



LÄNSSTYRELSEN
ÖSTERGÖTLAND

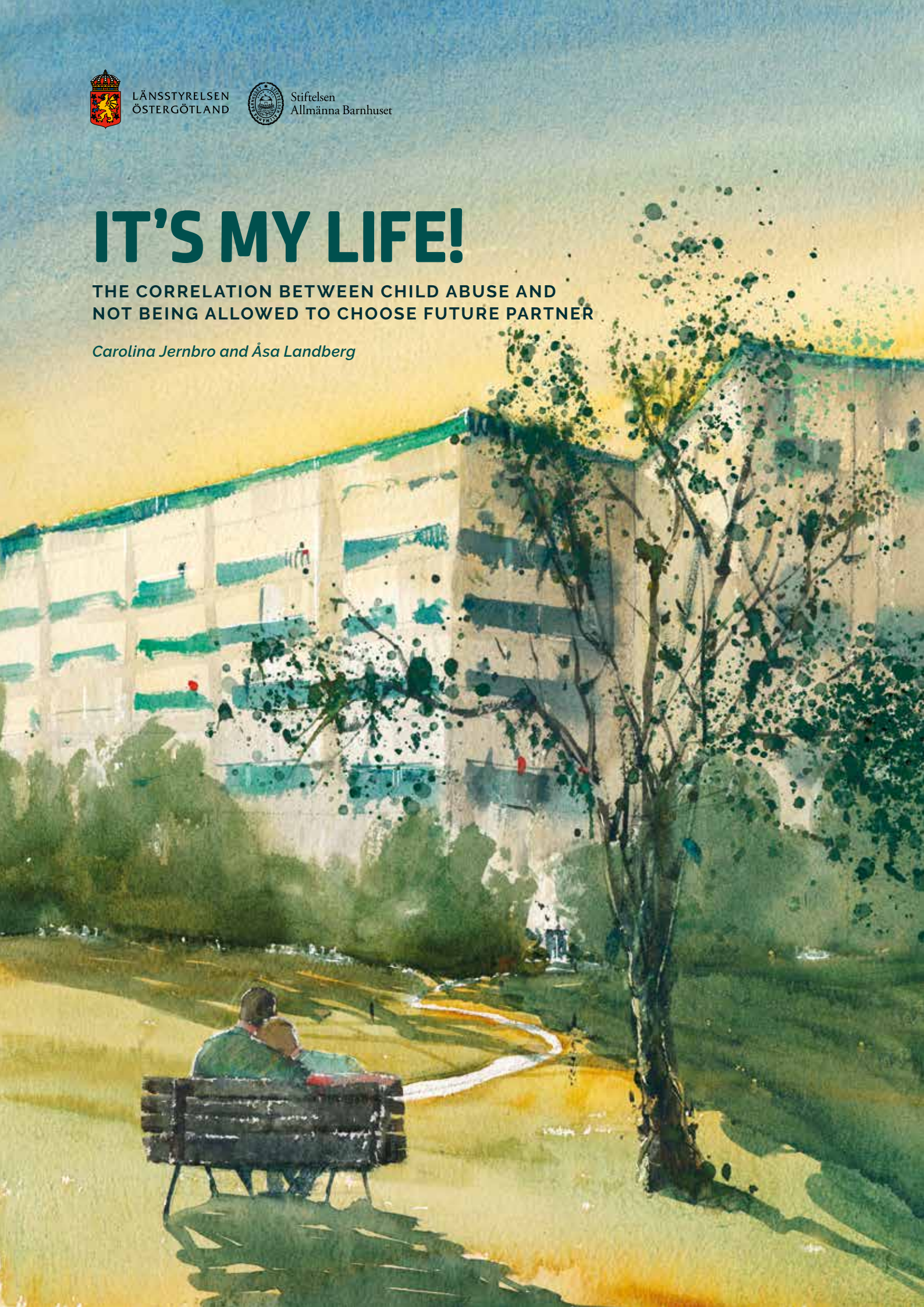


Stiftelsen
Allmänna Barnhuset

IT'S MY LIFE!

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN CHILD ABUSE AND
NOT BEING ALLOWED TO CHOOSE FUTURE PARTNER

Carolina Jernbro and Åsa Landberg





Stiftelsen
Allmänna Barnhuset

The Children's Welfare Foundation

Linnégatan 89 C
115 23 Stockholm

Company. reg. no.: 802000-1072

Tel: +46 8 679 60 78
info@allmannabarnhuset.se
www.allmannabarnhuset.se

ISBN: 978-91-86759-47-6

Date of publication: March 2021

Publisher: The Children's Welfare Foundation

Authors: Carolina Jernbro and Åsa Landberg

Illustration & layout: Johan Andréasson, Hectornado

FOREWORD

Since 2014, the County Administrative Board of Östergötland has had a national expert team, developed on behalf of the government. According to the mission, the Swedish Expert Team on honour-related violence and oppression shall coordinate and support efforts to prevent and counteract honour-related violence and oppression, child marriage, forced marriage and female genital mutilation, as well as provide knowledge and competence in this area.

The Swedish Expert Team consists of a number of experts who have considerable practical and theoretical knowledge, as well as experience in efforts to prevent and counteract honour-related violence and oppression and its various forms of expression, within such sectors as social services and the judiciary, research and the non-profit.

The Swedish Expert Team runs a helpline for counselling professionals and non-profit employees in matters concerning children and adults who are vulnerable, or at risk of being subjected to, honour-related violence and oppression, child marriage, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Statistics on calls to the helpline provide both a picture of an extensive and very severe vulnerability to honour-related violence and oppression, as well as highlighting the need for knowledge for professionals.

The Swedish Expert Team has on several occasions emphasised the importance of the children and young people subjected to honour-related violence and oppression, being made visible in the investigations and surveys that illustrate violence against children and young people.

