

European Union
survey results in
the Dutch context

Violence against women

Institute on
Gender Equality and
Women's History

atria

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Atria is the national Dutch institute for gender equality and women's history, located in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Atria collects and shares knowledge about gender equality, feminism and diversity.

The institute has a library and an extensive archive collection on the history of the women's movement and gender equality, both in the Netherlands and internationally. Atria conducts research, provides advice and develops programmes to stimulate social and political debate.

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Introduction

On 5 March 2014 the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) published the research report 'Violence against women', a report on the first representative, large-scale survey study into the nature and scope of violence against women in the 28 countries in the European Union (EU) (FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). This is a true milestone. For the first time, we have a study providing a detailed comparative picture of the scale on which women and girls in Europe experience violence in their daily lives – at home, at work, on the streets and online. The results show that physical and sexual violence against women occurs on a large scale. There is convincing evidence that in many cases this violence is more than an isolated blow in the course of a heated argument but involves repeated, serious and deliberate acts of violence, a picture that emerges throughout the countries studied, including the Netherlands.¹ So what we are talking about here are violations of fundamental human rights: the right to security, the right to freedom from discrimination and the right to health care.

The fact that a renowned European Commission institution such as the FRA has conducted a detailed study of violence against women in the EU represents a historic step. In 2013 the European Institute on Gender Equality (EIGE) pointed out that no reliable, comparable European data on the scale and seriousness of violence against women were available. It was therefore impossible to include any information on this subject in the European Gender Equality Index (European Institute on Gender Equality, 2013). These new survey data fill that gap. The findings show how important it is that a detailed study of this topic has finally been made. For example, one of the report's most radical conclusions is that the most unsafe place for women and girls is at home. That's where most violence, both physical and sexual, takes place – at the hands of a partner, ex-

¹ The FRA survey in the EU was only conducted in the European part of the Netherlands, so it does not include the Caribbean islands of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba (also known as the BES islands).

partner, family member or acquaintance. It's not the stranger in the bushes but the husband, father, uncle or family friend who presents the greatest threat to the safety of women and girls.

Violence always undermines the victim's security, well-being and health. In view of the scale of the problem, efforts need to be made to ensure proper attention is given to the latest information. In this publication, Atria, institute on gender equality and women's history, summarises the main outcomes of the EU study by the FRA and compares the findings in the Netherlands with the average situation in the EU countries. Where possible, the European survey results for the Netherlands are compared with results of earlier Dutch research. Atria's aim is to make the new information from the FRA survey available in a concise and clear form to a range of interested parties, including policymakers, politicians, researchers, teachers, journalists and support workers.

Objective, current focus and urgency

Violence against women, in particular domestic violence, is an urgent topic in public debate and government policy. With the opening of the first Dutch women's shelter in Amsterdam in 1974, the conspiracy of silence about violence in the home was a thing of the past. The first telephone helpline for rape victims opened around the same time. The issue of violence against women has not lost any of its urgency or seriousness in the meantime. It occupies a prominent place in national policy and legislation (including the Dutch Social Support Act (WMO), the decentralisation policies, shifting increasing responsibilities in the area of health care and social support to municipalities, and the legislation relating to emergency barring and restraining orders) and international regulations (Atria, 2014).

At the same time, the taboos and feelings of shame surrounding the issue of violence persist. Not only do they affect many victims, lack of familiarity with the issues still often leads support workers and police

to underestimate the seriousness of the problem. Police and public prosecutors are often reluctant to arrest or prosecute perpetrators, or to view this as a matter of public concern. Care workers regularly fail to correctly diagnose the symptoms presented to them. News of the scale on which violence occurs is met with varied responses ranging from shock and indignation to trivialisation and denial. It is essential, therefore, to analyse the problem in all its nuances, based on reliable scientific information, and use this analysis as the basis for a well-founded, coherent policy.²

The focus of the European research presented here is on violence against women. It is a known fact that men are also victims of domestic violence. However, numerous studies, including the most recent Dutch study (which will be discussed later), have shown that intimate partner violence against men occurs less frequently than intimate partner violence against women and that it generally involves less serious violence. It is unclear whether more men than women fail to report violence due to shame, but as there is no evidence of a significant hidden need for support for male victims, it is at this point in time unlikely that this represents a major problem comparable to violence against women. Earlier research has convincingly shown violence against women to be a serious social problem.³ The scale and seriousness of violence against women make it a health and security problem of epidemic proportions (WHO et al., 2013).⁴ Empirical evidence is needed so that governments can develop robust and effective policies. This is also the European Commission's motivation for having the FRA survey conducted and developing its own policy in this area.

- ² The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence obliges the governments to do so. (See the Istanbul Convention, Articles 7 and 11 respectively). For further information on the convention, see 'New European Regulations' on p. 10.
- ³ The FRA survey in the EU was only carried out among women so it does not provide any data to enable a comparison with victimisation of men.
- ⁴ See also World Health Organization & London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010; and World Health Organization, 2013.

New European regulations

In 2011 the Council of Europe presented the 'Istanbul Convention', on preventing and combating of violence against women and domestic violence, for ratification.⁵ The convention came into force on August 1 2014. This human rights convention states that violence against women is a violation of human rights and, in particular, a form of discrimination against women. The Netherlands has ratified the convention in 2015 and it entered into force on March 1, 2016. Ratification means that our country undertakes obligations including the development of an integrated approach that adequately acknowledges and specifically combats the gender dimension and the underlying discrimination against women and girls (Atria, 2014).

