

# Partner-related domestic violence: facts and figures

The RoSa-factsheets aim to familiarise you with the scope of equal opportunities in Flanders. Each factsheet probes the situation in a specific area. Broad themes as well as specific ones are put into the spotlight, depending on the relevance and/or availability of information and numerical data. We do not intend to offer exhaustive information, our primary aim is to sketch the position of women in Flanders in a surveyable and accessible way.

Since its founding in 1978, RoSa is the place in Flanders to look for information and documentation about equal opportunities, emancipation policy and women's studies.

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## Introduction

Acts of violence against women still cause great trouble<sup>1</sup>. Regularly, reports of violent acts committed by partners, brothers, sisters or other family members, emerge in the press. A recent survey of the World Health Organisation (WHO) figures out that one out of four women is at least once in her lifetime confronted with sexual violence, committed by her partner or a relative. 50 % of women dying a violent death, are killed by their (ex-) husband or friend<sup>2</sup>.

Speaking about partner-related crime, we can immediately ask some questions. Which situation do we have in Belgium? How often do people have to deal with this sort of violence? What is the share of partner-related crime in the entire criminality? Who are the victims: mostly women or also men? To answer these questions, this factsheet studies to sorts of figures: police statistics en prevalence figures.

## Police statistics and prevalence figures

### POLICE STATISTICS

The number of times police forces have to deal with domestic violence *in the course of one year*, is reported in the police statistics. The numbers used in this factsheet, are derived from the survey *Het strafrechtelijk beleid in België inzake partnergeweld*, which was published in 2002 under the authority of Belgian federal minister of Employment and Labour responsible for the promotion of equal opportunities for men and women<sup>3</sup>. A team of researchers from the Catholic University of Leuven and the Université Libre de Bruxelles examined the way judicial authorities deal with domestic violence.

<sup>1</sup> A more theoretical explanation of partner-related domestic violence: RYS, Partner-related domestic violence against adult women *RoSa-factsheet* nr. 15.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/releases/pr73/en/print.html>

<sup>3</sup> KUMPS en VAN BEEK, *Het strafrechtelijk beleid inzake partnergeweld*.

The Belgian law of November 27th, 1997 recognized violence between partners as a crime<sup>4</sup>. From February 6th 1998 onwards, the partner relationship between offender and victim becomes a new aggravating circumstance. As such, domestic violence between partners is listed separately in the statistics.

This factsheet starts from the general level of the entire registered criminality. Those figures are then brought to the level of partnercrime. So, first we have the entire registered criminality, followed by the crimes inflicting bodily harm. Under this heading includes the Algemene Politieonderdienst<sup>5</sup>: murder and manslaughter, (deliberate) blows and injuries, rape, indecent assault, other deliberate crimes inflicting bodily harm, omission, undeliberate blows and injuries, unintentional killing and finally all other undeliberate crimes inflicting bodily harm. Then, we can deduce from the level 'blows and injuries' how many times violence is connected to family and partnership.

Since police statistics are fully based on crime reportings, there are some disadvantages. These reportings don't necessarily have to coincide with a real increase or decrease of crime. An increased willingness to report criminal acts can have a great influence here. There's another problem. Police forces started to use the category 'partnercrime' in 1998. They had to get acquainted with the new category. Because of this, there can be a distortion of the figures. Moreover, the police don't make a distinction between men and women so there can be no conclusion on the sex of the offenders / victims. Therefore it could be very useful to study a second set of figures: the prevalence figures.

#### P R E V A L E N C E F I G U R E S

Prevalence figures study the crime-experiences of human beings *during their whole lifetime*. A research team of the University Centre of Limburg supplied pioneering research to the minister of Employment, Labour and Equal Opportunities at the time, Miet Smet. The survey contains an inquiry into the experiences of the victims and the crime-patterns of the inflictors<sup>6</sup>.

Instead of working with police statistics, the researchers make use of sample surveys. 1.439 women and men divided into three age categories (20 to 29 years, 30 to 39 years and 40 to 49 years) were questioned. By doing so, the team continued an earlier survey concerning 953 Flemish women, published in 1988 by the University Centre of Limburg<sup>7</sup>. The women in this study are represented by the age category 40-49 years in the new study.

