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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Comparative reanalysis of prevalence and health impact data in Europe – obstacles and possible solutions. Testing a comparative approach on selected studies.\*

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## Abstract

Comparison of prevalence data over time and between countries can help us to understand if and to what extent they reflect a common and unchanging social problem, and to consider possible explanations for differences, changes and continuities. Thus the EU-funded research network “Coordination Action on Human Rights Violations (CAHRV) has among its objectives collecting state-of-the-art studies and developing and testing a common framework for cross-national re-analysis. However, accurate data comparison is more difficult than it seems at first sight; even small differences in data collection, time-frames, acts and contexts limit comparability. This paper present some preliminary results and discusses the challenges; an extensive comparative paper will be published on the CAHRV website.

## Introduction

The CAHRV network, linking nearly 100 researchers from 18 countries, gathered together in one working group experts in prevalence and health impact research. In their first report<sup>1</sup>, an overview of the available European studies and their methodology and research instruments showed that, while there has been a considerable increase in cross-referencing between national studies on violence prevalence and health impact, these are still constructed differently from country to country, at least in part due to considerations of specific policy needs on the one hand, practicability in the cultural context on the other.

The working group then undertook to recalculate the data from national surveys to test the practicability of post-hoc inter-country-comparison between studies that are not identical in methodology, data collection and sampling. Five prevalence surveys on violence against women seemed close enough in their methodology and major questions, and the responsible researchers, members of CAHRV, had access to the data sets from Finland, France, Germany, Lithuania and Sweden, surveys conducted between 1997 and 2003. Based on examination of existing prevalence and health impact data, the project plans, in its next phase, to identify potential indicators in the absence of, or as follow-up to larger studies.

It has to be stressed that prevalence studies are often funded only up to the point when descriptive tables and a few correlations are presented. In-depth and multivariate analysis is usually not part of the politically motivated funding, and the researchers may not be able to continue data analysis over a longer period. Thus, the present work was largely done on a voluntary basis next to other primary work commitments of the researchers and in many respects can only be illustrative of what could be done. Furthermore, only one of the national studies has made the data set accessible to the research community; in other cases, comparative work is

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Manuela Martinez, Monika Schröttle et al. (2006): State of European research on the prevalence of interpersonal violence and its impact on health and human rights. [http://www.cahrv.uni-osnabrueck.de/reddot/CAHRVreportPrevalence\(1\).pdf](http://www.cahrv.uni-osnabrueck.de/reddot/CAHRVreportPrevalence(1).pdf)

dependent on the lead researcher. In the CAHRV re-analysis, each participating researcher re-analyzed her own data according to common guidelines.

The full-length report will document the working plan and the secondary data analyses and describe the results in detail. Overall, it proved possible to make the existing prevalence data more comparable, but experience was also gained about the possibilities and limitations of data comparison between countries. The limits relate to both differences in definitions, samples and methods, as well as cultural differences and differences in reporting that have not yet been sufficiently well studied.

The report also includes a comparative analysis of data on violence against migrant and non-migrant women in Germany and France, carried out by two researchers within the working group. This section further highlights the utility of inter-country and inter-cultural data comparison. In a third chapter the comparability of health impact data from European prevalence studies is considered and recommendations for future research are made. Finally, standards for comparative re-analysis of prevalence and health impact data will be discussed.

The present summary concentrates on aspects of this work most relevant to the UNECE meeting and is not intended to pre-empt the unfinished work of the CAHRV working group, but to reflect on some elements of present interest.

## **1 Comparison and comparability of prevalence data**

Comparison of prevalence data on interpersonal violence is faced with methodological, socio-cultural, economic and political differences and, in particular, persistent heterogeneity in the wording and perception of acts of violence that are included for measurement. The information needed for interpreting differences is often not given in the reports; it is frequent for only partial findings to be published. Methodological differences concern not only the wording of the questions, their location within the questionnaire, the diversity of target populations (e.g. age range, relationship context) and the method of interviewing (face-to-face, self-administered, telephone), but also the grouping together of variables in the construction of rates or indicators.

Good options were seen for the comparison of data on sexual, psychological and physical violence against women by intimate partners because the instruments are similar in this regard. A common core of items could be identified, reflecting comparable definitions to be used for structured secondary data analyses.

Less good options for comparison were seen in the case of violence against women in other life contexts and by other perpetrators than intimate partners and in relation to psychological violence by others than partners. These kinds of violence either are not included in some studies or they have been investigated in very different ways.

Some of the problems could be solved by a structured and well-defined data reanalysis, using the same age groups and time periods and recalculating prevalence data separately on defined population groups and violent acts. Other problems cannot be solved by data reanalysis and still limit comparability of prevalence rates (e.g. cultural variation, possible differences in reporting, differences in samples and methods of data collection).

## **2 Definitions and Measurement**

The first stage of the secondary analysis entailed harmonizing age groups, contexts, time periods and forms of violence.

### **(1) Age groups**

The data for each study was recalculated for the same age groups:

- for one central age-group, covered by all studies (20-59 years), and
- insofar as younger and older women were included, the age groups: 18 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 59, 60 and older.

Attention was also given to violence experienced in childhood and youth, but the data are not comparable because the instruments differ considerably.

