Private Life Violence:
Female Dutch Students’ Perceptions and Experiences

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For Mother(s)
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ABSTRACT

Title: Private Life Violence in the Netherlands: Female Dutch Students’ Perceptions and Experiences

Violence Against Women (VAW), especially in private life, is still a hidden problem, although the World Health Organisation (WHO) has estimated that on average one in five women has been physically abused by a man at some time in her life. The cost for health and social services for this problem is high. The ICPD 1994, 1997 Beijing, and the 1999 The Hague ICPD+5 conferences recommend meeting the needs of adolescent girls who are susceptible to violence.

The main objective of this paper is to identify students’ perceptions and experiences of private life violence in the Netherlands. This paper specifically focused on three aspects: firstly students’ definitions and perceptions of private life violence; secondly, how female students view private life violence and the factors increasing vulnerability; and thirdly, how female students cope with their experience of private life violence (direct / indirect experience).

This study concentrates on 11 female Dutch students’ respondents. All of them are University of Amsterdam (UvA) students. Six key informants who work in related field were interviewed to give a broad picture of this issue.

This subject is not an unknown notion among my respondents. From this study it was found that students could identify the different types of physical, psychological and sexual violence. They define these kinds of violence based on their own experiences of violence, either direct or indirect (from their family, friends, etc.). They explain violence from various points of view; it is caused by the power-hierarchical position between men and women, it is because of individual factors from both sides (women and men), and it is also caused by incidental factors.

As a result of the study I recommend that youth, in the early part of their life, should be taught knowledge and skills with regard to respecting others; this can be included in the sex education programme. Sex education in school also should be given at an earlier age.
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Chapter I
Introduction

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this thesis is to identify students' perceptions and experiences of private life violence in the Netherlands. This thesis will specifically focus on three aspects: firstly, female students' definitions and perceptions of private life violence; secondly, how female students view private life violence and the factors increasing vulnerability; thirdly, how female students cope with private life violence (direct/indirect experiences).

1.2. Why has this topic been chosen?

One of the four key goals identified at the International Conference on Population and development (ICPD) in Cairo 1994 and World Women Conference in Beijing 1997 was to meet the needs of adolescent girls who are susceptible to violence. In the 1999 ICPD + 5 Conference in The Hague, there was a renewed demand for attention to the problem.

Violence against woman (VAW) causes more deaths and disability among women aged 15-44 than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents or even war in general\(^1\). The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that on average one woman in five has been physically abused by a man at some time in her life; and research suggests that women are more at risk from their husbands, fathers, neighbours or colleagues than they are from strangers (Panos Briefing, 1998). The cost for health and social services is also high. In Great Britain, where one woman in 10 is severely beaten by an intimate partner every year, the cost for the health and social services is estimated to be more than £ 1 billion per year.

\(^1\) In a war situation, we can have specific gender violence as well. Rape is the most severe case; it is used to terrorise and humiliate women as well as the whole society.
Research conducted by the WHO, the Population Council and some Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have already given an idea of the impact of violence against women. However, it does not explore how women themselves define violence. It is therefore very important to allow women themselves to speak out and give their own definition of violence, because there is still a lot of discussion about whether “violence against women” is really a problem experienced by “the victims” themselves, or whether it is just an activist’s and feminists’ idea. Violence against women, especially in the private life sphere, is still largely an under-discussed problem.

The WHO stressed the need to adopt a cross-cultural perspective and a participatory approach in research on Violence Against Women. Richters (Richters, in WHO, 1996:16) explains, “Anthropology takes as its point of departure that the purposes and meanings of acts of gender violence vary and are largely a function of the culture in which they occur. Anthropological studies elucidate the cultural, political and economic dynamics of gender relations and sexual behaviour. Studies are also used to document interventions and indigenous protective and preventative strategies that may be used as prototypes for intervention planning.”

Women are also survivors of violence and, as such, have positive attributes. Women and women’s group have strengths that need to be recognised. Research on Violence Against Women which also focuses on women’s strengths may double its value for intervention programmes to eliminate violence against women. Women’s articulation of their positive attributes may help to counter some of the negative psychological effects of violence (WHO, 1996:16). Knowledge of positive attributes is useful for the development of intervention programmes, either by Governments, NGOs or society and it serves as an encouragement and example to other women.
Violence against Women in Private Life

Article 1 of the Declaration on Elimination of Violence against women, adopted in 1993 by the General Assembly of the United Nations defines VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN as:

*Any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life* (as cited by Heise, et al, 1994:3)

Private life violence might include child abuse (by parents), incest or sexual abuse (by family members), and domestic violence (between husband and wife).

In this study, the focus is on heterosexual male-on-female violence, but it also includes female-on-male violence, including physical, psychological and sexual violence.

Dailey (Dailey, in Carter, C., ed.: 1995) ranked relationships as follows:

a. Stranger; a person who is neither a friend nor acquaintance -- someone previously unknown; unfamiliar;

b. Acquaintance; knowledge of a person acquainted by a relationship, less intimate than friendship -- a person or persons whom one knows;

c. Friend; a person whom one knows, likes, and trusts;

d. Date; an appointment, especially an engagement to go out socially with a member of the opposite sex;

e. Committed Relationship; giving in charge; entrusted -- a pledge to do something -- the state of being bound emotionally or intellectually to a course of action

In this research, for direct experience we deal with categories b, c, d, and e; with emphasis on categories d and e (date and committed relationship). For indirect experience the category is wider, including violence between husband and wife and violence by a stranger or by an acquaintance.
In general, the health consequences of gender-based violence can be categorised as follows: (Heise, 1994:5)

**Non-fatal Outcomes:**
- **Physical health consequences**
  STD, injury, pelvic and inflammatory disease, unwanted pregnancy, miscarriage, chronic pelvic pain, headaches, gynaecological problems, alcohol/drug abuse, asthma, irritable bowel syndrome, health damaging behaviours (smoking, unprotected sex), partial or permanent disability.