Unlike the 1988 survey, the inquiry included ten years later also a group of men. This measure was a direct consequence of the growing understanding that not only women became victim of violent acts. The presence of men in the survey allows us to make a comparison between men and women, which of course enriches the conclusion.

We will not compare police statistics and prevalence figures because they don't have the same subject. They are instead put beside one another so we can get an idea of 'partner-related crime' in our country.

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<sup>4</sup> 'The act of November 24th, 1997 to the effect of combating violence between partners'. KUMPS en VAN BEEK, *Het strafrechtelijk beleid inzake partnergeweld*, pages 3-18.

<sup>5</sup> This service makes the statistics.

<sup>6</sup> BRUYNOOGHE, NOELANDERS en OPDEBEECK, *Geweld ondervinden, gebruiken en voorkomen*, page 1.

<sup>7</sup> BRUYNOOGHE, OPDEBEECK en VANDEWEGE, *Ervaringen van vrouwen met fysiek en seksueel geweld: prevalentie en gevolgen*.

FIGURES

**The entire registered criminality and the share of deliberate crimes inflicting bodily harm**

	1997	1998	1999
Entire registered criminality	818.660	856.495	857.445
Deliberate crimes inflicting bodily harm	64.523 (7.8%)	65.973 (7.6%)	65.493 (7.7%)

Source: KUMPS en VAN BEEK, *Het strafrechtelijk beleid inzake partnergeweld*, 34.

**Evolution in terms of percentage**

	1997	1998	1999
Entire registered criminality	+10.4	+4.6	+0.0
Deliberate crimes inflicting bodily harm	+10.3	+2.2	+0.0

Source: KUMPS en VAN BEEK, *Het strafrechtelijk beleid inzake partnergeweld*, 34.

The entire registered criminality came to a halt in 1999, after the increase in the years 1997-1998. The figures of the deliberate crimes inflicting bodily harm show a similar situation.

According to the survey, deliberate crimes inflicting bodily harm (+/- 7.5 %) occupy a third place in the entire criminality. By doing so, this type of crime follows 'theft and blackmail' and 'violent crimes against property'.

Deliberate crimes inflicting bodily harm are classified into categories, including 'blows and injuries'. This group is important here because Kumps en Van Beek classify 'domestic violence caused by partners' under this heading.

**Deliberate crimes inflicting bodily harm and the share of blows and injuries**

	1997	1998	1999
Deliberate crimes inflicting bodily harm	64.523	65.973	65.943
Deliberate blows and injuries	53.730 (83.3%)	54.605 (82.8%)	54.314 (82.4%)

Source: KUMPS en VAN BEEK, *Het strafrechtelijk beleid inzake partnergeweld*, 35.

'Blows and injuries' occupies with an average 80 % the most important place in this category. After a slight increase in the years 1997-1998, the situation steadied in 1998-1999.

**Deliberate blows and injuries - family background**

	1997	1998	1999
Deliberate blows and injuries	53.730	54.605	54.314
Within the family	14.274 (26.6%)	15.265 (28.0%)	17.242 (31.7%)
Outside the family	39.455 (73.4%)	39.339 (72.0%)	37.072 (68.3%)

Source: KUMPS en VAN BEEK, *Het strafrechtelijk beleid inzake partnergeweld*, 37.

As we can deduce from this schedule, the blows and injuries are situated mostly outside domestic circles. Somehow, in the period 1997-1999 we can notice a shift towards an increase of violence acts within the family while non-domestic violence is decreasing.

### Violence within the family - relationship victim / offender

	1997	1998	1999
Against parents	433 (3.0%)	593 (4.5%)	618 (3.6%)
Against relatives	103 (0.7%)	115 (0.8%)	142 (0.8)
Against -16's, acts committed by parents	440 (3.1%)	479 (3.1%)	525 (3.0%)
Against disabled, committed by parents	5 (0.0%)	10 (0.1%)	4 (0.0%)
General familial troubles	13.293 (93.1%)	13.940 (91.3%)	10.148 (58.9%)
Between (ex-) partners	-	129 (0.8%)	5.806 (33.7%)
TOTAAL	14.274	15.265	17.242

Source: KUMPS en VAN BEEK, *Het strafrechtelijk beleid inzake partnergeweld*, 38.

