



Federal Ministry for
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,
Women and Youth

Violence against men.

**Men's experiences of interpersonal
violence in Germany
– Results of the pilot study –**

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Violence against men

Men's experiences of interpersonal violence in Germany

– Results of the pilot study –

on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

Dissens e. V. Berlin, GeFoWe Eckenhaid/Mittelfranken, SOKO Bielefeld

Project team: Ludger Jungnitz, Hans-Joachim Lenz, Dr. Ralf Puchert,

Dr. Henry Puhe, Willi Walter

I.

Introduction

The pilot study “Violence against men” is the first study to look at the entire spectrum of interpersonal violence against men. Studies on men as perpetrators and women as victims have been conducted for a long time. To date no overview of men as victims of the most diverse types of violence has been published.

The aim of the pilot study was to open up ways for research to explore this topic and to acquire some initial figures to indicate how many men have experienced violence, both in a domestic and non-domestic context, by surveying men living in Germany. To achieve this, the current state of research and knowledge, along with different research methods, were described and evaluated. Qualitative interviews were used to develop and test an instrument comprising different questionnaire sections that could be used in a representative study on the extent and relevance of violence against men. Due to the restricted scope of the project, the background to and consequences of violence against men were investigated only as a secondary consideration.

The study included as central *forms of violence* physical, emotional psychological and sexualised violence and categorised them separately according to whether they were experienced in childhood, adolescence or adult life. Structural violence was not investigated systematically or actively, but was only included or noted in cases where it was “self-evident” either from the material or the respondents.

Structure of the study and informative value of the findings

During the course of the study, this lasted almost two years, after an analysis of the literature qualitative interviews with experts from organisations throughout the country offering counselling and support explored different aspects of violence. Following this, guided interviews lasting several hours were carried out with 32 men, half of whom were selected randomly, the other half purposively. The process culminated in a survey comprising 266 largely standardized interviews that included qualitative components. The quantitative survey was carried out orally. An additional written questionnaire, filled out by 190 respondents, specifically investigated domestic violence.

Although the men in the quantitative survey were selected to be a representative sample, the small number of cases means that the findings do not permit a valid generalisation to the population of all men in Germany. Higher numbers of cases (more than 10%) mean that the findings indicate tendencies and from lower numbers of cases (less than 10%) it is only possible to conclude that the phenomenon under investigation actually occurs.

In contrast to the way we have described the findings here, the violent act experienced in adulthood were actually recorded in the main questionnaire without any categorisation into different areas of life. Thus, for the individual areas of life, there are only estimates derived from the perpetrators named in this connection. The only information that can be unequivocally classified is that relating to long-term relationships, because the additional questionnaire was used specifically to that end.

II. Selected findings

2.1 How is violence perceived? To what extent is it possible to investigate it?

An overall finding of the study is that not all violent acts are perceived and talked about to the same extent. Certain forms of violence are so normal in men’s lives that the men themselves do not perceive them as violence and therefore have only limited memory of them. Experiences that go unnoticed in male normality include, for example, acts of physical violence in public that are perceived as normal disputes. Other forms of violence are so tabooed that they are either not accessible to memory or the men who suffered them do not talk about them. Examples of the tabooed “unmanly” area are to be found particularly in sexualised violence. Violent actions in these areas are probably underrepresented in the study. The type of violence that is more easily perceived is therefore that which falls into the range that goes beyond “the normal limits” but has not yet become “unmanly”.

VISIBILITY OF VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN AND ITS ACCESSIBILITY TO RESEARCH		
Male normality (too normal, too manly)	Range of violence against men that can be perceived	Not manly – deviating from the norm (too shameful, too unmanly)
<i>Violence against men – Results of the pilot study 2004</i>		

In the course of the stages of research, which built on one another, it emerged that the range of experiences of violence that can be perceived and therefore can in principle be spoken about is greater than was assumed when the study began. The barriers around what can be described in terms of shameful experiences are – in qualitative interviews at least – a great deal more permeable than was originally expected.

Experiencing violence: translator’s note

In reporting the findings of the study, the question arose as to what language to use to describe violence that happens to a person. The authors of the report decided to avoid using the German word that translates as “experience”, because it has positive connotations. The expression chosen instead means something that befalls someone and is intended to convey that violence is something that happens to individuals and is directed against them. There is no obvious equivalent in English that would not have made for difficult reading; thus the translation here uses the term “experience”.