The Children's Welfare Foundation has on behalf of the Swedish Government allowed the researchers Carolina Jernbro and Staffan Janson to carry out a survey of violence against children in Sweden where questions related to children's lack of freedom were included for the first time. The Swedish Expert team then tasked the Children's Welfare Foundation to produce a short descriptive and comparative report on how young people with limited choices in terms of partners have responded to different forms of violence, family relationships and wellbeing, and whether they have disclosed their exposure, compared with young people who have not expressed restrictions in their choice of partner.

The Swedish Expert Team on honour-related violence and oppression emphasises the importance of this target group's vulnerability being highlighted further, and that through increased knowledge we can provide vulnerable children and young people with the help they are entitled to and need.

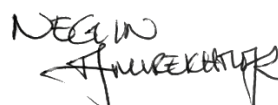
This report is a translation of a report that was published 2018 in Swedish, which has been widely distributed. By translating the report, we make it possible for non-Swedish speakers to take part of the information.



Cecilia Sjölander
General Secretary
The Children's Welfare
Foundation



Carl Fredrik Graf
County Governor
The County Administrative
Board of Östergötland



Negin Amirekhtiar
Development Manager The Swedish
Expert Team on honour-related
violence and oppression

It's my life!

The correlation between child abuse and not being allowed to choose future partner

Every child has the right to grow up without violence, and the aim is for all violence against children to stop. There is still some way to go before this can be achieved in Sweden and in the rest of the world. The Children's Welfare Foundation has on behalf of the Swedish Government allowed the researchers Carolina Jernbro and Staffan Janson to carry out a survey of violence against children in Sweden.

The study is a nationally representative school survey performed in 9th grade in primary school and high school year two during late autumn 2016. A total of 4,741 pupils answered questions on being subjected to various forms of violence during their entire upbringing. The survey shows that the majority of children who grow up in Sweden have not been subjected to any violence whatsoever by adults during their upbringing. The majority of the violence that the pupils are subjected to is less severe violence on individual occasions. But almost nine per cent have been subjected to three or more different forms of violence. The same pupils have also often been subjected to more severe and repeated abuse. ¹

There are also certain groups of pupils who are more vulnerable to child abuse than others, but this is due to an increased risk at group level. This means that there are pupils who do not belong to any risk group at all but who are nevertheless subjected to child abuse. This also means that there are pupils who belong to several risk groups but who are nevertheless not subjected to child abuse.

The pupils who are not allowed to decide over their own lives constitute one of the groups that are more vulnerable when it comes to child abuse. In this report we describe the correlations that exist in terms of children not being allowed to decide their own life and their future partner and vulnerability to child abuse. Even though the figures we are reporting say nothing about a causal link, teenagers who are not allowed to choose their future partner are a particularly vulnerable group that need to be brought to attention.

Child abuse

The UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child has a broad interpretation of the term violence against children. It includes all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, regardless of the age of the perpetrator. The Committee emphasises that children can be subjected to violence by adults, but that violence may also occur among children. Moreover, some children harm themselves.

The Committee is aware that different forms of violence against children often occur at the same time. It stresses that both boys and girls risk being subjected to all forms of violence, but that the susceptibility to violence is not only different but is also experienced differently depending on gender. ²

1. Jernbro, C. & Janson, S. (2017). *Violence against children in Sweden 2016 – a national survey. The Children's Welfare Foundation.*

2. UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2014). *The Committee on the Rights of the Child's general comment no. 8 (2006). The right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment. The Ombudsman for Children in Sweden.*

Child abuse is when an adult subjects a child to physical or psychological violence, sexual abuse or violations, but also when the adult neglects to provide the child's basic needs. ³ In this report we mainly discuss these various forms of child abuse.

Violence as an upbringing method

Up until the second half of the twentieth century, corporal punishment, i.e. disciplining through physical punishment, was deemed to be an effective and almost necessary upbringing method in Sweden. By the middle of the 1960s almost all Swedish parents thought it was their duty to smack their children in order for them to grow up to be good citizens. In recent decades the use of violence by adults as a way of raising children has declined sharply in Sweden. Sweden was the first country in the world to prohibit all forms of violence against children (1979). Nowadays a large majority of parents feel that all forms of violence against children are wrong. In many other countries the notion that violence is an acceptable upbringing method persists.

Parents often turn to violence when they are tired, stressed or pressured by things that are nothing to do with the child. It can be difficult to determine whether violence is a part of the strategy for raising the child, or whether the parents quite simply take out their stress or frustration on the child. Even severe violence is still used in some parts of the world as part of upbringing. In countries that permit corporal punishment, therefore, there are limits on the severity of violence that is permitted. In Sweden all violence against children is prohibited, which means that what used to be referred to as corporal punishment or physical punishment is now included under the term child abuse.

Research shows that corporal punishment as an upbringing method does not have any lasting positive effects. On the contrary, it has been shown in various parts of the world that corporal punishment has a strong correlation with aggressive behaviour and mental ill health in children. There is also scientific evidence that the violence adults use to raise children often escalates into more severe forms of violence. ⁴

Honour-related violence and oppression

Honour-related violence and oppression is often sanctioned collectively and involves the control of girls' and women's sexuality. The choice of partner is not the individual's own choice but a matter for the immediate or extended family. The violence and oppression affect girls and women as well as boys and men, and the perpetrators are both men and women. Sometimes the same person is both a victim and perpetrator, this applies not least to boys and young men.

Violence can initially be used to make people follow the family's norms and values around virginity, for example, and to put the collective before the individual. The exposure can then be about being controlled, being forced to live with major restrictions and being subjected to pressures, threats and physical violence.