- **Mental health consequences**
  Post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, sexual dysfunction, eating disorders, multiple personality disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder

**Fatal Outcomes:**
Suicide and homicide

In the adolescent age (WHO definition: 10 - 20 years old), women can suffer dating and courtship violence, date rape, economically coerced sex, sexual abuse at school and in the workplace, sexual harassment, forced prostitution, and be a victim of trafficking in women.

Wilson (1968) distinguishes two categories of violence: individual and collective violence. Individual violence includes murder, suicide, assault, wife-beating, and child-beating (Wilson, as cited by Makubuyo, 1994: 145). It is difficult to follow his categorisation entirely, because although the direct perpetrator of private life violence is an individual, we still have to consider the community as an indirect perpetrator.

Violence against women is basically gender-based violence. Gender violence is caused by an unbalanced power relationship between males and females. Like all other manifestations of violence, it is embedded in the socio-economic and political context of power relations. This violence occurs within class, caste and patriarchal social relations (Kelkar, 1992, as cited by Richters, 1994: 1). With regard to gender-related factors, adolescent girls are two to three times more likely to be sexually abused than are boys, and are particularly vulnerable to date rape and acquaintance rape (Strauss, 1994:16).
Gender-based violence differs from culture to culture, place to place and also from one era to another. In India for example, dowry is a gender violence issue that does not occur in most other countries; while female genital mutilation is largely limited to Sub-Saharan Africa. Under China’s one-child policy implemented in 1979, many families prefer their one child to be a boy. Half a million female infants were estimated to be missing in China in 1987. In the Indian state of Punjab girls between 2 and 4 are twice as likely to die because they are uncared for; while in rural Bangladesh, girls are three times more likely than boys to be undernourished (Panos Briefing, 1998:6).

Violence against female adolescents in private life (boy against girl) is a burning issue in some countries. Research in Morocco indicated that young girls from all social groups are in danger of being “trapped”; i.e. have unwanted intercourse or of being raped by their partner (Reysoo, 1998). Wood’s ethnographic research in the Eastern Cape (South Africa) also found a similar phenomenon (Wood, 1998). Every society is characterised by a specific form of gender-based violence due to the culture that exists in that society. In these cultural backgrounds, the sacredness of virginity and the rule for not having sex before marriage play important roles.

In the Netherlands, of 1,016 women aged 20-60 who took part in face-to-face interviews, 20.8% had experienced physical violence in a heterosexual relationship (either by the current or a former husband/boyfriend). Half of them had experienced severe, repeated violence (Romkens, 1989, in Foeken, 1990). Eliashuis’s data shows that there are more than 1,500 applicants a year in Amsterdam who seek shelter because of domestic violence (Eliashuis, 1999).

According to TransAct², women are health care’s major clients. The use of medicines among women is twice as high as among men. Two thirds of the patients admitted with depression are women. Many women begin psychiatric treatment as a result of sexual

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² TransAct is a Netherlands centre for gender issues in health care and prevention of sexual violence
abuse in their youth. One in nine women is repeatedly and severely abused by her male partner (TransAct brochure).

Dhalganjansing’s & Raams’s (1995) study of date rape among female students of the University of Amsterdam (UvA) indicates that 82.1% of 462 their respondents had sexual intercourse, and 19% of them had experience of sexual violence. Almost half (50%) of the 19% who experienced sexual violence, reported that it was a rape attempt. Both psychological and physical threats were used by the perpetrator.

Scientific research from the Netherlands Ministry of Justice conducted by Prof. Jos Frenken shows that more and more young males between 12 - 18 are arrested because they are suspected of committing sexual offences. In 1990, 139 boys harassed girls, and in 1996 the number rose to 314 (rise of 126%). The number of boy-on-girl rape in 1990 was 69, against 175 in 1996 (Frenken, 1999).

Private life violence includes domestic violence, date violence and incest. Although its existence is recognised in every society, women’s bitter experience in their lives is not recognised. Occurring in private places, and for many societies a dark, but persistent tradition, gender violence is still seen as an acceptable part of social life, even by many of its victims (Panos Briefing, 1998: 3). Surveys carried out throughout the world indicate that between 25-50 per cent of all women in most societies have been physically assaulted at least once by an intimate partner at some time in their lives (Panos Briefing, 1998:5).

Private life violence may be explained by three major determinant factors:
- individual factors (personality, education, age, life experience as well incidental aspects such as alcoholism, drug use, etc.)
- family factors (socialisation in the family and parents’ behaviour / relationship)
- socio-environmental factors (culture, gender, ideology, law, religion, etc.).

