



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

SPEAK UP ABOUT IT!

Funded by:



Federal Ministry for
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,
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Every hour, a woman in Germany becomes the victim of domestic abuse. For me, this is a horrifying statistic which shows that domestic abuse can affect women of any age and from any section of the population.

Most of these victims are afraid to accept help – often out of fear or shame, or because they feel that they are partly to blame. When those affected do seek help, their first point of contact is often their doctor. Zeitbild MEDICAL wants to encourage all women who are the victims of abuse to talk to their doctor. Not only can they understand and treat physical and psychological wounds, they are also able to offer advice on the further sources of help that are available.

Nina Moghaddam



Freedom, independence and equality for women have become issues that play a central role in my life. I see it as my task to give women courage and to protect them whenever a boundary has been overstepped. Whether those boundaries have been overstepped in verbal, physical or emotional terms – women must be listened to.

Natalia Wörner

DISCOVER DIGITAL CONTENT

This magazine also offers you digital content via augmented reality (AR). On all those pages that carry the AR symbol, we have included links (videos, websites, podcasts) which you can explore with your smartphone or tablet.

1. **Download the free “Xtend” app for iOS or Android!**
2. **Scan! In the main menu, click on “Scan” and hold your camera over the page or image marked with the AR symbol.**
3. **Discover! Videos, websites and much more besides ...**

App for the use of augmented reality



Symbol for digital content via augmented reality



THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT FORMS OF ABUSE



Domestic abuse means all forms of physical, sexual or psychological abuse and includes both abuse within the family and between partners in a relationship. We use the term domestic abuse when the abuse is occurring between persons who live together as a family or as partners in a relationship. We also use the term when the abuse is occurring within a family or in a current or former relationship where the persons involved do not have a shared household.

The place where the abuse is occurring may be the person's own home, but it may also be their workplace, a public space, a childcare facility or another location.

Domestic abuse primarily affects women, and the perpetrators are mostly men. It ranges from physical attacks, such as pushing or hitting, through to forcing someone to perform sexual acts and psychological abuse such as humiliation, persecution and being constantly controlled or insulted by a partner.

Many women find it difficult to talk about their experiences. This means that the serious consequences for their health and their difficult circumstances often remain hidden from their doctors. This may even lead to incorrect treatment being given as chronic complaints often continue for years without any connection being made to the abuse that the patient is suffering.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Holding someone tight, pushing, hitting or kicking them, strangling or choking them, injuring them with weapons or other objects, depriving them of food, preventing them from sleeping, etc.

SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexualised language, forcing a person to look at pornographic material, coercing/forcing them to perform sexual acts, rape, etc.

VERBAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Insulting someone, humiliating or threatening them, calling them crazy, using children to exert pressure, etc.

SOCIAL ABUSE

Forbidding a person from having contact with others, controlling them, making them socially isolated, taking away their car/bike (key) or travel ticket, locking them up, etc.

DIGITAL VIOLENCE

Using digital media to insult someone, making them look stupid, slandering them, blackmailing them, threatening them, etc.

ECONOMIC ABUSE

Only allowing a person small amounts of money or taking their money away from them, forbidding them from working, forcing them to work, etc.

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



Violence and abuse can affect women of any age and from any section of the population.

In Germany ...

- **25 percent** of women have experienced physical or sexual violence by a **current or former partner**.

Types of offences:

- 59.3 percent deliberate minor bodily injury
- 24.2 percent threats, stalking, coercion
- 1.7 percent grievous bodily harm
- 2.5 percent rape, sexual coercion, sexual assaults
- 0.2 percent murder and manslaughter
- 2.1 percent other offences

- In 2022, a total of **157,818 persons were the victim of violence or abuse by a partner in a relationship**; of these, 80 percent were women.

- Women who are **in the process of separating from or getting divorced from a partner** are especially at risk of becoming the victim of violence or abuse at the hands of their (ex-) partner.

- **Women with a disability or impairment** are more often exposed to all forms of violence compared with the average woman in the population, and this applies throughout their whole lives.