The Istanbul Convention represents a historical development in international standard setting and an important step forward in establishing national obligations to protect women and prevent violence. It builds on earlier instruments (in particular, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women – CEDAW), case law of the European Court of Human Rights concerning violence against women and scientific research in this field. Its fundamental premise is that the widespread violence against women is connected to their more vulnerable social and cultural position in comparison with men. The social inequality between women and men and the stereotyping this brings with it are manifested in many ways, for example inequalities in social power, the gender wage gap and the unequal division between parents of responsibility for childcare and domestic work. In this context, violence against women is more than an individual relationship issue. It is connected to the unequal social positions of the sexes and to persistent social and cultural legitimisation of violence and sexual misconduct towards women

5 See www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/default_en.asp for more information on the convention. The minimum number of ratifications for the entry into force of the convention (ten in total, with a minimum of eight EU countries) has already been achieved. The convention therefore entered into force in those countries on 1 August 2014.

and girls. Now that all forms of discrimination are legally prohibited, it is essential that this equality is translated into practice. The Istanbul Convention imposes binding obligations on the European Member States to develop policy and legislation that will bring an end to the vicious circle of social inequality and violence against women.

Preliminary notes

There are quite significant differences in the prevalence statistics for the EU countries in the degree to which violence occurs. Similar EU differences emerged from earlier studies into public acts of violence (Van Dijk et al., 2005). Where the prevalence range differs widely for different countries, the average is of limited relevance. We do know from research that the more urbanised a country is (like the Netherlands), the higher the statistics for all forms of violence in that country. However, it is unclear whether, and if so how, urbanisation influences violence against women, particularly violence in the home.

Scientific research into negative and potentially traumatic experiences (such as family violence) is a challenge in terms of both methodology and ethics. It raises varying emotions in respondents that may bias their responses, talking about the subject may evoke resistance and other factors unrelated to the survey question, may influence interviewees' responses. This means that a risk of bias is inherent to this type of survey, particularly due to under-reporting.⁶ To facilitate a proper understanding of the outcomes of the EU survey, the FRA report covers several factors that may have influenced the differences in the extent to which violence is reported in the 28 EU countries. We summarise the most significant factors below.

⁶ There are no indications in research to suggest that over-reporting is a source of systematic distortion.

Taboo

There are significant differences between the EU countries in the degree to which people consider it acceptable to talk about violence against women at all. For example, in earlier research only 6% of respondents in Bulgaria said that they had ever heard colleagues mention domestic violence, compared to 43% of respondents in Sweden (Eurobarometer 344, TNS Opinion & Social, 2010). Considerable differences exist in the extent to which domestic violence is discussed among friends and family members between these and other countries.

Social debate and facilities

It is striking that countries with high prevalence statistics, including the Netherlands, also have a high level of shelter facilities and support for victims of violence. In these countries, regular public debate takes place on the issue, and media campaigns about violence within families and against women are already relatively well-developed. In the Netherlands, violence against women is addressed as a social phenomenon; it is recognised as a problem and it is regularly the subject of social debate. We cannot exclude the possibility that in countries where very few facilities for shelter or assistance are available, both within the family and with friends or others, or where intimate partner violence is not viewed as a problem, or is even legitimised, there is a greater disincentive to report violence. This is also related to the taboo on talking about violence as mentioned above.

Level of gender equality and readiness to report violence

A progressing level of gender equality and the existence of an active women's movement in a country, translates into a stronger social awareness and clearer policy and regulations on violence against women (Htun & Weldon, 2012). In countries where this is the case, public information campaigns often encourage victims and those close to them to report violence to the police or support services. Where such influences have

made women more assertive, this may mean that women are more able and willing to talk about violence in an interview situation.

Employment status and level of education as risk factors

In countries with relatively high numbers of women in work, far more women report having experienced some form of sexual harassment at work. To some extent this is predictable. The more women working outside the home, the greater the risk of them encountering violence from colleagues. However, a striking aspect of the FRA study is that this risk is higher for women with a university education or equivalent compared to women in intermediate and lower occupational groups. Further research would be required, to assess the causes of this.

In research into violence, every figure is a more or less accurate approximation of a painful reality that is difficult to pin down with precision. Statistics cannot be taken at face value. Differences in research methods can have far-reaching consequences for the results and, consequently, for the comparability of the data obtained. Of particular relevance are differences in sample size, and its representativeness for the larger population. Unless the sample size is large and representative, it will not be possible to draw conclusions for the entire population. Other factors influencing outcomes include the method of data-collection (written questionnaire, by telephone, face-to-face or online), the definition of violence (narrow or broad – and the extent to which it is clear to the respondents), the gender of the interviewer (female interviewers generally obtain a higher response rate and better quality responses) and the degree to which the interviewers have received specific training.

Some caution is therefore required when comparing the outcomes – where necessary we specifically point this out below. The high prevalence numbers for violence against Dutch women are certainly no indicator of the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of current Dutch policy (with a relatively high

level of facilities for victims and regular public information campaigns to encourage people to report violence). Such a conclusion is based on the assumption that effective policies would immediately lead to a decrease in the number of victims and the number of reports of violence, whereas in fact one can initially expect an increase of reported violence. Furthermore, preventive policies (alongside victim support policies) are essential to bring about a medium to long term reduction in violence. Only trend research based on a reliable baseline measurement will enable trends to be identified, in order to establish whether or not there is a decrease in the victimisation of women.

In the paragraphs below, we will first cover experiences of physical and sexual violence, divided into intimate partner violence and non-partner violence. This is followed by results on specific forms of violence: stalking, sexual harassment and cyber violence. Finally, we look at the degree to which women seek help, their feelings of fear and their perceptions of safety. This publication ends with conclusions and recommendations.

Research methodology in ‘Violence against women’

The results of the FRA survey into violence against women are based on standardised personal interviews with 42,000 women in all 28 Member States of the EU, on average 1,500 interviews per Member State. The respondents were selected at random. The interviews were conducted by women who had received extensive training preparing them for this task. The results are representative of the experiences and opinions of women aged 18 to 74 years living in the EU. The interviews covered physical, sexual and psychological violence, violence in childhood, sexual harassment and stalking, including new forms of abuse and violence such as abuse on the internet. The women were asked about their experience of various types of violence since the age of 15, how often they had experienced certain types of violence and the effect that the violence had on them. The survey asked women about experiences of violence perpetrated by men and/or women. Information was also recorded about whether the violence was reported to the police and whether support services were used (FRA, 2014).