### **(2) Contexts of violence included**

All studies asked questions on violence in different life situations inside and outside of the home and all contained a particular focus on intimate partner violence. Thus, for reanalysis a first distinction was made between:

- intimate partner violence
- violence outside of intimate partner relationships.

Intimate Partner Violence was divided into three categories: violence by current and/or former partner, by current partner and by former partner.

Where possible, perpetrators other than intimate partners were distinguished as:

- unknown persons/strangers
- the work place
- family members (other than partner)
- acquaintances
- professional care-takers.

### **(3) Time periods**

Violence prevalence in adult life was recalculated for

- the past twelve months and
- any time during adult life (since 16/18),

because most studies have information on these time periods.

#### (4) Forms of violence included

All studies asked about different forms of violence, either by separate questions or separate items within behaviourally specific item lists.

Forms of violence were divided into:

- physical violence (without threat)
- sexual violence (narrow definition: rape and attempted rape)
- psychological violence (selected similar items), and
- threat of violence.

For intimate partner violence, the overlap of physical, sexual and psychological violence in the current or former partnership was also analysed.

#### (5) Levels/severity of violence

To assess levels of severity of violence, data on injuries and frequencies of acts of violence of partners was recalculated. Although this assessment would be important for interpreting differences, it was very difficult to produce comparable levels of severity, because context of reference (the last or most serious act or the overall impact of a number of acts) differed.

Data on violence with injuries/without injuries was given as far as possible for all overall rates and/or selected incidents on physical and sexual violence. This could at least allow a tentative interpretation of variation in the results.

Frequencies/incidence of violent acts by partners was recalculated for:

##### a) the past twelve months:

- once
- more than once

##### b) ever and within a past relationship

- 1 incident
- 2-10 incidents
- more than 10 incidents

#### (6) Definitions of violence

On the basis of the item lists from the various questionnaires a list of core items common to all or most studies was selected. There were also subsets of data from a smaller selection of studies. Each researcher recalculated the existing data based on the new variables following a uniform definition that presents the least common denominator.

##### a) Common items for physical violence included:

- Shoved/pushed/pulled/kicked her/pressed her against the wall

- Slapped/beaten her (with open hand, fist, a hard object, her head against something) – light as well as more serious forms were included
- bitten or scratched her (so that it hurt)
- thrown a (hard) object at her/hit her with something that could hurt
- strangled/tried to strangle/scalded/burned her
- threatened or injured her with a weapon/shot at her/cut or stabbed her
- behaved violently against her in some other manner.

Threats of violence often appear within the item lists of physical violence and are sometimes included in summarizing items. These, as well as items of sexual violence, were excluded in recalculating physical violence.

Although the behavioral specification of physical violence seemed at first the area of greatest similarity, it was not possible to give comparable figures for these items separately, because they were grouped together in different combinations in the item lists of the studies. Thus, the comparative analysis only tells us what proportion of women in the sample had ever experienced any one of these acts.

#### b) Definition of sexual violence

Some studies used narrower, others broader definitions of sexual violence. To approach comparability the researchers agreed to limit this recalculation to narrower definitions and thus include only forms of *forced* sexual acts (against her will or perpetrated with physical force). As far as possible, the data was analyzed to distinguish between:

- rape
- attempted rape
- other forced sexual acts or unwanted sexual practices.

#### c) Definition of psychological violence

Psychological violence was only comparable for current intimate partner relationships. Only a few studies have investigated this for other life contexts (e.g. the workplace), and the definitions were too different for comparison. The following dimensions represent combinations of very similar items in the surveys:<sup>2</sup>

- extreme jealousy
- restricting the partner from seeing friends or other relatives
- humiliating behaviour
- economic control
- threaten to harm the children
- threat of suicide.

Here it was possible to give figures summarized for all items and separately for each.

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<sup>2</sup> Dimensions and items that were not comparable between surveys were excluded from this secondary data analyses; thus the dimensions included here represent only a selection of what can be measured as “psychological violence” by Intimates.

#### d) Definition of threat of physical harm

In several surveys, threat of physical harm was included in lists of physical violence by partners. The working group constructed a separate variable comprising:

- threat of violence (to harm physically or hurt the victim)
- threat to kill the victim.

The combination of Items on threat of physical harm differed in the studies: some used threat of physical violence only (Swedish and Finnish survey), some used only threat to kill (French survey) and some used both (German and Lithuanian survey).

### 3 Violence by intimate partners

Only in a limited number of studies do the items on violence have approximately the same content. Even where they are similar, on closer inspection the words used to describe acts of physical, sexual or psychological violence often retain different connotations and meanings in different languages and cultures.

The post-hoc analysis of data found similarity between some rates and notable differences between others. Likely explanations for these differences may be on a cultural and political level (influencing, for example, reporting behaviour) as well as linked to methodology. However, they may also indicate actual differences in violence prevalence between the countries. Thus, the resulting tables must be interpreted very cautiously.

#### 3.1 Physical Violence by Intimate Partners

The behavioral items for physical violence by partners were grouped quite differently; the questions are of different length and use various levels of differentiation. The French survey combined acts to make four separate items, the German survey asked about 17 different items, and the others lay in between. Also, some studies specify that they are asking about violence, while others merely list the acts that might occur.

