



Stiftelsen  
Allmänna Barnhuset



# Violence against children in Sweden 2016

A NATIONAL SURVEY

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## FOREWARD

In conjunction with a commission from the government, the Children's Welfare foundation has allowed the researchers Carolina Jernbro and Staffan Janson to conduct a survey of violence against children in Sweden. Approximately 4700 pupils in 9<sup>th</sup> grade in primary school (14-15 years of age) and in high school year two (16-17 years of age) have responded to questions about their exposure to violence in the course of their childhoods. The results are based on what the pupils themselves have chosen to share. Because some of the same questions were asked in previous surveys, it is possible to make comparisons over time.

The goal is to eliminate all violence against children and to ensure that all children feel that they have an adult in their lives who looks after them. Although the use of violence by adults as a child-rearing tool has sharply decreased in Sweden over the past few decades, we still have a long way to go.

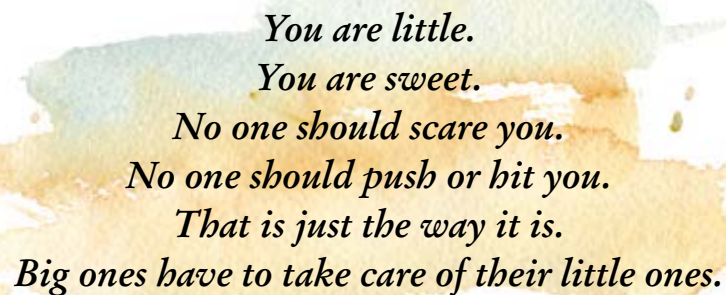
In order to prevent and stop violence against children, knowledge about how common the violence is and the forms that it takes is needed. This information gives us the tools to prevent violence and protect children. Official statistics on the number of police reports filed or notifications made to social services do not give us the full picture of how many children are actually abused. It is relatively seldom that knowledge of violence against children reaches the authorities. When the tolerance of violence decreases, the number of notifications and reports filed will increase. Another way to encourage reporting is to allow children and young people to answer questions anonymously. That way, abused children who do not come in contact with the authorities can make themselves heard and we can get a more accurate picture of the pervasiveness and nature of violence against children.

How common is it for adults to subject children to physical and psychological abuse? How common is it for children to be neglected? How common is sexual abuse? How is the mental and physical health of the pupils who have been abused and what help have they received?

The pupils' answers have provided us with very valuable knowledge about children's and young people's living conditions. The results show that the trend in Sweden is largely positive; adult violence against children is decreasing. Most of the pupils have not been subjected to violence by adults, and many are grateful to their parents: "Everything is fine with me; I have nothing to talk about. I am happy and I have a good life with my parents and friends," writes one pupil.

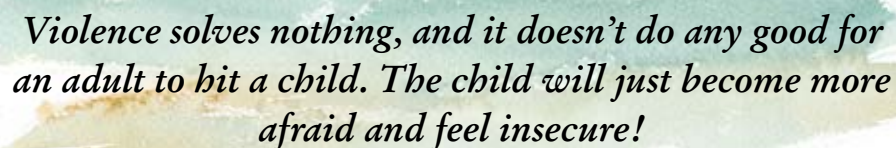
But the results show that far too many children are still exposed to violence, and that too few of those who are abused gain access to the protection and rehabilitation they need: "What I've seen a lot is that when there's an investigation, they don't care about the children in the case, about what they say, for example. They don't care about what children think and what they want, and just do what's best for themselves," writes another pupil. The results also provide insights about which groups of children are particularly vulnerable and thus suggest ways in which preventative efforts must be strengthened.

In Stina Wirséns children's book Little, the teacher listens to the main character when he/she is sad and afraid at home. Then the teacher says:



*You are little.  
You are sweet.  
No one should scare you.  
No one should push or hit you.  
That is just the way it is.  
Big ones have to take care of their little ones.*

Or, as one pupil in the study puts it:



*Violence solves nothing, and it doesn't do any good for  
an adult to hit a child. The child will just become more  
afraid and feel insecure!*

**CECILIA SJÖLANDER**

*Secretary-General, the Children's Welfare Foundation*

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## INTRODUCTION

### Child abuse as a public health problem

Child abuse is a significant public health problem, due to its widespread prevalence all over the world. Even in economically more developed countries, the abuse of children remains common (Gilbert, Spatz Widom, et al., 2009). European studies on violence against children indicate that:

- **5-35 percent are exposed to severe abuse in the home.**
- **4-9 percent are exposed to severe psychological abuse.**
- **Roughly every third child is exposed to severe humiliating treatment.**
- **15-30 percent of girls and 5-15 percent of boys are subjected to sexual abuse. This abuse primarily occurs outside the home.**
- **3-15 percent of children are subjected to severe neglect.**
- **8-25 percent have witnessed violence between adults in their family.**

The lower percentages relate mainly to the Nordic countries, while the higher levels of incidence pertain particularly to Eastern Europe.

Previously known risk factors include:

- **Financial instability/poverty and parents who are less educated.**
- **Economic inequality in a country (this particularly increases the risk of death due to abuse).**
- **Ethnic factors that are largely explained by related social ones (e.g. neighbourhood and neighbours), financial and educational factors.**
- **Drug problems (increase the risk of violence between adults in the family).**
- **Low social status and poor social climate (account for approximately 10 percent of the overall risk of violence).**

Child abuse is a hidden problem in society, because it is rarely disclosed or recognised (Gilbert, Kemp, et al., 2009).

It is well known that the abuse of children leads to acute risks of injury and even death. In addition, child abuse and living under the threat of violence are strong stress factors that increase the risk of poor school performance, reduced quality of life, mental illness and self-harm. More recent, well-implemented studies have shown that there is a strong correlation between abuse in childhood and behaviour problems, posttraumatic stress disorder, crime and obesity in adulthood. A group of American studies of adverse childhood experiences, the so-called ACE studies (CDC-Kaiser Adverse Childhood Experience), have demonstrated that people who have gone through four or more of eleven negative childhood experiences



are at a significantly increased risk of experiencing ill health early in life and of suffering from severe illnesses such as heart attacks and strokes. Moreover, these studies show an increase in the risk of various immunological diseases, which particularly affect middle-aged women who have been abused in childhood (Campbell, Walker, & Egede, 2016).

## Definitions of child abuse and violence against children

The Swedish Committee against Child Abuse states that child abuse is when an adult person subjects a child to physical or psychological/emotional violence, sexual abuse, humiliating treatment, or neglects to provide for a child's basic needs (Socialdepartementet, 2001 p 120). This definition is based on a child's point of view; it does not distinguish between intentional and unintentional acts or active and passive neglect. The definition also does not take cultural differences into account. Under this definition, all corporal punishment is included in the definition of physical violence, and experiencing violence between adults in the family is considered to be a form of psychological/emotional violence (Socialdepartementet, 2001).

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child uses a definition that includes all forms of physical or psychological/emotional violence, injury or abuse, negligence or neglect, maltreatment, and exploitation – including sexual abuse, regardless of the age of the perpetrator. The committee stresses that children may be subjected to violence by adults, but that violence may also occur among children. Moreover, some children harm themselves. The committee is aware that various forms of violence against children often occur at the same time, and stresses that both boys and girls are at risk of being subjected to all forms of violence. However, gender often plays a role in the violence (Barnombudsmannen, 2014).

In this report, the term "violence against children" will be used in parallel with the term "child abuse."

## Corporal punishment and physical abuse

Until the second half of the 1900s, "disciplining" children by using corporal punishment (such as spanking) was seen as an effective and virtually indispensable child-rearing method. In the mid-1960s, almost all Swedish parents felt it was their duty to occasionally physically punish their children, so that they would grow up to become upstanding citizens. In many countries (even in Europe) this attitude persists. However, decades of research have demonstrated that while corporal punishment may prevent children from engaging in certain behaviors in the short-term, as a child-rearing method it has no positive lasting effects. In addition, research indicates that corporal punishment has a tendency to gradually evolve into ever more severe forms of violence that greatly risk causing the children physical harm. A gradually increasing body of research has also shown that an upbringing that is characterised by warmth and support is optimal for children's development (Durrant & Ensom, 2017).

Those who have defended the use of corporal punishment have argued that it cannot be equated with abuse. Major survey studies (so-called meta-analyses) of fifty years of research from various parts of the world have shown that there is a strong correlation between the use of corporal punishment and undesirable behaviors by children, such as aggressive behavior and mental illness. In recent years, it has also been clearly shown that there is a causal link; the punishment precedes later disruptions in the child's development. This causal relationship has proven to be remarkably similar, regardless of which country or cultural context was studied. In instances of what is referred to in the United States as blatant abuse, the proportional incidence of the negative effects of corporal punishment has generally been estimated at 2/3 (Grogan-Kaylor, Ma, & Graham-Bermann, 2017). There is thus a clear need to ask children and young people about so-called milder punishments as well, and not just about more severe forms of violence.

## The rights of the child

Child abuse violates a child's human rights, because every child has the right to grow up in safe conditions without violence and other mistreatment. This is stated very clearly in Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that "State Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child." (Regeringskansliet, 2006 p 41). In their study on violence against children (Pinheiro, 2006), the United Nations Children's Fund addresses these rights and develops further develops them into its guiding principles on the prevention of violence against children. They write:

- **No type of violence against children is defensible.**
- **All violence against children is preventable.**
- **The individual States have the primary responsibility to safeguard the child's right to protection and access to service.**
- **The individual States are obligated to demand accountability for every occasion of violence against children.**
- **The vulnerability of children is related to their age and development.**
- **Children have the right to express their opinions and to have their viewpoints taken into account.**

This assertion is repeated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in Goal 16.2: All States are required to prevent abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence or torture against children (UN, 2015).

In Chapter 6, Section 1 of the Swedish Parental Code, the so-called anti-corporal punishment-act of 1979, this obligation is taken somewhat further; it states that not only must children not be subjected to abuse, but they should also not be exposed to humiliating treatment.

## Background to the present study

The Children's Welfare Foundation has been commissioned by the government to implement a school survey about the prevalence of corporal punishment, neglect and other maltreatment of children in Sweden. This study is a follow-up of previous surveys carried out in the years 2000, 2006 and 2011.

In Sweden, the prevalence of corporal punishment and other maltreatment of children have been studied continuously at the national level since the introduction of the so-called anti-corporal punishment law act into the Parental Code in 1979, and a number of smaller, not entirely nationally representative studies were also carried out in the 1950s and 1960s. The historical perspective on child abuse and the early studies are well-described in a previous report (Janson, Jernbro, & Långberg, 2011).

The earlier national surveys highlighted parents' use of and attitude towards various forms of punishment (1980, 2000, 2006 and 2011) and school pupils' experiences of violence and maltreatment (1995, 2000, 2006 and 2011). Since the year 2000, the studies have been commissioned by the government in cooperation with the Children's Welfare Foundation and Karlstad University.

By periodically carrying out surveys that implement the same methodology, Sweden has gained a unique knowledge base regarding child-rearing, abuse and maltreatment of children. We know of no other place in the world where such monitoring has been carried out over such a long period of time. The studies have shown that over a period of 40 to 50 years, Swedish parents have radically changed their child-rearing methods, progressing from a situation where corporal punishment was considered to be a natural part of child-rearing to a situation in which 95 percent of all young parents believe that all forms of violence against children is abhorrent. This deep attitudinal and behavioral change has attracted attention and admiration in many parts of the world (Gilbert et al., 2012; Gilbert, Spatz Widom, et al., 2009; Janson, Långberg, & Svensson, 2010) and is one of the main reasons why Sweden is seen as a role model when it comes to the rights of the child. This has in turn led to briefings and discussions at the parliamentary level between Sweden and a number of countries, including Japan, Indonesia, the Republic of the Philippines, Brazil, South Africa, Scotland and (in the year 2017) with several of the Baltic states.

Following a sharp decline in the use of corporal punishment methods between 1980 and 2000, violence against children within the family has stabilised at what is by international standards a very low level. At the time of the previous survey in 2011, only about three percent of the parents said they had hit their child at any point during the past year, and no parent reported that such an incident had occurred ten times or more (Ellonen, Jernbro, Janson, Tindberg, & Lucas, 2015). The studies also suggest that Swedish parents have largely ceased to shake small children, particularly infants. It can be hoped that this is the result of national information campaigns that have been implemented over the last 10 years to inform the public of the danger of harming small children by shaking them.

When it comes to the studies of children's and young people's attitudes regarding violence and their experiences of violence, since the year 2000 there has been remarkable stability in the responses. About 17 percent of children have experienced corporal punishment in the home at some point in their lives, and just over five percent have experienced more severe and/or repeated abuse. In the 2000 survey, it emerged for the first time that almost one out of ten Swedish children had witnessed intimate partner violence, which has proven to be a very serious stressor (Janson, 2001). The studies of children's and young people's experiences of violence and maltreatment have been carried out through school surveys implemented in collaboration with the Swedish school system. As a result, participation has been very high and the results are therefore highly reliable.

In-depth analyses of the previous school surveys have shown that children with chronic illness or disabilities (especially children with neuropsychiatric disabilities) are particularly vulnerable to violence (Svensson, Bornehag, & Janson, 2011; Svensson, Eriksson, & Janson, 2013), and that young people who are victims of physical child abuse have psychosomatic symptoms (Jernbro, Svensson, Tindberg, & Janson, 2012) and poorer quality of life (Jernbro, Tindberg, Lucas, & Janson, 2015). They are also exposed to more bullying at school (Lucas, Jernbro, Tindberg, & Janson, 2016).

## Other Swedish studies on child abuse

A number of other studies of the prevalence of child abuse, sexual abuse and other forms of maltreatment have been carried out in Sweden, and some are of particular interest to the present study. In the study *Liv och Hälsa ung Sörmland* (The Lives and Health of Sörmland's Youth), about 15 percent of the young people surveyed reported that they had been subjected to physical violence in the home at some point in their lives, a prevalence that corresponds well with the national studies from 2006 and 2011. Just over six percent had been subjected to physical violence more than once. Girls reported physical violence by adults in the family to a greater extent than boys, and the older children (9th graders and high school sophomores) reported violence at a significantly higher rate than 7th grade children (Annerbäck, Wingren, Svedin, & Gustafsson, 2010).