It is important to emphasise that comparison of the latest EU data with data from earlier Dutch research is challenging. Differences in research methodology may influence results (differences in the sample size and its representativeness, the data collection method, the definition of violence, the gender of the interviewer and the degree of training received by interviewers). Some caution is necessary when drawing conclusions from the comparison below.

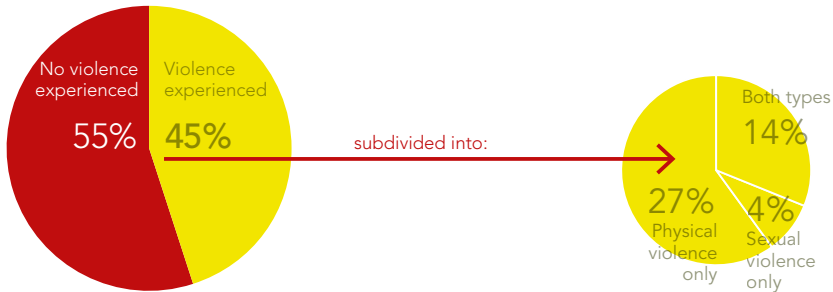
Prevalence of violence against women

Violence against women is a common phenomenon in the Netherlands. Almost half (45%) of the Dutch women interviewed for the FRA survey has experienced some form of physical or sexual violence (since the age of 15).⁷ The average figure in the 28 EU countries is 33%. These figures encompass violent incidents in all categories of severity: both one-off incidents and repeated or systematic violence, violence by known and unknown perpetrators, and violence both in the home and elsewhere.

The perpetrators of violence are more often male than female. Violence by partners or ex-partners is almost always perpetrated by men. The number of female perpetrators of partner or ex-partner violence in the EU survey is negligible. For violence by someone other than a partner or ex-partner, more than three quarters (77%) of the Dutch women surveyed stated that the perpetrator was a man (compared to the EU average of 72%). One in six (16%) Dutch women reported violence by a female perpetrator (as against an EU average of 20%). In the remaining cases both male and female perpetrators were involved or the sex of the perpetrator was unknown.

- 7** In the FRA survey **physical violence** is understood to mean: hitting, pushing, throwing an object at someone, pulling hair, hitting with a fist or a hard object, kicking, setting on fire, trying to suffocate or strangle, stabbing with a sharp object or weapon, shooting with a firearm, beating someone's head against something.
- Sexual violence** is understood to mean: rape, attempted rape, making someone participate in sexual acts and using threats to make someone carry out sexual activities.

Ever experienced physical and/or sexual violence (Netherlands)



Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) 2014

The statistics for domestic violence in the latest Dutch study differ from this international picture, to the extent that the data are comparable (Van der Veen & Bogaerts, 2010). In the Dutch study, just over 11% of the women surveyed reported being a victim of 'obvious domestic violence' in the previous five years.⁸ The fact that the FRA figures are higher can partly be explained by differences in the research methods: the Dutch survey was conducted using written questionnaires to be filled in on-line, the sample is less representative because it was drawn from an internet survey panel and there are differences in the definitions and in the time period surveyed.

- 8** The term 'obvious domestic violence' includes the various forms of physical and sexual violence, together with: keeping an eye on / following (stalking), hitting with an object, suffocating/strangling/burning and injury or attempted injury with a knife or weapon. Less serious forms of violence (such as humiliating/belittling or threatening to cause physical pain) were only included as 'obvious violence' when the victim had experienced more than ten such incidents.

The Dutch survey was limited to experience within the previous five years, whereas the FRA interviewers asked whether respondents had 'ever' had the relevant experiences.⁹ The Dutch survey related to domestic violence only, whereas the FRA survey covered all physical and sexual violence directed against women, regardless of where it took place. Finally, the Dutch survey focused on more serious forms of violence when using the definition 'obvious violence'.

Another Dutch source of data on violent victimisation is the Safety Monitor published by Statistics Netherlands (CBS), in which women and men are asked about incidents of violence in the past twelve months. Safety Monitor publications do not generally distinguish between female and male victims. The 'Emancipation Monitor 2012' did publish a number of statistics specified for each sex based on the Safety Monitor. This revealed that 5% of the women respondents (and 6% of the men) had experienced violence in the past year (Merens et al., 2012).

⁹ Incidentally, UN guidelines for prevalence research recommend basing surveys on whether the respondent has 'ever' had the relevant experience.

Physical violence – general

The FRA survey asked about experience of various forms of physical violence, varying from relatively minor to very serious.¹⁰ Of the Dutch respondents, 41% said they had been a victim of physical violence at some point. In absolute numbers, this equates to approximately 2.4 million Dutch women who have experienced physical violence.¹¹ The EU average is 31%.

Ever experienced physical violence

partner/ex-partner
and/or non-partner
violence

41%

31% (range 17-48)

partner/ex-partner
violence

22%

20% (range 12-31)

non-partner violence

31%

20% (range 10-36)

Netherlands

EU Average

Explanatory note

The 'range' for the EU average (in this diagram and subsequent diagrams) indicates the minimum and maximum percentages reported in the EU countries. The diagram shows that many victims have experienced both intimate partner violence (including from ex-partners) and non-partner violence.

Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) 2014

¹⁰ See note 7.

¹¹ Based on the population statistics in 2014 (CBS): almost 6 million women aged between 18 and 74.