³. Socialdepartementet. (2001) *[The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs]. Barnmisshandel. Att förebygga och åtgärda. (SOU 2001:72) [Child abuse. Prevention and protection.]*

⁴. Jernbro, C. & Janson, S. (2017). *Violence against children in Sweden 2016 – a national survey. The Children's Welfare Foundation.*

Violence can also be used against those who have transgressed the family's norms and values for the purpose of preventing the transgression from being discovered by a wider group of people or in order for the family and relatives to regain the lost honour. This takes place by punishing the person who has transgressed the family's norms and values. This could be due to having sex before marriage, refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, marrying without parental approval, being unfaithful, divorce, style of dressing or otherwise deviating from a stereotypical gender role. It also happens that victims of sexual abuse are subjected to honour-related violence. The punishments can take on a variety of different forms, and may for example relate to emotional and social exclusion, violations, forced marriages and physical violence, including murder. ⁵

Convention on the Rights of the Child and violence

The UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child has, together with the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, published a general comment that concerns the abolition of harmful practices. Harmful practices include recurring practices and behaviours associated with discrimination due to gender or age for example and which often involve individuals being subjected to violence or psychological suffering. Examples of such harmful practices are female genital mutilation, child marriage and forced marriage, polygamy and honour-related violence.

The Committees regard relevant data collection and statistics as being of crucial importance for ensuring effective policies, developing appropriate strategies and deciding on measures that can put an end to the harmful practices. The research we present in this report is an example of such statistics.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child highlights some articles from the Convention on the Rights of the Child that have particular relevance in terms of harmful practices. ⁶

- **Article 24. The right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.**
- **Article 19. The child has the right to be protected from physical or mental violence, neglect or exploitation by parents or any other person who has the care of the child.**
- **Article 37. No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.**
- **Article 2. Every child has the same rights and equal worth. No child may be discriminated against.**
- **Article 3. The best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.**
- **Article 6. Every child has the inherent right to life. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.**
- **Article 12. The child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child.**

⁵. <http://www.hedersfortryck.se/>

⁶. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women & Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2014). Joint general recommendation No 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination of Women/general comment No 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on Harmful practices.

Pupils who are not allowed to choose

All too many teenagers grow up in homes where they feel that their opportunities to choose and control their own lives are limited.

The pupils were given the option to answer whether the following statements correspond very well, quite well, rather badly, or very badly with them being allowed to make their own choices in a number of situations:

I may choose for myself...

- ...what I wear and how I look
- ...which friends I have
- ...what I do together with my friends
- ...what leisure activities I take part in
- ...what education I will have
- ...which religion/philosophy I will have
- ...which political or ideological view I will hold
- ...who I will marry/live with as an adult ⁷

The majority of pupils feel that they may choose in all these situations, but there are also pupils whose freedom of choice is restricted.

It was more common that pupils who have one or both parents born outside the Nordic region were not allowed to choose for themselves. The aspects where the differences were particularly pronounced were the opportunity to be able to decide their own religion/philosophy and the opportunity to be able to decide who they will marry or live with as an adult. Not being allowed to choose how you look or what you wear, not being allowed to choose friends or what you can do with friends, and not being allowed to choose leisure activities, education or political views are also more common among the pupils who have parents born outside the Nordic region. The differences are consistently significant.

7. Socialstyrelsen. (2007). *Frihet och ansvar – en undersökning om gymnasieungdomars upplevda frihet att själva bestämma över sina liv*. Socialstyrelsen. [The questions were obtained from: The National Board of Health and Welfare. (2007). *Freedom and responsibility – an investigation into secondary school pupils' perceived freedom to decide their own lives*. The National Board of Health and Welfare.]

TABLE 1. *The opportunity to make own choices in life based on the origin of the pupils' parents.*

I may not choose for myself...	Both parents born in the Nordic region (72.8%, n= 3384)	One or both parents born outside the Nordic region (27.2%, n=1263)	Total %
... what I wear and how I look	0,9	2,5	1,3
... which friends I have	1,4	5,4	2,5
... what I do together with my friends	2,8	6,7	3,9
... what leisure activities I take part in	1,6	3,6	2,2
... what education I will have	1,9	3,9	2,4
... which religion/philosophy I will have	2,0	10,7	4,4
... which political or ideological views I will have	1,6	4,3	2,4
... who I will marry/live with as an adult	0,9	6,6	2,5

Somewhat more girls (2.6%) reported that they may not choose their future partner than boys (2.1%), but the difference is not statistically significant.

The pupils who are not allowed to choose future partners reported to a greater extent unstable family finances compared to those who reported that they may choose their future partners (14% compared to 2.9%). They also reported to a greater extent that the parents misused alcohol (18% compared to 8%) and drugs (10% compared to 2.5%), and that the parents had mental health problems (18% compared to 6.8%) or had tried to take their own lives (12% compared to 2.6%). Moreover, the pupils who may not choose partners stated to a greater extent that their parents had been convicted of a crime (13% compared to 3%).

"My parents are trying to control me and decide what I do with my life. I know that they do it because they love me and want the best for me, but it is my life and my choices." ⁸

"Mum cares a lot about me. She even wants to decide who I will marry in the future, and I don't think that's good."

8. All quotes have been obtained from the free text answers that pupils who did not feel that they might choose their future partner submitted in the survey.

"Mum is too protective, and when I'm not allowed to do something, dad simply says so."