In explaining private life relationship, Pateman (1988) focuses on connections between the “sexual contract” and the “social contract”. She thinks that the social contract has
been viewed as a key of development in Western political thought, while the sexual contract has been seen as irrelevant to the concerns of political theory. She argues that this way of thinking gives men orderly access to women’s bodies, which is crucial to understanding why patriarchal power continues to define relationships within the family and household, as well as in the public world of work and law. The separation of civil society into public and private spheres, and the continued existence of disparities in power that go unrecognised because they are merely “private”, is a legacy of the mythic agreement giving men sexual access to women’s bodies (Pateman, cited by Boling, 1996:6). The patron in the marriage setting is adopted in the other “sexual relationship” setting. The power relation among the partners is one of them.

Kinnon (1989) attacks the notion that private life relationships are free from coercion and inequality. She says that when what men do is private, their aggression is not seen at all, and women are seen to consent to it (Kinnon, cited by Boling, 1996:9). If the relationship between male and female becomes more intimate, women will think that their experience of violence is no longer “real” violence. They will deny this fact and even blame themselves (self-blame); they tend not to talk with others about their experience. Furthermore, the psychological burden they bear is more severe.

Generally findings on private violence against women within a partnership indicate that proper sex education, high self-esteem and assertiveness, and an equal gender position play important roles in declining violence cases. Studies in Morocco and South Africa and Rifka Annisa3 working experience in Indonesia show that a woman who has experience of violence from her partner has not had adequate sex education and stays in a low bargaining position due to the patriarchal culture that exists in that society. These findings match with Frenken’s recommendation. He comments on the increasing number of violence violent acts committed by adolescent, that instead of giving them more punishment, it is better to focus more on treatment of the young people and guiding youth

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3 Writer is a staff of Rifka Anise Women’s Crisis Centre, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
In order to avoid a recurrence. Youth should be taught themes, like forming a relation, sexual norms and values, and how to control aggression (Frenken, 1999).

In the Netherlands, sex education is given in the second grade when adolescents are around 14 years old in the biology classes. Sex education stresses on the medical and technical aspects of sex, and also positive attitudes toward sexuality. There is no national curriculum, so it is up to the school what issues will be included on sexuality. Sex education is given at nearly all Dutch schools (Rutgers Foundation).4

In a study of cultural conceptions of teenage sexuality in the Netherlands and in the US, 71% of Dutch parents interviewed would allow their teenage child to sleep with a boyfriend or girlfriend at home (Schalet, 1994). The age of consensual sex in the Netherlands is 16 years old. From 12 to 16 years, sex is allowed with mutual approval of both partners, as long as parents do not lodge an objection to it. Around age 14 most Dutch girls and boys start their sexual activity with kissing and hugging, and half the Dutch youngsters between 17 - 18 years have engaged in sexual intercourse (Rutgers Foundation).

The number of teenage pregnancies and abortion cases in the Netherlands is the lowest in the Western world. This is a result of a successful sex education and campaign, high acceptance of the contraceptive pill and the availability of contraceptives (Rutgers Foundation). The low number of teenage pregnancies and abortions - as the most severe impacts of private life violence among girls - should lead us to think that cases of private life violence is low in this country. Nevertheless, the number of date rape cases among students that is indicated by Dhalganjansing & Raams (1995) shows that violence still occurs in private life in the Netherlands.

In addition, though the Netherlands has the lowest teenage abortion rate in the world, within this country teenagers are still considered a risk group with respect to unwanted

4 Rutgers stichting (foundation) is a NGO, it is the Netherlands affiliate of IPPF that has nearly 30 years
pregnancy and abortion. Every year, 5,000 Dutch teenage girls become pregnant on average. Of every 100 girls who get pregnant, 43 choose to have an abortion. Based on this phenomenon, several studies on the determinants of contraceptive failure in adolescents have been carried out. These studies show the importance of communication and negotiating skills as major determinants of teenage “safe sex” behaviour. Rademakers’s study (Rademakers, n.d.) took two different groups as respondents. Two groups of teenage girls were compared with respect to the effectiveness of their contraceptive behaviour; a group of abortion clients and a group of girls who came to a family planning clinic to obtain contraceptives. As expected, the contraceptive behaviour of the abortion clients was in general less effective than that of the other girls. Two of these findings might be relevant to illustrate what kind of private life violence exists within adolescent Dutch culture. The abortion clients were much less active in the negotiating process than the girls from the other group. Their contraceptive behaviour was more vulnerable and dependent on the level of competence of their male partners. Another finding was the degree to which the girls have control over what happens during sexual contact. It is obvious that the influence of the abortion clients is weaker than that of the other girls. This difference is not only at the emotional and maturity level. While the girls from the family planning clinic groups seemed to learn gradually from their earlier contacts about how to control and influence the situation, the girls from the abortion group did not learn about it. That was also a reason why the effective use of contraceptives in this group remained less consistent over time and more susceptible to temporary and situational circumstances. From this data, we can conclude that some girls do not have the level of assertive and communication skill that is vital in building an equal relationship.

**Services for Abused Women in the Netherlands**

Since 1983, the Dutch Government has carried out an active policy against sexual violence. Starting in 1979, it has been doing this in the field of women’s health care as well. There are Women Health Centres in 15 cities in the Netherlands, namely Utrecht,
Den Helder, Appingedam, Assen, Arnhem, Artemis, Delft, Den Haag, Gaia, Leiden, Amsterdam, Maastricht, Rotterdam, Tilburg, and Alkmaar. Within the GGD (Gemeentelijke Geneeskundige Dienst or Municipality Health Service) system in The Netherlands, there is also a network that specifically handles sexual abuse. Some organisations under the umbrella specifically work for child abuse, sexual harassment in the workplace, sexual harassment in school, etc. (GGD Leiden). By subsiding NGOs, the government has contributed to the development of methods and training courses. Action by NGOs is also essential to bring about fundamental changes in the power structure between men and women and to change the healthcare system.