Physical violence by partners (or ex-partners) and non-partners

In the FRA survey, 22% of all Dutch women say that the physical violence they experienced was perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner. This is more than half of all Dutch victims of physical violence and represents approximately 1.3 million Dutch women. Intimate partner violence is generally not limited to a single incident. Approximately half the victims of violence from their current partner have experienced more than one violent incident, and approximately two-thirds of victims of an ex-partner have experienced repeated violence.

These statistics appear to correspond with the results of the first Dutch study into the prevalence of intimate partner violence, which used a method comparable to the FRA study: both involved in-depth face-to-face interviews by specially trained interviewers conducted among a representative population sample (Römkens, 1989).¹² In the Dutch study one in five women (20.8%) reports ever having experienced physical violence (unilateral or otherwise) from a partner or ex-partner. These prevalence figures correspond with various international studies into intimate partner violence against women in industrialised countries published in the last two decades: these indicate that between one in three and one in four women are assaulted by a partner at some stage in their lives.¹³

In the Dutch study published in 2010, over 8% of the women surveyed reported having been the victim of 'obvious domestic violence' by a partner or ex-partner in the past five years (Van der Veen & Bogaerts, 2010).

¹² This study reveals that violence by ex-partners is reported more often than violence by the current partner. Respondents also report more serious violence by ex-partners: of the women who were a victim of violence by an ex-partner a third stated that four or more types of violence had occurred. See also Römkens, 1992.

¹³ See WHO, 2013. For a systematic overview of the most significant data, see also: Römkens, 2008.

Given that this percentage includes both physical and sexual violence, the difference with the international findings is striking. Possible explanations have already been given (notably, the different timeframe – the previous five years – and the limited definition of ‘obvious violence’).

The Dutch figures for physical violence from non-partners are higher than the EU average. 31% of the Dutch women respondents experienced violence from someone other than a partner or ex-partner (representing over 1.9 million Dutch women). Contrary to what is often assumed, in non-partner violence the perpetrator is often also someone known to the victim. It may be a family member, friend, colleague, other work contact, teacher or fellow student. Only in three out of ten cases is the perpetrator someone unknown to the victim. The FRA statistics also show that non-partner violence in the Netherlands often takes place in or around the victim’s home: this is true for 30% of cases, which corresponds to the EU average. Incidents also often occur at school, at work, at restaurants and bars and in public places. The Safety Monitor also asks victims about the location of incidents of violence and the type of perpetrator. With respect to physical assault, a quarter of the women surveyed (and 8% of the men) stated that the violence occurred in their own home. Almost one in five (19%) of the women and 3% of the men reported that the perpetrator was a partner or ex-partner (Merens et al., 2012).

In the Netherlands the Consumer Safety Institute (VeiligheidNL)¹⁴ has also collected data about violence based on a representative sample among patients attending hospitals' Accident & Emergency (A&E) departments. A&E departments register the causes and circumstances leading up to injuries on the basis of the information given by the victim. These data cannot be compared with prevalence statistics based on population surveys because the sample in this situation represents the tip of the iceberg: women who have suffered such serious injury that they need to visit A&E. However, they still provide relevant information.

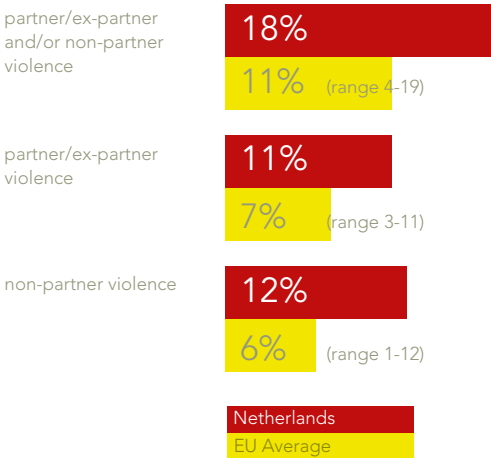
VeiligheidNL's statistics show that women are more often the victim of perpetrators who are known to them than of unknown perpetrators. In 2012, 80% of female patients aged 15 years and over attending A&E with injuries caused by violence, and who provided information about the perpetrator, stated that this person was known to them. In almost half of cases the perpetrator was their partner or ex-partner (30% partners, 15% ex-partners and 34% other persons known to the victim). The same picture emerges from the 2010 Dutch study. Women become victims of violence by a partner or ex-partner more often than men. When men become the victim of domestic violence, the perpetrator is more often a brother, father, another male relative or a male family friend (Van der Veen & Bogaerts, 2010; Movisie, 2013). VeiligheidNL's statistics show that when women provide information on the location of the violent incident, in almost half of cases (44%) it is in, or in the vicinity of their own home (VeiligheidNL, 2014).

14 The Consumer Safety Institute (VeiligheidNL) is a civil society organisation that focuses its expertise on all areas of safety in which injuries and deaths occur. See www.veiligheid.nl.

Sexual violence – general

In the FRA survey, 18% of the Dutch women report that they have experienced sexual violence at some time in their life. This varies from rape or attempted rape to participating in sexual activities due to threats or against their will.¹⁵ The prevalence figure in the Netherlands is higher than the EU average of 11%, but is comparable with that of certain other European countries, such as Denmark, Finland and Sweden.

Ever experienced sexual violence



Explanatory note

Many victims turn out to have experienced sexual violence from both a partner (or ex-partner) and a non-partner (in the Netherlands 5%, EU average 2%).

Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) 2014

¹⁵ See note 7.