A 2007 study in which nearly 6000 high school sophomores took part, the majority of young people (83% of the boys and 85% of the girls) indicated that they had been victims of some form of violence. Eight percent of boys and 13 percent of girls could be characterised as victims of poly-victimisation. The young people who were living with both biological parents were less vulnerable (Aho, Gren-Landell, & Svedin, 2016). Exposure to several different types of abuse and to repeated abuse was associated with poorer health, especially in girls (Aho, Proczkowska-Björklund, & Svedin, 2016).

In the so-called *Resumé Study*, 2500 young adults aged 20-24 who were born between 1987 and 1991 were interviewed about their exposure to violence in the course of their lifetimes, their current state of health, and their behavior. The study showed that it was more common that they were subjected to violence in adolescence than in the early years of their childhood, and that among both boys and girls, recurring incidents were more common than isolated

incidents. All forms of violence primarily took place outside the home, and were mostly perpetrated by other children and young people. In general, the women reported more abuse by adults in the family while the men reported more exposure to abuse outside the family. The study showed that the overlap of different types of exposure is common; 28 percent of women and 30 percent of men had been subjected to three or more types of victimisation. Much of the violence against boys (18%) and sexual abuse against girls (24%) was committed by unknown individuals. An equal proportion of sexual violence against girls had been committed by peers. Anxiety, post-traumatic stress symptoms, self-harm and criminality were more common among those who had been victims of violence than among other children (Cater, Andershed, & Andershed, 2014).

In a survey conducted by the National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence against Women in Sweden, in which a large study population of men and women aged 18-74 years were included, just over 15 percent of women reported having been subjected to physical abuse (including threats of violence) by their fathers in the course of their childhoods, while 12 percent reported that their mothers had committed such abuse. 19 percent of men reported that they had been subjected to physical abuse by their fathers and eight percent said that their mothers had exposed them to physical abuse. Two percent of the women and 0.5 percent of the men reported that they had been victims of some form of sexual abuse by their father, stepfather or mother's partner/boyfriend in the course of their childhood. 15 percent of women and 13 percent of men reported having witnessed intimate partner violence during their childhood (Heimer, Andersson, & Lucas, 2014).

Another Swedish study that examined the sexuality, experiences of sexual abuse and sexual exposure of nearly 6000 young people (high school juniors) found that 21 percent of the high schoolers had experienced some form of sexual abuse in the course of their childhood. Female high school pupils were three times more likely than male high school pupils to have experienced sexual abuse (29% versus 10%, respectively). Nine percent of women and three percent of men had been subjected to penetrative abuse (Svedin, Priebe, Wadsby, Jonsson, & Fredlund, 2015).

## Objective and research questions

When we first began studying children's exposure to violence, our interest was focused on corporal punishment in the home. As knowledge has increased both in our country and abroad, our awareness of the significance of children's and young people's overall exposure to violence and maltreatment (known as poly-victimisation) has grown. In the present survey, the poly-victimisation of children and young people (primarily perpetrated by adults) has been studied, because it seems to be a major determinant of the children's future quality of life and success in life. More detailed questions about psychological/emotional abuse, neglect, experience of violence between adults in the family and sexual abuse are also included, as well as questions of honor-related oppression and bullying.

In preparation for the present school survey, two validation studies were conducted with the help of two medical pupils at Uppsala University. The reason for this was that in the 2011 pupil study, we wondered if some of the questions were difficult to understand, and if the pupils currently being surveyed might find that other questions may be important to ask. In the first study, medical students interviewed ten high school pupils individually (Anwyia, 2016a). In general, they showed a high level of acceptance for the survey's design, appearance and content but pointed out certain ambiguities in the wording that have since been corrected. In the second study, focus groups composed of high school pupils were carried out. They expressed that psychological abuse is more common in today's society. They stressed the relationship between relative poverty and vulnerability and the exposure of young people with atypical gender identities to abuse. These young people also considered parents' mental health problems to be a contributing factor in various forms of abuse, and all the participants expressed concerns about online bullying (Anwyia, 2016b). In formulating the 2016 annual survey, the pupils' remarks have been taken into account.

The overall objective of the study was to investigate the prevalence of different forms of child abuse and how such incidents have changed since the 2011 survey was conducted. The primary questions being addressed are:

1. **Has the prevalence of child abuse in Sweden changed since 2011?**
2. **What are the children's attitudes as concerns the corporal punishment of children? Have they changed over time?**
3. **How do the different types of child abuse (physical and psychological/emotional violence, witnessing intimate partner violence, neglect, and sexual abuse) overlap?**
4. **To what extent and to which people do children disclose abuse? Has this changed over time?**
5. **To what extent do children who are victims of violence by adults at home have access to support and treatment?**
6. **To what extent are children subjected to violence and mistreatment by other children? Has this changed over time?**
7. **What emotional reactions are common among abused and neglected children?**
8. **Are there differences in perceived physical and mental health among children who are victims of child abuse and children who have not been abused?**
9. **Are there differences between the responses provided by boys, girls, and children who do identify as male or female?**
10. **Do the responses provided by children with a disability or chronic illness differ from those of other children?**



## METHOD

The study is based on a nationally representative survey of pupils in the 9th grade of primary school and in the sophomore year of high school. The data collection was carried out in the late autumn of 2016 with the cooperation with Statisticon AB.

### Study population

In this investigation, researchers strove to obtain a sample size of approximately 5000 pupils. The investigation was conducted in the form of a classroom survey, which meant that a direct, individual sample of pupils could not be obtained. Instead, a framework of schools was created, based on the Swedish National Agency for Education's school register, in which the school constitutes the primary sampling unit and the class constitutes the secondary sampling unit. The resulting framework consisted of 1,561 primary schools and 1,320 high schools. Thereafter, the schools were stratified based on the number of pupils, with six strata for the pupils in the 9th grade of primary school and seven strata for high school sophomores (year 2). This was intended to ensure that schools of different sizes were included in the sampling. Initially, a simple random sample of 75 schools (primary sampling unit) was made per school year, and at one or two classes at each of the selected schools were chosen at random (secondary sampling unit) depending on the number of classes in the school. Due to a high rate of attrition among the participating schools, a supplementary sampling of schools was necessary. The supplementary sampling of schools took place successively. This means that when it became apparent that the number of schools in the annual selection would not be sufficient, more schools were added. The supplementary sampling was implemented in such a way that the final sample is a simple random sample within each respective stratum. The final sample size of schools amounted to 313 for 9th grade and 440 for the sophomore year (year 2) of high school. Of these, 71 schools per year (a total of 142 schools) participated, representing a participation rate of 22.7 percent of the polled primary schools and 16.1 percent of the high schools. The most common causes of attrition were that the schools did not have the time to participate; they pointed out that many such studies are conducted in the schools. A few schools ended their participation because the school leadership felt that the content of the survey was too serious and therefore ran the risk of shocking and frightening the pupils.

Out of the participating schools, a total of 273 classes took part in the study (116 at the primary schools level and 157 at the high school level). Out of 2,751 pupils from the selected 9th grade primary school classes, 2,260 participated in the survey. At the pupil level, the response rate was thus 82.2 percent. The corresponding information from the high schools indicates that out of a total of 3,285 pupils in the selected classes, 2,481 took part in the survey. This corresponds to a pupil response rate of 75.5 percent.



## Measures

The questionnaire was used is similar to the questionnaire used in the previous surveys, and featured 60 questions in the following main areas (see Annex 1):

- **Background information about the pupil and the pupil's family.**
- **Questions about health, disabilities/chronic diseases, risk behaviour, and injuries.**
- **Questions about attitudes concerning different child-rearing methods and experiences of various forms of violence within and outside the family.**
- **Questions about disclosure and support.**

The background questions related to country of birth, family finances and living situation are largely the same as those in the previous surveys. The questions used to measure physical and psychological abuse are based on the parent-child version of the Conflict Tactics Scales (Strauss, 1998). Similar questions were used in the previous pupil studies, but they had focused solely on the home environment. In this study, pupils were asked questions about violence perpetrated by adults in general (in the home and outside the home), with a follow-up question about the perpetrators. This study expanded upon questions about experiences of violence between adults in the family (i.e. a parent exercising psychological/emotional and/or physical violence against another parent). The study implemented the same questions used in the National Centre for Knowledge of Men's Violence against Women's study "Våld och hälsa" ("Violence and Health") (Heimer et al., 2014).

The questionnaire has also been expanded to include questions about other forms of violence. A validated instrument from a major American study (the so-called ACE study) that measures physical and emotional neglect (Anda, Butchart, Felitti, & Brown, 2010), has been included. The battery of questions about sexual abuse was based on questions from previous national and international studies (Marshall, Faaborg-Andersen, Tilton-Weaver, & Stattin, 2013; Mohler-Kuo et al., 2014; Priebe, 2009). A battery of questions about pupils' perceived freedom to make decisions about their own lives that was previously used in a study by the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen, 2007) has also been included.

The PSP scale, an eight-point evaluative instrument developed by researchers at Karlstad University, was used to measure psychosomatic problems (Hagquist, 2008). A question about perceived health included in the Kidscreen instrument (which measures quality of life) (Erhart et al., 2009) was included in the survey. Questions about self-harm and suicide attempts have previously been used in the study "Våld och hälsa" ("Violence and Health") (Heimer et al., 2014). The questions about disclosure and support have been used in the previous surveys.

## Data collection

The work of inviting the randomly selected schools to participate in the survey began in early September of 2016. A letter of invitation was sent to the principal of each school.



Thereafter, the schools received an oral request, asking if they were interested in participating in the survey. Throughout the entire process, in many cases it was difficult to come into contact with the principal of the school. The principal was often unavailable, and contact was made with other administrative staff member at the school. Once contact with the principal was established, a long process often ensued before the principal decided whether the school would participate in the investigation. In principle, all the principals were in favour of participating in the survey, but for various reasons described earlier, many still declined.

The schools that chose to participate in the survey were sent an information letter, which the school was asked to distribute to all pupils in the participating classes. 9th grade pupils received an additional information letter that they were asked to take home to their parents. The letters contained information about the upcoming classroom survey. The parental letter was used only at the primary schools, not at the high schools, at which the prevailing ethics regulations permit pupils aged 15 and up to decide on their own about their participation in surveys.

The data collection at the schools was conducted in October and November of 2016. The company EVRY handled the organisation of all field work. Field personnel had prior experience with similar data collections and many had experience in schools (often as teachers). In the classrooms, the desks were always separated so that no pupil could "look over the shoulder" of any other pupil. The field personnel informed the pupils about the investigation and the importance of answering truthfully. The aspect of anonymity was emphasised, and pupils were assured that no person would be able to identify an individual pupil's responses. Pupils were informed that when they had completed the survey, they should go up to the teacher's desk and leave the survey in an envelope that was sealed as soon as the last pupil submitted had submitted his/her survey. The surveys were devoid of identification numbers of any kind. Once a pupil had completed the survey, he/she was not permitted to leave the classroom. Rather, pupils were asked to continue working on a school assignment, such as reading a book (pupils had brought materials for these activities with them in advance).

## Analyses

The data that constitutes the basis of the findings in the report was processed in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The report will primarily present descriptive statistics, such as prevalence and Chi 2 test. In order to study the relationship between two or more variables, logistic regression analyses were also performed. In all of the analyses, statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

## Reliability and validity

All statistics are associated with a certain degree of uncertainty. Measurement error and attrition are the primary sources of uncertainty that could affect the results of the present

study. Respondents may misunderstand the questions, find it difficult to remember traumatic events that occurred in early childhood, or may choose to refrain from sharing their experiences of violence. To reduce the risk of measurement error, validated instruments have been used. Individual interviews and focus group interviews with young people about the questionnaire from the previous school surveys have been conducted, and the questionnaire has been revised based on the comments provided. This procedure is described in more detail under the heading "Objective and research questions." Meetings with a reference group of individuals who have extensive experience of large studies on exposure to abuse in Sweden have also resulted in revisions to the questionnaire. The final version of the survey was answered and commented upon by five young people.

Partial or internal attrition (i.e. a pupil choosing to skip a question that he/she was asked to answer) account for another aspect of measurement error. A high rate of internal attrition may indicate problems with the question, or imply that pupils misunderstood the instructions on how to complete the survey and thus answered inconsistently. In the case of multiple answer option questions (wherein a pupil may select several of the listed answer options), it is difficult to calculate the rate of internal attrition. If a particular answer option is not specified, it is impossible to know if this is because (I) the answer option is not applicable for the pupil in question, or (II) the pupil has chosen not to select the option even though it is relevant/applicable. In this study, questions related to sexual abuse and neglect had a relatively high rate of attrition, as did supplementary questions about who carried out the abuse. This means that the numbers should be interpreted with some caution.

At the school level, the attrition rate was high. However, because supplementary sampling within the same stratum was carried out, the probability that the results would be distorted was not very high. The response rate at the pupil level was very good, which is a boon to the study. The causes of the attrition that did occur are not known. For example, illness, truancy or late arrival to school in the morning (if the questionnaire was administered during first period) may account for some of the attrition.

It is highly probable that such attrition can be interpreted as being random, because the pupils did not know the exact time when the classroom survey would be carried out. All the pupils received an information letter about the classroom survey well in advance, but they were not informed ahead of time about when (during which class/period) the survey would take place.

## Ethical considerations

Whenever human beings participate in research, the risks and potential for knowledge gains must be weighed carefully. In this investigation, the study population consists of young people. This can be perceived as particularly sensitive, because there is a risk that the subject of child abuse will evoke powerful memories and feelings in those who have been abused or who are currently being subjected to abuse. Because police



reports regarding child abuse and reports about child and adolescent social care cannot provide us with an accurate picture of the problem, children's and young people's own reports about their experiences are essential in order to gain greater knowledge about the scope of abuse and high-risk groups. It is also important that those who are directly affected by abuse be given the opportunity to report their experiences anonymously. Conducting studies on child abuse can help to highlight this social issue, which in turn can make it easier to talk about the abuse - a subject which has long been taboo. Many children and young people who participated in the previous surveys indicated that it is important that child abuse be studied and stated that they didn't mind sharing their experiences.

Participants in the study had received information in advance about the study's purpose and the terms and conditions for participation. It was made clear that participation was voluntary and that pupils had the right to stop participating any time. All pupils who attended the class in which the study was conducted participated in the investigation. Parents of 9th grade pupils also received this information and were given the opportunity to decline to allow their child to participate (if the child was under the age of 15). There was only one case in which a parent declined to allow his/her child to participate.