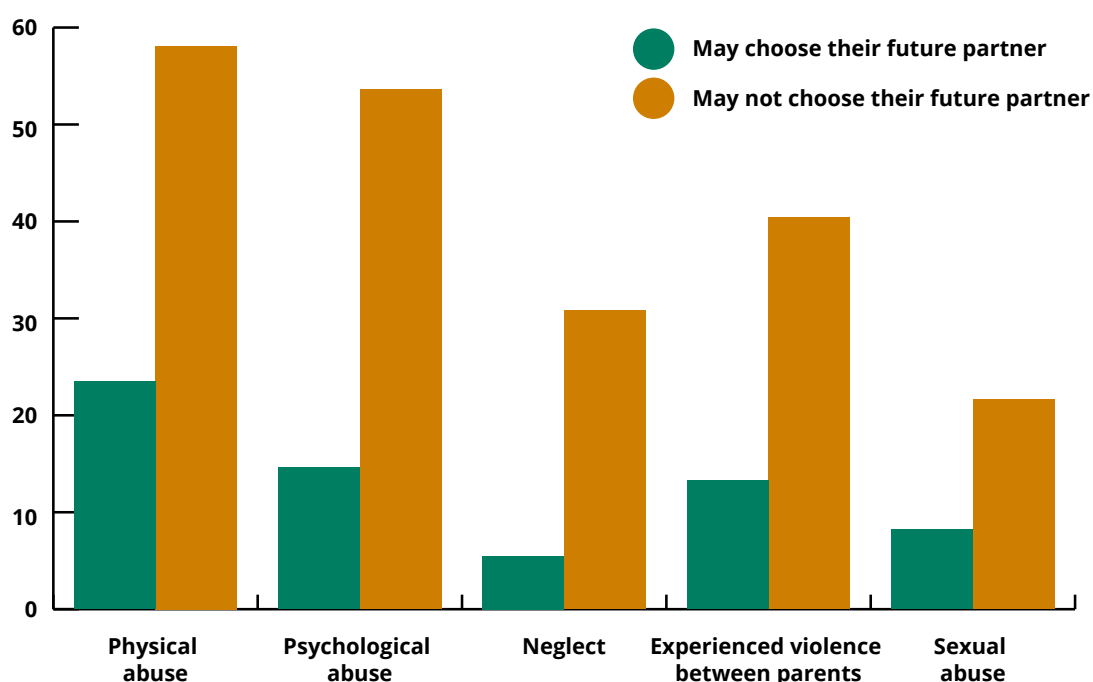
"It is mostly my three brothers that are the problem, and dad. PS. How do these answers help someone else?"

The correlation between not being allowed to choose future partner and child abuse

The pupils who are not allowed to choose their partner are subjected to different forms of child abuse significantly more often than others – 88 per cent have been subjected to some form of child abuse at some point during their upbringing compared with 42 per cent. This includes physical abuse, psychological abuse, witnessing violence against a parent, sexual abuse and neglect.

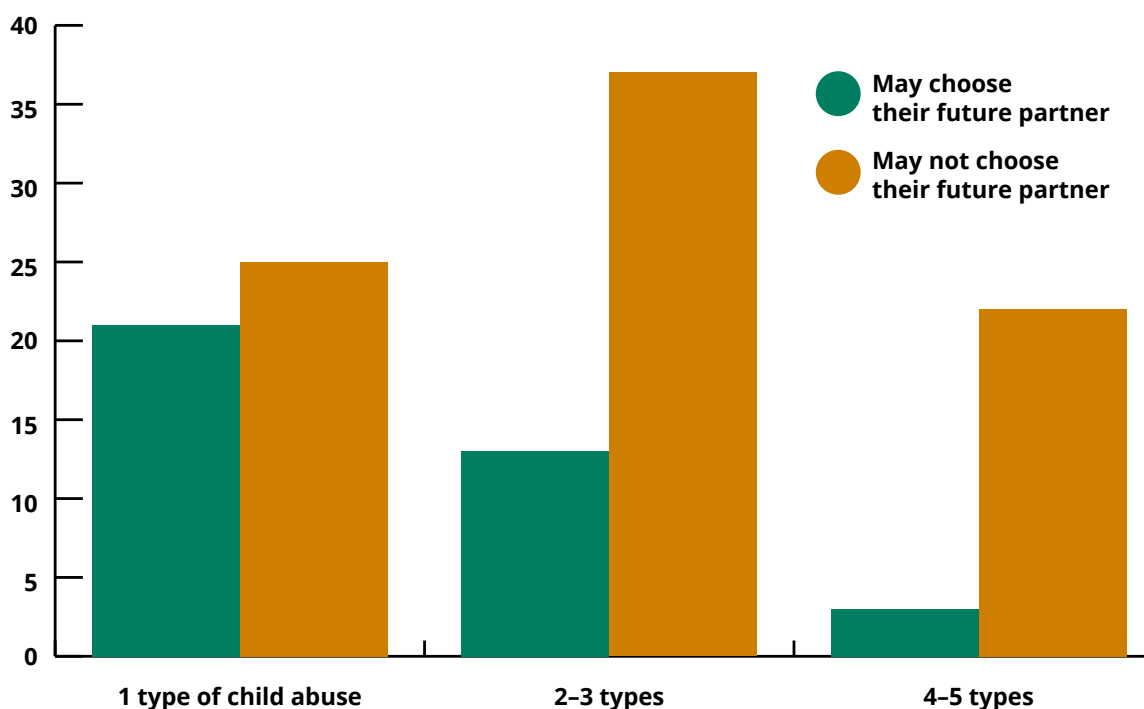
There are no significant gender differences in terms of the different forms of abuse in the group of pupils who are not allowed to choose their own partner, which can partly be explained by the small size of the group. However, among the pupils who may choose their partner, girls report being subjected to all forms of child abuse (apart from neglect and physical abuse) to a greater extent than boys.

FIGURE 1. *Exposure to different forms of child abuse. A comparison between those who may choose their future partner and those who may not (%).*



Research shows that the children who are at risk of faring the worst are those who are subjected to several different types of violence or repeated violence, which is referred to as multiple victimization or polyvictimization. Different forms of child abuse often overlap. This also applies largely to the teenagers who may not choose their future partner – 59 per cent have been subjected to at least two forms of child abuse compared to 16 per cent of those who may choose their future partner.