Because of these differences, the variable created for comparison counts the proportion of women who have experienced “at least one of these acts”. Possibly, longer and more differentiated item lists, such as the German one, may produce higher prevalence rates because they increase the likelihood of remembering single acts, whilst rather summarizing questions as in the French study may tend to focus on more serious violence and so deliver lower prevalence rates. Also, the use of a generalized item “behaved violently against you in some other manner”, in the Finnish and Swedish study, may have influenced responses.

Lifetime prevalence rates for physical violence by **current and/or former** intimate partners could be compared for the Finnish, German, Lithuanian and Swedish surveys; the French survey only collected data on prevalence in the past 12 months for intimate partners, while lifetime rates

cover all life contexts. Lifetime prevalence rates range between almost 21% and 33% for those women in the age group 20-59 who ever had a partner. Lowest prevalence rates were found in Sweden, highest rates in Lithuania; overall prevalence rates in Finland and Germany are very similar (almost 28%).

For **current** partners, between 9% and 23% of women in the central age group have experienced at least one act of physical violence. Again, prevalence rates in Sweden are lowest and prevalence rates in Lithuania are highest while Finnish and German rates fall between these two rates. The relatively low rates in the Swedish study may, to some extent, have to do with the fact that only violence by spouses and cohabitants was counted and not violence by other partners (relationships more common among women in younger age groups). However, this cannot fully explain the country differences

The prevalence rates for physical violence by **former** partners are very similar and extremely high. In the Finnish, German and Lithuanian studies, around 40% of women, that is two out of five women who have at one time separated from a partner, report violence. The rates for violence by former partners are even higher when sexual and/or physical violence is included (see table 5). More than half of the Finnish women who have ever been separated have experienced at least one act of physical or sexual violence by a partner.

A clear overall pattern emerges: Violence from a former partner is always at least twice as frequent as that reported from current partners. Surveys have not yet found an approach to studying whether this pattern reflects difference in willingness to report (normalizing and denying the violence as long as the relationship is maintained), higher probability of separation when there is violence, or an increase in violence after the separation has occurred, since the surveys do not ask when the violence occurred in relation to separation. Qualitative research and service-based studies have shown that denial of violence in the current relationship can be an important coping mechanism, particularly when the violence is both chronic and severe.

It is notable that the variation between countries in reported violence by current partners (between 9% and 23%) is substantially greater than the variation in lifetime prevalence of partner violence (between 21% and 33%). Thus, violence by the current partner or within the past 12 months seems a poor indicator of overall prevalence, since the factors that work to lower reporting of current partner violence appear to operate differentially between countries and cultures. This suggests that experience of partner violence for the past five years might be a more reliable indicator; however, the present data comparison did not have that figure for most studies.

There are interesting differences between the results of the surveys when examined in more detail. For example, the relationship between age and violence prevalence does not seem to



follow the same pattern across studies. Last-year rates (which are more relevant for age-group-comparisons) show higher prevalence in younger age groups under the age of 34 in the Finnish, German and French studies (see table 7), but they are constant through age groups in the Swedish study.

Whilst in the German and Finnish study younger women have also reported the highest **lifetime** prevalence, no linear age-group differences were found in the Swedish study and the opposite tendency in Lithuania, where women from 45-59 reported the highest rates of physical partner violence. This may also be a consequence of (cultural) differences in reporting.

### **3.2 Sexual Violence by Intimate Partners**

It is very difficult to define exactly where sexual violence by intimate partners begins and where pressure is perceived as an (unwelcome) sexual advance, but not a violation. Some studies use rather broad definitions of unwanted sexual acts, others define it by forced acts that refer to legal definitions of rape and attempted rape. Some studies use very exact and clinical phrases to identify sexual violence in the questionnaires, others stay rather vague.

In all studies there is a relative consensus on the contents and the categorisation of acts of sexual violence but the detailed description of the actions, the structuring of the questionnaires, the time frame, and above all the grouping together of events and the subdivision into private or public spheres differs. Thus comparing data on sexual violence “irrespective of context” is difficult.

The questions on sexual violence by intimate partners differ between the surveys. However, an opening for cautious comparison is offered by the fact that all of them have included forced sexual acts in a similar way, and all but the Finnish study differentiate between forced sexual acts and attempts to force acts (see table 8).

The central age-group of women from 20-59 for the studies that have produced data on lifetime prevalence show very high levels of sexual violence by current and/or former partners in the Finnish study (11.5%) and rather similar rates of around 6 to 7,5 % in the other studies. Differences in reporting or sensitivity of the question cannot alone explain the almost twice as high rates in the Finnish study in relation to the German, Lithuanian and Swedish studies. Furthermore, the Finnish and Swedish surveys were administered in the same way. Thus there may in fact be higher rates of sexual violence against women by current and former partners in Finland.

As with physical violence, sexual violence is more often reported to be perpetrated by former partners in all of the countries, and here again the Finnish rates are highest. Between one and two out of ten women (11-18%) who have separated from a partner have at least once experienced sexual violence (see table 9). All data on sexual violence by current partners depend deeply on openness to reporting. Questions on attitudes, cognitions and values in this area could be useful for interpreting the results.

In all studies, physical violence by intimate partners is reported more often than sexual violence. It is not clear how far this is a difference in reporting behaviour and perception; it may be difficult for women distinguish clearly between forced sex and unwanted sex in a partnership. Some studies – like the Swedish and the German one - found that sexual violence tends to cause even more psychological harm (and trauma) than physical violence (anxiety, lower self esteem, suicide thoughts/attempts, feelings of shame and guilt). This suggests that it can be very difficult to recall and report on these experiences in surveys.