Experienced interviewers from EVRY were on hand during the data collection sessions, and there was an increased level of preparedness within the schools' health services. No teachers were present in the classroom while the questionnaires were being answered. The final page of the survey included information about where pupils could turn to if they needed to talk to an adult. The survey responses were anonymous at the individual level. The study was examined and approved by the Ethics Committee in Stockholm (reg. no. 2016/1014-31).

## RESULTS

### Description of the study participants

A total of 4741 pupils participated in the study. A description of the participants, based on a number of background factors, can be found in Table 1. Almost half of the pupils in the study were in 9th grade, and the remaining participants were in their second (sophomore) year of high school. The majority of the high school sophomores were enrolled in a college preparatory program. 12 percent of the pupils were born outside the Nordic region. Most pupils felt that their family was financially stable (could afford to buy what they needed) and only a little more than three percent reported that their family was not financially stable. The majority of the pupils lived with both their parents, who lived together in the same household. A greater number of pupils whose parents had separated lived primarily with one parent than did with both parents on an alternating basis.

**TABLE 1.** *Description of the 4741 study participants.*

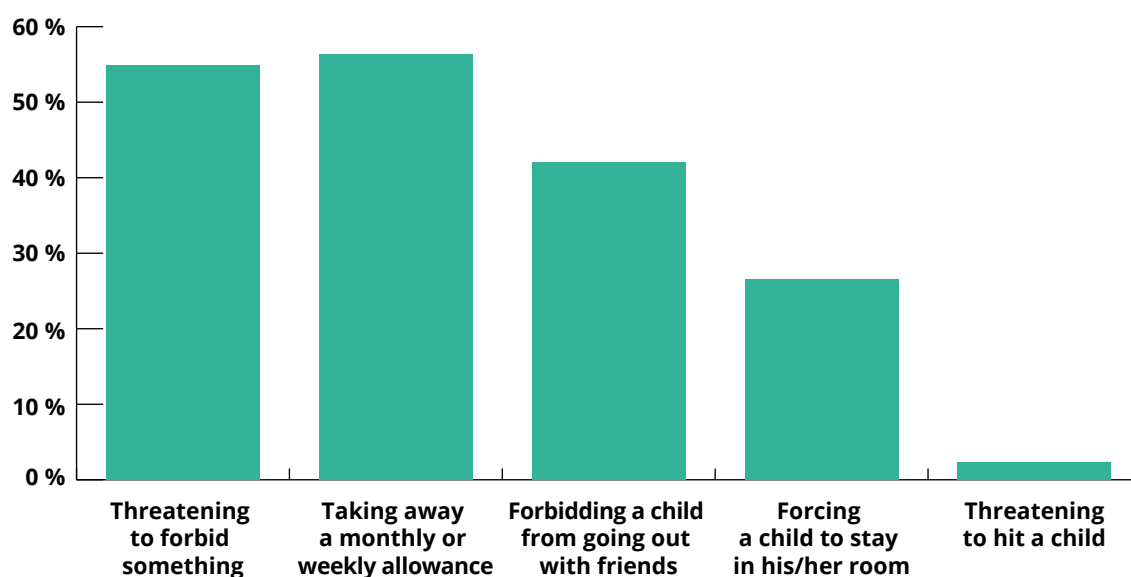
	n	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	2270	48,5
Male	2331	49,7
Do not identify as male or female	85	1,8
<b>Grade year</b>		
Grade year	2264	48,3
2nd year (sophomore) in high school: college preparatory program	1726	36,8
2nd year (sophomore) in high school: vocational program	643	13,7
High school preparatory program/introductory program	48	1,1
<b>Country of birth</b>		
Sweden	4141	87,9
Other Nordic countries	43	0,9
Outside the Nordic region	532	12,2
<b>Experience of the family's financial situation</b>		
Financially stable	4528	96,7
Financially unstable	153	3,3
<b>Living/family situation</b>		
Live with both parents, who live together	2966	65,5
Alternating schedule	498	11,0
Live mostly or exclusively with one parent	995	21,9
Foster Home/out-of-home-placement	72	1,6

## Pupils' attitudes regarding corporal punishment

- The majority of pupils had a negative attitude towards all forms of corporal punishment.
- 13 percent of pupils reported that they were in favour of corporal punishment in certain circumstances.
- Corporal punishment was more accepted by boys than girls, and was also more likely to be seen as acceptable among pupils whose families were financially unstable, among foreign-born pupils, among pupils who had experienced corporal punishment, and among pupils who lived primarily with only one parent.
- Pupils' attitudes towards corporal punishment has not changed much in the course of the 2000s.

The majority of pupils (81%) had a negative opinion of all forms of corporal punishment. 88 percent of the pupils reported that it is unacceptable to hit a disobedient child, and 82 percent said that it is unacceptable to smack a child (i.e. a lighter blow to the cheek or ear). A total of 13 percent of participants accepted corporal punishment in certain circumstances, but only three percent said they thought it was okay for their parent to strike them if he/she was angry with them.

It was much more common for pupils who had themselves been exposed to corporal punishment to accept it (30%) than it was for pupils who had not been exposed to corporal punishment (8%). Boys accepted corporal punishment to a greater extent (20%) than girls (7%), and a higher proportion of foreign-born pupils accepted corporal punishment (33%) as compared to pupils born in Sweden or the Nordic countries (11%). Pupils whose families were financially unstable were more likely (28%) to accept corporal punishment compared to pupils with stable family finances (13%). Pupils who mostly lived with only one parent accepted corporal punishment to a greater extent (17%) than pupils who live with both parents (13%). There was no statistical difference between pupils in 9th grade and high school pupils.

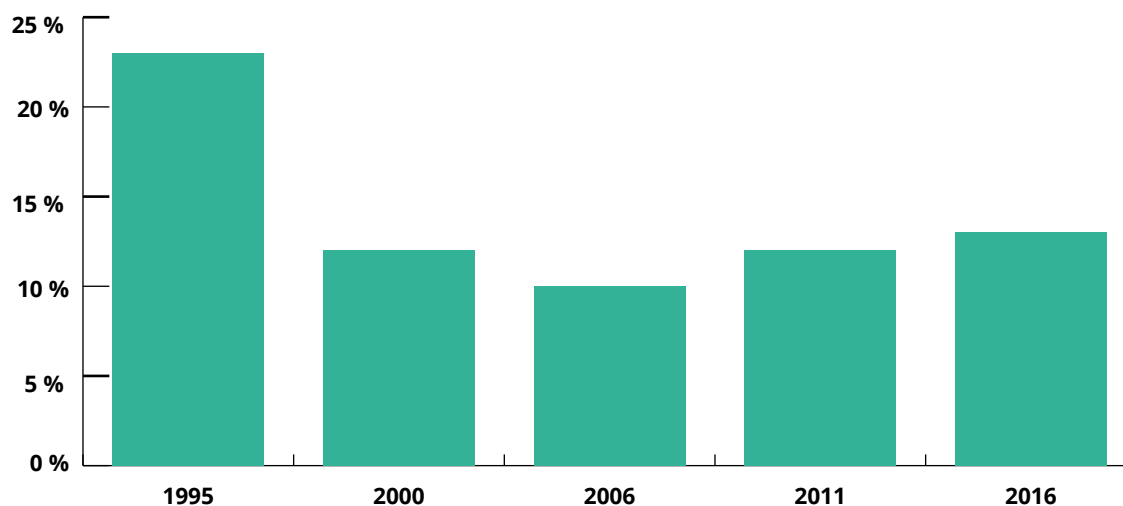


**FIGURE 1.** The percentage of pupils who have a positive opinion of various forms of punishments implemented in child-rearing.

The majority of pupils were in favour of parents using threats to forbid them from doing something (grounding) and/or suspend their monthly or weekly allowance (Figure 1). Only two percent were in favour of parents threatening to hit them. About 18 percent of the pupils said that they did not accept any of the forms of punishment presented in Figure 1.

### ***Comparison over time***

The proportion of pupils with positive attitudes towards corporal punishment declined significantly between the implementation of Statistics Sweden's 1995 Pupil Investigation and the year 2000. Since then, the proportion of pupils with positive attitudes towards corporal punishment has remained stable, at around 10-13 percent.



**FIGURE 2.** *The proportion of pupils who are in favour of the use of corporal punishment in child-rearing. Comparison of Statistics Sweden's 1995 Pupil Investigation and the national school surveys from 2000, 2006, 2011 and 2016.*

## **The prevalence of child abuse**

The various forms of child abuse - physical, psychological/emotional, neglect, having witnessed intimate partner violence (which falls under the category of psychological/emotional abuse but is presented separately in this report) and sexual abuse - have been summarised in Box 1. Each form of abuse will be presented in more detail.



- 24 percent of students have been victims of some form of physical violence committed by an adult person (a parent or another adult person).
- 16 percent of students have been victims of psychological violence by an adult.
- 14 percent of the students reported that they had witnessed intimate partner violence (i.e. a parent exercising physical and/or psychological violence against another parent).
- A total of six percent have been neglected. One percent have been victims of physical neglect and five percent have been subjected to emotional neglect.
- A total of nine percent (14 percent of the girls and two percent of the boys) had been sexually abused by an adult person.

**BOX 1. *The occurrence of abuse divided by type (percentages without decimals).***

A total of 44 percent of the pupils have been victims of some type of abuse by an adult within or outside the family. The child abuse most commonly occurred within the family, and 36 percent of the pupils have been exposed to some type of abuse by their parents (including step-parents and foster parents).

The various forms of child abuse overlapped extensively. These overlaps will be addressed under the heading "Poly-victimisation."

## **Background factors and exposure to child abuse**

There are several background factors related to child abuse. As shown in Table 2, girls reported psychological child abuse, witnessing intimate partner violence, and sexual abuse to a significantly greater extent than boys. It is important to point out that boys reported physical abuse by adults other than their parents to a greater degree, while girls reported physical violence inflicted by a parent to a significantly greater extent than boys.

Significantly more high school sophomores reported that they had been subjected to all types of abuse by an adult in comparison with 9th graders. There were also differences depending on the high school program in which the pupils were enrolled. The pupils who were enrolled in a college preparatory program reported child abuse to a lesser degree (46%) than those who were enrolled in a vocational program (50%) or a high school preparatory/introductory program (74%). Those who attended a high school preparatory/introductory program constituted a small but vulnerable group; they reported all types of child abuse, in addition to sexual abuse, to a greater extent than pupils who attended a college preparatory or vocational program. Approximately half of the pupils

in high school preparatory/introductory programs were born outside the Nordic region, and they reported unstable family finances and living with only one parent, in a foster home, or in out-of-home-placement to a greater extent than other pupils.

Pupils whose families were financially unstable reported exposure to any form of child abuse to a much greater extent (83%) than pupils whose families were financially stable (41%). They also reported severe forms of physical child abuse and exposure to multiple types of child abuse to a greater degree than other pupils.

**TABLE 2. Exposure to different types of child abuse in relation to gender, grade level, family finances, country of birth, and living situation.**

	Physical	Psycho-logical	Sexual (by adults)	Neglect	Witnessed intimate partner violence
All pupils	24,4	15,7	8,5	6,2	14,2
Female	22,4	16,7***	14,2***	6,2 (ns)	17,4***
Male	25,4**	13,2	2,0	5,6	10,1
9th grade	21,9	14,3	6,6	5,1	12,2
High school sophomore (2nd year)	26,5***	16,6*	10,2***	7,0**	16,0***
Financially stable	23,3	14,4	8,3	5,2	13,0
Financially unstable	57,5***	46,9***	13,6**	31,9***	42,4***
Born in Sweden/the Nordic region	22,3	14,3	8,7 (ns)	5,5	12,9
Born in another country	42,5***	27,3***	7,7	11,5***	25,0***
Live with both parents	20,8	11,2	7,2	3,9	9,4
Live mostly with one parent	34,9***	28,6***	11,6***	11,8***	28,7***

\* P-value below 0,05, \*\* P-value below 0,01, \*\*\* P-value below 0,001

NS = no significant difference

Pupils who live mostly with only one of their parents reported some form of exposure to abuse to a greater extent (61%) than those living with both parents (37%).

The pupils who were born outside the Nordic region were significantly more likely to report that they were victims of some type of child abuse (63%) than the pupils who were born in a Nordic country (41%). They were more vulnerable to all forms of child abuse,



including sexual abuse, than pupils born in the Nordic region. They were also more vulnerable to more severe forms of violence. 30 percent of the pupils who were born outside the Nordic region had been victims of more severe forms of physical violence, and 14 percent had been subjected to physical violence on many occasions. The corresponding percentages among Swedish or Nordic-born pupils were eight and four percent, respectively. The pupils who were born in Europe and those who were born in Asia (including Middle Eastern countries) reported that they had been abused to an equal extent (64% and 63%, respectively). Among the pupils who were born in Africa, 58 percent reported that they had been victims of child abuse. Among foreign-born pupils, the majority of the physical abuse had been inflicted by adults other than their parents.

## Physical child abuse

- 24 percent of the pupils reported that they had been exposed to physical child abuse on at least one occasion.
- 14 percent reported that they had been physically abused by one or more of their parents.
- Almost eleven percent of all pupils reported that they had been subjected to severe forms of physical child abuse, and five percent had been subjected to repeated physical child abuse.
- There has been a decrease of physical child abuse during the period of 1995 to 2016.

A total of 24 percent of pupils reported that they had experienced some form of physical child abuse (either an isolated incident or on many occasions). Table 3 shows the incidence of the various forms of physical violence.

**TABLE 3. The prevalence of various forms of physical child abuse (isolated incidents or on many occasions (%).**

	Isolated incidents	Many occasions
<b>Less severe forms of abuse:</b>		
Pulled by the hair or ear	11,3	2,7
Smacked with an open hand	11,9	2,7
<b>Severe forms of abuse</b>		
Hit hard with an open hand or fist	3,4	1,4
Kicked	2,8	1,1
Burned or scalded (with hot liquid)	0,5	0,3
Throttled or constricted around the throat/neck	2,7	0,8
Hit with a cane, belt, ruler or similar	3,1	1,5
Threatened with a knife or firearm	1,6	0,6
Injured with a knife or firearm	0,4	0,4

Approximately eleven percent of the pupils reported that they had been subjected to severe forms of physical child abuse, and a total of five percent said that they had been victims of physical child abuse on many occasions (Table 4). Four-fifths of those who had been abused frequently had also been exposed to more severe forms of physical abuse.