The prevalence figure for sexual violence in the Netherlands in the FRA study is lower than in various studies in this field by Rutgers WPF.¹⁶ In the 'Sexual health in the Netherlands 2011' population survey, 33% of Dutch women aged 19 to 71 reported that they had experienced a form of sexual violence at some time (De Haas, 2012).^{17/18} The differences between the FRA statistics and those obtained by Rutgers WPF may be related to differences in the method of data collection: unlike the FRA, Rutgers WPF used online questionnaires, rather than live interviews. The taboo on talking about violence may have caused women to be more reluctant to speak out in face-to-face interviews that were conducted by the FRA (Römkens, 1989; Römkens, 1992). The outcomes of the studies by Rutgers WPF do not provide any evidence of over-reporting in these studies. This suggests that sexual violence may be occurring on a larger scale in the Netherlands than the FRA survey indicates.

Sexual violence by partners (or ex-partners) and non-partners

11% of all Dutch women in the FRA survey reported having experienced sexual violence from a partner or ex-partner. In absolute numbers this represents almost 660,000 women in the Netherlands. The EU average for sexual violence by partners and ex-partners is 7%. The Dutch score is therefore considerably higher than the average, but comparable to scores in countries such as Denmark, Finland Sweden and the United Kingdom.

- 16** Rutgers WPF defines sexual violence broadly along the same lines as the definition in the European survey: serious forms of sexual misconduct, such as rape or assault or where violence, threatened violence or blackmail is used.
- 17** The percentage of men who stated that they had experienced sexual violence was 8%.
- 18** In studies among young people aged 12 to 25, 17% of the girls and 5% of the boys stated that they had on at least one occasion in their lives been made to do something sexual that they did not actually want to do (De Graaf et al., 2012).

12% of all Dutch women in the FRA survey reported sexual violence by non-partners. This includes unknown perpetrators and perpetrators known to the victim who are not partners or ex-partners. The Dutch figure is twice the EU average (6%) but is comparable to those of Sweden, Denmark and Finland. 5% of the Dutch women in the FRA survey had experienced sexual violence from both one or more partners or ex-partners, and one or more non-partners.

Here again the FRA survey confirms the findings of the Dutch studies mentioned above, which indicate that in many cases sexual violence is perpetrated by persons close to or known by the victim. The study by Rutgers WPF also revealed that only a minority of one in five victims of sexual violence (20%) did not know the perpetrator (De Haas, 2012). Of the women surveyed in the Safety Monitor who had been the victim of sexual violence in the past year, 45% stated that the perpetrator was known to them. 7% stated that the perpetrator was a partner or ex-partner and in a significant number of cases the perpetrator was reported to be 'someone from work' (17%) (Merens et al., 2012).

Rape

Rape is a specific and very serious form of violence. 5% of all women in the FRA survey stated that they had been raped since the age of 15.¹⁹ Again partners and ex-partners were reported as perpetrators more frequently than non-partners: 4% of the women in the EU surveyed reported rape by a partner or ex-partner, 2% by a different perpetrator. Of the Dutch women surveyed in the FRA study, 10% reported having experienced rape.

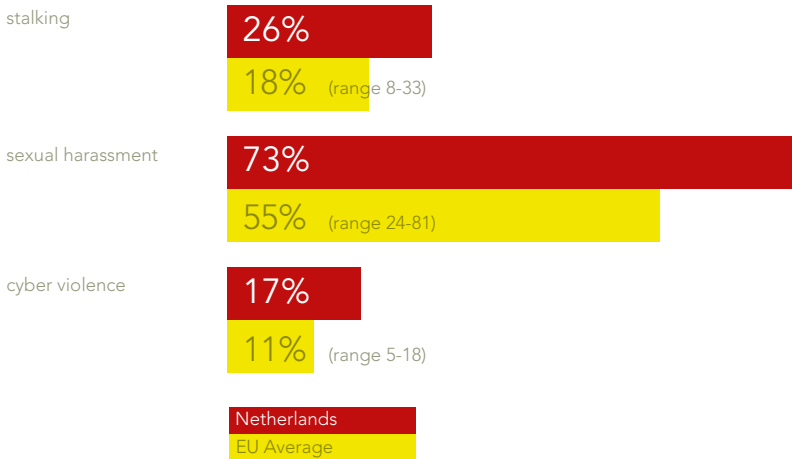
In an earlier Dutch study, just over 7% of the women surveyed stated that they had been raped, but this only included rape by a partner (Römkens, 1989; Römkens, 1992). The more recent study by Rutgers WPF revealed that 15% of women aged 25 to 70 had been forced to have sexual intercourse at some point in their lives (De Haas, 2012).^{20/21}

- 19** Although rape is a criminal offence in all EU Member States, the definition differs in each Member State. In the Netherlands rape is: sexual penetration of the body using violence (or threats of violence) or when someone is unconscious, powerless or mentally unstable. This covers vaginal penetration and oral or anal sex.
- 20** 5% of the women in this survey had taken part in anal sex against her will and 8% in oral sex (the figure for male victims is 2% in both cases). This study does not state how many women were raped by a partner or ex-partner. However, when asked about their most recent experience of physical sexual misconduct, 30% of respondents who had experienced this after the age of 16 stated that the perpetrator was their current or former partner/boyfriend/girlfriend. Of the respondents who experienced this before the age of 16, 16% said that the perpetrator was their current or former partner/boyfriend/girlfriend.
- 21** The previously mentioned Dutch research by Rutgers WPF among young people between 12 and 25 years of age reveals that over 7% of girls has had sexual intercourse against her will at some time, as compared with just under 2% of boys. The first time they had sexual intercourse 0.2% of boys and 3% of girls were forced to participate and 5% of boys and 14% of girls were persuaded (De Graaf et al., 2012).

Stalking, sexual harassment and cyber violence

The FRA survey also asked about experiences of stalking and sexual harassment. In this context, forms of cyber violence were also included in the survey as subcategories (see the definitions in the notes). There is some overlap between these categories.