Within the category of intrafamilial violence, the violent acts committed in 'general familial troubles' constitute the biggest group. This category exceeds the boundaries of the traditional domestic family situation. By doing so, it covers also violent acts between stepchildren, stepparents and people living together. Consequently, non married partners can be found here until 1998. By recording this group separately from 1998, there can be noticed a considerable drop in the share of the 'general familial troubles'. On the other hand, the category 'violent acts between (ex-) partners' booms because of the separate registration of partnercrime. In 1999, this sort of crime represents almost 1/3 of the total amount of violent acts within domestic circles.

### CONCLUSION

According to police statistics, the entire criminality increased slightly during the years '97-'99. Partner-related crime was mentioned separately only in 1998 but it is not until 1999 that these figures can be trusted. The entire crime ran up in 1999 to 857.445 units. Police forces registered 5.806 cases of partner-related crime acts. This brings the share of partner-related crime in the entire registered criminality up to 0.67 %. At the same time, within the category of the blows and injuries, domestic violence is gaining ground at the expense of the extrafamilial violence.

### Prevalence figures

#### Experience with violence in terms of percentage

	Women 1988	Women 1998	Men 1998
No physical or sexual violence	42.1	31.9	27.0
Sexual violence	14.9	11.1	3.8
Physical violence	21.3	24.2	48.0
Physical and sexual violence	21.7	32.8	21.2
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: BRUYNOOGHE, NOELANDERS en OPDEBEECK. *Geweld ondervinden, gebruiken en voorkomen*, 55.

According to this schedule, men are in general more confronted with violent acts than women. Women are more frequently a victim of sexual violence whereas men are more often confronted with physical violence.

An important part of the survey deals with the relationship between victim and offender. The following schedule shows the importance of partner-related crime. The figures are again split into physical violence (FG) and sexual violence (SG).

### Relationship between victim and offender

Type of relationship	Women 1988		Women 1998		Men 1998	
	FG	SG	FG	SG	FG	SG
Partners	17.7	17.3	27.5	20.9	1.8	7.7
Parents	65.0	3.1	43.1	8.1	36.7	4.6
Brothers/Sisters	4.1	3.5	4.9	1.7	3.3	1.8
Children	-	-	0.3	0.0	0.9	0.3
Other family members	1.4	11.5	2.1	11.1	1.2	2.1
Work/School/Army	n.b.	n.b.	4.9	5.9	15.5	9.0
Authoritative person / relief worker	6.1	2.6	0.9	1.7	3.1	8.0
Other acquaintances	4.1	26.7	9.4	24.0	10.4	38.4
Strangers	1.6	33.2	6.9	26.6	27.1	28.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: BRUYNOOGHE, NOELANDERS en OPDEBEECK. *Geweld ondervinden, gebruiken en voorkomen*, 69.

During the years 1988-1998 the experiences with partner-related crime increased in the female group. An evolution in the male group cannot be found because men were not tested in 1988. It is a fact though, that men are less confronted with partner-related crime than women. It is curious that men then suffer mostly from sexual violence for the previous schedule showed that men get more often involved in physical violence. Thus, regarding men, the trends concerning partner-related crime do not follow the general tendencies. Women do follow this trend: in both cases they tend to be more confronted with physical violence. The share of partner-related crime in the experience with violence is higher for women: approximately 25 % (women) — approximately 7% (men).

### CONCLUSION

In studying partner-related crime, it is useful to split up the figures by sex. By doing so, you can see that not only women fall victim to violent acts committed by (ex-) partners. Most widespread types of partner-related crime vary according to sex. Men are more confronted with sexual violence than women. Moreover, the sample surveys show a greater share of partner-related crime than can be seen in police statistics. Therefore, it is not easy to conclude whether this share is big or not. A lot depends on classification. Researches should therefore proceed very cautiously and avoid jumping to conclusions.

### References

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