FIGURE 2. Multiple victimization. A comparison between pupils who may choose their future partner with pupils who may not (%).



"I think that child abuse is wrong because you can be scarred or something else for the rest of your life, and no child can want that."

"It's terrible that it can happen. Some people don't understand how it can happen, but it can happen for the most ridiculous things. But you learn to live with it."

"I think that it is stupid to do that when children are small, as young children will make mistakes but there is no need to smack them or anything."

Physical child abuse

Physical child abuse can include being pulled by the hair or ear or being smacked. We are defining severe forms of child abuse as being kicked, burned or scalded, being squeezed by the throat or neck, being beaten with a weapon and/or threatened or harmed with a knife or firearm.

The pupils that are not allowed to choose their own future partner had been subjected to physical child abuse significantly more than other pupils – 58 per cent compared to 24 per cent. The increased incidence applies to all forms of physical child abuse, both less severe and very severe forms. Being severely beaten, being kicked, being scalded with hot water, being squeezed by the throat/neck and being struck with weapons, and threats or injuries involving knives/firearms are more common than among other pupils.

Of the pupils who may not choose their future partner, one in five has been severely beaten by an adult, one in four has been kicked, one in ten has been scalded with hot water, and nearly one in ten has been injured with a knife or firearm.

Moreover, among the pupils that may not choose their future partner, 36 per cent reported that adults in their family have beaten one or more siblings, and half of these state that this has happened on several occasions. Among pupils who may choose their future partner, ten per cent stated the same, and only 2.5 per cent of them reported that it had happened several times.

TABLE 2. Exposure to different forms of physical child abuse. A comparison between those who may choose their future partner and those who may not.

	May choose their future partner	May not choose their future partner
Been pulled by the hair or ear	13%	34%
Been smacked with a hand	14%	44%
Been beaten severely with a hand or clenched fist	4%	21%
Been kicked	3%	25%
Been burned or scalded (with hot water)	0,5%	10%
Been squeezed by the throat/neck	3%	16%
Been struck with a stick, belt, ruler or similar	4%	28%
Been threatened with a knife or firearm	2%	15%
Been injured with a knife or firearm	1%	9%

The most common perpetrator of physical violence against pupils who may not choose their future partner was, as for other children, the parents. However, there are other significant differences when compared to perpetrators of physical child abuse against the pupils who may choose for themselves. Above all, it is considerably more common that those who may not choose their future partner are beaten by relatives (26%, compared to 6.5% among those who may choose future partners).

A significantly larger proportion have been subjected to physical violence by a sibling (42% compared to 27%), and it is girls who report this to the greatest extent. In terms of being subjected to physical violence by others of the same age, there are no significant differences between those who may choose future partners and those who may not.

TABLE 3. Perpetrators of physical violence. A comparison between those who may choose future partners and those who may not.

	May choose their future partner	May not choose their future partner
Father	36 %	44 %
Stepfather	4,3 %	15 %
Mother	26 %	39 %
Stepmother	2,1 %	12 %
Other relative	6,5 %	26 %
Foster home parents	2,2 %	13 %
Friend or acquaintance of the family	4,0 %	13 %
Nursery school teacher/Teacher	7,9 %	15 %
Sports or leisure leader	4,0 %	12 %
Someone completely unknown	9,4 %	20 %
Other person:	4,1 %	4,9 %

* Bolded figures denote statistically significant higher proportion than pupils who are allowed to choose their own partner.

"Both my parents always want the best for me and strive to make sure that their children are always doing fine."

"When I think about child abuse, I am lost for words and totally speechless because I do not understand how you could even think about abusing someone, especially a child."

Own perpetrating violence

Those who may not choose their future partner, regardless of gender, reported to a greater extent that they themselves had subjected their mother or stepmother to physical violence compared with those who may choose their future partner (6% compared with 1%). A greater proportion also stated that they subjected a partner to physical violence (3.5% compared to 0.6%). The figures should however be interpreted with caution as the group is small.

Who do they tell?

The pupils most commonly tell someone their own age that they have been abused. It may be a sibling, a friend or a partner. Only a small proportion of the pupils report the abuse to the police or social services.

TABLE 4. *Category of person to whom pupils disclose the abuse.*

Disclosed the abuse to:	% (n) of those who reported abuse (total 61 people)
Sibling	23 % (14)
Parent/related adult	18 % (11)
A friend of similar age	25 % (15)
Girlfriend/boyfriend	9,8 % (6)
Staff at school (e.g. teacher, nurse, student counsellor)	9,8 % (6)
Social services	13 % (8)
Police	8,2 % (5)
Health and medical care	4,9 % (3)
BRIS (Children's Rights in Society), around-the-clock chat-based support service or similar	6,6 % (4)
Staff at a youth guidance centre	3,3 % (2)
Adults in a local club or similar	4,9 % (3)
Another person	3,3 % (2)

What support have they received?

The pupils who were subjected to physical child abuse were asked whether they had sought or received professional help for what had happened. A total of 43 pupils who may not choose their future partner answered the question.

Just over half (51%) stated that they did not need any help. A little under a quarter (23%) thought that they had needed help but had not sought it. The remaining pupils had either sought help without having had contact (9%) or were dissatisfied

with the help they had received (16%). Not a single pupil had received help that they were satisfied with.

Even among the other pupils who were subjected to child abuse, there is a great dissatisfaction with the professional help they have been offered, but among them approximately half are satisfied with the help they have received.

**"Dad and I have had a hard time for the past 3 years.
I have had social services, the police and family—something with
rights or help."**

**"It is awful but I do not want to bring it up again
as it only ruins things."**

Psychological abuse

Psychological abuse includes being repeatedly insulted, being treated repeatedly as though you do not exist, being locked in, being locked out of the house, or being subjected to threats of physical violence.