Ever experienced stalking, sexual harassment and cyber violence



Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) 2014

Stalking

Dutch women experience stalking ²² relatively often: one in four women (26%) has experienced some form of stalking, compared with an EU average of 18%. The Dutch prevalence figure represents one-and-a-half million women in absolute terms. It should be noted that the definition of stalking used is relatively broad: it also includes repeatedly sending offensive emails. If the definition is restricted to physically following a victim and loitering in close proximity to the victim or waiting for her without a legitimate reason, then the figure for the Netherlands is 10% and the EU average is 8%. Like the other forms of violence, stalking is also often perpetrated by someone the victim knows. In more than half of cases women reported that the stalker was known to them. Almost one in three women who reported stalking (32%) were stalked by their partner or ex-partner.

A significant proportion of the experiences of stalking appeared to have a profound effect on the victim. Three in five of the women interviewed by the FRA who experienced stalking, indicated that this had led to long-term psychological consequences such as anxiety and difficulties in sleeping. One in seven victims (14%) moved house as a result of the stalking. For one in five victims (21%) the stalking continued for more than two years.

These results from the FRA survey correspond to the analysis in the Dutch Police Monitor 2001 (Van der Aa, 2010). This reveals that approximately 29% of Dutch women has experienced stalking at some point in their lives. If only repeated incidents are included, the figure is 9%. The prevalence of

22 The FRA survey distinguishes various forms of stalking: sending threatening or offensive emails, text messages, letters or cards, offensive or threatening phone calls or silent phone calls, posting offensive comments about the victim on the internet, sharing or posting intimate photographs or videos of the victim on the internet or by mobile phone, loitering in close proximity to the victim without a legitimate reason, deliberately following the victim, interfering with or damaging property.

the more serious forms of stalking also corresponds to the percentage in the FRA survey.²³

Sexual harassment

Almost three-quarters of the Dutch women in the FRA survey (73%) reported having experienced sexual harassment at some time.²⁴

Calculated for the population as a whole, this represents 4.3 million women. This percentage is significantly higher than the European average of 55%. It is not possible to account for this at present as only limited data on sexual harassment are available from Dutch studies. An annual study into employment relations in the Netherlands did reveal that almost 9% of the female employees surveyed had been a victim of unwanted sexual attention from customers in the previous twelve months. Just under 3% had received such attention from a supervisor or colleague (CBS/TNO, 2011).

Cyber violence

Cyber violence, or cyberharassment, is a relatively new form of violence, resulting from the developments in the field of communication technology and social media. Examples include applications for mobile telephones that track another person's location (using GPS or other means) and the means to circulate sexually explicit pictures, even to large groups of recipients, at the touch of a button. One in six Dutch women reported cyberharassment in the FRA survey (17%, occurring from the age of 15). Among young women (aged 18 to 29) the percentage is higher: one

23 This Police Monitor was based on telephone interviews with over 80,000 respondents. After 2001 no questions were included relating to stalking. The Police Monitor later became part of the Safety Monitor.

24 The FRA survey asked about experiences of a number of different forms of sexual harassment behaviour: unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing, sexually suggestive comments or jokes, inappropriate advances, intrusive questions about the victim's private life, intrusive comments about the victim's physical appearance, staring or leering in an intimidating way, sending sexually explicit images, photographs or 'gifts', indecent exposure, making the victim watch pornographic material against her wishes, sending unwanted sexually explicit emails or text messages.

in three. In this area the Dutch percentage is again higher than the EU average, which is 11%. The Dutch figure is comparable to that of countries such as Sweden and Denmark.

The FRA statistic for the Netherlands is higher than the figures revealed by earlier Dutch studies. In the Safety Monitor, 3.6% of the Dutch women surveyed reported having experienced some form of cyberbullying in the previous year (CBS Statline). When analysing this difference, one must remember that the Dutch Safety Monitor survey only asked about experiences in the past year. Actions classified as cyberbullying are: defamation (creating offensive websites or profiles about someone, posting messages under a false name on internet forums, circulating photographs or video clips or spreading gossip), blackmail/extortion and threatening with violence. On average each victim experienced approximately two offences. Incidentally, in the Dutch study lesbians and homosexual men emerged as victims of cyberbullying significantly more often (6.4% and 6.2% respectively) than heterosexual respondents.

Although the results of the FRA survey suggest that a significant social problem exists, little comparable research has been conducted in the Netherlands into the prevalence and effects of cyber violence. As a result, it is not possible to make a comparison at present. Recent criminal cases, in the Netherlands and in other countries, in which suspects have used harassment and blackmail via cyber means to force large numbers of victims (often young teenagers) into sexual acts, both online and in face-to-face meetings, indicate problematic developments within the field of cyber violence.

Seeking help after victimisation

Health care

The FRA survey shows that approximately half the victims of physical or sexual violence sustained injuries, varying from bruises to broken bones and brain injuries. They were asked whether they sought medical help following the most serious incident of violence that they experienced. Almost a quarter of the Dutch women surveyed who experienced violence by a partner or ex-partner (23%) visited a doctor or health centre; 6% ended up in hospital as a result of their injuries. These data correspond to the findings of earlier Dutch research: this showed that a minority of approximately a quarter to a third of the women who experienced intimate partner violence sought help from a GP (Römkens, 1989; Römkens, 1992; Prosmán et al., 2011).²⁵

In cases of non-partner violence 13% of the women in the FRA survey visited a doctor or health centre and 5% attended a hospital. These statistics underline both the larger scale and more serious nature of intimate partner violence as compared to violence by other perpetrators and the health risk it poses for women. The European average for women visiting hospital following incidents of violence is higher, but lower for visits to a doctor or health centre.

