

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN SPEAK UP ABOUT IT!

IT'S NOT A PRIVATE MATTER!

Violence against women is not uncommon and can affect anyone – regardless of age, level of education, income or family background.

IT MAKES YOU ILL!

Women affected not only suffer from visible physical injuries, but also from the psychological effects and their long-term consequences.

THERE IS HELP!

No woman has to endure violence. Doctors, counseling centers, women's shelters, the police and the justice system can help you get out of a violent situation.



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Federal Ministry for
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,
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MEDICAL



Dear Readers,

Every human being has the right to a life without violence. Physical and psychological violence affects the people concerned to an equally high degree.

A person living in fear of violence, whose life is defined by violent experiences, can hardly live a free and independent life. Many of those affected shy away from speaking about what they have experienced out of fear or shame. Many of them do not dare to seek help.

Even after their worst experience of violence, two thirds of female victims of violence do not go to the police and do not seek out a support facility. One reason for this is the uncertainty as to what will happen if they confide in an outsider. They are afraid of losing control of what they might be setting in motion by doing so.

I would like to encourage those affected to take that first step away from violence and to trust their doctor or contact a qualified advisory service.

Furthermore, the federal helpline "Violence against women" offers easily accessible advice and support for those affected, their relatives and friends. Qualified, multilingual advisors are available around the clock at 08000 116 016 and on the website at www.hilfetelefon.de.

I very much hope that many of those affected will make use of this support and find their way to a life free of violence.

Manuela Schwesig,
Federal Minister for Family Affairs,
Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

VIOLENCE HAS MANY FACES

Domestic violence – regardless of where the crime is committed – includes all forms of physical, sexual and psychological violence that occurs between adults who are or were in a close relationship with each other. In particular, this includes people who are related to each other or who live together. The place where the crime is committed may be your own home, but also your place of work, public places, the daycare centre etc.

Domestic violence mainly affects women and is usually committed by men. It ranges from physical attacks such as pushing or hitting to forced sexual acts and psychological violence such as humiliation, stalking, constant control or insults by one's partner.

Many women feel ashamed because of the violence they experience, they feel guilty and find it difficult to talk about their experiences. This means that serious health consequences and effects often remain hidden from doctors too. This can lead to incorrect treatments, as chronic complaints often fail to be connected to the patient's violent experiences for years.

Violence can affect women of all ages and from all sections of the population.

In Germany...

- **25 percent** of women have experienced physical or sexual violence by a **current or former partner**.
- **13 percent** of women over the age of 16 have experienced criminally relevant forms of **sexual violence**.
- **42 percent** of women **have experienced psychological violence**, such as intimidation, slander, threats or psychological terrorisation.
- violence against women is mainly committed by a **partner or ex-partner** in the domestic sphere.
- women in **separation or divorce situations** are particularly vulnerable to violence by their (ex-)partner.
- **women with disabilities and impairments** are more exposed to all forms of violence throughout their lifetime than women in the general population.

Source: BMFSFJ: Life situation and the health and safety of women in Germany (2004). See also: The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights: Study on violence against women in Europe (2014)

VIOLENCE HAS MANY FORMS

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Holding, pushing, hitting, kicking, choking, strangling, injuring with weapons/objects, withholding food, sleep deprivation, etc.

SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE

Sexualized language, forcing the victim to watch pornography, forcing/coercing them into sexual acts, rape etc.

VERBAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

Insults, humiliation, threats, calling them mad, using children as leverage etc.

SOCIAL VIOLENCE

Forbidding contact, controlling, social isolation, taking away car/bike (keys)/ticket, imprisonment etc.

ECONOMIC VIOLENCE

Allocating or withholding money in small amounts, forbidding or forcing the victim to work etc.

Source: www.gobsis.de/thema-gewalt/haeusliche-gewalt





“NO LONGER BEING ABLE TO TRUST ANYBODY ...”

- Paula, 34

My boyfriend and I had been together for a long time and were very happy about our first daughter Laura. A happy little family – we did so much and got on well. However, after the pregnancy I only very rarely wanted to have sex. This had nothing to do with my feelings for him and, in order to avoid rejecting him, I usually played along. Nevertheless: He knew of course that I wasn't really interested and one night I didn't want to have sex so I refused. He went berserk and pushed me onto the bed, held my wrists until it hurt and forced me to sleep with him. At that time, I thought that perhaps it was somehow just part of it, but it happened more often that he became brutal and forced me to have sex. I was ashamed, began to drink and of course all of this didn't go over Laura's head either. When I went to the gynaecologist for my routine check-up, she recognised the signs. She asked me about the bruises on my arms and between my legs and I completely broke down. Finally, I was able to confide in someone. Today I know that my boyfriend had raped me. But it was only through the attention of my doctor that I was able to find the strength to leave my boyfriend. Today I am so grateful that she didn't turn a blind eye back then and that I was able to find trust and support.



“HOW WRONG YOU CAN BE ABOUT A PERSON ...”