2.2 Violence in childhood and adolescence

In childhood and adolescence the risk for men of becoming the victim of violent acts is far greater than in adult life. Only a small minority of the men in the study – every seventh – reported no experience of violence in this phase of life. Both for physical and for psychological violence a majority of men confirmed at least one incident.

In the quantitative survey, the following findings related to **physical violence** in childhood and youth emerged:

- Three out of five men (161 of 266) said that as children or adolescents they had been hit, slapped, kicked or beaten up.
- Two out of five men (108 of 266) have been harassed, threatened or stalked in childhood or youth.
- Every fifth man (51 of 266) has been assaulted or robbed or had something stolen.
- Every sixth man (47 of 266) suffered intentionally inflicted injuries during childhood and adolescence, such as cuts, broken bones, bruises or burns.
- Every ninth man (30 of 266) had been threatened or injured with a weapon.

Severe physical violence in childhood and adolescence seems to be on the increase. For example, the last three violent actions in the above list were named significantly more often by men aged between 18 and 35 than by older men.

Although the level of physical violence experienced in childhood and adolescence appears to be increasing overall, physical violence as a parental disciplinary measure is decreasing: Younger men reported physical punishment less often than men of older generations. Physical violence as a means of parental discipline is seen by many men not as violence, but as a “normal” form of discipline. An act of this kind is often classed as violence or abuse only if other factors come into play such as the impression that it was arbitrary or of “unjustified severity”.

The following findings on **psychological violence** emerged from the study:

- Three out of five men (164 of 266) said that in childhood or youth they had been bullied, insulted, intimidated or humiliated.
- Two out of five men (113 of 266) reported that older children or adults had told them about things that disturbed them and said that they should not tell anyone else.
- Every eighth man (34 of 266) was blackmailed as a child or adolescent or forced into doing something.

The comparison between the age groups showed that only the older retired men reported significantly fewer incidents in childhood and youth, which presumably has more to do with failure of recollection than with actual lower levels of psychological violence.

Far less **sexualised violence** was reported – it was however mentioned in all the degrees of severity and variations covered by the survey. Men were most likely to report instances of unwanted, unpleasant touching, some of which in childhood and adolescence were of a clearly sexual nature. In the qualitative interviews, the various degrees of severity behind the figures became clear. There were also reports of extremely severe incidents – including sustained abuse and rape over periods of years.

Approximately every twelfth man interviewed reported clearly sexualised violence in childhood and adolescence, which puts the study into a range of frequencies corresponding to that in other, specialised studies. Furthermore, many respondents said that they had been sexually molested.

Looking at all the different forms it takes, the violence experienced by boys and male adolescents is relatively equally distributed across the various areas of life: family, public sphere/leisure time and school/job training. Both in the public sphere and leisure time and during school and job training, the vast majority of respondents said that the perpetrators were male (about five out of six). By contrast, in the case of violence in the family sphere the proportion of male and female perpetrators was almost equal.

2.3 Violence in adult life

The overall level of violence suffered by men is significantly lower in adulthood than in childhood and adolescence, with the exception of time spent in military or civilian service. The following description of violence experienced in adulthood is categorised according to different areas of life, because violence can only be understood and changed in context. The spheres of public life/leisure time and work are more or less evenly represented, although there are distinct differences in the forms of violence experienced: men experience physical violence predominantly in the public sphere and during leisure time, psychological violence mainly at work. Within long-term relationships there is no clear weighting. What is striking here is the frequency with which the men cited a particular area of abuse: That of their (female) partners exercising control over their social activities.

2.3.1 Public sphere and leisure time

Up to two-thirds of physical violence reported in adult life and approximately one fifth of all psychological violence experienced takes place in the public sphere or during leisure time.

Physical violence

The findings of this study, like other studies, indicate that the majority of physical violence against adult men occurs in the public sphere¹.

- Approximately every tenth man stated that within the last five years he had at least one experience of someone seriously threatening to physically attack or injure him.
- The numbers of men who were angrily pushed away in the public sphere or during leisure time were of the same order of magnitude.
- Three to five percent of men questioned reported here that an object capable of injuring them had been thrown at them, that they had been seriously threatened with a weapon or in some other way, or that they had been kicked, shoved, grabbed, pushed hard or hit.
- Only about one percent of respondents stated that they had been thrashed or beaten up.

¹ Cf. page 4, box: Structure of the study.