### **3.3 Psychological violence, threat and control by Intimate Partners**

It is still very difficult to define exactly what psychological violence in Intimate Partner relationships is, where it begins and when it is just one aspect of “bad partner behaviour”. Most prevalence studies use several dimensions of dominance, humiliating behaviour, threat and control in order to measure psychological violence; sometimes indicators are developed in order to assess lower or higher levels of psychological violence. It is often the combination and the frequency of several dimensions of psychological violence and control that helps to identify the more serious forms of psychological violence; these often appear in combination with physical and sexual violence (woman abuse). But the problem remains of not being able to define objectively what it comprises.

As most studies used similar items for the selected dimensions of psychological violence, the data are broadly comparable, with some limitations, between the Finnish, German, Lithuanian and Swedish surveys.

The figures on “extreme jealousy” as well as on other dimensions are very high in the Lithuanian and again lowest in the Swedish study. This may reflect different perceptions and cultural meanings of jealousy and control (e.g. as an expression of love, of male dominance or as an aggressive restriction of individual freedom).

Despite difficulties of definition, the significance and consequences of psychological partner violence should not be underestimated. Several studies that have investigated the impact of psychological violence on health and wellbeing of women concluded that the effects on physical and psychological health are even more serious than those of physical violence. Besser so: „Though it remains difficult to define and measure psychological violence uniformly across countries and (sub)cultures, the data comparison suggests that it makes sense to differentiate its

dimensions and find ways to compare and interpret them. Further development of methodology should seek ways to measure meanings and levels of severity of psychological violence (e.g. through multiple items, frequency, impact and individual perceptions).

### **3.4 Levels of severity of physical and sexual violence by partners**

Reported levels of violence may differ widely; it is important to examine whether studies have counted similar levels of severity and consequences. Severity of violence can be examined by:

- Prior definition of the acts as more or less severe
- consequences of violence (injuries, psychological and social consequences)
- frequency of acts in a given time period.

Studies using the CTS frequently define severity as if it were inherent in the concrete act. This is empirically not well founded. The German study found that acts that would be defined as minor can cause in at least one in seven to one in three cases physical injuries and thus can be underestimated in their actual severity when consequences are not considered.

In the present comparison the rates of **injuries** range between 57% and 79%; they tend to be higher in the Finnish survey. This suggests that the Finnish study has not only found a higher extent of prevalence of intimate partner violence but also higher levels of violence. Levels of violence between the Finnish and the Lithuanian studies seem to be rather similar.

**Frequency** could be compared cautiously for physical and/or sexual violence within the past twelve months for France, Finland, Germany and Sweden. Comparability is limited, because some studies ask this question only on violence by current partner while others referred to both current and former partners.

Again the Swedish study shows lowest rates of repeated violence (36%), whilst in the Finnish, German and French surveys the rates are similarly high, ranging between 50% in Germany and 55% in Finland. This could be a further indication that Swedish women did not only experience less intimate partner violence in terms of prevalence but also in terms of incidence.

The difficulties in comparing levels of severity of violence between the European studies reflect the lack of agreement and common definitions on how to measure severity of partner violence. The expert group suggests to develop common definitions and measurements on the basis of inter-country data analysis and exchange of experience among researchers.

### **3.5 Overlap of forms of violence**

Victimisation is often described in a very fragmented way, especially when quantitative data are presented according to the different forms of violence. However, different forms and acts of violence are often perpetrated in the same relationship. Furthermore, the harm done can be due

to the fact that one person can suffer different forms of violence in different life contexts over time.

All studies included in the secondary analysis found an enormous overlap between different forms of violence. The most common form of partner violence against women in all studies is psychological violence, which often occurs without any other form, but often in combination with physical violence. Physical violence is often reported without any other form of violence (e.g. in the German survey). Sexual violence is generally reported more rarely, but when it is, it often appears combined with other forms.

In the French survey 90% of the women who reported violence by a current partner cited psychological violence, over 80% of them without any other form of physical or sexual violence, 19% in combination with physical and around 5% in combination with sexual violence. Physical violence was in two out of three cases combined with psychological violence and in 1 out of 10 cases combined with sexual violence.

### **3.6 Correlations of violence with other factors**

There is a growing interest in research and in practice in identifying risk and protective factors. Many studies have collected relevant information, but in most cases the funding and timeframes did not permit multidimensional analysis of factors likely to increase or reduce the risk of violence as well as the risk of staying in violent situations and relationships without being able to escape from them.

The CAHRV working group can only offer some correlations that suggest certain continuities and similarities across studies. Difficult situations and violence experienced during childhood dramatically increase the risk of being a victim in adulthood; divorce and separation are strongly correlated with more physical and sexual partner violence, which may be a consequence as well as the occasion for intimate partner violence to escalate. The practise of violence does not follow a social hierarchy and all social and educational groups can experience violence, but persons socially and economically deprived or marginalised are at greater risk not to be able to stop or leave violent situations and violent partners.

Unemployment, alcohol, low level of education, low social status and dependency are often suggested as causes or risk factors for violence in close relationships. Although all of these correlate with violence in some studies, others have found only weak links, and many well educated, non-alcoholic and employed men exercise intimate partner violence.