The 1992 data by Stichting Vrouwen Opvang Nederlands shows that there are 38 Women Crisis Centres, including Vrouwen Opvang-centra, Fiomhuizen, Blijf van M’n Lijf. These services exist in almost every city in the Netherlands (Stichting Vrouwenopvang, 1994:20). These centres give consultation services, either face to face or hot-line services, safe places for battered women, and include consultation and support groups.

Sexual violence is recognised in the Netherlands, statistic on it's occurrence exist and there are good services for abused women. Nevertheless, research which takes as point of departure sex young women’s perception of and experiences with sexual violence is lacking.
2.1. Type of Study

This study uses an exploratory design: how female Dutch students interpret the nature of the problem and how they seek solutions. Respondents' concepts in describing the problem, the causes, consequences and possible solutions to the problem that they identify are studied (Hardon, et al. 1994:116).

2.2. Data Collection Technique

To discover female Dutch students’ perception and experiences of private life violence, this study uses the following techniques:

1. Focused life story (connected with experience of violence) interviews with female Dutch students

   At the start at the interview, the emphasis is on the experience. Perception is invited at the end of the interview. This is to avoid asking a leading question. The life story technique interview was chosen, given that this study is on a sensitive topic, and it will be difficult to obtain the data by using other methods. This technique is also a way to allow girls to speak about themselves and to express their experiences and opinions freely and allow them to be the subject, and not the object, of the study (Renzeti and Lee; 1994, Jacobson and Gottman; 1998, Heise; 1995).

2. Individual interviews with people who are working on this issue, namely counsellors in Hoek Vrouwen Opvang’s - Hertogenbosch, The Counselling Co-ordinator of Blijf van m’n Lijf Amsterdam, a Social Worker in ISIS Amsterdam, a Psychologist in Universiteit van Amsterdam, a researcher in Afra Bodaert, and a staff of Eliashuis Amsterdam.
2.3. Study Population and Sampling

In the research proposal, the study populations were adolescent Dutch students and clients of Women’s Crisis Centre (WCC). However, I found it difficult to find respondents from WCC for a number of reasons. First of all there is an ethical issue. The counsellor at the centre has to have the client’s permission before I can contact her. Therefore I have to accept this condition. In Den Bosch Vrouwen Opvang there were two young women who were willing to talk to me and they could speak English. Because of the ethical issue that the counsellor are not allowed to push their client to do something against their will, I had to lose one of them who had already stated that she would like to be my respondent. Just before I interviewed her, she had a headache because of her family problem. I could not do anything. In Blijf van mijn Lijf, the counselling co-ordinator told me that they had difficulties to asking their client to speak with outsiders. They could not guarantee that their clients would still keep their promise to be interviewed. They had experience, for example, with television stations. For campaign purposes, there was a television station that asked some women to give their testimony on television; they said they would, but they then refused to do so. It is therefore the reason why the counselling co-ordinator advised me not to interview her clients. Secondly, in Vrouwen Opvang almost no Dutch adolescent clients stay there. However, I find it interesting to have respondents who have not identified whether they have had experience of violence. Women who seek help to WCC normally have had severe experiences and they have already identified their experience as violence. With “lay” respondents, I can ask their experience and further I can also ask how they classify their experience; how and why they consider their experience as violence.

During my fieldwork, it was difficult for me to find Dutch students who were willing to talk about private life violence. Some of them said that they would contact me, but they never called me. I also met two students who, according to a friend of theirs, had had experience of violence, but then they refused to be interviewed. Almost all students who finally wanted to share their experiences are young adults.
This research interviewed 11 female Dutch students and six key informants who work with related issue. All of the respondents are students of University of Amsterdam (Universiteit van Amsterdam; UvA) but they come from different cities. They are 20 - 25 years old. It is perhaps worth noting that four of 11 respondents spent some time abroad because of their parent's job. Two of the respondents have parents of mixed nationality, but since all of them are from Western Europe, I would say that it would not make so much difference from the cultural perspective. More detailed backgrounds and stories of the respondents are in Annex I (Respondents' Profile).

Owing to the sensitive nature of the study, the willingness of a person to talk is the most important factor in getting respondents. The snowballing method was used to find respondents.

2.4. Ethical Consideration

Speaking about experience of violence, especially severe ones, risks opening wounds and traumas. Therefore, the interview process must allow respondents to decide how they should tell their story and which part they would like to tell. A friendly, non-hierarchical relationship and a bias-free gender approach are used. Since this study comes under the category of sensitive research, the confidentiality of respondents' identities must be guaranteed. Privacy, confidentiality and a non-condemnatory attitude are important for the researcher because they provide a framework of trust (Lee, 1999: 98). Owing to the counselling ethic that a counsellor should not reveal details about her/ his clients to a third person, the interview with services providers / counsellors just discusses cases in general terms. It is also important to note that the way of asking should not show our judgement.
2.5. Experiences in Field Work

During the fieldwork I discovered a lot of things due to my status as a foreigner who is doing research on a sensitive topic. I also feel that this may have biased my fieldwork because of my current job as a staff member of a WCC in my country. These aspects are discussed in greater detail below.