Up to 90% of the perpetrators in these incidents are men. In two-thirds of cases of violence in the public sphere and during leisure time the victim did not know the perpetrator.

There are vast differences between the age groups. It is predominantly younger men between 18 and their mid-twenties who experience this kind of violence. With increasing age, the incidence of violence in the public sphere and during leisure time decreases constantly.

There are clear indications in the qualitative reports of the respondents that the physical violence that occurs during fights is not perceived as violence by the men questioned. In situations of that kind men do not see themselves as defenceless or “victims” – to some extent they even contribute to the physical conflict occurring and see themselves more as “perpetrators”. Thus, the way physical violence against men in the public sphere is spoken of often tallies both with the pattern of male normality described above (“Fights are normal”) and with the taboos in operation (“I am not a victim”). The frequency of this kind of violence indicated by this study is thus probably lower than its actual occurrence.

Psychological violence

Men in the study spoke about significantly less psychological than physical violence in the public sphere and during leisure time. Roughly three to five percent of men stated that they had been insulted, intimidated, shouted at aggressively, ridiculed, teased, belittled, or humiliated either by a stranger or someone they knew.

Being ignored or having people attempt to exclude them from a group was more likely to have been experienced at the hands of acquaintances or neighbours, albeit by less than three percent of respondents.

Ninety percent of psychologically violent actions by strangers were perpetrated by men. By contrast, in the case of incidents occurring in the circle of acquaintances the proportion was only slightly over sixty percent. Also in the area of psychological violence in the public sphere and during leisure time the levels reported decrease continuously with increasing age.

Sexualised violence

Sexualised violence against men in the public sphere and during leisure time exists in a broad spectrum of variations ranging from sexual harassment to coercion and rape. This was expressed on the one hand in the qualitative interviews, in which men talked about sometimes severe experiences of sexualised violence, such as having been raped. The destructive psychological effect that sexualised violence such as rape can have is particularly significant here. On the other hand sexualised violence was also found in the quantitative survey. Reported incidents were persistent sexual harassment by a woman they knew and unwanted sexual advances from a man in a bar.

In the case of sexualised violence in adult life men seem to experience huge obstacles to talking about what has happened to them. Not only do they not have the appropriate language and images, but the mechanism of “shame at not being a proper man” acts as a great hurdle.

2.3.2 Work environment

By contrast with the knowledge gained about the public sphere and leisure time, in the work environment it is psychological violence that is predominant: One fifth of incidents of physical violence and over half of the incidents of psychological violence reported took place at work.

Physical violence

Fewer than five percent of men reported instances of physical violence by people at work. Three to four percent of men reported that someone had pushed them angrily or had seriously threatened to physically attack them or injure them. A small number of men reported actual attacks.

Physical violence against men at work – if it occurs at all – is more likely to be exercised by male colleagues. Customers, clients or people in their care were seldom cited. Disputes amongst colleagues often form the background when physically violent actions in the workplace are described in the qualitative sections of the survey.

Psychological violence

Over a quarter of the men in the survey reported that they had experienced psychological violence in the last five years. A little over half of these incidents happened at work. The following picture emerged²:

- Approximately every eighth man has been insulted, intimidated or shouted at aggressively by superiors or colleagues.
- Every eleventh man has had the experience of being defamed in connection with work or that someone has spread malicious rumours about him.
- Every twelfth man has been ridiculed, teased, belittled or humiliated in a hurtful way at work.

In the more extensive reports, harassment, being shown up in front of the workforce, being insulted by superiors and colleagues also play a large part, as do being treated unfairly or given too great a workload. Many men define this as bullying. However, only some of the experiences actually describe bullying in the sense of regular harassment that can ultimately lead to being excluded from the work context. This study does not provide precise figures on this, but the findings of other studies indicate that this problem exists on a significant scale.

² Cf. page 4, box: Structure of the study.

The perpetrators are primarily supervisors, who are reported as being responsible for attacks of psychological violence. However, psychological violence perpetrated by colleagues also accounts for a considerable proportion of the experiences of violence suffered by men at work. Eighty percent of perpetrators of psychological violence in the workplace are men.

The men in this survey reported numerous other examples of strain in their working life such as overwork and dissatisfaction with their working conditions. Overall, up to 45 percent of men experience the work environment as being a psychological strain and are dissatisfied with their colleagues and supervisors.