In many countries it is a widespread belief that alcoholism is the main reason of domestic violence. The Lithuanian survey found that the relationship between prevalence and the

consumption of alcohol (by both partners) is not statistically significant, that is, women whose partners often consume alcohol to the level of being drunk are as often victimised through violence as those women whose husbands get drunk rarely. In the German survey, the relevance of the influence of alcohol in violent situations was confirmed, especially for serious forms of violence, but a high proportion of intimate partner violence was not connected with alcohol abuse on the part of perpetrators (or victims) at all. The Finnish study found a connection between alcohol and intimate partner violence, but also a relevant number of men exercising violence who don't use alcohol to the level of intoxication.

Aspects such as social isolation and social participation, women's and men's attitudes towards violence and the normalisation of violent behaviour also may be relevant. More multidimensional analyses on the strength and direction of influencing factors and their interdependency are needed in future research. A closer view of similarities and differences between societies could give more insight into what aspects of political and societal contexts contribute to a decrease or increase in interpersonal violence.

#### **4. Violence outside of partner relationships**

All studies included in the comparative secondary data analyses collected data on violence by perpetrators other than partners. The German survey, for example, asked about physical violence by anyone in the oral part of the face-to-face-interviews and then presented a list of possible perpetrators. The French telephone survey asked questions on each life context in separate sections of the interview (public space, workplace, etc.), the Finnish and Swedish postal surveys added summarizing questions on violence by men other than partners/cohabitants (in different wordings), whilst the Lithuanian survey asked about different victim-perpetrator contexts in one section of the interview only.

Highest lifetime prevalence rates of physical violence by other perpetrators than partners were found in the Lithuanian and in the German study. It seems very likely that this is partly due to methodological differences, because the German and Lithuanian studies used longer questions with behaviour-specific item lists whilst the other studies used summarizing or shorter questions on violence. Additionally both the Lithuanian and the German study included male and female perpetrators whilst the Swedish and Finnish surveys were related to male perpetrators only. In the German survey, among women who reported physical violence by others than partners, only 71% cited exclusively male perpetrators.

#### **4.2 Sexual violence outside of partner relationships**

Questions on sexual violence by other perpetrators than partners were included in all surveys, but again the questions were placed in different parts of the questionnaire and were related to

different contexts and perpetrators. Besides that, the questions on sexual violence by other perpetrators than partners differ widely: some have asked very detailed information on behaviour related acts, as in the German and French studies, whilst others have used rather summarizing questions (as in the Finnish, Lithuanian and Swedish surveys). Some have asked questions specifically on rape and sexual intercourse and almost all studies made a distinction between attempted and actual forced sexual acts.

The questionnaires for national prevalence studies are often based on the national legal norms for sexual assault. Thus the terminology of the Scandinavian countries refers to “sexual activity” whilst the German study refers to penetration and distinguishes between rape, attempted rape and other forced sexual acts. The forms of constraint (threats, forcing to remain still) are taken into account in the studies differently.

In the framework of this secondary data analyses it was agreed to include only items on sexual violence that refer to forced acts in order to make the data more comparable. Thus, the aim of constructing comparability narrowed the field taken into account. Although this may be inevitable in post-hoc comparison, consideration should be given in future research to avoid this, since the effect is to filter out results that do not fall into the common core area.

Most studies found that sexual violence is predominantly perpetrated by intimate partners. The overall rates of lifetime prevalence of sexual violence by other perpetrators than partners show prevalence rates in a wide range from about 8% up to 19%. Highest rates were reported in the Finnish and Lithuanian survey, followed by the Swedish survey, whilst rates in the Germany survey were lowest (more than a half lower than in Finnish/Lithuanian study). It must be underlined that these rates relate to rather narrow definitions of sexual violence and to violence perpetrated by others than intimate partners.

The complexity and difficulty of comparing data on sexual violence between countries suggests that more similar questions on sexual violence could be enlightening. This is more complex than it seems, because there can be culture-specific as well as language-specific subtexts of how to investigate this very sensitive topic. In the pre-study to the German survey, for example, the detailed item list from the British Crime Survey was tested. Researchers found in discussions with interviewers that women in Germany found it offensive and uncomfortable; after the pretest the list was shortened and summarized. But interviews conducted with Turkish migrant women showed that many still felt these questions to be too offensive; this may have been the case for some of the elder women in the general population too. This can lead to underreporting. Prevalence studies should consider including some questions on attitudes, norms and values to help interpret different reporting levels. The measurement of sexual violence needs further testing in different countries and population groups and perhaps new item lists should be constructed that are neither too detailed nor too vague; this could improve the chance for valid and reliable comparisons between countries and population-groups.

## 5. Lessons learned from data comparison

Overall, the data comparison by the CAHRV expert group suggested that real prevalence rates of violence against women might be higher in Finland and Lithuania and lower in Sweden, while France and Germany were placed differently in the middle range depending on type of violence. However, it is not possible to assess how far this was a consequence of differing social acceptability of reporting the different forms of aggressive behaviour, differences in how the items were phrased and the questions were asked, or whether might other factors enter into this. This could be addressed by questions that might capture factors that influence reporting.

What Liz Kelly wrote in her landmark Council of Europe report in 1997 still holds true and limits comparability of prevalence rates between countries and in time: “The level of official reporting should never be taken as an accurate estimate of the problem (...) Once the taboo on talking begins to be broken, (...) reporting increases (...) No country in Europe has yet created a climate of confidence for women and girls experiencing violence.”