Sources:

- Lebenssituation, Sicherheit und Gesundheit von Frauen in Deutschland – Ergebnisse der repräsentativen Untersuchung zu Gewalt gegen Frauen in Deutschland (Living situation, safety and health of women in Germany – results of the representative study on violence against women in Germany) (Müller/Schröttle, Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2013)
- Partnerschaftsgewalt. Kriminalistische Auswertung. (Violence within relationships. Criminal assessment.) Reporting year 2022 (Federal Criminal Police Office, 2023)
- Lebenssituation und Belastungen von Frauen mit Behinderungen und Beeinträchtigungen in Deutschland (Living situation and added difficulties of women with disabilities and impairments in Germany) (Schröttle/Hornberg, 2013)



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

● Paula, 34

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



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

● Simone, 26

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



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

● Charlotte, 63

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



“I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HIM ... ”

● Özlem, 40

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



“JUST TALK TO SOMEONE!”

● Katy Karrenbauer, from TV broadcaster Crime + Investigation's interview series “Im Angesicht”.

And I kept thinking, he'll never do it again. After all, he said he was sorry. A person who I love can't be that bad. If he is bad, then I've made a mistake, and who likes making mistakes? I don't like making mistakes.

Someone who says sorry, but who has already hit you before, will hit you a second time. And that's something I know from experience, as well as from talking to lots of women and also children who have told me their stories.

I would always recommend that young women, and older women too, seek help, get in touch with someone, build up trust with someone who can help. Just talk to someone!



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ADVICE AND HELP FOR WOMEN



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

What kind of violence have women experienced when they call the helpline?

Women call us for a wide range of different reasons. They may be in a situation of acute danger, in which case it will be a matter of deciding whether tangible help needs to be organised (police, ambulance). Or it may be, for example, that they want to talk about a violent situation that has been going on for some time. The range of situations we encounter are very varied, which means the advice we offer has to be individually tailored to each specific case.

How can you help women in concrete terms?

The first step is for the advisor to take the time to really listen. Each case is treated individually, so she will talk to the caller and they will decide together what kind of support would be best for her. There are no standard solutions. It is very important that the woman decides for herself whether action is to be taken and, if so, what should be done. She is in control of the situation and nothing will happen without her consent. As a next step, they look at possible solutions together.

Anonymity and confidentiality are considered very important on the helpline. Why?

We know how difficult it is for women who have experienced violence to seek help at all. Studies have shown that only around 20 percent of affected women in fact do so. The "Violence against women" helpline provides an easy-to-access service with its guarantee of anonymity, as this is often something that women want to be sure of, especially when they get in touch for the first time. Those who call the helpline can decide for themselves what and how much they want to disclose in terms of their personal details and their story. The advisors will not ask them for any details and will not pass on any information to anyone else.

How did the situation change during the Covid-19 pandemic? Are you getting more calls?

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic the number of people seeking advice has steadily increased. The uncertainties and restrictions that came with the pandemic have shaped and changed the counselling work that we do on the hotline, even into the second

The national hotline "Violence against Women" offers anonymous, free-of-charge advice in 18 different foreign languages, on the phone, via chat or via email, on telephone number **116 016** and on the website www.hilfetelefon.de. It is the only nationwide service that offers victims 24/7 support. The service is provided by more than 80 qualified counsellors who work for the Federal Office for Family Affairs and Civil Society Tasks (BAFzA). Petra Söchting runs the hotline "Violence against Women".

year of the crisis. As in the previous years, 60 percent of the counselling we provided in 2022 was related to domestic abuse. Every 20 minutes, we get a request for help on the hotline which involves violence or abuse by an (ex-) partner. It has become clear that Covid-related restrictions and added difficulties are not the cause of domestic abuse, but they increase the risk that difficult and conflict-laden situations will escalate, that violence will increase and that assaults will become more serious and more frequent.

How can people help if, for example, they suspect that there is a violent situation within their family or in their circle of friends?

It's best to avoid giving suggestions or tips, as this can often make the victim feel even more under pressure. You should listen to them and acknowledge the fact that, for many people, it's a huge step even just to talk to someone. It's important to make it clear that you are there to offer support whenever needed. Then you can perhaps work together to consider what kind of help they would like to be offered and what might be possible. It is absolutely crucial that you never undertake anything without the consent of the affected person – they should be the one who decides what happens next.



SINCE ITS LAUNCH IN MARCH 2013, THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE BEING COUNSELLED HAS BEEN STEADILY INCREASING

In our first year, we counselled just under 19,000 people, but by 2022 the number had risen to almost 53,000. Since 2013, a total of 338,000 people have sought advice from us on the phone, via chat or via email. Nine percent of all counselling sessions were done online. The large majority of callers are themselves the victims of violence (216,417 persons). More than 79,000 persons who are either professionals or from the victim's immediate social environment have also made use of the service. Advice has been given on all forms of violence and abuse. Our counsellors have provided 193,834 persons seeking advice with details of local facilities and organisations; in 82 percent of cases these were advice centres and women's refuges.