A foreigner doing research on a sensitive topic

Being a foreigner as a researcher in a sensitive research topic gives both advantages and disadvantages. Getting respondents and asking them to share their experience about private experience is a difficulty. "Hhmmm, who are you? Why are you so curious about my life experience? It is my business...". These are the kinds of reactions, both implicit and explicit, that I recognised in my potential respondents. It was therefore understandable that some of them just refused to talk to me. Some students just either gave me their telephone number or asked for my own telephone number and promised to contact me later (but just one of them kept their promise). Four people whom I asked directly without using a contact person kept their promise to talk to me. Here, they considered my status as a foreigner as a reason for their willingness. Respondents whom I contacted through a contact person (snowballing method) thought similarly. "I think you do not know who my friends are, and who my family is" is the most common statement that they made. Nevertheless, two of my respondents still asked me to promise not to use my interview record against them in the future.

Language is also a problem but it is not the most crucial one, since my respondents and I both can speak English. Neither of us is a native speaker, which means that we would speak slowly enough to follow each other. Considering the sensitive nature of my research, I decided not to use a translator; as a result only respondents who can speak English were chosen. As stated before, talking about experience of violence might open the wound. Therefore, I have to be very careful in formulating my questions. Since I have experience as a counsellor for survivors, I am sure that I can handle this problem, but I
am not sure whether I can find and train a translator who is sensitive to these kinds of problems. Another reason is that it is better for respondents to feel that just one person listening to their private story.

The language became a problem when I transcribed interviews. The Dutch students whom I interviewed are not a native English speaker. They sometimes used not correct words. Added to this is the fact that their language sometimes contains informal expression or structures. Therefore I had to change or add my own explanations following my respondents' emic expressions (I use square brackets) just to give a better understanding for the reader.

Interviewing experiences; bias and recall problem
Lee (1999, 99) says that the interviewer can affect the validity of the responses that s(he) receives in many ways. Firstly, the social characteristic of the interviewer might affect on the result, and secondly, the expectation of the interviewer about the interview may itself have an influence.
During my fieldwork, I tried to keep these statements in mind in order to avoid bias. Despite my best efforts, I sometimes still found my own ideological background influencing my questioning of the respondents. As stated earlier, I am a staff member of a WCC and I have already had 5 years working experience in this field either as a counsellor, public speaker or as the person responsible for our publications. Meeting women survivors who have experience of violence is part of my daily life. Their story, their sadness, their explanations about their own experience are not new for me. These experiences make me understand my respondents' story more easily. On the other hand, if my respondents said that they have not suffered any experience of violence, I tried in different ways to make sure that they really did not have any experience. We might call it a way of probing, of course, and it was clear that after I asked them in these different ways, they started to remember their experience of violence (direct/indirect), or talked about an experience that they did not consider violent but I did. Still, I was afraid that I was influenced by my ideology, by my working experience; I found it unacceptable if it
seemed to my respondents that I was expecting them to have experience of violence. Fortunately, one of my respondents (let’s call her W) gave a comment about my interview which reassured me about this aspect of methodology. Just by chance, a girl whom I interviewed before W was a friend of W’s. She told W that she had been interviewed about private life violence and she said that she had been impressed by the way I was interviewing her. She was shocked by some of my questions about her past experience (I could see it from her periodic blush during the interview), but she did not feel that I was bothering her. She said that I was making her think about some things that she had never thought about before. W also told me that it made her very eager to be interviewed. Furthermore, at the end of interview she stated that the way I was interviewing her allowed her to answer me freely without have any feeling of being bothered or provoked. She remarked; “You did not seem very curious or push me to tell you about my experience. You just allowed me an opportunity to talk”. Such comments are naturally welcome for the researcher. First of all, as an activist (at least in my own country), I am anxious for my research to have an applied, functional value either directly or indirectly. Succeeding in making a woman think about and analyse her own life is an important part of my motivation for doing this research.

The second comment, that my respondents did not have a feeling of being provoked, is also very important for me. It reduced my fear that I was influencing my respondents’ answers. Hearing a respondent state that I was just allowing her to talk about whatever she wanted is exactly what I want to have in my research as far as the relationship between researcher and respondent is concerned. As I mentioned in the section on data collection technique, one of the purposes of using the focused life story technique to get data is to allow women to speak out about their experience without being frightened. Respondents are the subjects of my research; they are not the objects.

It gave advantages for me since I always started my interviews by asking them about others’ experience. It made them feel that they were not pushed to tell their own story.
Some of respondents continued to tell me about their own life story on their own initiative.

Asking about something in the past always involves remembering and memorising. This is another problem in gathering data. Some respondents just remembered their experience after we had been talking for half an hour or more. Just a few of them, especially those who had direct experience, could remember exactly when and how their private life experiences happened.
Chapter III
Findings

This chapter where the findings from my fieldwork are presented, is divided into four parts: definition of violence, causes of violence, impact of violence and solving the problems and seeking help.

3.1. What is violence?
Since a shelter for battered women has existed in the Netherlands since 1973, it appears that male violence against female is well recognised in this country. There are, however, still large numbers of women who have experience of violence without going to seek help from a shelter for women (Romkens, 1990:75, in Foeken, 1990).