- Simone, 26

In our relationship, Robert was always very courteous, he could read my every wish and we were always there for each other. Then, out of the blue, he suddenly broke up with me, without saying what was wrong. I was shocked as we were always so honest with each other. After some time, he wanted me back. But this was no longer possible for me as the trust was gone. Robert called several times a day, stood outside my front door and kept ringing the doorbell at night. At the start we were still on speaking terms but he became more and more insistent. If I went out, he would suddenly be there, even though I always sought out different venues. He was constantly writing comments on Facebook and posting pictures online. I was no longer able to keep up with blocking him on all media. I felt I was being watched all the time and had the feeling that I was no longer able to move about freely. Not only did he call family and friends, he even called my workplace – and I got in trouble with my boss. That was the turning point: I went to the police.



“I DIDN’T UNDERSTAND THE WORLD ANYMORE ...”

- Charlotte, 63

My husband had always enjoyed a few drinks extra at family celebrations or festive occasions. But after he was forced into early retirement, he started coming home drunk from the pub on the corner more and more often. I ignored it at first because I thought he would straighten himself out again. If he established a routine in his everyday life and found a task, everything would be okay. But the evenings when he drank three, four or five bottles of beer became the rule and not the exception. One evening, I had had enough and it just burst out of me: “Can’t you do something other than drink?!” Initially, he was shocked and insulted and then he became aggressive, jumped up and shook me until I lost my balance and fell to the floor. I didn’t understand the world anymore. What had become of the man I married 40 years ago and had loved so much? He was extremely embarrassed about it, he couldn’t look me in the eye and shied away from confrontation. But I couldn’t keep it bottled up inside and sought out a therapist. Now my husband and I see a couples therapist together and my husband is also attending a course for violent men and is trying to get his alcohol problem under control. Yes, I pulled the emergency brake in time; but not every woman manages to do so. I know this from my weekly meeting with women affected by violence.



“I DIDN’T EVEN KNOW HIM ...”

- Özlem, 40

I am glad to be here. I sit in a small room, somewhat sparsely furnished perhaps. My gaze falls on the small case that I had left with a good friend of mine for so long. Our district’s Equal Opportunities Officer advised me to do so. Yesterday evening, the time had come. My husband hit me again – harder than usual. I was in fear of my life. I called the police and was brought to the women’s shelter. What had happened?! As a little girl, I dreamed of becoming a doctor and of helping people. On my 16th birthday, this dream was over. That day, my father told me that he had found a man for me and I was now engaged. I didn’t even know him. Even before our wedding, my husband was very domineering but it got really bad afterwards. I was not allowed to go out alone and always had to be accompanied by a family member. In the beginning, I tried to stand up for myself. Then my husband grabbed me and pushed me to the floor. He often took his bad moods out on me. Sometimes he pushed me against the wall or hit me in the face. The move to the women’s shelter was essential. I cannot expect help from my family. They think that it is up to the husband to decide whether and how he is to punish his wife.

HELP AND ADVICE FOR REFUGEE WOMEN



**Interview with
Petra Söchting
Director of the helpline**

What experiences of violence are refugee women contacting the helpline about?

This varies widely. It often concerns violence they experienced in their countries of origin or during their flight, as well as violence that occurs here in the reception centres and refugee shelters. This largely concerns violence within a partnership or in the family as well as sexual abuse, rape and forced marriage.

How often is the helpline called by refugee women and how do these conversations actually work?

Since late 2015, more and more refugee women have been turning to us. This is certainly also due to the fact that the helpline is the only one in Germany that provides advice around the clock for free in regard to all forms of violence in 15 languages, including Arabic, Persian, English and French.

When they call, refugee women are put in touch with an advisor, who takes time and listens. The next step is to seek solutions together. All advice is provided exclusively by women. They are all qualified specialists from the psycho-social field. It is very important to know that the conversation is confidential and anonymous. This means that nothing is queried or passed on.

Those who contact the helpline decide for themselves what and how much they want to reveal about themselves and their history.

What advice do you give refugee women?

In principle, we clarify the rights of women in Germany and help them to make use of local, confidential support. But we discuss what can best help the woman affected on a case-by-case basis with each individual caller. There are no "one-size fits all" solutions.

Where else can refugee women get support?

Refugee women, like all other women who are victims of violence, can make use of the violence protection system, including women's shelters and local advisory services. Links with the asylum system, migration advice and, in the case of very specific risk, the police are also helpful. What is decisive here, too, is that the woman alone decides what is to happen.

SPECIAL PROTECTION NEEDS – REFUGEE WOMEN

- At least one third of all refugees are women and girls.
- They flee from war, oppression and persecution, as well as for gender-specific reasons.
- Often, they have already experienced various forms of violence in warzones and crisis areas.
- They can also fall victim to violence at the refugee shelter.

How can better protection for refugee women be ensured?

By taking safety aspects into consideration when accommodating women and children, for example separate sanitary facilities, lockable bedrooms and opportunities for privacy, as well as on-site interpretation and direct contact persons. It is very important that the women are informed of their rights and the support system in Germany. We have to encourage the women concerned to take that first step away from violence and to no longer be silent, but rather to seek support.

The "Violence against women" helpline can be reached at:

08000 116 016



ZERO TOLERANCE OF VIOLENCE: YOUR RIGHTS!