Post hoc data comparison is possible and constitutes a useful contribution to the international discussion of prevalence. It requires detailed information on the measurement, data sets and framework of the studies and must interpret comparisons against this background very carefully. At a minimum, there is a need to harmonize time frames and age groups before quoting figures from different countries, as is frequently done in international reports. In CAHRV, it was only possible to do this for five studies, although a total of at least 19 such studies have been carried out in EU countries. Major obstacles are the unavailability of data for secondary analysis and the language of publication.

It seems difficult to reach agreement on the violence items themselves. Interestingly, physical violence, which seems the most obvious and well-studied form, presented the greatest obstacle to constructing differentiated variables across studies. The researchers had given extensive consideration to finding items and phrasing most likely to enable women in their country to disclose experiences that are may be painful, intimate, and even shameful. Although these studies, unlike earlier ones, were aware of each other’s work, differences in the instruments emerged as a major obstacle to comparability of the results. Thus, no cross-country differentiation could be made on types of physical violence, and no empirically based measure for the level of severity has been found applicable across studies. In future research, a few core items might be agreed upon, with additional aspects added on as the objectives of each survey in its socio-cultural and policy context may suggest.

Comparison was even more difficult for the information obtained in the different surveys about the impact of violence on women’s health. Surveys differ considerably in their health-related questions, and the differences in assessment of the violence, in particular of the level of severity, pose a problem for taking the further step of analyzing health impact.

It has been suggested that the impact of violence could be examined within each survey, and these results compared. In each case, comparison among the women that participated in the same survey, where the measurement of violence and that of symptoms were the same, would be possible and the fact of interest would be the higher rate of symptoms in specific subgroups of women depending on variables such as the type of violence experienced, the age group, and any other variables that can provide information about patterns of health status of women and its relation to the experience of violence.

Thus, it would be possible to compare if women of a survey who had experienced a medium to severe level of partner physical violence had similar, higher or lower levels of specific complaints than those who had a low level or no violence at all. The relation between the level of violence and the level of complaints could be compared with that found in other surveys. For comparing patterns of health impact within each survey many possibilities exist and many important questions arise about the role that variables such as cultural factors may play in the impact of violence on women's health.

The data comparison exercise has stimulated a lively debate within CAHRV on the advisability of developing standardized instruments for prevalence research. While on the one hand, comparisons seem necessary, and the calls for benchmarking and monitoring suggest that the instruments ought, at least, be measuring more or less the same phenomena in a comparable way, on the other hand, the diversity of existing studies is by no means due to lack of attention to issues of validity and reliability. The considerable expertise, engagement with the problem of gender-based violence, and research experience gathered within the CAHRV network has not resulted in selecting one instrument as appropriate to all countries, and it becomes clear that the choices made for the different studies were often grounded in the realities of the various countries. This raises the question, still being debated, of what degree of standardization will still yield a valid instrument and how to develop it.



*Selected tables from:***Comparative reanalysis of prevalence and health impact data in Europe –  
obstacles and possible solutions.****Testing a comparative approach on selected studies***Preliminary version, do not cite!***Table 1: Selected prevalence studies on violence against women for data secondary analyses**

Country	Year survey	Sample		Data collection	Publication/Survey
		Number	Age		
Finland	1997	4,955	18-74	Postal + self-administered	Heiskanen and Piispa, 1998
France	2000	6,970	20-59	Telephone	Jaspard et al, 2003
Germany	2003	10,265	16-85	Face-to-face+ self-administered	Schrötle and Müller, 2004
Lithuania	2000	517	18-74	Face-to-face	Reingardiene, 2002, 2003
Sweden	1999/0	6,926	18-64	Postal + self-administered	Lundgren et al, 2002

**Table 2: Questions/items on physical violence by intimate partners from each study used in the secondary analyses.**

French Study	Finnish Study	German Study	Lithuanian Study	Swedish Study
Has your current/ former partner: - Thrown an object at you, shoved/pushed you or touched you brutally? - Slapped or beaten you or behaved violently against you in some other manner? - Threatened you with a weapon (knife, tool, gun)? - Tried to strangle or kill you?	Has your current/ former partner sometimes be- haved violently against you, such as: - slapped you? - thrown a hard object at you? - beaten you with a fist or a hard object or kicked you? - strangled or tried to strangle you? - shot at you or stabbed or cut you with an edged weapon? - beaten your head against something?	How often have you experienced your current (former) partner attacking you physically, for exam- ple hitting you, slapping you, pulling your hair, kicking you, or threatening you with a weapon or other object? Frequently, sometimes, rarely or never? My current/former partner has: - pushed me away angrily - given me a light slap in the face. - bitten or scratched me so hard that it hurt or I became frightened. - twisted my arm until it hurt.	Indicate if your current or previous partner has ever: - Thrown something at you? - Pushed or grabbed you painfully? - Slapped you? - Pulled your hair? - Hit you with a hard object? - Kicked you? - Beaten you with a fist? - Strangled you? - Shot at you or cut you with a knife?	Has your current/ previous partner ever behaved violently against you: - thrown something at you that could have injured you? - pushed you, prevented you from moving, pulled you? - hit you with a fist, slapped you with a hard object or kicked you? - tried to strangle you? - beaten your head against something? - used a