The pupils that may not choose their future partner are subjected to physical child abuse significantly more than other pupils.

TABLE 5. *Exposure to different forms of psychological child abuse. A comparison between those who may choose their future partner and those who may not.*

	May choose their future partner	May not choose their future partner
Isolated you from friends/partners	12%	partner
Insulted you (e.g. called you worthless, stupid, ugly) many times	21%	54%
Locked you in a basement, wardrobe or similar	2%	12%
Locked you out of the house	4%	23%
Threatened to beat or hurt you	10%	44%
Treated you as if you did not exist many times	13%	34%

TABLE 6. Perpetrators of psychological child abuse. A comparison between those who may choose their future partner and those who may not.

	May choose their future partner	May not choose their future partner
Biological or adoptive father	49 %	53 %
Stepfather	9,6 %	15 %
Biological or adoptive mother	34 %	48 %
Stepmother	6,4 %	12 %
Other relative	12 %	32 %
Foster home parents	3,9 %	12 %
Friend or acquaintance of the family	7,9 %	17 %
Nursery school teacher/Teacher	12 %	14 %
Sports or leisure leader	6,0 %	14 %
Someone completely unknown	12 %	15 %
Other person:	3,1 %	6,8 %

* Bolded figures denote statistically significant higher proportion than pupils who are allowed to choose their own partner.

Experienced violence against a parent

For a child to witness or experience violence against one parent is a form of psychological abuse. We have chosen to report this form of violence separately, and have included both physical and psychological violence. Physical violence can for example include a slap, pulling hair, throwing things or beating or kicking. Psychological violence can include insulting with words, oppressing, dominating or threatening with physical violence.

Of the pupils who may not choose their future partner, 40 per cent had experienced one parent using violence against the other (compared with 13% of other pupils).

"I have never experienced it myself. But I have seen someone who has been abused, and that is my fantastic mother."

Neglect

Physical neglect can include not getting enough food, being forced to wear dirty clothes, or that the parents are too much under the influence of alcohol or drugs to take care of the child. Emotional neglect can lead to the child not feeling loved, or that nobody in the family is perceived to be a source of strength and support.

Of the pupils who are not allowed to choose their own future partner, 31 per cent had been neglected (compared with 5.5% of other pupils).

"I don't think that child abuse is okay, when parents smack their own children every time they do something wrong. Otherwise they might never feel loved in their lives. Love is above all else the most important thing in their life, and the best thing there is."

"Me? Mum cares, dad does not."

"My mum always wants the best for me, my dad is an alcoholic."

"My dad and I hardly have any contact."

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse can for example involve someone kissing, touching the body of or having sex with a child against their will. It can also take the form of someone having taken or shared naked images of the child, or having forced them to look when someone else exposed their body.

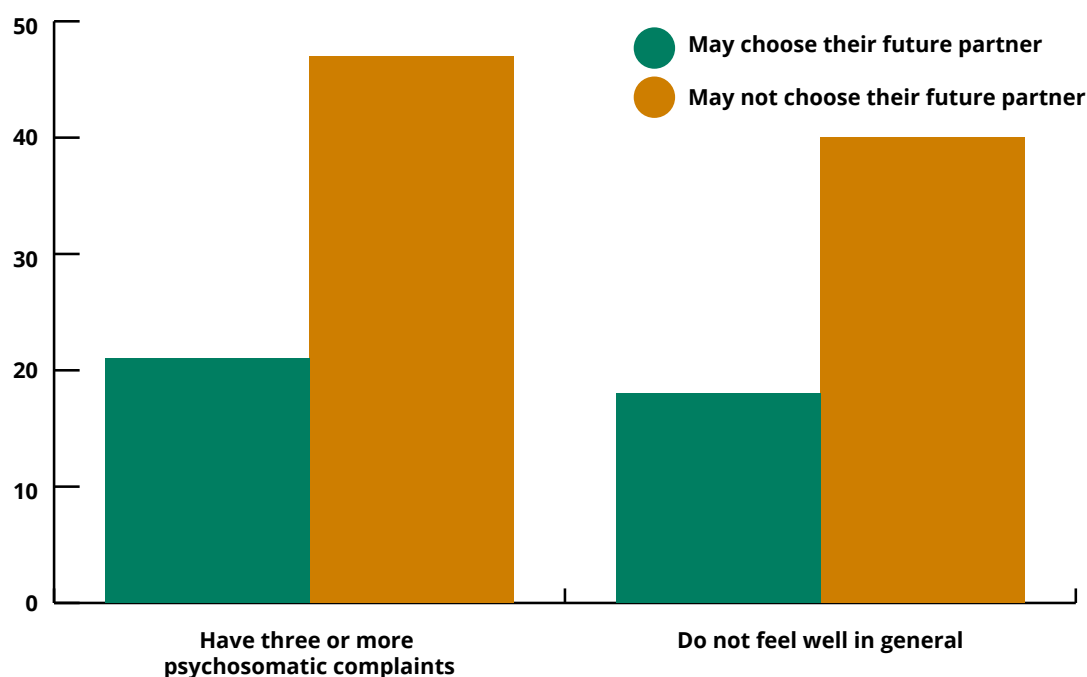
Of the pupils who may not choose their future partner, 22 per cent had been subjected to sexual abuse by an adult (compared with 8.2% of other pupils). The difference is particularly great in terms of boys who may not choose their future partner, just over 14 per cent had been subjected to sexual abuse compared with 1.7 per cent of boys who may choose their future partner.

"Even though the survey is completely anonymous, it can be hard to talk about certain things for those who have been subjected to them."