**TABLE 4. Prevalence of physical child abuse, based on level of severity.**

	%
Less severe forms of physical violence on isolated occasions	12,0
Severe forms of abuse	10,5
Repeated abuse	5,0
Severe abuse (more severe forms of abuse and/or repeated violence)	11,5
Injuries (resulting from violence by an adult) that required medical care	2,7

### Perpetrators

14% of all the pupils reported a parent as the perpetrator. Since many pupils who reported that they had been physically abused did not answer the question regarding who had perpetrated the abuse, this percentage may actually be higher. As Table 5 demonstrates, a biological parent was often the perpetrator of the abuse. The father was more likely than the mother to have perpetrated the violence.

**TABLE 5. Perpetrators of physical child abuse, in both numbers and percentages (%)**

	Number	Percentage of physical child abuse victims	Percentage of all pupils*
Biological or adoptive father	395	36,6	9,6
Stepfather	52	4,8	1,3
Biological or adoptive mother	301	27,9	7,3
Stepmother	28	2,6	0,8
Other relative	81	7,5	2,0
Foster parent	31	2,9	0,8
Friend or family acquaintance	50	4,6	1,2
Preschool teacher/school teacher	93	8,6	2,3
Sports coach or recreational activity leader	48	4,4	1,2
A complete stranger	109	10,1	2,7
Another person	44	4,1	1,1

\*4098 pupils are included in this analysis

Six percent of all pupils said they had been hit by one or more parent while they were of preschool age (6 years or younger) and eleven percent said that they had been hit while in primary school. Almost four percent had been struck by one or more parent during both preschool and primary school, which means that the majority of pupils whose parents strike them while they are of preschool age continue to be struck once they reach primary school. The reporting of child abuse that occurred in the preschool years is probably underestimated, because memories of abuse that took place during the first three to four years of a child's life are likely to be vague or non-existent.

Just over seven percent of the pupils said they had been victims of physical violence by adults other than their parents, and three percent said they had been struck by both their parents and other adults. Just over two percent of all pupils reported that they had been subjected to physical violence by a preschool teacher or teacher. Nearly three percent of all pupils had been abused by an unknown person.

### Comparison over time

Because we expanded the questions regarding physical child abuse in this study, its comparability with studies from previous years will be somewhat limited. The questions used in the previous pupil studies have focused on the adults in the home, and the questions in the current investigation concern adults both within and outside the home. However, these questions were followed by supplementary questions about who had abused the respondent, and for the sake of comparison we have singled out the pupils who reported that they had been abused by their parents (including step-parents and foster parents).

Different age groups were included in the school survey that were conducted to study the presence of physical child abuse. The present study included both pupils in the 9th grade of primary school and pupils in the second year of high school (sophomores). The 2011 study included only 9th graders, and in 2006 the study also included both 9th grade pupils and 4th and 6th grade pupils. The school survey conducted in 2000 included only middle school pupils. Statistics Sweden's 1995 high school investigation included pupils from grades 7, 8 and 9. Because we know that older children report abuse to a greater extent, it is important that comparisons are made within the same age groups. Since most of the studies (except for the one carried out in 2000) included 9th grade pupils, this age group has been used for comparison.

The comparison indicates a decrease in physical violence inflicted by a parent during the period of 1995-2016, wherein the greatest decrease (from 35 percent to 17 percent) occurred between 1995 and 2006 (Figure 3). The declines that have taken place since 2011 (14%) and 2016 (12%) must be interpreted with caution because the questions were not exactly the same, and because many pupils who participated in the 2016 survey did not provide an answer to the question of who had perpetrated the abuse.



**FIGURE 3.** *A comparison of physical child abuse over time. Proportion of 9th grade pupils who reported that they had been victims of physical child abuse by one or more of their parents, based on data from four studies.*

More pupils in the present study reported more serious forms of child abuse (more severe forms and/or repeated abuse) than in the 2011 study. When only parent perpetrators reported in the 2016 are taken into account, the prevalence rates from both years are comparable.

## Psychological abuse

- 16 percent of the pupils reported that they were victims of psychological abuse by an adult.
- Eleven percent reported that they had been abused by one or more of their parents.
- The most common forms of psychological child abuse were threats of physical violence and systematic insults/put-downs.
- The proportion of pupils who have been victims of psychological abuse by parents has decreased somewhat in comparison with the 2011 study.

A total of 16 percent of the pupils said that they had ever been psychologically abused by an adult. As shown in Table 6, just over six percent of pupils reported that they had been insulted by adults on many occasions. Almost eleven percent said that someone had threatened to strike them. Nearly three percent of the pupils had been locked in a basement, closet or similar confined space, and almost five percent had been locked out of their home.

**TABLE 6. Percentage of pupils (%) who had been subjected to various forms of psychological abuse by an adult. Numbers followed by a star have been defined as psychological abuse in this study.**

	Isolated incidents	Many occasions
Insulted you (e.g. called you worthless, stupid, ugly)	15.4	6.1*
Locked you in the basement, in a closet, or in a similar confined space	1.9*	0.8*
Locked you out of the house	3.7*	1.0*
Threatened to hit or hurt you	7.7*	3.0*
Treated you as if you didn't exist	9.6	3.7*

### ***Perpetrators***

A total of eleven percent of the pupils reported that they had been subjected to psychological abuse by one or more parents. The most common abuser was the biological father, followed by the biological mother (Table 7). Five percent of all pupils had been abused by someone other than their parents.

**TABLE 7. Perpetrators of psychological child abuse, in both numbers and percentages (%).**

	Number	Percentage of victims of psychological/emotional child abuse	Percentage of all pupils*
Biological or adoptive father	353	49.5	7.8
Stepfather	70	9.8	1.5
Biological or adoptive mother	246	34.5	5.4
Stepmother	48	6.7	1.1
Other relative	95	13.3	2.1
Foster parent	33	4.6	0.7
Friend or family acquaintance	62	8.7	1.4
Preschool teacher/school teacher	92	12.9	2.0
Sports coach or recreational activity leader	48	6.7	1.1
A complete stranger	86	12.1	1.9
Another type of person:	28	3.9	0.6

\*4549 pupils are included in this analysis

### Comparison with the study from 2011

The same question was used in the pupil study that was carried out in 2011, in which twelve percent of respondents reported that they had been psychologically abused by their parents - a slightly larger proportion than in this study, in which eleven percent of pupils said they had been subjected to psychological abuse by a parent. When only 9<sup>th</sup> grade participants in the present investigation were taken into account (to make the data more comparable to the 2011 study), the prevalence in 2016 fell to nine percent. This suggests that there may have been a decline in psychological abuse since 2011.

### Witnessed intimate partner violence

- 14% of pupils reported that they witnessed intimate partner violence .
- Pupils had more commonly experienced a father's violence against a mother than vice-versa (eleven percent compared to seven percent).
- A total of eight percent of pupils had experienced that one parent had used physical violence against the other parent; of these, three percent had witnessed repeated incidents of physical violence.
- Girls reported that they had witnessed intimate partner violence to a significantly greater extent than boys.
- Since 2006, reports of having experienced physical violence between parents has dropped by nearly 50 percent (when only 9th graders are compared).

14 percent of the pupils stated that they had witnessed intimate partner violence. Eleven percent of the pupils had witnessed their father psychologically and/or physically abusing their mother (see Table 8a), and almost seven percent had witnessed a mother committing an act of violence against their father (Table 8b). There is some overlap here, because these pupils often stated that both their mother and their father had been violent. However, 59 percent of the pupils who had experienced violence at home reported their father had been the sole perpetrator.

**TABLE 8A. Proportion of pupils (%) who witnessed their father subjecting their mother to violence. Numbers followed by a star have been defined as violence between adults in the family in this study.**

	No, never	Isolated incidents	Occasionally	Often
Your dad used some form of physical violence against your mom (e.g. slapped her in the face, dragged her by the hair, threw things at her, struck her with his fist/a weapon, or kicked her)	94,1	3,4*	1,5*	1,0*
Your dad threatened your mom with physical violence	94,4	3,1*	1,4*	1,1*
Your dad used words to insult, oppress, or dominate your mother	83,0	11,1	4,1*	2,8*

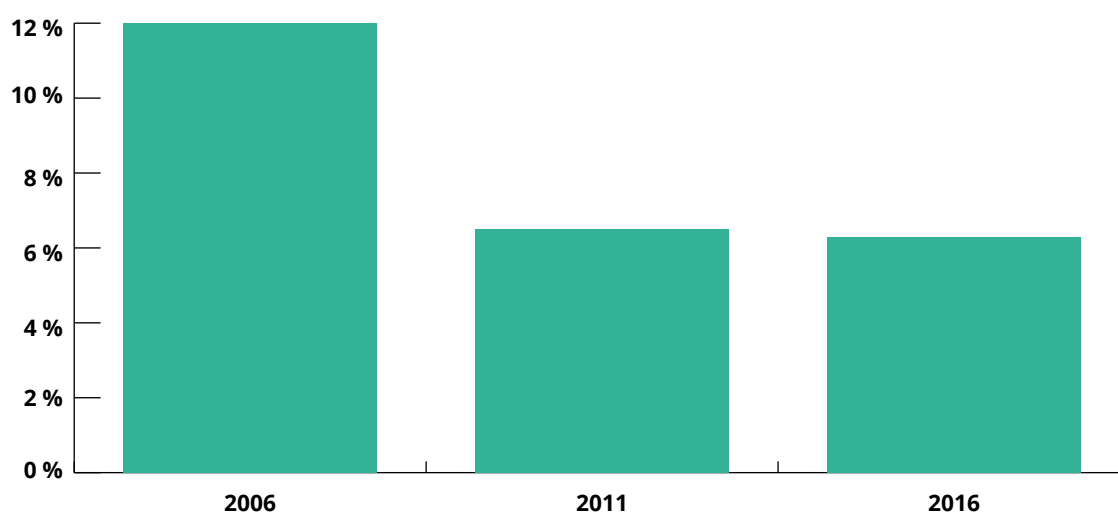
**TABLE 8B.** *Proportion of pupils (%) who witnessed their mother subjecting their father to violence. Numbers followed by a star have been defined as violence between adults in the family in this study.*

	No, never	Isolated incidents	Occasionally	Often
Your mom used some form of physical violence against your dad (e.g. slapped him in the face, dragged him by the hair, threw things at him, struck him with her fist/a weapon, or kicked him)	96,3	2,7*	0,6*	0,4*
Your mom threatened your dad with physical violence	96,3	1,6*	0,6*	0,4*
Your mom used words to insult, oppress, or dominate your father	87,7	8,6	2,6*	1,1*

Almost eight percent of the pupils reported that they had experienced physical violence between their parents, of which three percent had experienced such abuse on several occasions. Fathers accounted for the majority of the physical and systematic violence.

### **Comparison over time**

In the 2016 survey, questions about intimate partner violence in the family have been expanded to include both psychological and physical violence. Previous studies have focused only on physical violence between parents. By singling out the group that had experienced physical violence and examining 9th grade participants in the current study separately, the incidence rates from the three most recent surveys (2006, 2011 and 2016) can be compared. The survey from 2006 differs markedly from the 2011 and 2016 surveys, which describe comparable rates (Figure 4).



**FIGURE 4.** *A comparison over time. Percentage of 9th grade pupils who reported having experienced physical intimate partner violence in the family, based on three different school surveys.*





## Neglect

- Just over six percent of the pupils reported that they had been neglected in the course of their childhood.
- A little more than one percent of the pupils reported physical neglect, and just over five percent reported emotional neglect.
- Nearly nine percent of the pupils felt that at least one parent (usually the father) did not care about them.

A validated instrument from the ACE study (Anda et al., 2010) was used to measure physical and emotional neglect. The instrument used ten questions, as shown in Table 9. Questions 1-5 represent physical neglect, and questions 6-10 represent emotional neglect. The responses were scored (1-5), in which an answer of "very often true" the answer alternatives in questions 1-3 were assigned 5 points, "often true" was assigned 4 points, etc. For questions 4 and 5, the point system was reversed. The same applies to the scoring for emotional neglect (questions 6-10). Thereafter, the points were tallied. A score of over 16 was considered to constitute physical or emotional neglect.



**TABLE 9.** *The validation instrument used to measure neglect, and the prevalence rate for each sub-question.*

	Very often true	Often true	Sometimes true	Rarely true	Never true
<b>Physical neglect:</b>					
1. I did not have enough to eat	3,6	1,0	1,5	3,9	90,0
2. I had to wear dirty clothes	0,8	0,7	1,3	5,1	92,1
3. My parents were too drunk or too high to take care of me.	1,2	1,0	2,1	3,1	92,7
4. I knew there was someone at home who could take care of me and protect me	81,1	9,4	3,2	1,4	5,0
5. There was someone who could take me to the doctor if necessary	88,5	6,7	1,8	0,7	2,3
<b>Physical neglect</b>					
6. Someone in my family made me feel important or special	79,2	11,0	5,7	1,8	2,3
7. I felt loved	81,3	10,0	5,0	1,8	1,9
8. People in my family looked out for each other.	79,4	11,6	5,6	1,6	1,8
9. People in my family felt close to each other.	72,7	14,6	7,9	2,5	2,4
10. My family has been a source of strength and support	70,6	14,8	8,1	3,2	3,3

A total of just over six percent of the pupils reported that they had been neglected in the course of their childhood. A little more than one per cent of the pupils reported physical neglect and more than five percent reported emotional neglect.