For my respondents, violence in general, and male violence against female in particular, is not an unknown notion. All of my respondents answered me directly when I asked them about violence. Just 1 of 11 respondents said that she really had not had either direct or indirect experience of violence, although she said that she saw it on television or read about it in newspaper or magazines.

When I asked where the information on violence came from, most mentioned television, newspapers and magazines as the source; it was also a subject of conversation. “I saw a lot on television,” S said, while K said; “I heard it from people.”

Questions about boy-on-girl violence are also given space in girls’ magazines, although they do not have special sections. These vary from date and gang rape to abortion following date rape. Below are some examples:

In the Vrijen & Zo section in Fancy the following letter appeared (originally in Dutch).
I am a 15-year-old girl and I do not consider myself beautiful. However I am quite popular, and I have been going out with a handsome, very popular boy for about a year. Last month, when his parents went away, he asked me whether I’d like to stay overnight.
When I got to his place, he grabbed me without saying a word and threw me on his bed. He handcuffed me and started to whip me. He forced me to do all kinds of awful things and he had sex with me, while I was lying there. Afterwards he put my clothes back on and he beat me up. After that he forced me to leave the house. I did not dare to tell anyone. The next day at school he treated me as if nothing had happened. He even wrote a letter to me, telling me how sorry he felt about what had happened. I forgave him.

Another day, in the evening, we went to a restaurant. When we left the restaurant all of his friends were waiting outside. That was kind of strange, but I did not really think about it. All of us went to his house and there, everything happened again. He and his friends raped me. It was terrible. I am afraid to talk about it. (Fancy, No. 08, August 1998, translated by Wittberger, K.)

Another story is about date rape as well. Dana (17) was raped by an acquaintance of her. One day after they met, they had a date. He looked very gentlemanly, arrived on time and introduced himself to her parents. On the way Dana told him that she was not used to drinking alcohol and asked him therefore not to take advantage of this. He agreed. Finally, however, both of them got drunk; to the point where she could not stand up straight while he was quite all right. He brought her back home and put her to bed. In the end, Rick was not the gentleman he had pretended to be. She wanted to fight him off, but because of the alcohol she did not have her normal strength (Fancy, No. 08, August 1999, translated by Wittberger, K.)

During my research I also found a feature (spot) about seksueel geweld (sexual violence) in Folia, a weekly newspaper for university students in the Netherlands.

The translation is as follows:

Don't keep silent; talk about it

Sexual Violence

If it happens voluntarily, having sex can be deliciously thrilling. In the case of sexual violence on the other hand, you are only being used.Everybody can become a victim:
girl, boy, woman, man, young, and old. In 80% of all cases the culprit is not a stranger. This can make it difficult to be open about it. Keeping silent, though, can lead to long-lasting psychological as well as physical problems. Talk about it! Ask for help in time. (Folia 1, 27 August 1999, pg. 14, translated by Wittberger, K.)

Although the spot was about sexual abuse in general; it was not just about man-on-woman sexual violence, it illustrates that violence can be a public discussion point. On the other hand, the presence of the feature also implies that the organisation publishing it has suspected that there are a lot of sexual violence victims who have not yet sought help.

I gathered stories about experience of violence from 10 respondents. Some of them referred to some kinds of general violence such as war, street violence, violence in the mass media, etc. Since at the beginning of my interview I mentioned that my research topic was private life violence, they mostly continued to explain what do they think about private life violence. Some of them gave me their definition of violence, while the rest gave examples as an explanation. Violence from a partner, misused by a father, sexual violence, beating, bruising, mental violence, and emotional abuse, were the expressions they used.

H (22), for example, when I asked her whether she had direct / indirect experience of violence, told me about her neighbours. They were two girls, who were sexually abused by their own father. She used the term misused [for sexual abuse] with the additional comment; “I do not know whether this is the correct word, but I think he had intercourse with both his daughters”.

C (24) mentioned not only sexual violence but also beatings. Her first indirect experience was from her aunt. She said, “ My aunt was in a violent relationship. She had a partner who was staying with her in her house who was occasionally violent.” She also gave another example about an acquaintance who was beaten by her boyfriend.
"I do not see her very often; she told me that she had a boyfriend who was violent; they were doing fine now but she has once left him. He beat her repeatedly". Finally, she mentioned her own experience. "I did have sexual violence experience when I was young. I was 17. It was in cafe ... there was a band, after they played my friends and I talked with the guys from the band. I got involved with one of them, and I kissed him. After that we went outside. We were standing and talking near their caravan. Then I got into trouble. It all happened very quickly ... he forced me to help him masturbate; I had never seen or touched a penis ... it was the first experience for me; he opened his trousers ... basically he held my arm, so he was masturbating by using my hand. Yuck, ugh .... I did not want this ..."). Next, J (22) mentioned mental abuse as another kind of violence. She said, "I have a friend, and she has a boyfriend, and I heard from another friend of mine that he beats her ... for me, it was mental abuse as well, because he blamed me for things that he said made him depressed ..."

On another occasion, IN (23) told me how her father had abused her mother (his wife). She told me directly. "I do not have experience, but my father used to do it to my mother. They are divorced now, so it no longer happens ... Once I saw it happening when I came into the house, and once when I heard noises downstairs; she was crying, and I saw she had some, not black and blue, but red bruises."

In addition she said that she had a Moroccan female friend who used to be beaten by her partner. "Also one girl I used to know, but I do not know her any more; she also suffered violence. She was married quite young, and her husband beat her, then he was nice again, then he beat her again, he was nice again ...")