Sexualised violence

As in other areas of life, cases of sexualised violence against men in the workplace were reported as isolated occurrences. During the course of the interviews, one man spoke of a female colleague having tried to force him to have sexual intercourse with her. A younger man talked about sustained sexual harassment by a trainer at his workplace. According to the information provided by other studies, sexual harassment of men at the workplace seems to be a fairly widespread problem, but one into which little research has been conducted to date.

2.3.3 Long-term relationships

The extent of violence in long-term relationships ascertained in the pilot study is of a similar order of magnitude to other areas of life, although the weighting between the different forms of violence differs. Almost all the men in the survey have or have had a female partner in their long-term relationships. The following findings thus refer to heterosexual partnerships only.

Physical violence

On the basis of knowledge to date, the extent to which men are subjected to physical violence by their female partners is a highly controversial issue. Here points of view range from “inconceivable” and thus non-existent in a male-dominated society to assertions that men experience domestic violence to a similar degree as women. On the basis of the qualitative interviews of this study, the first thing to be said is that every form of violence against men can occur in this sphere, including relationships in which men are systematically abused. The quantitative survey yielded the following findings:

- Every fourth of the ca. 200 interviewed men suffered an act of physical violence by their latest partner at least once or in some cases several times. It must be said that this includes minor acts that cannot be classed unambiguously as violence.
- Every sixth of the respondents (36 of 196) stated that they had had been pushed away angrily once or several times by their latest partner.
- Each of the following actions was cited by five to ten percent of the men: Their partner had “slapped them lightly” (18 of 196), “bitten or scratched them so that it hurt” (13 of 196), “kicked them painfully, pushed or grabbed them hard” (10 of 196) or their partner had “thrown an object that was could have injured them” (10 of 196).

Approximately five percent of respondents had sustained an injury at least once as a result of domestic violence. The same proportion of men in one or several situations of this kind had been frightened of receiving a serious or life-threatening injury.

Not one of the men who stated that they had experienced domestic violence from their female partners called the police, although some of them believed that their partners should be punished for their actions. Roughly half of them stated that they never defended themselves physically in situations of this kind with their partners; for example, they never hit back. More than half said that they had not initiated the physical violence.

Psychological violence and control of social activities

Psychological violence within relationships was reported with far greater frequency than physical violence. What is striking here is that far more incidents related to social control were mentioned than direct psychological abuse, humiliation, belittling, disparagement and insults.

- Every fifth man (38 of 199) said that his partner is jealous and prevents him from having contact with other people.
- Every sixth man (35 of 199) said: My partner controls exactly where I go with whom, what I do, and when I will come home.
- Five to eight percent of men reported that their partners monitor their post, telephone calls, e-mails (16 of 199), that they decide what they should do or not do (9 of 199), or that they prevent them from meeting friends and relatives (13 of 199).

With slightly lower frequency men also reported other forms of psychological violence in long-term relationships: My partner intimidates me if I disagree with her; my partner abuses me verbally and insults me or intentionally says things to hurt me; my partner belittles me in front of other people; my partner intimidates me with her angry, erratic or aggressive behaviour.

An important finding of the pilot study is that men whose female partners control their social activities are also significantly more likely to experience physical attacks within the relationship.

Sexualised violence

In the case of sexualised violence the greatest obstacles for men, as mentioned above, seem to be the difficulty of overcoming their shame and finding the language to talk about it. With regard to their long-term relationships with women, men very rarely report experiences of sexual violence:

- Five men said: My partner imposes her sexual needs on me with no consideration of my wishes
- Three men said: My partner forces me to do things I do not want to do.
- One man stated his partner had forced him to take part in sexual acts against his will.

Overview of physical and sexualised violence

The following table gives an overview of how frequently and during what period of time the men in the survey experienced physical conflicts or sexualised violence within relationships. The data were collected in a concluding question on violence in long-term relationships.

FREQUENCY OF PHYSICAL CONFLICTS OR SEXUALISED VIOLENCE IN RELATIONSHIPS					
(n=190)	Did not experience	Did experience	Once	2-3 times	≥ 4 times
Last 12 months	93%	7%	4%	2%	1%
Last 5 years	88%	12%	5%	4%	3%
Life to date	77%	23%	6%	8%	9%

Violence against men - pilot study 2004

2.4 Special contexts of violence

The study focused on the kind of personal circumstances and therefore contexts of violence in which the majority of men live. However, there are also contexts of violence, to which only a small number of men are exposed and which cannot be captured in a random population sample. However, our literature review and interviews with experts indicate that men and boys in specific institutional contexts are more likely to experience violence. That includes – in varying degrees – prisons, hospitals, psychiatric institutions and religious communities. Similarly, it can be assumed that sections of the population who suffer discrimination, such as people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and homosexuals in poverty are at greater risk of violence.

