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Domestic violence affects over 100,000 women in Germany

For the first time, federal police have released national data on violence in relationships in Germany. The information shows that murder, sexual offenses, bodily harm and stalking are not uncommon between partners.

DW (22.11.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2qIh1m5> - The Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) together with the German Minister for Family Affairs, Manuela Schwesig, released the statistics in Berlin on Tuesday. This is the first time police were releasing numbers showing the extent of violence in intimate relationships, the BKA said in a press statement.

According to the BKA's figures, in 2015, a total of 127,457 people in relationships were targets of murder, bodily harm, rape, sexual assault, threats and stalking. Eighty-two percent, or over 104,000, of these were women.

Among the women, over 65,800 suffered simple injuries, 11,400 were badly injured, 16,200 were subjected to threats and nearly 8,000 were victims of stalking. Three hundred thirty-one women were killed intentionally or unintentionally by their partners.

In cases of rape and sexual assault, almost all the victims were women. Over ninety percent of victims of stalking and threats were also female, according to the statistics.

In a press statement, the BKA's President Holder Munch explained that police had registered several cases of abuse, starting from subtle forms of humiliation, insults and intimidation, psychic, physical and sexual abuse to rape and murder.

"Domestic violence against women, against men, against children is not a private affair, it is a punishable offence and must be tracked accordingly," Family Minister Manuela Schwesig told reporters.

"Violence, that takes place within one's own four walls, in a place where one should feel secure, is unfortunately true for many women. This taboo, of not speaking about it, must be broken. For the first time numbers for this particular subject have been specifically evaluated," she added.

"We need these numbers, because they help in making domestic violence visible. They also help in developing measures to prevent and fight against domestic violence," she said.

Schwesig also urged victims to call the "Gewalt gegen Frauen" (Violence against women) helpline at 08000116116. The 24-hour number offers free counselling to victims in 15 languages.

Cologne sex attacks: MPs debate tougher laws

The German parliament is debating draft laws to give women more protection in sexual violence cases.

BBC (28.04.2016) - <http://bbc.in/1Oko4d2> - Dozens of sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve shocked Germany, increasing the pressure to pass tougher laws on rape and molestation.

The new legislation could make groping punishable in more cases.

Campaigners for women's rights want the "No means No" principle enshrined in law. They say a woman should not have to prove that she resisted physically.

Justice Minister Heiko Maas wants courts to be able to punish sexual violence in cases where a woman felt unable to resist physically.

It is argued that current German law does not adequately protect victims who come under sexual pressure, who lack any means to defend themselves or who are subject to a surprise attack.

The tougher legislation would include: a woman assaulted in a park without any witnesses nearby, or a wife assaulted at home at night, who does not want to distress her children.

The justice ministers of Saxony and Bavaria say groping ought to be punished by up to two years in jail or a fine.

The Saxony Justice Minister, Sebastian Gemkow, said it was time for the judiciary to treat groping as a criminal offence, not as a type of "insult".

"For the victims it's simply incomprehensible when the judiciary dismisses such cases as 'irrelevant'," he said.

High-profile campaign

Only one in 10 rapes is reported in Germany currently, the n-tv news website reports, and of those, the conviction rate is only 10%.

Some female celebrities are prominent in the "No means No" campaign, including writer and journalist Susanne Froehlich, actors Sibel Kekilli and Jasmin Tabatabai, musician Judith Holofernes and TV chef Sarah Wiener.

A leading campaigner in the Social Democrat (SPD) party, Elke Ferner, said the draft law under discussion still had shortcomings.

"Unfortunately the principle still holds that a women must fight back in order to prove that she resisted," she told Die Welt newspaper (in German).

"A 'no' must be sufficient to signal that there is no agreement.

"Of course that refusal would also have to be proven, but the law would thereby establish a norm which any moderately intelligent man could understand," she said.

Women made more than 550 complaints of sexual assault after the New Year's Eve celebrations in Cologne. Similar attacks also happened in Duesseldorf and Hamburg, on a lesser scale.

Victims described how suddenly gangs of drunken men - many of them North African migrants - surrounded them at night, groped them and stole items such as mobile phones.

Police say many of the attackers may never be caught. Several North African men have been convicted of theft.