Beating is again mentioned by K (22) who had both direct and indirect experiences. She said that she knew some people who stayed in abusive domestic violence relationships; a cousin who was beaten by her husband is one example that she told about in detail. For her, violence means glass throwing, door slamming, pushing the partner around, etc. She gave me an expression that Dutch people use it when they tell somebody else that their
partner has beaten them. She said, “If Dutch people say *hij heeft losse handen* (he has loose his hands), I think people who hear it will suddenly understand what is happening. Sometimes they would say it in another expression; *hij is aggresief geworden* (he has become aggressive).” She also had two boyfriends who used to beat her, especially when they got drunk. One of them used to control her behaviour. He did not allow her to visit her parents and to see certain people. She said; “I was not allowed to meet certain people, even my mother. But I did not listen to him, it was a stupid situation.”

S (24) told me how one of her friends ran to her house. “My sister called me. I was in London. There was a friend of mine who had run to our house. Her boyfriend had beaten her. She did not have a place to go. Then, my sister went to her house to pick up her clothes and other things, and she stayed in our house for a while.”

Emotional abuse was the term used by M (25) when she told me about an experience of a friend of hers. M suspected that her friend was being emotionally abused by the boyfriend. She said that the man only gave her compliments about her body. He never talked about anything else. “My friend was crying all the time. She wanted to talk, have a discussion with her boyfriend, but he kept making sexual comments about her physical appearance. She was going crazy. I remember now ... I think it was also emotional violence.”

Only one respondent was not sure whether her experience was really violent. Before the age of 18, AN was sexually active. She stopped being active after she joined a Christian youth club and started putting Christian teaching into practice. Then she had a boyfriend. “I was honest, I told him that I had sexual intercourse before, but now I did not want to do it any more before I got married”. Instead of respecting her principle, her boyfriend blamed her for her past experiences and used them to make her guilty for not wanting sex with him. “When he asked me to have sex, I straight away said that I did not want it. And he said, why not with me while you had sex with others. He tried to make me guilty ... at that moment, I felt guilty in my relationship. Finally I had to agree to it.”
Her ambiguous feeling explains why she did not tell me about her own experiences at the beginning of our conversation. She had her own explanation for why she thought it was not violence. She explained, “For me, violence is the feeling; your own feeling of being a victim; whether you are being a victim or not; when you do not feel that you are a victim, it is not violence ... I think this because I felt that I could say “NO”. So, he did not force me.”

AN’s standpoint will help us to understand the next W case and what she was saying about her relationship. W said that even though sometimes she was not happy about what she did or about what her boyfriend did, she kept her feelings to herself. Her reason was as follows; “I have some male friends. They sometimes tell me about their girlfriends. They say that their girlfriends are not nice, that they are boring people. I do not want my boyfriend to think that I am not a good girlfriend and I would not want him to talk about me to his friends in the way I heard my friends talk about their girlfriends. So, I just follow his decision; I just want to please him ... I join him when they have drugs or drinks ... also in sex. I enjoy my sex with him, but he never does it in my way; in a way that I really like and want. I know that I should not always adjust to him.”

With regard to sexual violence, C added, “Sexual violence is basically when one party forces another to have sex, or causes any other sexual harm. It can be inside or outside a relationship.”

Physical violence usually comes up first in their story before other forms of violence in their story. When they have said that they did not have any experience of violence, I normally probe by asking what kinds of violence that they were thinking of. As a result, they would mention other kinds of violence: emotional violence, psychological violence and also sexual violence.

Although they themselves make such distinctions and categorisations of violence, they have difficulty making a distinction between physical, emotional and sexual violence.
They also do not think that physical violence is more serious than other kinds. K thought that when you hurt somebody physically it was at least visible, whereas with psychological violence the hurt was inside (internal). In the latter case, K said it would stop her loving the partner. J also added on the subject, "... so, between physical and mental abuse there is very fine line; you do not know when you cross it exactly."

3.2. Causes of Violence

Like an illness or a disease, violence has its own aetiology. Every person has her own explanation as to why she has an experience of violence or why violence might occur. My respondents’ explanations for the causes of violence vary from person to person.

Some respondents view it from the structural standpoint; the hierarchy of power. They say that violence in private life has to do with power; man’s domination and the submissive position of women. For J, if the partners see themselves basically similar, equal, they will treat each other as equals. This leads her to seek a relationship with a man who has a relatively similar socio-economic background. Another respondent, C, stated, “Violence is a force based on unequal power; I think violence has to do with power.” As for her experience of sexual violence, she commented, “Something was done against my will; I was forced. For a long time, I found sex very difficult for me because I saw it as a power; I saw it as a man misusing his power against woman.” IN also considers that her father has a dominant position. She says that in the present relationship between her father and his partner, he is “the man”; he is the one who says what has to happen. On the other hand, she found that her mother was quite dominant as well. It is interesting to observe how violence occurred in the previous relationship, and not in the later one.

Although the respondents might make no specific gender reference, their explanation of violence is relatively similar to the structural feminists’ analysis of the causes of violence against woman. Specifically, violence against woman has been called gender-based violence. The term was invented because this kind of violence results from the imbalance
of power and the unequal position between man and woman. Violence is closely related to Latin words “vis” (power, strength) and “latus” (from “ferre”, to give); it means therefore “give power” (Windhu, 1992, 62).