Health

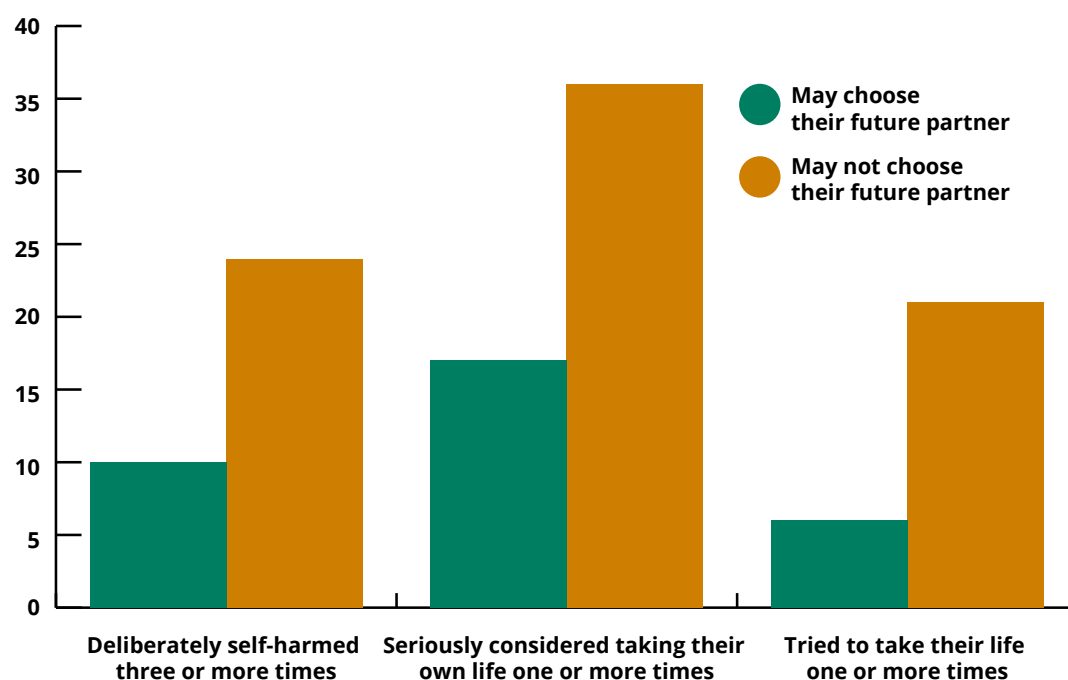
The pupils who may not choose their future partner feel significantly worse than other children. The pupils who may not choose their future partner often had more psychosomatic symptoms, and it was more common that they stated that they did not feel well in general, compared with other pupils.

FIGURE 3. Health consequences – psychosomatic complaints and general well-being.



Self-harming behaviour was common (24% compared to 10% among pupils who may choose their future partner) and suicidal thoughts (36% compared to 17% among pupils who may choose their future partner) and one in five pupils who may not choose their future partners had tried to take their own life.

FIGURE 4. Self-harming behaviour, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts.



"Hitting a child is cowardly. The mental damage and pain cannot even be compared with physical pain. I do not want anyone else to have to go through or live with being abused as I have. The pain never goes away."

"I just think that child abuse is so very unnecessary, whatever the situation. Violence is the worst way to get a child to understand or listen. If a child is subjected to abuse, it may lead to depression and consequences in the future."

"I think it's bad and it can destroy a person totally. I have developed severe anxiety from it and cannot trust people. I have also developed an aggression problem."

"Child abuse is terrible and can scar the child for life. I have been through it myself and am still going through it, and it really hurts, especially psychologically. Nobody deserves to be ill-treated."

Attitudes towards violence

The pupils who may not choose their future partner accepted to a greater extent than other pupils that parents use physical punishments or violations as a part of disciplining children.

Of the pupils who may not choose their future partner, 31 per cent accepted physical punishment on certain occasions, compared with 11 per cent of those who may choose. Of those who may not choose, 14 per cent thought that it was completely fine to smack a child who makes a parent angry, compared with 2.3 per cent among those who may choose. 17 per cent thought it was fine sometimes, compared with 8.3 per cent among those who may choose.

"Child abuse is not good but I think that parents should be able to smack their children if they do not listen. A good example is children who go around taking drugs, most have never been smacked by their parents."

"It is wrong to abuse anyone at all. I have only had... light slaps on the cheek, it was because I did something stupid. Otherwise I think that child abuse and other types of maltreatment are wrong."

"I think that regardless of what a child has done, you must absolutely not harm the child either mentally or physically."

"Wrong to a certain extent, but sometimes talking to the child doesn't help at all."

"I think that it is awful. Of course, it's okay if you grew up with it and you aren't scarred for life. Those who have a different background understand. You can get slapped on your cheek but it's not that bad. But when it is bad, and when parents have been drinking..."

"It's not worth it, talk about it instead. Spread love instead of hate, it lasts longer."

Afterword

Regardless of background and cause, violence against children is always wrong. In Sweden we have largely succeeded in preventing parents from using violence in order to discipline children, but severe violence against children has not declined over time in the same way as less severe forms.

Pupils who state that they are not allowed to choose their future partner are as a group significantly more often subjected to several types of violence and to severe violence than other children. It is serious enough that they are limited in their lives and in their choices, but the major excess risk of child abuse means that these pupils need to be identified and offered protection and support if necessary.

Another reason to pay attention to pupils who are not allowed to choose their future partner is that they more commonly accept the fact that parents use violence. There is therefore a risk that some of them will use physical punishment when they themselves become parents. This needs to be prevented so that negative generation patterns can be broken.

The survey does not give the background as to why the pupils are limited in their choices, but what we do know is that this largely concerns pupils from families with unstable family finances and with parents born outside the Nordic region. But there are also instances where pupils with parents born in the Nordic region and who have good finances are limited in their choices. It is more common that pupils who are not allowed to choose future partners report that their parents abuse alcohol or drugs, have a mental illness and/or have served a custodial sentence. This has led us to draw the conclusion that this concerns a heterogeneous group. Some examples of contexts where there may be adults who control their children's choices are families who have emigrated from countries where there is a traditional honour culture and arranged marriages, families who do not accept same-sex relationships, families with fundamentalist religious views and families with strong prejudices against certain groups.