	<p>- behaved violently against you in some other manner?</p>	<p>kicked me painfully, pushed or grabbed me hard.</p> <p>shoved me so hard that I stumbled or fell.</p> <p>given me a hard slap in the face or hit me with an open hand.</p> <p>thrown something that could have injured me.</p> <p>hit me with an object that could have injured me.</p> <p>hit me with a fist so that it hurt or I became frightened.</p> <p>thrashed me or beaten me up.</p> <p>strangled me or tried to smother me.</p> <p>scalded or burned me on purpose with a hot object.</p> <p>threatened me with a weapon, for example a knife or a pistol.</p> <p>injured me with a weapon, for example a knife or a pistol.</p> <p>assaulted me physically in another way that hurt me or made me afraid.</p>		<p>knife, firearm or other weapon against you or threatened you with it?</p> <p>behaved violently against you in some other manner?</p>
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**Table 5: Physical and/or sexual violence by Intimate Partners – lifetime -prevalence. Central age-group (20-59 years)**

	Finland	Germany	Lithuania	Sweden
<b>Physical and/or sexual violence by current and/or former partner</b> (based on women who ever had a partner)	29,9%	28,9%	37,6%	21,4%
<b>Physical and/or sexual violence by current partner</b> (based on women who currently have a partner)	18,9%	13,7%	23,7%	9,2%
<b>Physical and/or sexual violence by former partner</b> (based on women who had a partner before)	51,8%	41,3%	46,3%	32,8%

**Table 7: Physical Violence by partners by age group.**

	France Study		Finnish Study		German Study		Lithuanian Study		Swedish Study	
	Last Year	Ever	Last Year	Ever	Last Year*	Ever	Last Year	Ever	Last Year	Ever
<b>Physical violence by current and/or former partner by age</b>										
18 – 24 years	3,9%		14,6%	25,7%	(6,9%)	28,9%	-	22,7%	4,7%	20,3%
25 – 34 years	2,5%		9,0%	28,6%	(4,1%)	30,7%	-	30,8%	4,4%	19,5%
35 – 44 years	2,6%		6,9%	27,4%	(2,8%)	28,0%	-	33,3%	4,6%	21,1%
45 – 59 years	2,3%		4,7%	27,7%	(1,4%)	25,4%	-	44,5%	4,7%	20,8%
60 +	-		2,3%	14,3%	(0,1%)	13,1%	-	29,6%	5,2%	17,1%
<b>Physical violence by current partner by age</b>										
18 – 24 years	3,9%		11,0%	15,6%	-	16,7%	-	18,2%	4,5%	10,8%
25 – 34 years	2,5%		8,4%	17,2%	-	14,6%	-	26,9%	3,0%	7,5%
35 – 44 years	2,5%		6,3%	15,2%	-	13,2%	-	15,6%	3,3%	9,0%
45 – 59 years	2,2%		4,7%	19,0%	-	13,0%	-	26,5%	4,1%	8,5%
60 +	-		2,6%	11,4%	-	7,9%	-	18,5%	3,3%	7,0%
<b>Physical violence by former partners by age</b>										
18 – 24 years	3,3%		20,2%	53,6%	-	33,3%	-	27,5%	2,4%	27,8%
25 – 34 years	1,9%		5,3%	46,8%	-	38,5%	-	36,7%	4,6%	31,4%
35 – 44 years	5,5%		4,8%	49,2%	-	41,6%	-	51,3%	4,4%	33,3%
45 – 59 years	5,0%		3,1%	48,5%	-	40,3%	-	60,1%	3,2%	32,1%
60 +	-		1,3%	19,8%	-	15,6%	-	31,7%	7,2%	28,7%

- Annual rates for physical and/or sexual violence; not comparable.

**Table 8: Questions/items on sexual violence by intimate partners included from each study for the reanalyses.**

France	Finland	Germany	Lithuania	Sweden
Has your current/ previous partner: - Forced you to intercourse by physical violence? - Forced you to unwanted sexual practices?	Has your current/ former partner sometimes behaved violently against you, such as: - Coerced or tried to coerce you to have sex with him?	How often has your current/ former partner: - forced you to perform sexual acts, that you did not want to do? - tried to force you to perform sexual acts that you did not want to do. (once, several times, never)	Has your current / former partner: - raped you? - forced to have sex with him after threatening you (by word, hard object, gun, etc.)?	Has your current / former partner: - forced you to sexual activities by threat, adherence or by hurting you somehow? - attempted to force you to sexual ac- tivities by threat, adherence or by hurting you some- how? - forced you or attempted to force you to sexual activi- ties, when you couldn't defend yourself, e.g. be- cause you slept or used drugs?

