

ONE BLOW IS ONE TOO MANY

Have you or somebody close to you been the victim of family violence? Are you distressed, angry or scared? Do you wonder what you should do and whom to turn to? Do you need help, support and practical advice? Would you like to discuss your experiences of violence with somebody who knows what to do and could listen to you and understand? If so, please read this text carefully.

What is spousal and non-spousal abuse?

Violence occurring in a relationship may involve physical abuse – pushing, beating-up and sexual violence. There can also be mental pressure – name-calling, disparaging comments, intimidation and threats. Spousal and non-spousal abuse can mean that you are being held incommunicado at home without food and money. Violence can also result in destruction of property or using economic control for emotional blackmail.

Violence is regrettably common. It is usually perpetrated by men. He can be the victim's husband or common-law husband, boyfriend, brother or grown son. The target is usually a woman: the perpetrator's wife or common-law wife, girlfriend, sister or elderly mother. In a minority of the cases, the perpetrator is a woman.

For the victim, the consequences of violence can be extremely traumatic. The more experience a person has of violence, the more severe the damage – pain, agony, anxiety, feelings of insecurity and hopelessness, despondency, pent-up anger, mental ill-health, substance abuse and other problems.

There is always hope, though. It is possible to break free from the vicious circle of violence. Many people have successfully left their violent relationships. In addition, some perpetrators have agreed to participate in treatment programmes, where they have dealt with their aggression and decided to stop using violence. This has enabled the relationship to continue on a healthier and safer basis.

Prevalence of violence

According to a study published by Statistics Finland in 1998, 40 per cent of Finnish women had experienced physical or sexual abuse or threat thereof perpetrated by men. A fifth of the women responding reported having faced violence in their present relationship. During the year preceding the survey, some 90,000 women had experienced physical violence perpetrated by men.

Violence in the family inflicts damage on the children, too

Violence against the mother increases the child's risk of falling victim to violence. The child can also be used as a tool to exert pressure. Witnessing violent conflicts has a damaging effect on the child. Images of the weeping mother and brawling father can bring back painful memories for years. People who have been victimised in childhood often become victims or victimisers themselves. However, this does not have to be the case: the vicious circle can be broken.

Nothing justifies resorting to violence

There is no excuse for violent behaviour. The threat of divorce, jealousy, fear of abandonment, sexual rejection, difficult childhood, economic situation or inadequate housing conditions do not justify hitting another person. One blow is one too many.

Violence is a crime

In Finland, causing bodily harm in a private or public place constitutes a felony subject to official prosecution. Therefore, an act of violence occurring in the privacy of somebody's home may result in seeking an indictment even though the victim has not pressed charges. However, the incident must be reported to the police.

In force since 1999, the Finnish Act on the Restraining Order aims to prevent crime and to provide better possibilities to intervene in serious harassment and threats of violence. A person subject to a restraining order is not allowed to meet or otherwise contact the person being protected. Nor can he or she follow and observe the protected person. You can apply for a restraining order from the police or directly from the district court. A person who has acted violently or threatened to do so can also be denied access to a certain area, such as the victim's home or workplace and their environs. For additional information on the restraining order, please refer to www.poliisi.fi

Seek help

Violence will not stop of its own accord. Therefore, the victim is advised to be active and seek help. While violence may not occur every day, it can be felt as a threatening presence. If the vicious circle is not broken, violence may become more brutal and frequent.

Help is available both to victims and batterers. Do not hesitate to seek professional help to find a solution for yourself and your close person. Your safety and domestic peace are the most important considerations. Everybody is entitled to a nonviolent life.

Nationwide emergency numbers and helplines in Finland:

General emergency number 112

Police 10022

Finnish Service for Crime Victims 0600-16116

Finnish Service for Crime Victims, legal counselling 0600-16117

Tukinainen – the Rape Crisis Centre 0800-97899

Tukinainen – the Rape Crisis Centre, legal counselling 0800-97895

Lyömätön linja – Nonbeating Choice 6126-6212

Jussi activities for men and the Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters, inquiries (09)-454-2440

Nonviolent Choice Association helpline (09)-726-1600

Multicultural Association Monika ry (09)-4114-8700

Health centre, family clinic or family counselling centre in your locality

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