It is very serious that none of the pupils in the survey are satisfied with the support they have received. The pupils' answers do not reveal what the dissatisfaction is due to, but it is clear that they have not received the support they want and need. Continued research and method development are needed, and everyone who works with the target group must make a point of involving children and young people in the planning of interventions and routinely following up how they feel about the support they have received.

Inform!

Children have a right to know what rights they have. They have the right to know what violence is, where to turn if they are subjected to it, and what protection and support they are entitled to. Children that the Children's Welfare Foundation have encountered would like to receive this information from their parents, but also stress that others must inform them about it when the parents are the perpetrators. They also think that nursery school and school are the natural place for such information. Explain to children that nobody is allowed to hurt them and that they have the right to receive support and protection if it does happen.

Ask!

Direct questions make it easier for children to say whether they are being subjected to violence. It is often a good idea to combine information with a question.

Every person has a right to decide who they want to live with! Do you feel that you will be allowed to choose who you want to live with when you are an adult?

Nobody is allowed to hurt children. However, there are many children who have been hurt by adults or other children. Has this happened to you?

You have said that you will not be allowed to choose who you will be together with or live with when you are an adult. How do you know that? Has someone threatened or hurt you? Has anyone tried to force you to get married against your will?

Listen, provide support, and sound the alarm!

Everyone can help! Whether or not you work with children or if you are a neighbour, friend or relative, you can react and speak up when children and young people are not allowed to make decisions about their own lives or when someone hurts them. Listen, provide support, and sound the alarm if you suspect that a child is being abused!

When children say that they are being subjected to violence, the first step is to listen calmly. Children that the Children's Welfare Foundation have encountered say that it is hard when adults react strongly and become angry or sad about what they hear. Adults may need to temper their reactions in front of the child.

The Children's Welfare Foundation, with the help of children and young people, has created the website www.dagsattprataom.se. They explain how they want to be treated by adults when they need to talk about sexual abuse or other difficult things:

- **Listen!**
- **Give them time, children must be allowed to explain at their own pace!**
- **Ask questions – but not too many...**
- **Be calm!**
- **Believe the child!**

In many cases it is enough that the adult listens and provides support. It can be reassuring to the child to hear that what has happened is wrong and that it is not the child's fault. The adult confidant might not be the one who can stop the violence or the one who will provide long-term support. But they can listen, offer support at that moment, and pass on the information to others such as social services or the police.

Sometimes children talk about violence that is no longer taking place, and that has been reported and investigated. It can still be important for them to be able to share what has happened. Other times they may talk about violence that is ongoing or violence that has not yet been investigated. All adults who work with children are obliged to report to social services if they suspect a child is being maltreated. Private individuals are encouraged to report but are not obliged to do so by law.

- **If you suspect that a child is being maltreated: Contact social services! ⁹**
- **If you discover abuse that is ongoing or if the child is in immediate danger: Call 112! ⁹**
- **If you want to report a crime to the police: Call 114 14 or visit a police station! ⁹**

⁹. This contact information apply only within Sweden.



Stiftelsen
Allmänna Barnhuset

The Children's Welfare Foundation is a national foundation tasked with supporting the development of methods and knowledge with the aim of supporting children and young people in socially vulnerable situations.

Our work is based on the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child and focuses on raising competence levels among professionals who encounter children, by developing and disseminating knowledge from research and practice.

Among other things, we provide grants for research on children and young people, we conduct our own development projects, we organise conferences and seminars, and we publish books on relevant issues.

www.allmannabarnhuset.se



LÄNSSTYRELSEN
ÖSTERGÖTLAND

Since 2005 **the County Administrative Board of Östergötland** has had a national government commission to prevent and combat honour-related violence and oppression, child marriage, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

Among other things, the County Administrative Board of Östergötland operates a helpline for counselling professionals in matters concerning children and adults who are vulnerable, or at risk of being subjected to, honour-related violence and oppression, child marriage, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. The purpose of the helpline is to ensure that professionals can provide vulnerable children and adults with the support they need and are entitled to.

www.hedersfortryck.se

IT'S MY LIFE!

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN CHILD ABUSE AND NOT BEING ALLOWED TO CHOOSE FUTURE PARTNER

Carolina Jernbro and Åsa Landberg

All too many teenagers grow up in homes where they feel that their opportunities to choose and control their own lives are limited. It is more common that pupils with one or both parents born outside the Nordic region are not allowed to decide for themselves, but children with Swedish-born parents can also be limited in their choices. This can involve not being allowed to choose who they marry or live together with as an adult (or whether they want to get married at all). It can also involve not being allowed to choose how they look or what they wear, not being allowed to choose their own friends or what they can do with their friends, and/or not being allowed to choose their own leisure activities, education, religion or political views.

In this report we describe in more detail the correlations that exist in terms of children not being allowed to decide their own life and their future partner and exposure to child abuse. The pupils who are not allowed to choose their partner are significantly more often subjected to various forms of child abuse than other children. This includes physical abuse, psychological abuse, witnessing violence against a parent, sexual abuse and neglect.

Even though the figures we are reporting say nothing about a causal link, teenagers who may not choose their future partner are a particularly vulnerable group that needs to be brought to attention.

The information has been obtained from a national representative school survey which the Children's Welfare Foundation allowed Carolina Jernbro and Staffan Janson to conduct within the framework of a government commission.

This report is a translation of a report that was published 2018 in Swedish, which has been widely distributed. By translating the report, we make it possible for non-Swedish speakers to take part of the information.