War experiences

One of the most striking – and in this form also most surprising – findings of the study was the frequency, and in some cases the intensity, with which the Second World War had made its mark on respondents. In the foreground of the victimisation as a soldier or a civilian during the war was the memory of extreme situations that go far beyond average human experience. Many respondents had not spoken to anyone about their experiences for decades and used the interview as an opportunity to simply communicate their feelings about them. It became clear that this is a topic that is still on the minds of many men and still affects their lives.

Military or civilian service – “Beyond the normal limits”

We asked questions on the same acts of violence for the time spent in military or civilian service as for other phases of life. However, many acts of violence are accepted as being such a normal part of military service that interviewers and respondents often reached an agreement that they would talk only about those experiences that went “beyond normal limits”. Even so, the level of violence to which men are subjected during military service recorded in the study, particularly in the sphere of psychological violence, far exceeded the

levels experienced subsequently in adult life.

- Three out of five men who did military service reported being bullied, demoralised, insulted or humiliated (63 of 107).
- A third (31 of 107) stated that they had been forced to do or say something completely against their will.
- Every sixth man (17 of 107) had been actually locked up, tied up, or had their freedom of movement restricted in some other way.

In the opportunities for open comments, respondents also reported additional instances of superiors treating them unfairly and taking advantage of their position of power. They also talked about being forced to engage in pointless and humiliating activities. They reported rituals between soldiers “in which you have to subordinate yourself”.

For men eligible for conscription, **civilian service** seems to present a lower risk of being the object of violent acts than military service. However, the risk is still far greater than in normal civilian life. Here too it is predominantly incidents of psychological violence that seem to pose the most significant risk to men in civilian service. For example, almost every third man said that he had been harassed, bullied, demoralized, insulted or humiliated (10 of 32).

These findings are all the more serious since military or civilian service in Germany is not voluntary. That means that the state has a particular duty to ensure the safety of men during their military or civilian service.

III. Conclusion

The pilot study has identified the vast gamut and high frequency of interpersonal violence against men. The structure of the study proved to be appropriate for developing a quantitative instrument.

It was possible to quantify violence against men using the instrument developed. However, due to the breadth of the project and the relatively small random sample, it was only possible to derive a small amount of statistically sound information about the frequency with which violence occurs in the population of German men. Further specialised and representative research would be needed to ascertain the frequency of the occurrence in particular of severe or tabooed violence.

Apart from looking at the possibility of researching this kind of violence, the following conclusions also speak to the need for action that follows from recognizing the extent of violence that men are exposed to. At numerous points in the pilot study it became clear that there is a lack of appropriate support services for men and boys, or that men are not making use of those resources that could potentially offer help because either the men themselves and/or their environment do not perceive the violence they experience as such.

Action is required in three different areas to reduce the levels of violence against men:

- I Firstly, it is of central importance to **expand knowledge** about the violence that men experience. Apart from representative research about the frequency with which men experience violence, specialised research is also needed to establish what kind of support they need, how that can be achieved and what form the support must take to ensure that it genuinely helps to tackle the problem. In a broader perspective, there is a need to integrate a gender dimension into violence research, recognizing that men are also sexual and vulnerable beings.
- I Secondly, it is very important to create **public awareness** of the problem. The first crucial task would be to inform the public about the diversity and extent of violence – in particular those kinds of violence that have been overlooked or not perceived as such to date.
- I Thirdly, a competent **support system** it is necessary to help men and boys who have experienced violence. Above all, with regard to types of violence that have in the past been shrouded in taboo, the prospects for men of receiving support in stopping the violence, overcoming its effects and coping must be improved. Existing services need to be qualified so as to address crises and help-seeking patterns specific to men and boys; information and training should be provided for the actors within the systems.

These measures to tackle violence against men are an important part of the project to eliminate or reduce factors in our society detrimental to the health, well-being and personal opportunities of people of both sexes. Furthermore, each of these activities will increase the probability of the very thing that is also essential if a change is to occur: more men talking, or being capable of talking, about violence.

Final report of the study available on the internet at www.bmfsfj.de (see: → “Forschungsnetz” → “Forschungsberichte”)

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