The study included also a question about whether the pupils felt that their parents cared about them (Table 10). The vast majority of pupils felt that their parents care about them. Nearly 98 percent of the pupils responded that they felt that their mother cared about them, and 93 percent stated that they felt that their father cared about them. In the comments field that followed the question, many pupils wrote about the positive support and love they receive from their parents. One example: *"Both my parents have always been a great support and both of them have always shown me how much they care."*

**TABLE 10.** *The pupils' feelings about whether their parents care about them (%)*.

	Mom (or equivalent)	Dad (or equivalent)
Care a lot about me and always want what's best for me	92,4	84,6
Care quite a lot about me	5,1	8,7
Care very little about me	1,5	4,3
Don't care about how I'm doing	1,0	2,4

Almost nine percent of the pupils felt that one of their parents (usually the father) did not care about them. Just under three percent of the pupils reported that their mother cares little or not at all about them, and nearly seven percent reported that their father does not care about them. An example of a comment by a pupil: *"My dad has never been there for me. He abused my mother and my brothers and me. He took drugs in front of us when we were little, and when we grew up."*

Less than one per cent had no parent who cared about them. An example of a comment by one pupil: *"Mom is too focused on how bad she feels. Dad has always put his job first."*

Questions about the pupils' experiences of their parents' care for them were used in the 2011 pupil survey, but the questions were not divided between mother and father. The comparability with the present study is therefore somewhat limited. Seven percent of 9th grade pupils who participated in the present study reported that they had a parent who does not care about them, and less than one percent stated that they have no parent who cares about them. In 2011, between two and three percent of pupils reported that they felt that their parents did not care about them. The majority of respondents who responded that their parents cared about them then wrote in the comments field that one parent, (often the mother) cared but that the other parent did not.

## Sexual abuse

In the section on sexual abuse, we set aside the concept of child abuse (violence committed by adults against children) and address the sexual abuses to which the pupils have been exposed, regardless of the age of the perpetrator.

- **26 percent of pupils (40 percent of girls and ten percent of boys) reported that they had been sexually abused on one or more occasions.**
- **The majority of the abuses had been committed for the first time in the respondent's teenage years, and the abuser had been either someone the child knew or a peer who the child did not know.**
- **Nearly nine percent of the pupils (14 percent of girls and two percent of boys) stated that the perpetrator was an adult, usually a stranger.**
- **Two percent of all pupils (four percent of the girls and 0.4 percent of the boys) stated that a parent or step-parent had been their abuser.**

In total, 26 percent of the pupils (40 percent of girls and ten percent of boys) reported that they had been sexually abused on one or more occasions. The majority of the incidents of sexual abuse (79%) had taken place for the first time in the child's teenage years (ages 13-17). Approximately 19 percent of respondents were abused for the first time when they were 7-12 years of age. Just over two percent of the pupils who reported that they had been subjected to sexual abuse recalled that they were six years old or younger when they were first abused.

As demonstrated in Table 11, the most common type of abuse was having been groped or kissed against one's will (16%), followed by having been asked to perform sexual services on the internet (11%). A total of just over four percent of pupils (seven percent girls and one percent boys) reported that they had been subjected to penetrative sexual abuse. Just over one percent had been repeatedly subjected to penetrative sexual abuse.

**TABLE 11. Percentage of pupils (%) who had been exposed to various forms of sexual abuse, by gender and overall.**

	Isolated incidents		Many occasions		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Both genders
Showed you images of you or other people in sexual positions, on the internet or via mobile phones	8,1	2,6	1,8	0,6	7,0
Asked you to perform sexual acts on the internet	13,2	2,2	6,2	0,5	11,2
Groped you or kissed you against your will	20,7	4,4	5,1	0,7	15,5
Forced you to grope or kiss someone else	5,2	1,9	1,1	0,4	4,5
Forced you to watch while someone else exposed his/her body or parts of his/her body to you	5,2	1,2	1,1	0,5	4,3
Forced you to expose your body or parts of your body	8,0	1,1	2,0	0,3	5,9
Forced you to have vaginal, anal, or oral sex	5,9	0,6	1,4	0,3	4,4

### **Perpetrators**

The majority of sexual abuse incidents are perpetrated by teenagers. Just over 21 percent of the pupils have been abused by a peer, usually a peer who the pupil knew personally. Unknown peers were close behind as the second most common type of abuser.

Nearly nine percent of all pupils (14 percent of girls and two percent of boys) reported that they had been victims of sexual abuse by an adult person. The adult who perpetrated the abuse was usually a stranger. Two percent of all pupils (four percent of the girls and 0.4 percent of the boys) stated that they had been subjected to abuse by a parent or step-parent.

**TABLE 12. Perpetrators of sexual abuse, number and percentage (%).**

Abusers	Number	Percent*	Percentage of all pupils
Girlfriend/boyfriend	166	15,1	3,9
Acquaintance/peer who the child knew	455	41,4	10,6
Peer who the child did not know	382	34,7	8,9
Parent/stepparent	66	6,0	1,5
Sibling	59	5,4	1,4
Adult relative	32	2,9	0,7
Friend of the family	35	3,2	0,8
Another adult (such as a teacher or sports coach)	44	4,0	1,0
Adult stranger	272	24,7	6,3

\* = (Percentage of 1100 pupils who reported sexual abuse)

### Poly-victimisation - overlaps of various forms of child abuse

The various forms of child abuse overlapped extensively. 17 percent of all pupils have experienced at least two forms of child abuse, and half of these pupils have been exposed to three or more types of abuse. Poly-victimisation overlapped with the degree of severity of the violence. This means that the pupils who were exposed to repeated violence or more severe forms of violence were also more frequently exposed to numerous types of violence.

**TABLE 13. Overlap of child abuse forms (read horizontally, from left to right).**

	Physical abuse	Psycho-logical abuse	Witnessing intimate partner violence	Neglect	Sexual abuse (by adults)
Physical abuse	X	43,9	31,3	15,3	14,7
Psychological abuse	69,0	X	45,8	24,2	19,3
Witnessing intimate partner violence	54,2	49,7	X	20,0	19,2
Neglect	61,6	62,0	47,2	X	25,1
Sexual abuse	42,8	35,2	32,5	18,2	X

The pupils who reported neglect are the group that is most vulnerable to other forms of child abuse (Table 13). The majority of them had been subjected to physical and psychological violence, and nearly half of them had witnessed intimate partner violence. Psychological abuse also largely overlaps with other forms of child abuse, especially physical abuse.

Exposure to many different types of abuse is strongly linked to financial instability. Among the pupils who felt that their family was financially unstable, 58 percent reported that they had been exposed to two or more types of abuse by adults, as opposed to 15 percent among pupils who stated that their family was financially stable. More than 24 percent of the pupils whose families were financially unstable had been subjected to four or five types of abuse, compared to just over two percent of pupils who reported that their family was financially stable.

Girls also reported exposure to multiple types of abuse to a significantly greater extent than boys. 20 percent of the girls reported that they had been subjected to two or more forms of abuse, as opposed to twelve percent of boys. Pupils born outside the Nordic region also reported exposure to two or more types of child abuse to a greater extent (31%) than the pupils who were born in the Nordic region (15%), and pupils who primarily live with only one parent reported higher levels of exposure (32%) compared to those pupils who live with both parents (12%).

## Bullying

Almost 38 percent of all pupils reported that they had been bullied at some point in their lives. In total, 21 percent had been bullied on numerous occasions (see Table 14a). Nearly 23 percent of pupils reported that they had bullied someone on at least one occasion, of which just over six percent had bullied others on numerous occasions (Table 14b). The most common forms of bullying were that a pupil had been “frozen out” and that other pupils had said mean things about a pupil or made fun of him/her. 52 percent of all pupils had never been bullied and had never bullied others.

**TABLE 14A. Percentage of pupils who said they had been bullied**

	%
Bullied on many occasions	7,7
Bullied occasionally	13,3
Bullied once or twice	16,5
Never bullied	62,5

**TABLE 14B. Percentage of pupils who said they had bullied others**

	%
Bullied others on many occasions	1,5
Bullied others occasionally	4,8
Bullied others once or twice	16,4
Never bullied others	77,3

As with child abuse, significantly more girls (43%) than boys (31%) reported that they had been subjected to bullying. However, more boys (26%) than girls (17%) reported that they had bullied others. Bullying (both having bullied and/or having been the victim of bullying) was also reported to a greater extent among the pupils whose families were less financially stable, among those who did not live with both parents, and among high school pupils. However, there were no significant differences between pupils who were born in Sweden and other Nordic countries and those who were born outside the Nordic countries.

There was a certain amount of overlap between bullying others and being bullied. Just over 33 percent of pupils who had been bullied also bullied others. Bullying (both having been bullied and bullying others) was strongly linked to all forms of child abuse. More than half of the pupils who had been victims of any form of child abuse had also been victims of bullying (52%, compared to 28% among those pupils who had not been victims of child abuse). A higher proportion of pupils who had been victims of child abuse (34%) had bullied others, compared with those who had not been subjected to child abuse (16%). The previous surveys from 2006 and 2011 have shown similar results.

### Comparison with previous years

In one comparison, a greater proportion of pupils in the present investigation reported that they had been bullied than did in the 2011 study. In grade nine reported 38 percent of pupils in the current study that they had been bullied, compared with 31 percent in the 2011 study. In the 2006 study, 34 percent of 9th grade pupils reported that they had been bullied; these results are more similar to the results of the current study.

On the other hand, slightly fewer pupils in the current study (23%) reported that they had bullied others than did in the 2011 study (30%). In the 2006 study, 34 percent of 9th graders reported that they had bullied others.

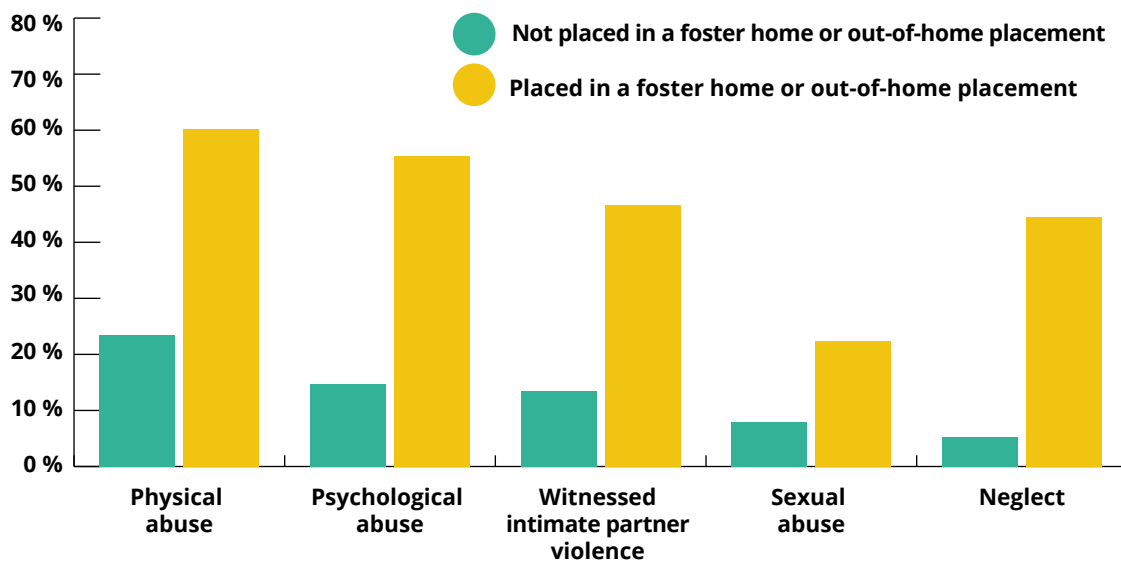
## Particularly vulnerable groups

In the earlier section "Background factors and exposure to child abuse," several high-risk groups were identified. Girls have been identified a high-risk group, because they reported child abuse committed by their parents to a greater extent than boys. Above all, they were exposed to sexual abuse (both by adults and peers) to a significantly greater extent than boys. They also reported having been bullied to a greater extent than the boys. Other high-risk groups that have been identified are foreign-born pupils, pupils whose families are financially unstable, and pupils who primarily only live with one parent. The following are other groups of pupils who have been identified as particularly vulnerable.

### Pupils placed in a foster home or out-of-home-placement

72 pupils (1.6%) stated that they were placed in a foster family or other out-of-home-placement (at the time the survey was conducted). 83 percent of these pupils reported that they had been exposed to at least one form of child abuse, as opposed to 42 percent of the pupils who lived at home. The pupils in foster care/out-of-home-placement were particularly vulnerable to all forms of child abuse (Figure 5). Pupils placed in foster care or out-of-home-placement were also exposed to multiple forms of child abuse and severe physical abuse to a greater extent than those pupils who were not in the care of the state. 39 percent of pupils in foster care/ out-of-home-placement have been exposed to four or five different types of child abuse, as opposed to two percent of those who are not in the care of the state. 57 percent of pupils in foster care/ out-of-home-placement reported that they have been subjected to repeated and/or more severe forms of physical child abuse, compared with eleven percent of those who are not in the care of the state.

**FIGURE 5.** *A comparison of the exposure to different types of abuse experienced by children who are placed in foster homes or out-of-home-placement and those who are not.*



Foster care/ out-of-home-placement is most likely a result of the abuse to which the pupils were subjected. Few pupils reported that they had been victims of abuse while living in a foster home or out-of-home-placement. Four pupils reported that they had been psychologically abused by a foster parent, and three pupils reported that they had been physically abused by a foster parent.



## Pupils with disabilities

54 percent of the pupils surveyed reported that they have at least one disability or chronic illness (Table 15), and 45 percent stated that the disability/illness had been diagnosed by a physician or psychologist. There were 22 percent of them that skipped the question altogether and about whom we have no information.