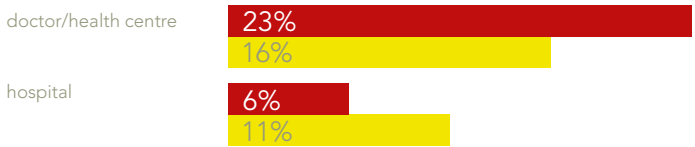
Based on these data it appears that the proportion of female victims reporting to primary care providers in the Netherlands is higher than the EU average. In the EU as a whole a relatively high percentage make use of hospital care and A&E departments. However, caution is advisable in drawing conclusions from these statistics, given that there are significant differences between the EU countries' healthcare systems in terms of

²⁵ A survey conducted by general practices revealed that 30% of women visiting the GP had at some stage been a victim of intimate partner violence (Prosmán et al., 2011).

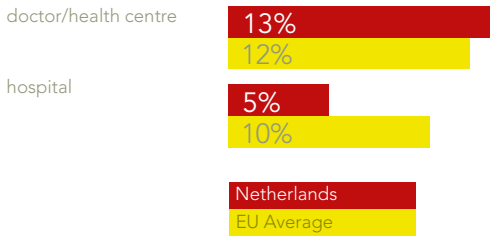
the level of facilities and the infrastructure. The relatively high number of women in the Netherlands who make use of primary care facilities following violence may be an indicator of relatively easy access to these facilities.

Victims seeking medical help following the most serious incident of violence

partner/ex-partner violence



non-partner violence



Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) 2014

Based on the Injuries and Physical Activities in the Netherlands (OBiN) questionnaire 2006-2012, VeiligheidNL estimates that a total of 75,000 injuries were suffered by women each year during this period. In almost two-thirds of these cases (63%) these injuries required medical treatment. **26**

26 Unfortunately the data recorded do not include who caused the injury and whether the injury took place in the domestic situation or elsewhere.

Police

In the FRA survey, 15% of the Dutch victims of violence by a partner or ex-partner, or by a non-partner contacted the police. These figures are similar to the EU averages of 13% for non-partner violence and 14% for partner or ex-partner violence. A recent study in the Netherlands showed that approximately 20% of female victims of domestic violence reported one or more incidents to the police (Van der Veen & Bogaerts, 2010).

The records maintained by the Dutch police include approximately 95,000 domestic violence incidents each year. Three-quarters of incidents involve violence against a female victim. In two-thirds of cases, the perpetrator is the partner or ex-partner of the victim (Ferwerda & Hardeman, 2013).

The FRA survey also asked respondents about the reasons why incidents of violence were not reported to police or other support services. The reason most often given was that women regarded them as a private matter and wanted to resolve the situation themselves. Other responses included that they did not consider the incident to be serious enough, that they wanted to keep it secret, that they didn't believe anyone could help, that they were ashamed and that they were afraid of the perpetrator.

The Dutch internet survey in 2010 also asked about reasons for not reporting an incident. Here again female victims generally mentioned shame and fear of the perpetrator, as well as other responses such as 'I consider it a private matter' and 'not important enough / never thought of it' (Van der Veen & Bogaerts, 2010). This corresponds to the findings of earlier Dutch research in which women also frequently cited 'shame' and 'fear of the partner' as reasons for not going to the police (Römkens, 1989; Römkens, 1992).

Women's shelters and victim support

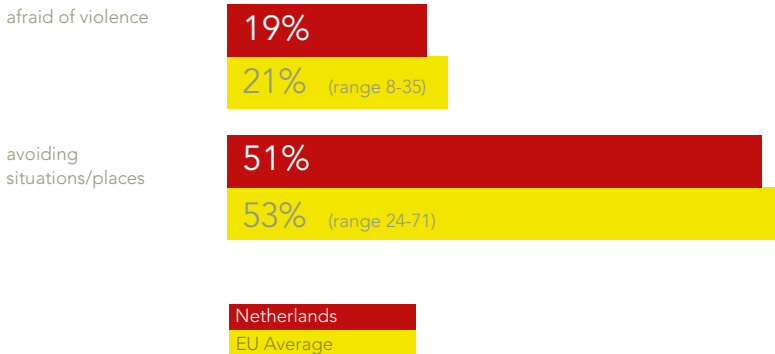
Most EU countries have facilities such as women's shelters and victim support organisations. However, for many women leaving their home to flee to a shelter is a very big step. The FRA survey clearly shows that only a small group of victims of violence take this step. 6% of the Dutch women surveyed had contacted a women's shelter (as compared with 4% on average in the EU). Calculated for the population as a whole, this represents 360,000 women who have contacted a women's shelter due to one or more incidents of violence. It appears that the capacity of women's shelters in the Netherlands, which provide approximately 3000 beds, is not always sufficient.

Victim support agencies were contacted by 4% of victims (both EU-wide and in the Netherlands).

Fear of victimisation and feelings of safety

The FRA statistics show that fear of becoming a victim of violence is slightly lower among Dutch women than the EU average: 19% of women (as compared with 21% in the EU) were afraid of violence within the last year. So approximately one in five Dutch women sometimes worries about her risk of becoming a victim of physical and/or sexual violence. Half of the Dutch women (51%) avoids certain places and situations: out of fear, or because she considers them to be high-risk. This percentage is comparable to the EU average.

Fear and avoidance in the past year



Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) 2014

The places and situations that women avoid are not always in public areas. 3% of the Dutch women in the FRA survey had avoided their own home at some point in the previous twelve months out of fear of domestic violence. Calculated for the population as a whole this represents around 180,000 women who do not always consider their own home to be a safe place.

A striking aspect is that fearing violence is particularly prevalent among young women. 32% of Dutch women between 18 and 29 years had experienced this within the last year (as compared to 28% on average in the EU). Six out of ten young women in the Netherlands avoid certain situations and places for this reason. This percentage does not differ from the EU average.