ZERO TOLERANCE OF VIOLENCE: YOUR RIGHTS!

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

Call the police if you or someone else is being threatened! Give your name and address and make it clear that you need help immediately. The police can issue an order to prevent the perpetrator from entering your home for a number of days. They have to step in straight away if they are informed of a case of domestic violence.

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

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



CHANGE STARTS WITH EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

One in three women in Germany has been the victim of abuse, and in well over half of these cases the violence occurs within their own direct family environment. Nevertheless, only one in five victims actually seeks help. Far too many cases remain shrouded in silence. Not only because they are afraid of the perpetrator, but because they are worried about what people will think.

That's why we say: let's talk about it. We can't simply sweep violence against women under the carpet. This starts with the language we use. Femicide is femicide. Every year in Germany, well over a hundred women are murdered because they are women. Yet the media still reports on "incidents caused by relationship issues" and "family dramas", rather than calling femicide by its name. 92 percent of the articles on this subject that were published in the German media during 2020 played down the seriousness of violence against women. This really can't go on.

Change starts with education and information. We not only need low-threshold access to offers of help for women so that things don't get that far in the first place, we also need to start earlier. Women and girls are not "to blame" when they are the victims of violence. The bitter struggle for women's rights and for the protection of these rights should be an important topic that is dealt with in every educational institution.

Women and those who are supporting them can find advice and help at: frauen-gegen-gewalt.de/de/hilfe-vor-ort.html, the nationwide advice database run by the bff. Confidential, free-of-charge and, if requested, anonymous.

PROTECT YOUR CHILD!

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

Sarah Wiener,
Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and patron of the Federal Association of Women's Advice Centres and Women's Emergency Hotlines (bff).

WHO CAN I TURN TO?

No woman has to deal with violence on her own! Help is available, for example from:

- the police (110)
- our helpline
- advice centres
- the court system
- a doctor
- women's refuges and shelters

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I CAN DO?

- Ask a person you trust to come and see you or call you regularly.
- Confide in a doctor.
- Allow your injuries to be documented in a way that will stand up in court as evidence of the frequency and severity of the injuries.
- Leave your mobile phone in a specific room so you can get help in case of emergency.
- Leave a suitcase with important documents and perhaps some essential clothing with a person you trust.
- Find out about special codes that can be used to let people know about your situation without anyone else realising, e.g. at the pharmacy or during a video call.



WE CAN BE REACHED 365 DAYS A YEAR, 24 HOURS A DAY:

- The "Violence against women" helpline is manned 24 hours a day.
- We offer anonymous and free-of-charge advice, on the number 116 016 or via an online advice session, to persons affected by violence or to their relatives, people who are close to the victim, or to professionals.
- We can offer safe and secure advice sessions via chat or e-mail through our website: www.hilfetelefon.de
- Our qualified advisors offer help and support to callers and, if requested to do so, they can refer them to support services in their local area. We can also organise an interpreter if required, in one of 18 languages.
- For women with a disability, we are able to offer advice in simple language and in German sign language.

www.hilfetelefon.de

USEFUL LINKS

www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/themen/gleichstellung/frauen-vor-gewalt-schuetzen

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

www.frauen-gegen-gewalt.de

Website of the Federal Association of Women's Advisory Services and Women's Emergency Helplines.

www.frauenberatungsstelle.de/pages/beratungsstelle/download.php

Website of the Federal Association of Women's Advisory Services and Women's Emergency Helplines.

www.frauenhauskoordinierung.de

Information portal of the women's refuges with a regional search function.

www.gesine-intervention.de

Information for women affected by violence.

www.gewaltschutz.info

Information for affected persons on getting protection against violence and on their rights.

<https://gleichstellung.dosb.de/themen/schutz-vor-gewalt>

Website for the campaign „Strong networks against violence!“ which was set up by the German Olympic Sports Confederation to offer self-defence courses.

www.polizei-beratung.de/themen-und-tipps/gewalt/

Crime prevention by the police – domestic abuse is something that concerns all of us!

www.telefonseelsorge.de

Anonymous advice available on the phone, via chat or in person for people in all kinds of difficult situations.

<https://weisser-ring.de>

Information, advice and help for the victims of violence.

www.zanzu.de

Online portal of the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA), with information on sexual/reproductive health in 13 languages.

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