**TABLE 15. Number and percentage of children with various disabilities/diseases that had been subjected to some form of child abuse.**

	Number in the entire study group	Subjected to some form of child abuse child abuse	
	(N)	n	%
No disability or chronic illness (ref)	1120	231 (ref)	31,0 (ref)
Impaired vision	269	164	61,0
Hearing loss	170	101	59,4
Reading and writing difficulties (dyslexia)	441	245	55,6
Speech impediments	125	72	57,6
Diabetes	54	25	46,3
Epilepsy	44	27	61,4
Inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis)	54	31	57,4
Asthma	615	332	54,0
Allergy/intolerance (such as pollen, grass, animals with fur, food allergies, gluten intolerance)	1357	622	45,9
Eczema	511	258	50,5
Mobility impairments	64	42	65,6
ADHD or ADD	426	279	65,5
Asperger's syndrome, autism or Touret- te's syndrome	116	79	68,1
Eating disorder (Anorexia or Bulimia Nervosa)	194	154	79,4

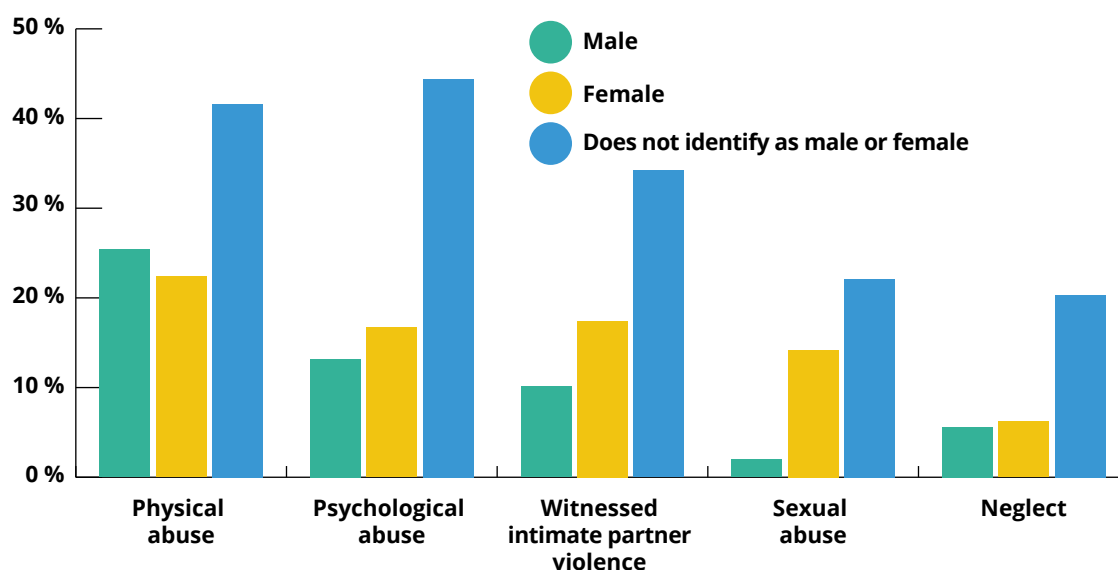
All of the disabilities had a significant association with child abuse. Because the disabilities often overlap, it is difficult to determine which disability or illness had the strongest association. However, pupils who reported neuropsychiatric disabilities (defined in this study as ADHD, Asperger's syndrome and autism) and those who reported that they had an eating disorder stands out as being particularly vulnerable. Nearly 80 percent of the pupils with eating disorders had been subjected to some form of child abuse in the course of their childhood. Pupils who reported that they had an eating disorder were much more vulnerable to all types of child abuse than those pupils who did not have this health problem. Over 32 percent of pupils with eating disorders had been subjected to sexual abuse by an adult, which means that such abuse is four times more common among eating disordered pupils, compared with other pupils.

All forms of child abuse had a correlation with disability or illness. Eleven percent of pupils with disabilities had been victims of sexual abuse by an adult, in comparison with the five percent of pupils who did not have a disability. Twice as many pupils with disabilities had witnessed intimate partner violence (17%), compared to those who did not have a disability (8%). Disabled pupils reported physical abuse to a greater extent (28%) than pupils who did not have a disability or chronic illness (17%). Psychological abuse and neglect were reported more than twice as often by disabled pupils than they were by pupils who did not have a disability or chronic illness.

### Pupils who do not identify as male or female

85 pupils (1.8%) reported that they do not identify as male or female. This is a vulnerable group of pupils. They reported all forms of child abuse to a much greater extent than other pupils (Figure 6).

**FIGURE 6.** *The exposure of boys, girls and pupils who identify themselves as neither male nor female (%) to child abuse.*

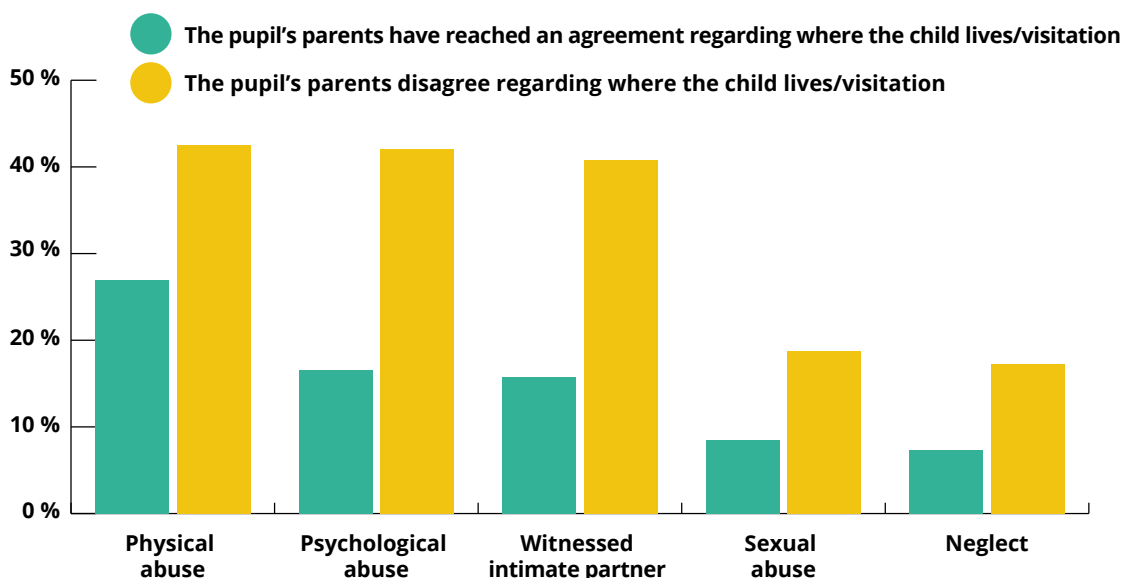


More than 76 percent of the pupils who do not identify as male or female reported that they had been exposed to some type of child abuse in the course of their childhood. Pupils who do not identify as male or female were also subjected to more numerous types of abuse, as well as more severe forms of abuse. About five times as many pupils in this group had been subjected to four to five different forms of abuse, compared to participants who identify as male or female. Moreover, 27 percent of these vulnerable pupils had been subjected to more serious (more severe forms and/or repeated) physical violence, compared with 11 percent of pupils who identify as male or female.

### **Pupils whose parents have not reached an agreement regarding living arrangement and visitation**

Eleven percent of all pupils reported that their parents had been at odds over where the pupil should live or had disagreed about how often the pupil should see the other parent. Eight percent reported that this happened on rare occasions, and three percent reported that their parents had often disagreed on matters related to where they should live/visitation. These pupils were especially vulnerable to child abuse. Among the pupils who reported that their parents had disagreed about where they should live or about visitation issues on rare occasions, 71 percent had been subjected to some form of abuse. Among those who reported that their parents had often disagreed about such issues, over 84 percent had been victims of some form of abuse.

**FIGURE 7. Exposure to different types of child abuse among pupils with separated parents where parents were in agreement regarding living arrangements and visitation, and among pupils whose parents had disagreed on these issues (%).**



The pupils who reported that their parents had disagreed about where they should live and visitation issues were exposed to all types of child abuse to a significantly greater extent than the pupils with separated parents who were in agreement about living arrangements and visitation (Figure 7).

## Pupils who do not have control over their own lives

This study included a question about the pupils' perceived freedom to make decisions about their own lives (see Table 16). This question had previously been used in a study conducted by the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen, 2007).

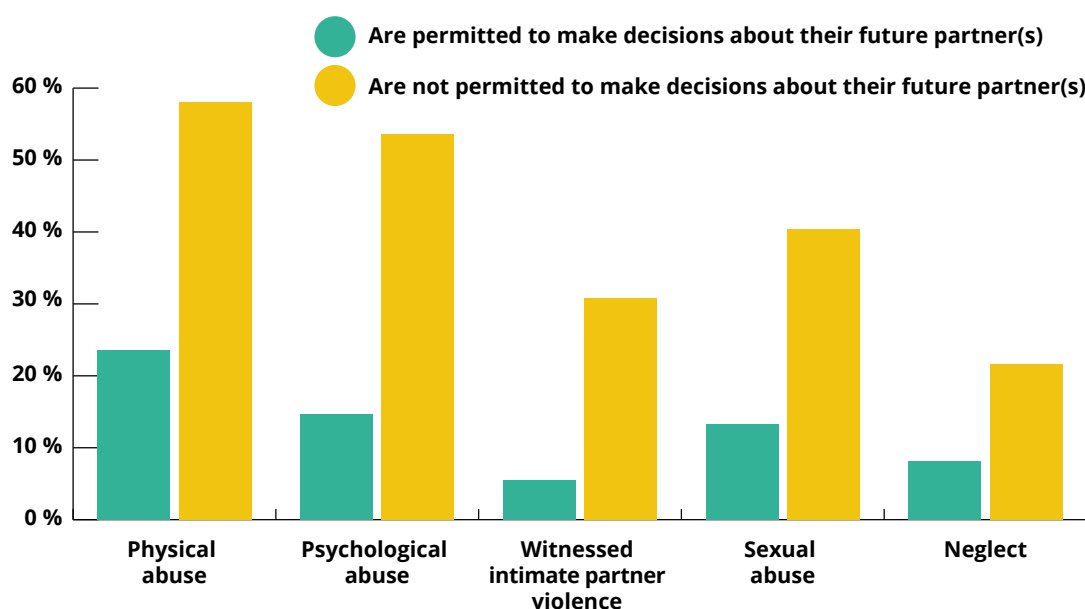
**TABLE 16.** *The possibility to make decisions about their own lives, based on the origins of the pupils' parents.*

I get to choose ...	True	Not true	p-value
<b>a) ... what I wear and how I should look</b>			
Both parents were born in Sweden/the Nordic region	99,1	0,9	<0,001
One or both parents was born outside the Nordic region	97,5	2,5	
<b>b) ... which friends I have</b>			
Both parents were born in Sweden/the Nordic region	98,6	1,4	<0,001
One or both parents was born outside the Nordic region	94,6	5,4	
<b>c) ... what I do with my friends</b>			
Both parents were born in Sweden/the Nordic region	97,2	2,8	<0,001
One or both parents was born outside the Nordic region	93,3	6,7	
<b>d) ... what leisure activities I participate in</b>			
Both parents were born in Sweden/the Nordic region	98,4	1,6	<0,001
One or both parents was born outside the Nordic region	96,4	3,6	
<b>e) ... what education I should receive</b>			
Both parents were born in Sweden/the Nordic region	98,1	1,9	<0,001
One or both parents was born outside the Nordic region	96,1	3,9	
<b>f) ... what religion/philosophy I follow</b>			
Both parents were born in Sweden/the Nordic region	98,0	2,0	<0,001
One or both parents was born outside the Nordic region	89,3	10,7	
<b>g) ... what political or ideological views I should have</b>			
Both parents were born in Sweden/the Nordic region	98,4	1,6	<0,001
One or both parents was born outside the Nordic region	95,7	4,3	
<b>h) ... who I will marry/live with as an adult</b>			
Both parents were born in Sweden/the Nordic region	99,1	0,9	<0,001
One or both parents was born outside the Nordic region	93,4	6,6	

A large majority of all pupils have control over their own lives, but pupils whose parents were born outside the Nordic countries are not given the opportunity to make decisions about their own lives as often. Such decisions pertain to appearance, clothing, friends, leisure activities, education, religion/beliefs, political or ideological beliefs, and who the pupils will marry or live with. The aspects where the differences were particularly large included the pupil's possibility of deciding his/her religion/beliefs for him/herself and the pupil's freedom to marry or live with the person of his/her own choosing. The results are consistently significant.

When the analyses were stratified according to gender, there were no significant gender differences among pupils with parents born in Sweden or the Nordic countries. However, significantly more girls with foreign-born parents did not get to make decisions about what they could wear or their personal appearance, in comparison with boys with foreign-born parents. In percentage terms, there were also more foreign-born girls who do not get to choose who they will marry (7%), compared with the boys (5.5%). However, this difference was not statistically significant.

All the sub-questions pertaining to self-determination listed in Table 16 were strongly linked to child abuse, regardless of the nation(s) of origin of the pupils' parents. Of the pupils who felt that they would not get to decide who they would marry or live with, 88 percent had been victims of some form of child abuse, compared with 42 percent of those who think that they will be allowed to choose their future partners themselves. These pupils were overrepresented with regards to all forms of child abuse (Figure 8).



**FIGURE 8.** *Exposure to various forms of abuse among pupils who think that they will be allowed to choose their future partners themselves and those who feel that they will not have any say-so in the matter.*



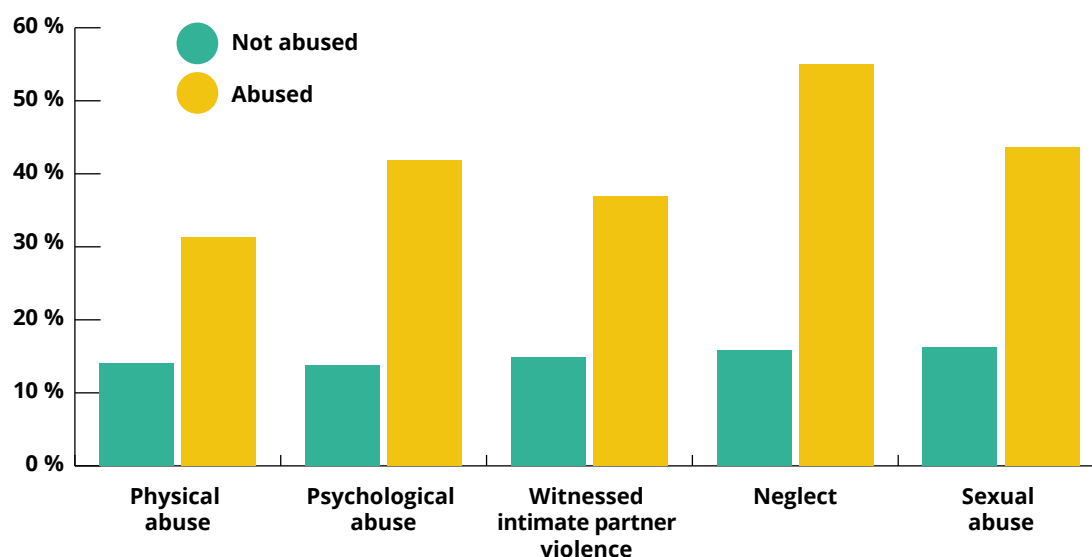
## Child abuse and health

- Pupils who had been subjected to some form of child abuse were three times more likely to have poor general health, compared to pupils who had not been abused.
- Pupils who had been victims of child abuse reported various psychosomatic symptoms (usually three or more) to a greater extent than pupils who had not been subjected to abuse.
- Self-harming was five times more prevalent among the pupils who had been victims of child abuse than among pupils who had not been abused.
- Suicidal ideation was at least three times more prevalent among the pupils who had been victims of child abuse than among pupils who had not been abused.
- Just over 13 percent of the pupils who were victims of child abuse had attempted suicide, in comparison to less than two percent of pupils who had not been abused.
- There was a dose-response relationship between exposure and various forms of ill-health.