**Table 9: Sexual Violence by Intimate Partners – lifetime -prevalence - central age-group (20-59 years)**

	Finland	Germany	Lithuania	Sweden
<b>Sexual violence by current and/or former partner</b> (based on women who ever had a partner)	11,5%	6,5%	7,5%	6,2%
<b>Sexual violence by current partner</b> (based on women who currently have a partner)	5,0%	1,0%	2,9%	1,4%
<b>Sexual violence by former partner</b> (based on women who had a partner before)	17,6%	12,1%	12,4%	11,1%

**Table 12: Questions on psychological violence by the current partner included from each study for reanalysis.**

	France	Finland	Germany	Lithuania	Sweden
My current partner ...					
a) extreme jealousy	prevented me from talking to other men.	was jealous and did not want me to speak with other men.	is jealous and doesn't want me to speak to other men/women.	is jealous and does not want me to speak with other men.	is jealous and demands to know whom I met and what I've done.
b) restricting the woman from seeing friends or relatives	prevented me from meeting friends or relatives or talking to them.	tried to restrict me seeing my friends or relatives.	prevents me from meeting friends, acquaintances or relatives.	tries to restrict me seeing my friends and relatives.	forbids me to meet friends and relatives.
c) humiliating behaviour	devalued everything I did; criticised my physical appearance; ignored or scorned my opinions	called me names in order to subdue me or to humiliate me.	says that I'm ridiculous, stupid or incapable.	calls me names in order to subdue or humiliate me.	calls me names in order to subdue or humiliate me.
d) economic control	prevented me from having access to the household money for day-to-day necessities.	prevented me from making decisions about the family finances and from shopping independently.	prevents me from making my own decisions about money or things I'd like to purchase.	ignores my opinion about financial decisions in our family.	prevents me from making decisions about finances or from shopping independently.
e) threaten to harm the children	threatened to harm the children or to separate me from the children.	threatened to harm the children.	threatens to take the children away from me.	threatens to harm or abuse the children.	threatens to harm the children.
f) threaten to suicide	threatened to commit suicide.	threatened to do something to himself if I leave him.	threatens to do something to himself.	threatens to do something to himself if I leave him.	threatens to do something to himself if I leave him.

**Table 13: Psychological violence by current Intimate Partner - central age group: 20-59 years.**

	France	Finland	Germany	Lithuania	Sweden
a) extreme jealousy	(4,4%)	8,2%	8,1%	24,4%	5,7%
b) restricting the woman from seeing friends or other relatives	3,2%	5,7%	8,1%	15,2%	0,5%
c) humiliating behaviour	(24,5%)	6,7%	(2,6%)	17,1%	5,9%
d) economic control	(1,2%)	3,8%	5,2%	(12,2%)	2,2%
e) threaten to harm the children	(1,1%)	0,2%	(0,6%)	8%	0,0%
f) threaten to suicide	(1,0%)	2,8%	1,3%	4,9%	1,0%
<b>At least one of these ...</b>	<b>(24,3%)</b>	<b>16,5%</b>	<b>14,3%</b>	<b>28,6%</b>	<b>11,6%</b>

\* for numbers in brackets comparability is limited.

**Table 19: Questions on and framing of physical violence by other perpetrators than partners from each survey.**

French study	Finnish study	German study	Lithuanian study	Swedish study
<b>Questions/Items</b>				
Has anybody slapped or beaten you or behaved violently against you in some other manner? Has anybody threatened or attacked you by a weapon or dangerous object (knife, stick, teargas, bottle, gun ...)? Has anybody tried to kill or strangle you?	After your 15.th birthday, has a man you know or a stranger (other than your current husband or cohabitating partner): – assaulted you physically, such as beaten or kicked you or used a weapon against you?	Sometimes people are physically attacked or become involved in physical conflicts. How often have you personally experienced being physically attacked since the age of 16, for example, someone hitting, slapping you, pulling you hair, kicking, or threatening you with a weapon or other object? Frequently, sometimes, rarely or never? + item list as with partners, table 2)	Indicate if your father/stepfather, any other known person or stranger has ever: - Thrown something at you? - Pushed or grabbed you painfully? - Slapped you? - Pulled your hair? - Hit you with a hard object? - Kicked you? - Beaten you with a fist? - Strangled you? - Shot at you or cut you with a knife?	Has it happened to you, that a man, with whom you did / did not have a sexual relationship (but with whom you were not married or cohabitant), - used physical violence against you (by physical violence is meant: slaps in the face and body; being pushed, pressed against the wall, kicked, restrained, slapped, bitten, hurt by a knife or shot by a weapon)?
<b>Framing</b>				
Questions were placed in different sections of the interview for each life context separately.	Question for violence by other than partners in one section.	Question for violence by any perpetrator in one section, followed by a differentiated victim-perpetrator-list.	Question for violence by any perpetrator in one section, but asked separately for different perpetrators.	Question for violence by other than partners in one section.
<b>Perpetrators / Contexts</b>				
Male and female perpetrators.	Male perpetrators only.	Male and female perpetrators.	Male and female perpetrators.	Male perpetrators only.

**Table 20: Physical violence by others perpetrators than partners. Lifetime prevalence.**

	Finland*	Germany*	Lithuania*	Sweden*
<b>Physical violence by other perpetrators than partners (central age group: 20-59 years)</b>	<b>12,0%</b>	<b>22,8%</b>	<b>18,4%</b>	<b>9,1%</b>
18 – 24 years old	17,1%	31,4%	25,8%	11,9%
25 – 34 years old	14,1%	26,5%	24,4%	10,2%
35 – 44 years old	12,6%	22,4%	21,2%	10,1%
45 – 59 years old	8,8%	18,3%	8,7%	6,6%
Since age of 60	4,7%	11,2%	4,2%	3,3%

\* Prevalence rates are not fully comparable because of differences in methodology and perpetrators included (see text above)