Violence will not be tolerated by the state and is punishable by law. First and foremost, protection of the victim and the principle of 'anyone who hits must go – the victim remains in the home' is comprehensively regulated in the Protection against Violence Act (GewSchG).

Call the police if you or someone else is being threatened! They can order the perpetrator to leave the home for several days. The police must intervene as soon as they become aware of a case of domestic violence.

In the case of severe violence, they can immediately apply for protection against violence through the district court. For a limited period of time (usually several months), the perpetrator is forbidden from living in the shared home or approaching or contacting the victim.

There are also other civil protection options for the victims of violence, such as damages and compensation for pain and suffering.



Protect your child!

Children who experience one of their parents being abused, hit or threatened by their (ex-)partner often show psychological as well as physical signs of this afterwards too, such as insomnia or concentration disorders. The development and health of your child can be permanently affected in the long term due to the experience of violence. The impact varies depending on whether the children witness acts of violence or are themselves mistreated, how long it has been since they experienced this violence and what measures were taken to resolve the acute situation. The age and gender of the child and their relationship with the adult also play a role. Children exposed to violence are at a higher risk of later experiencing violence at the hand of a partner. Through support and help your child can overcome the experience.



» MEN WHO COMMIT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ARE PATHETIC.

Differences of opinion, dealing with conflicts and even arguing are part and parcel of a relationship. But there are lines that should never – I repeat, never! – be crossed. Physical integrity is one of these lines. There is no excuse for violence against women.

Unfortunately, women often tend to blame themselves. "But I provoked him, he had had a hard day, I have to make more effort, I shouldn't answer back etc." Enduring violence and then still finding excuses for him is not the right way. Women should not rely on this being a one-off slip. His – sometimes even tearful – apologies will not help you.

Once this line has been crossed, it will happen again. The inhibition threshold decreases. Don't be a victim. You are not to blame.

Definitely get help from outside, because one thing I have unfortunately learned too often in my role as a patron of the "Strong networks against violence: No violence against women and girls!" campaign by the German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB) is that: The physical wounds heal at some point, but the psychological wounds never disappear. They define and often destroy a whole life. Those who experience violence should not have to bear it alone.

These crimes – and this is what they are – are usually committed within your own four walls; where you should feel safe. And if this violence is committed by a person that you love and trust, it is twice as traumatic. Trust and affection are destroyed.

Do not hesitate to open up. There is help! As a patron of the DOSB campaign, I fully endorse this under the motto: "Zero tolerance of violence against women and girls: You are. We are. Together we are strong!"

Regina Halmich
Boxing world champion and patron of the DOSB campaign
"Strong networks against violence:
No violence against women and girls!"



Who can I turn to?

No woman has to deal with violence alone! There is help! Your doctor is willing to listen and can treat physical and psychological complaints properly. Advisory services, women's shelters, the police and the justice system provide you with protection and qualified advice and support to resolve the violent situation.

What can I do?

If you are threatened, call the police emergency number (110)! Women's shelters and advisory services also have emergency hotlines. State your name and your address and emphasise that you need help immediately.

What else can I do?

- Ask someone you trust to come to you or call you.
- Confide in a doctor.
- Allow your injuries to be documented in a way that will stand up in court as evidence of the frequency and severity of the injuries.
- Look for a lockable room immediately.
- Leave your mobile phone in a specific room so you can get help in case of emergency.
- Leave a suitcase with important documents and perhaps some essential clothing with a person you trust.

Source: www.frauenberatungsstelle.de/pdf/NUR_MUT.pdf



CONTACTABLE 365 DAYS A YEAR, 24 HOURS A DAY:

The "Violence against women" helpline is the first nationwide advisory service for women who are affected by violence. Those affected, as well as relatives, peoples close to the victim and professionals can contact the helpline anonymously at 08000 116 016 or via the online advisory service for free advice. Qualified advisors are available to take your call in confidence and provide local support at your request.

If necessary, interpreters in 15 languages can be brought into the conversation.

With its multilingual counselling and information service, the helpline is also of particular importance to refugee women.

www.hilfetelefon.de

USEFUL LINKS

www.bmfsfj.de/BMFSFJ/Gleichstellung/frauen-vor-gewalt-schuetzen.html

Website of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth with further information on violence against women as well as external links.

www.zanzu.de

The website of the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) provides information on sexual and reproductive health in 13 languages, in pictures and words.

www.frauen-gegen-gewalt.de

Website of the Federal Association of Women's Advisory Services and women's emergency hotlines. Here, women who are affected by violence can find uncomplicated help close to home.

www.gewaltschutz.info

Information for people affected about protection against violence and their rights. Each site can be read in parallel in seven different languages.

www.frauenhauskoordinierung.de

Information portal for women's shelters with a shelter and advisory services search function.

www.gesine-intervention.de

Further important information and materials on this topic. Information for women affected by violence.

www.aktiongegengewalt.dosb.de

Website of the "Strong networks against violence!" campaign by the German Olympic Sports Confederation with information about nationwide campaign days and offers for self-defence courses, among other things.