### Perceived general health

18 percent of all pupils stated that they felt that their health was not good or poor. This was more commonly reported by pupils who had been subjected to some form of child abuse (30%) than by pupils who had not been victims of child abuse (11%). The relationship between exposure to child abuse and experienced poor health remained consistent when gender, age, country of birth, financial situation and living/family situation were taken into account (aOR=3,0  $p<0,001$ ).

When all of the forms of child abuse were analysed separately (see Figure 9), significant differences in perceived general health could be identified between the pupils who had not been abused in comparison with those who had been subjected to child abuse. Those who had been victims of neglect were most likely to report that they felt unwell.



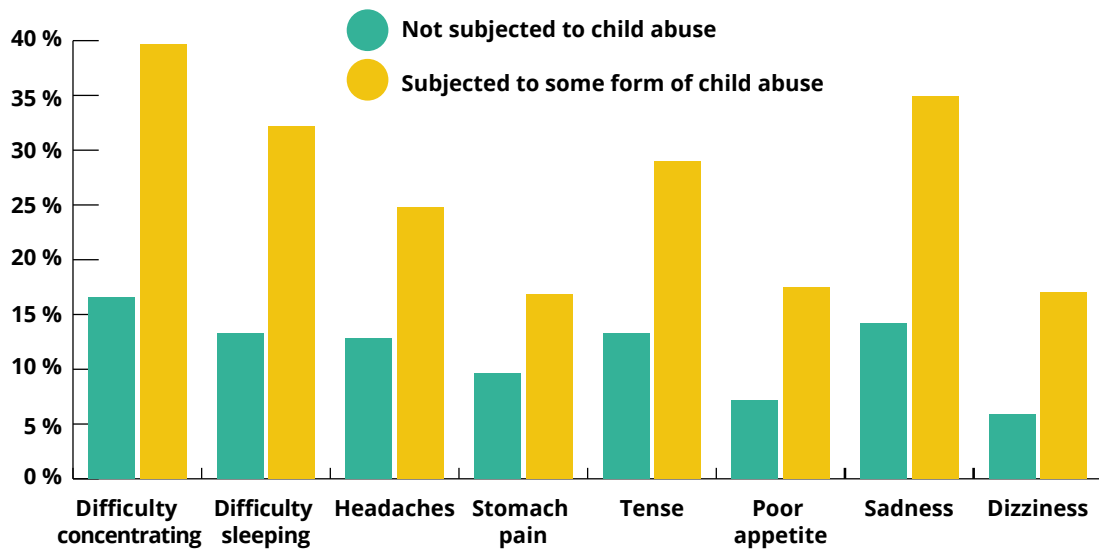
**FIGURE 9.** *Percentage of pupils who report that they do not feel well. A comparison between those who had not been abused and those who had been subjected to abuse, divided into types of abuse.*

There was a clear dose-response relationship between exposure and how pupils felt in general. Among the individuals who had been exposed to four or five forms of child abuse, 71 percent reported that they did not feel good in general, compared with 20 percent among those who had been exposed to a single form of child abuse.

### Psychosomatic symptoms

52 percent of all pupils reported that they often or always experienced psychosomatic symptoms; their responses are presented in Figure 10. 68 percent of the pupils who had been subjected to some form of child abuse reported psychosomatic symptoms, and more than half of these pupils had three or more disorders, unlike those pupils who had not been victims of child abuse, of whom 13 percent reported three or more complaints.



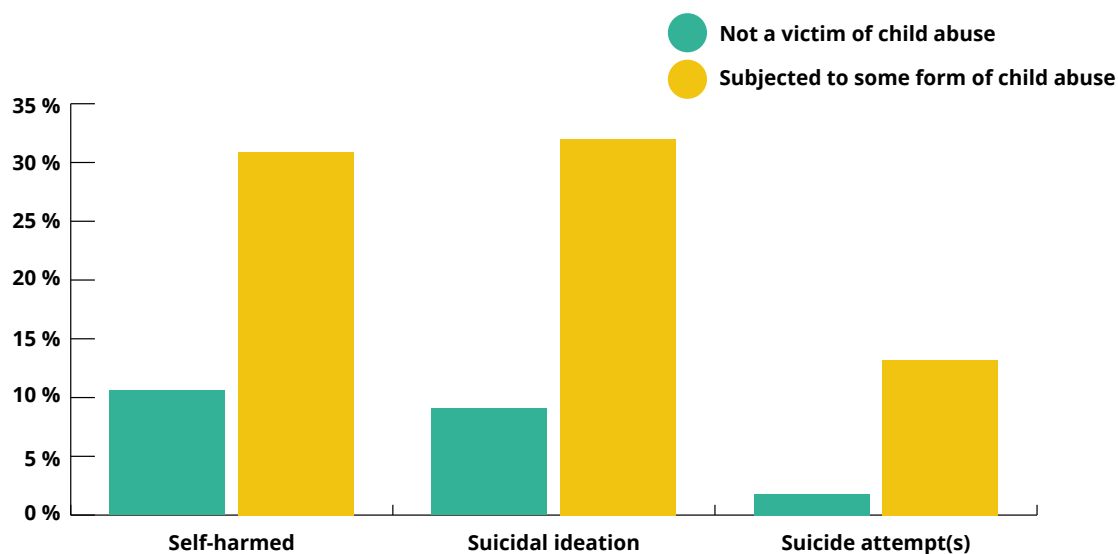


**FIGURE 10.** *Percentage of pupils who reported that they had experienced constant or frequent psychosomatic symptoms during the last six months. A comparison between pupils who had been victims of some form of abuse compared with those pupils who had never been abused.*

All of the symptoms had a significant correlation with child abuse (Figure 10). The differences between pupils who had been abused in comparison to those who had not been subjected to abuse were greatest when it came to concentration problems (OR=3,3  $p<0,001$ ), sleep problems (OR=3,1  $p<0,001$ ), sadness (OR=3,2  $p<0,001$ ), and dizziness (OR=3,2  $p<0,001$ ).

### Self-harm, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts

18 percent of all pupils (28 percent of the girls and eight percent of the boys) reported that they had ever deliberately harmed themselves by cutting/scratching/burning themselves, or by doing something similar. 31 percent of the pupils who had been exposed to some type of abuse reported that they had self-harmed, in comparison with just under eleven percent of the pupils who had not been abused (Figure 11). The differences are significant among both boys and girls. 15 percent of the pupils who had been victims of child abuse reported that they had attempted to harm themselves five times or more, as opposed to three percent among those pupils who had not been exposed to any type of child abuse.



**FIGURE 11.** *Percentage of pupils who self-harmed, had suicidal thoughts, or attempted suicide on one or more occasions. A comparison between the pupils who had been victims of child abuse and those who had not been abused.*

About 18 percent of all pupils (23 percent of the girls and eleven percent of boys) had considered committing suicide on at least one occasion. There was a strong correlation between suicidal ideation and child abuse. More than three times as many pupils who had been victims of child abuse had seriously considered taking their own life on at least one occasion, compared to those pupils who had not been subjected to abuse (Figure 11). The differences were significant among both boys and girls. Eleven percent of pupils who had been abused had often had suicidal thoughts (five times or more) compared to just under two percent of pupils who had not been victims of abuse.

Six percent of all pupils (eight percent of the girls and four percent of the boys) had attempted to commit suicide on at least one occasion, and attempted suicide was significantly more common among the pupils who had been victims of child abuse. Just over 13 percent of pupils in this group had attempted suicide, in comparison to less than two percent of pupils who had not been abused (Figure 11). There were also considerably more pupils in the abuse victims group who had attempted suicide on numerous occasions. Nearly five percent of them had attempted suicide three or more times, in comparison with 0.4 percent of pupils who had never been exposed to child abuse. The differences are significant among both boys and girls.

There was a clear dose-response relationship. 50 percent of the pupils who had been subjected to four to five types of child abuse reported that they had repeatedly self-harmed (five times or more), 46 percent said they often had suicidal thoughts, and 21 percent had attempted suicide on at least five occasions.

## Disclosure and support

88 percent of all pupils reported that they had an adult in their lives who they trusted and who they could talk to should they ever become victims of abuse. However, there was a significant difference between the pupils who had been victims of child abuse and those who had not been abused. 81 percent of the pupils who had been abused had an adult they could talk to, in comparison with 94 percent of those who had not been subjected to abuse. Of the pupils who had been subjected to four or five forms of abuse, only 55 percent had an adult who they could talk to.

### Professional support and disclosures of physical and psychological violence, neglect, or intimate partner violence

45 percent of the pupils who had been subjected to some form of abuse (excluding sexual abuse) had told someone about the abuse. They most commonly told a sibling or a friend from their peer group (see Table 17). Just over ten percent of pupils who had been abused had told a professional within their school, social services, the police, the health-care service, or a youth guidance centre employee. More girls (54%) than boys (33%) had disclosed the abuse.

**TABLE 17. People/organisation(s) to whom the pupils disclosed that they had been abused in the past (percentage and number).**

Disclosed the abuse to:	% (n) of those who reported abuse	% (n) of those who reported more severe abuse*
Sibling	13,4 (239)	20,9 (115)
Parent/close adult acquaintance	11,0 (197)	16,2 (89)
Friend of similar age	14,6 (260)	24,7 (136)
Girlfriend/boyfriend	6,3 (112)	11,8 (65)
School staff member (e.g. teacher, school nurse, guidance counsellor)	4,8 (85)	8,7 (48)
Social services	5,0 (89)	11,3 (62)
The police	3,3 (59)	7,6 (42)
Healthcare professional	3,9 (69)	8,0 (44)
Anonymous helplines or online support	1,6 (29)	3,1 (17)
Youth guidance centre staff	1,6 (28)	2,5 (14)
Adult in a club/association or similar person	1,2 (21)	1,8 (10)
Another person	1,5 (26)	3,3 (18)

\* Pupils exposed to severe physical violence and/or those who had witnessed physical intimate partner violence between adults on numerous occasions.



The pupils were more likely to have disclosed abuse to peers or professionals if it had been severe and systematic. 56% of the pupils who had been subjected to more severe forms of physical violence and/or had repeatedly witnessed physical violence between adults had told someone about the abuse, and nearly 20 percent had told a professional within their school, social services, the police, the healthcare service, or a youth guidance centre employee.

55 percent of the pupils who had been subjected to more severe forms of physical abuse and/or who have experienced physical violence between adults on numerous occasions stated that they did not require any professional help as a result of what they had experienced. Just over 16 percent reported that they needed help but had not sought it, and one percent sought professional help, but did not manage to get in touch with someone who could assist them. Nearly twelve percent had received professional help with which they were satisfied. Just over 13 percent had received professional help with which they were dissatisfied.

### **The disclosure of sexual abuse and professional support**

61 percent of pupils who had been sexually abused (regardless of the abuser) had told someone about the abuse. Pupils most often told a friend from their peer group, but many had also told a parent or a close adult acquaintance (see Table 18). Eleven percent of abuse victims had told a professional within their school, social services, the police, the healthcare service, or a youth guidance centre employee. Among the pupils who had been forced to have penetrative sex, 75 percent had told someone about the abuse, and 29 percent had told a professional.

70 percent of the pupils who had been victims of sexual abuse by an adult had told someone about the abuse. Nearly half of the victims had told a friend of similar age, and 25% of abused pupils had told a parent or a close adult acquaintance about the abuse. 18 percent of pupils who had been abused had told a professional within their school, social services, the police, the healthcare service, or a youth guidance centre employee. More girls (72%) than boys (53%) had disclosed the abuse.

**TABLE 18.** *People/organisation(s) to whom the pupils disclosed that they had been sexually abused in the past (percentage and number).*

Disclosed the sexual abuse to:	% (n) of them who reported sexual abuse, regardless of the abuser	% (n) of them who reported that they were sexually abused by an adult abuser
Sibling	8,9 (98)	12,6 (46)
Parent/close adult acquaintance	15,3 (168)	25,4 (93)
Friend of similar age	38,7 (426)	45,1 (165)
Girlfriend/boyfriend	12,5 (137)	16,1 (59)
School staff member (e.g. teacher, school nurse, guidance counsellor)	5,3 (58)	7,7 (28)
Social services	2,8 (31)	5,2 (19)
The police	5,6 (62)	10,9 (40)
Healthcare professional	3,6 (40)	5,7 (21)
Anonymous helplines or online support	0,9 (10)	2,2 (8)
Youth guidance centre staff	2,0 (22)	2,2 (8)
Adult in a club/association or similar person	1,1 (12)	1,6 (6)
Another person	1,6 (18)	3,3 (12)

The majority of those who had been victims of sexual abuse by an adult (74%) felt that they had not required any professional help. Just over 14 percent reported that they needed help but had not sought it, and one percent had sought professional help, but did not manage to get in touch with someone who could assist them. Six percent of the abused children had received professional help with which they were satisfied, and five percent had received professional help with which they were dissatisfied.





## DISCUSSION

### **The importance of a holistic approach when studying child abuse**

The 2016 school survey included all forms of child abuse, based on the existing Swedish definition of child abuse (the Swedish Ministry of Social Affairs, 2001). In previous surveys, the focus has been primarily on physical abuse and experiences of having witnessed physical intimate partner violence. Studying all forms of child abuse provides a clearer picture of children's overall exposure to abuse and of how the various forms of abuse overlap with each other. Only a few studies in Sweden have previously described poly-victimisation (Aho, Proczkowska-Björklund, et al., 2016; Cater et al., 2014).

International researchers have argued that it may be misleading to study the link between health and only one type of abuse, because of the great extent to which the various forms of abuse overlap (Higgins, 2004). The results of the present study confirm that all forms of child abuse correlate significantly with all of the health issues included in the survey. However, because the various forms of abuse overlap to such a great extent, it is difficult to determine which type of abuse that has the greatest impact. What we have seen before, and which this study also confirms, is that there is a dose-response relationship. There was a clear linear relationship between the number of types of abuse and health.