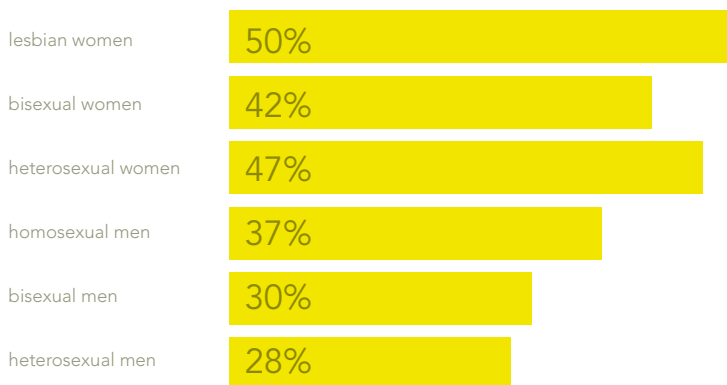
Other groups with a relatively high prevalence of fear of violence included single mothers in cities, women with an immigrant background, women experiencing financial difficulties and women who had lost their jobs within the previous year.

In the Dutch 'Safety Monitor 2012' the CBS surveyed perceptions about safety in the Netherlands.²⁷ This study reveals that almost half (47%) of the women surveyed had felt unsafe either frequently or occasionally during the previous year. This percentage is considerably lower (29%) for men. Among young women (up to 25) as many as 58% report feeling unsafe frequently or occasionally, compared with 31% of young men (the percentages of women and men who 'frequently' feel unsafe are low: 2.3% of women and 1.2% of men) (CBS, 2012).

²⁷ The 'Safety Monitor 2013' does not segregate the statistics according to sex.

The Dutch CBS study also asked about feelings of safety among women and men related to different sexual orientations. Significant differences emerged. Lesbian women feel unsafe more often than bisexual and heterosexual women. They also feel less safe than homosexual men (CBS Statline).²⁸

Feels unsafe frequently or occasionally



Source: CBS Statline

28 Incidentally, research has also been carried out in an EU-wide context into perceptions of safety by lesbians, homosexual men, bisexuals and transgender individuals (LGBT). This reveals that violence against LGBTs occurs frequently and many LGBTs avoid certain situations or places due to fear of violence. See: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/theme/lgbt>.

Conclusions

Violence against women is a widespread problem, in Europe and in the Netherlands. The prevalence and effects of violence against women in the Netherlands indicate a social problem, with profound consequences for women's safety, at home and in public, as well as having an impact on society at large. Some of the findings of the Fundamental Rights Agency's (FRA) 2014 EU-wide survey confirm earlier findings of Dutch research, but the FRA survey also provides new data and new perspectives.

When comparing the findings of the FRA survey concerning the Netherlands with results from Dutch studies and other international research, the data on prevalence and help-seeking behaviour for various kinds of violence (in particular after intimate partner violence) appear to correspond to earlier Dutch studies in which comparable methods were used. With respect to sexual violence, the FRA statistics for the Netherlands are lower than the results emerging from Dutch studies. The latter suggests that the prevalence of sexual violence might be higher than the FRA survey reveals.

In relative terms, the least safe place for women and girls is in their own home. That is where women are most at risk of becoming a victim of violence. In many cases, the perpetrators of violence against women are the victim's partner, ex-partner or someone else in her family or circle of friends.

The development of new forms of communication and technologies (such as internet, social media and mobile communication) has led to new forms of cyber violence, which are occurring on a relatively large scale. Young women and girls, in particular, are confronted with unwanted approaches and serious forms of transgressive cyber harassment and cyber violence.

Recommendations

The Netherlands has ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) in November 2015. Violence against women is a human rights violation that occurs on a large scale and obliges the government to combat it with cohesive national policy and legislation. Gender inequality is one of the causes of violence against women and it enables such violence to continue. For this reason, the integrated approach to violence against women advocated in the convention should go hand in hand with an active gender equality policy.

New prevalence research needs to be carried out in the Netherlands using methodology corresponding to standard international survey techniques such as those applied in the FRA survey, enabling reliable, comparable results to be obtained. This research needs to be repeated regularly so that trends can be identified. This will enable the effectiveness of policy to be assessed, and will also satisfy the requirement to carry out research as determined by the Istanbul Convention.

More consideration needs to be given in research and policy to safety at home. Women's fear and experiences of violence are not confined to public places; they specifically (and to an even greater extent) involve feelings of unsafety in their own homes.

The role of new media in relation to violence needs to be studied, to obtain a deeper understanding of the scale and seriousness of cyber violence against women and, in particular, how it can be prevented. In view of the rise in cyber violence, internet and telephone providers and mobile application developers also have a role to play.

The FRA data indicate that sexual harassment of women in the workplace, particularly of highly educated women, is more widespread and a more serious problem than previously known. For prevention purposes, and in view of the potential economic impact (sick leave), it is urgent and important that employers and unions pay attention to this issue, supported by research on how to address the problem effectively.

In view of the complexity and the social impact of violence against women, an integrated approach is required, combining prevention, protection and victim support. This approach deserves the highest priority by policy makers and police, as well as by employers and healthcare providers. The various professionals involved need to work together in this area.

As part of this integrated approach, extra attention needs to be given to the reporting of incidents of violence. Under the Istanbul Convention, the government has the obligation, for prevention purposes, to encourage awareness raising and break taboos that prevent victims from reporting violence. Awareness raising campaigns targeting society at large could contribute to achieving this goal.

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Violence against women

European Union survey results in the Dutch context

Violence against women and girls – at home, at work, on the streets and online – is a significant social problem. In early 2014 the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) published the groundbreaking survey report 'Violence against women'. For the first time, we have a study providing a detailed, comparative picture of the scale on which women and girls in Europe experience violence.

Atria, the Dutch national institute on gender equality and women's history, puts these European statistics into the Dutch context in a concise and clear fashion. What are the main outcomes of the FRA's survey in the EU and what is the situation in the Netherlands?

The European survey results for the Netherlands are compared, where possible, with the outcomes of earlier Dutch research.