be openly addressed and challenged in societies with greater equality.
- 3) Women's exposure to risk factors for violence can be examined at the Member State level with respect to factors that might increase exposure to violence, such as patterns in employment (working outside the home) as well as socialisation and lifestyle patterns (going out or dating).
- 4) Differences between countries in overall levels of violent crime, which need to be examined alongside findings on violence against women. For example, a greater degree of urbanisation in a country is generally related to higher crime rates.
- 5) As there is evidence, including in FRA's survey, of a relationship between perpetrators' drinking habits and women's experiences of domestic violence, different drinking patterns in Member States may help to explain certain aspects of violence against women.

13. Are the results from FRA's survey in line with findings from other survey research on violence against women?

The FRA survey results are broadly in line with results from national surveys on violence against women. For example, a survey of 10,000 women in Germany found that 37% of all women interviewees have experienced at least one form of physical attack or threat of violence by a partner or a non-partner since the age of 16. In England and Wales, a survey of 5,991 women showed that 18% of women had experienced some form of stalking since the age of 16, while the

FRA survey found that 19 % of women in the United Kingdom have been victims of stalking since the age of 15.

14. What can be done to improve the situation?

- Women are abused at work, at home, in public and online. And as most respondents think that violence against women is common in their country, EU and national bodies need to review measures to tackle all forms of violence against women, no matter where it takes place. Ratification and aligning national laws with the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, as well as ensuring the full implementation of the EU Victims' Directive, will be important steps forward in this regard.
- Police, healthcare professionals, employers and specialist victim support service providers should be trained, properly resourced and given the necessary powers to reach out to victims to ensure all forms of violence against women (and girls) in varied settings are recognised, recorded and acted on.
- Women's (and men's) knowledge about violence against women needs to be enhanced through awareness raising that draws on detailed data to ensure that messages target the right audience. This can help improve reporting of violence to the authorities and victim support services.
- National stalking laws should comprehensively serve the needs of victims.
- Internet and social media platforms should proactively assist victims of cyber-stalking/harassment to report abuse, and be encouraged to limit unwanted behaviour.
- Member States should learn from promising practices already adopted in other countries that effectively address and combat violence against women.

15. How will the FRA follow up on the results of the survey?

FRA will promote the use of the survey results for policy change. This will be achieved together with other institutions such as the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). FRA will also work in close cooperation with the Member States and civil society organisations.

FRA's work on gender issues and related publications can be found at:

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/theme/gender> and the [violence against women press pack](#).

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