From the perspective of the child, it is important to investigate and make visible all forms of abuse. Children have the right to protection from all forms of abuse. Previous studies have shown that consequences of psychological abuse are just as devastating as those of physical and sexual abuse (Jernbro, Eriksson, & Janson, 2010; Mills et al., 2013), yet in terms of research, this is the type of abuse that has received the least attention. Neglect can also have serious consequences, and has also been afforded very little research attention in comparison with physical and sexual abuse (Lucas & Jernbro, 2014).

### **No evident increase in child abuse in Sweden**

A large percentage of the pupils have been victims of some form of child abuse at some point during their childhood. The majority of those who reported abuse had been exposed to isolated incidents of less severe forms of violence. Nearly nine percent have been exposed to three or more forms of child abuse, and these pupils have also largely been subjected to more severe and repeated abuse.

Physical child abuse in the home and to have witnessed physical intimate partner violence have been studied in all national surveys on violence against children and therefore can be compared over time. The results show a reduction in these forms of abuse

in Sweden. It is difficult to determine with absolute certainty whether there has been a significant decrease in the physical abuse of children since the last survey in 2011, but there at least appears to have been no increase in such abuse. Psychological abuse (which was likewise investigated in the 2011 pupil study) also appears to have declined (albeit marginally) when the same age groups are compared. The number of pupils who have witnessed physical intimate partner violence has declined since the 2006 study, and the prevalence is the same as in 2011.

Sexual abuse was not investigated in the previous national school surveys, but several other Swedish studies have investigated sexual abuse in the past (Cater et al., 2014; Heimer et al., 2014; Svedin et al., 2015). Our results are consistent with these studies, and indicate that sexual abuse usually occurs during adolescence and is most often perpetrated by peers. It is less common for an adult to commit the abuse, and even rarer for parents or step-parents to sexually abuse their children. In one study (Cater et al., 2014), approximately two percent of boys and three percent of girls had been sexually abused by a parent, step-parent, or adult relative. In the current study, the prevalence was lower among the boys, but slightly higher among the girls. In another study (Heimer et al., 2014), two percent of the women and 0.5 percent of the men had been abused by a parent or step-parent. In the study conducted by Svedin et al. (2015), slightly over one percent of the young people had been sexually abused by their parents. Because the questions used in these studies are not identical, the comparisons are somewhat uncertain.

In the present study, just over six percent of participants had been victims of neglect, which is consistent with the prevalence identified in the study by Aho et al. (2016), in which less than five percent of respondents reported neglect. In another Swedish study (Cater et al., 2014), 13 percent of the young women and nearly seven percent of the young men reported that they had been victims of neglect. These differences may be due to the use of different validated instruments in measuring neglect, and may also be due to different methods of data collection.

## The most vulnerable groups

It appears that all forms of child abuse are affected by the same risk and background factors. Girls reported more child abuse in general, especially child abuse that occurred in a home environment. Other Swedish studies have had similar findings (Aho, Gren-Landell, et al., 2016; Cater et al., 2014). Girls also reported exposure to multiple forms of abuse to a greater extent, a result that has also been demonstrated in previous studies (Cater et al., 2014; Jernbro et al., 2015). In addition to abuse perpetrated by adults, girls also reported bullying to a significantly greater extent than boys, as well as exposure to sexual abuse (most often perpetrated by male peers).

All forms of abuse were strongly linked to perceived unstable family finances. Living primarily with only one parent was also linked to all forms of abuse; this can be seen as



a risk factor, but may also be a result of having been subjected to abuse by the parent with whom the pupil no longer spends as much time. The pupils who were born outside the Nordic region reported all forms of child abuse (except for sexual abuse) to a greater extent than pupils born in the Nordic region. However, it is important to point out that the various risk factors are strongly related to each other. Pupils who were born outside the Nordic countries report unstable family finances to a greater extent, a result that also applies to those pupils who live mostly with only one parent.

Another vulnerable group were the pupils who are enrolled in high school preparatory/introductory programs. The majority of these pupils have been victims of child abuse, and the abuse has often been of a more severe nature. These pupils are over-represented in terms of all of the risk and background factors presented in the above section.

Certain groups of children in our society are particularly vulnerable. Children in families where there has been disagreement about living arrangements and child visitation constitute a group that had been or is currently highly vulnerable to child abuse. The same applies to the group of children with disabilities, especially those with neuropsychiatric disabilities (ADHD, autism, Asperger's, OCD). Almost all disabilities, chronic illnesses or health problems that were examined in the current study had a strong association with child abuse. This can probably be explained by the fact that many health problems and disabilities (such as vision and hearing loss and epilepsy) were strongly associated with neuropsychiatric disabilities. 80 percent of young people with eating disorders had experienced some form of abuse. Many other studies have investigated this issue, with similar results (Caslini et al., 2016). It is important that these young people receive treatment for the abuse to which they have been exposed.

Pupils who do not have control over their own lives constitute another vulnerable group. It is primarily pupils with parents born outside the Nordic region who do not have the same opportunity to make decisions regarding their own lives. It is impossible to know for certain whether honour-related oppression is behind these statistics, but there is a possibility that some of the prevalence of abuse can be explained by honour-related violence. In-depth studies must be conducted in this area.

Pupils who do not identify as male or female constitute another vulnerable group. They were far more likely to report that they had been subjected to all forms of abuse (and above all that they had been exposed to numerous types of abuse). Further knowledge about this group is needed.

## Disclosing the abuse to professionals

The majority of pupils, including those who had been abused, reported that they had an adult they could talk to if they were ever abused at home. However, as with health outcomes, a dose-response relationship exists. The more exposed a person is to abuse, the less likely he/she is to trust adults. A relatively small percentage of the pupils who had

been abused had told a professional person about the abuse. About one-fifth of those who were exposed to severe physical abuse, who had witnessed physical intimate partner violence, or who had been subjected to sexual abuse by an adult person had disclosed the abuse to a professional. Qualitative studies from previous surveys (which also correspond with other previous research) have shown that children and young people choose not to disclose abuse due to loyalty to their parents, shame and guilt, or because they do not trust adults (Jernbro, Otterman, Lucas, Tindberg, & Janson, 2017; Jernbro et al., 2010).

This study has indicated that the pupils were more likely to tell peers and close adult acquaintances about the abuse. Because the study shows that the majority of young people felt that they did not need professional help, it is possible that the young people had received sufficient support from those they were close to. Scarcely one-third of pupils who had been sexually abused by an adult felt that they needed professional help, compared to nearly half of those who had been subjected to other forms of abuse. This may be due to the fact that when the perpetrator of the sexual abuse was an adult, he/she was rarely a family member. Many victims of sexual abuse had confided in one or more of their parents; doing so would be more difficult for someone who is subjected to abuse in the home.

A quarter of pupils who had been subjected to severe physical abuse or who had often witnessed physical intimate partner violence in the family had received professional help/support. Fifty percent of these victims were dissatisfied with the support they had received. Previous studies based on the national surveys (Jernbro et al., 2017; Jernbro et al., 2010) have indicated that young people had felt that professionals did not approach treatment/support from a child-focused perspective. This was especially true of social services professionals and the police. Young people felt that they were not heard, and that the professionals tended to side with their parents. Such bias is contrary to the intentions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Early intervention in child abuse is essential to reduce the likelihood that abused children will develop and behavioural problems (Gilbert, Kemp, et al., 2009). In order for early action to be implemented to assist the child and/or his/her family, professionals must become aware of the abuse. Because few children talk about their experiences (as has been demonstrated in this study as well as previous ones), it is of great importance that the adults in a child's life be able to detect the abuse and intervene on the child's behalf. Preschool, school, child health care and pupil health professionals require increased knowledge about risk factors and early signs of child abuse so that it can be detected at an early stage. Research results must also be disseminated in such a way that they are accessible to professionals who work with abused children.

## The limitations of the study

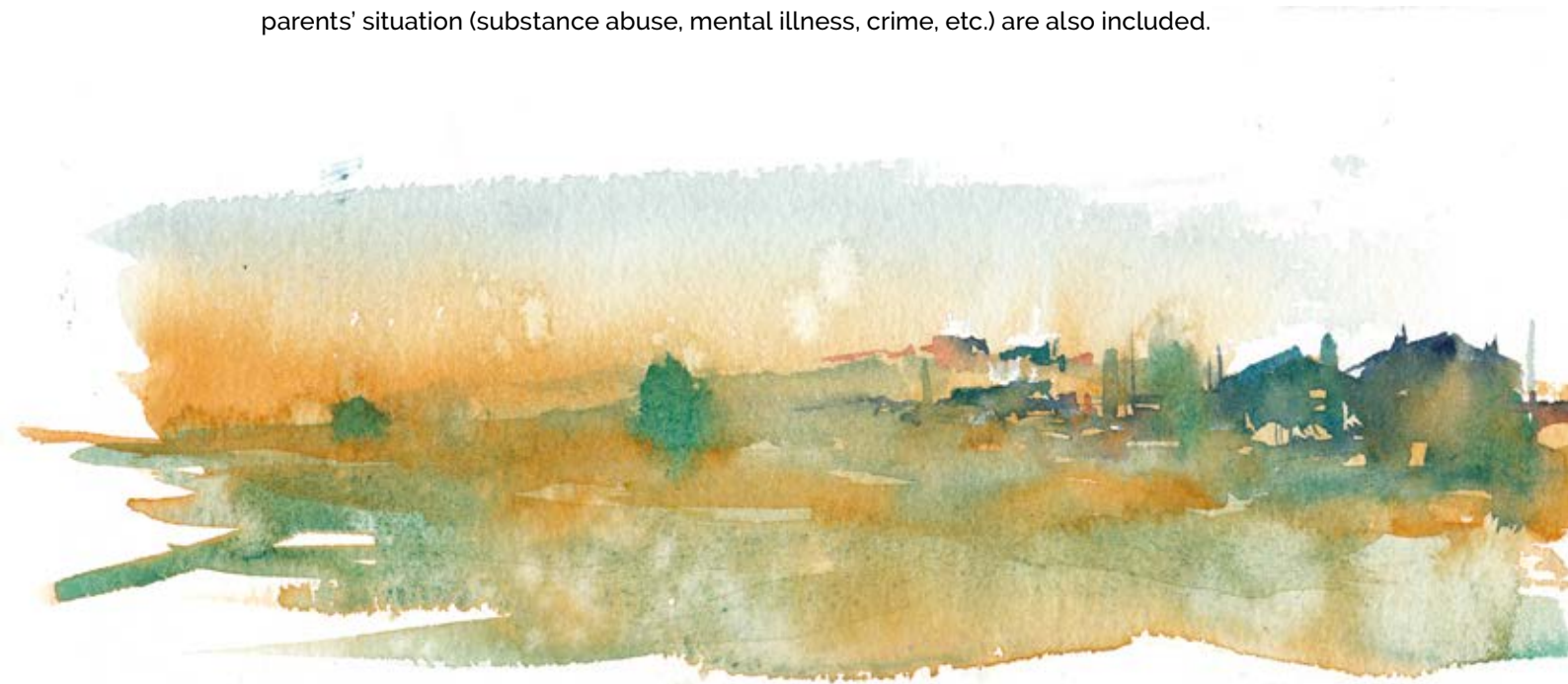
This study does not allow us to obtain information about the children's early years, and when children report abuse that occurred in early childhood, there is a risk that they will misremember what occurred. However, research has shown that children who have been victims of various forms of violence have a good ability to remember the traumatic events, even those that occurred at an early age, and can distinguish between fantasy and reality (Christianson, Azad, Leander, & Seleniu, 2013). Nonetheless, feelings of guilt and shame can contribute to an under-reporting of the prevalence of child abuse.

The study is of cross-sectional design and it is therefore impossible to determine if the relationships observed are causal. The study's reliability has been discussed under the heading "Method" in this report.

## Future research

There is a need for more knowledge about the most vulnerable groups that have been briefly described in this report. These include pupils who do not identify as male or female, pupils who are placed in a foster home or other out-of-home placement, pupils with disabilities, pupils whose parents disagree on their living situation and/or visitation issues, and pupils who do not have control over their own lives. There is a need for in-depth analyses of these groups on the basis of the data collected for this report. The collection of qualitative interview data is also required in order to gain in-depth knowledge about their experiences of abuse, health and their need for support.

There is also a need for more in-depth studies of overall vulnerability in which bullying and other serious life events (such as war, fleeing one's homeland, divorce etc.), and the parents' situation (substance abuse, mental illness, crime, etc.) are also included.



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# Violence against children in Sweden 2016

## A NATIONAL SURVEY

All children have the right to grow up in safe conditions without violence.

In 1979, Sweden became the first country in the world to prohibit all corporal punishment of children. Since then, several surveys of violence against children have been carried out, which have shown that there has been a decrease in physical violence. This indicates that Sweden's ban on corporal punishment has been effective. It is possible to change attitudes about violence, and it is possible to raise children without using violence and or mistreatment as child-rearing methods.

This study was conducted in connection with a commission that the Children's Welfare Foundation Sweden received from the government. The foundation has allowed the researchers Carolina Jernbro and Staffan Janson to conduct a survey of violence against children in Sweden. Approximately 4700 pupils in 9th grade (14-15 years of age) and in high school year two (16-17 years of age) have responded to questions about their exposure to violence in the course of their childhoods. The results are based on what the pupils themselves have chosen to share. Because some of the same questions were asked in previous studies, it is possible to compare their responses with results from previous years.

How common is it for adults to subject children to physical and psychological/emotional abuse? How common is it for children to be neglected? How common is sexual abuse? How do the pupils who have been abused fare, and what help have they have received?

The pupils' answers will provide us with knowledge about children's and young people's living conditions. The results show that the trend in Sweden is largely positive; physical violence by adults against children has decreased over time. However, the results show that far too many children are still exposed to many types of violence, and that far too few of those who are abused choose to disclose the abuse. In addition, few abuse victims have access to social initiatives that provide protection and rehabilitation



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**The Children's Welfare Foundation** is a public foundation whose mission is to support methodological and knowledge development in order to empower children and young people in socially vulnerable situations. Our work is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and focuses on increasing the competency of professionals who work with children by developing and disseminating research and practice-based knowledge. Among other things, we provide grants for child and youth research, operate our own development projects, organize conferences and seminars, and publish books on topical issues.

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