The dependency of woman on man is also viewed as a cause. In IN’s Moroccan friend’s case, IN told me that her friend had already lived together with her boyfriend before they got married, which is not common among Moroccans due to their religious beliefs. Her parents did not want her to stay at home any longer. She did not have any place to go except her boyfriend’s house, thus creating dependency on him.

K’s cousin was very dependent on her husband because she thought that she was not worthy of him. In her eyes therefore he was a good catch.

Dependency, either economic or psycho-social, is considered to be one factor which makes women vulnerable to violence. In a society like in the Netherlands where women have relatively similar opportunities in education and employment, economic dependency might be less than in other countries which are coloured strongly by a culture of gender bias.

Others see it differently. They put more emphasis on individual factors either from the woman’s side or the man’s side. From the man’s side, they identified some reasons such as jealousy, fear of losing the partner, silent frustration, inability to express anger in other ways, introverted behaviour and an “inherited” behaviour.

K, for example, sees the cause of violence from some different angles. In her cousin’s case, she said that her cousin’s husband was violent because her father used to be violent to her mother. But in violence within a relationship in general, she would say that it occurs because of the fear of losing her partner: men are afraid that their wives will be unfaithful; that they are not submissive enough, or that they are not “doing their duty”. She made the analogy with the situation of parents who are afraid to lose their children.
who come home late, and then are beaten. At the end of her statement she added, “The result is of course that they even lose them.” In her own case she said that she thought that her boyfriend was afraid to lose her because she had other, stronger, people in her surroundings.

J sees jealousy as the cause of her friend’s experience of violence. She expressed it in the following quotation, “.... He is obsessed with controlling; he wants everything to go according to his way; he brings her everywhere; he does not give her any space; he is very very jealous...” It is nearly a similar story with IN’s Moroccan friend. IN said, “He was not very nice ... he did not let her do anything: never left her alone; always kept her at home all the time.” IN explained further that jealousy is understandable, but not as much as in this case.

Jealousy as a cause of violence is not just attributable to males. W’s experience and J’s sister’s experience, for example, show that women can also be violent when they are very jealous. W hit her boyfriend after she knew that he kissed a girl at a party. She was very angry and then she could not control herself.

These are perhaps simple examples of how women can also be violent when they are hurt. Some battered women defend themselves: they hit back, and might push or hit as often as their partners do. There are many battered women who are violent, mostly, but not always, in self-defence. They are living in a culture of violence, and they are part of violence (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998:36).

Inability to communicate one’s needs and feelings is another cause. For males, the inability to express their feelings and their anger is the most common reason mentioned by respondents. S and M have a similar opinion about violence being caused by an introvert personality and the inability to express anger. They said that if people could not express their feelings then it could accumulate, and lead to anger. Violence would then occur if they could not express their anger in different ways.
On the other hand, the inability of women to express their needs, to communicate their will and feelings also plays an important role as a background to violence. The cases of W and her mother are just some examples of women who never expressed their feelings. W said, “I do not know how to argue, it is why I simply adjust [just go along with him].”

C did not know how to express her feelings because of her childhood background. She was taught to be always a nice girl. The mother’s mental illness (manic depression) placed an extra burden on the family. She learnt how to keep her feelings to herself. Further, C mentioned that she just wants to have a harmonious existence. She does not want to fight or argue and therefore hurt somebody. With her current boyfriend she is learning how to fight which is something new for her. However, this does not mean that she feels comfortable with her strategy. When she was asked whether she really could feel comfortable with what she was doing, she replied, “Not really, normally I am going around [walking around trying to think about this situation]. I can do it for a week. I need time to think about how I can say it (her feeling) without hurting somebody. I also always wait for the right time to say that. I am ... [sighs].”

K has a similar attitude. Whenever her boyfriend said something which hurt her, she just kept silent. I asked, “What was your feeling, can you forget it?” and she answered me, “No, I put it in a box. So, when the box was full, I exploded.”

In the case of teenage pregnancy, Vogelvang (a researcher in Afra Boddart; an institution that helps teenage mothers) suggests that it is caused by various factors. As a background, it is important to note that while the Netherlands as a country has the lowest rate of teenage pregnancy in the Western world, Amsterdam as a city is considered to be the third highest among European cities. 50% of these cases involve blacks and migrants. Whether blacks, migrants or original Dutch citizens, all those who go to Afra Boddart in the case of teenage pregnancy, have a low education and socio-economic background. Basically they do not continue their secondary school. With such a disadvantaged background, it is not surprising that they have little knowledge about sexuality in general,
also something that makes it easier for a girl to “allow” her boyfriend to do something to her that she would not normally allow. Feelings of love and fear of being alone, of losing someone are inter-related. W said that with other friends when she thinks that her friends say something to hurt her, she can just simply reply, “Do not say that - it hurts me.” But she could not do the same thing to her boyfriend. She does not want to argue because she loves him and just wants to please him. To him, she normally says, ”Well, maybe you are right.” She added, “I think one reason why I always go along with him is also because I do not like to be alone. I do like to have a boyfriend.” AN gave a similar reason, ”Maybe love makes it easier for me to agree with my boyfriend’s decisions; I do not want to lose him because I am afraid of being alone.” The feelings of love, love as an irrational element (M’s statement), something that cannot be explained (AN’s opinion) creates a bond in a relationship that makes it difficult for the woman to simply abandon the relationship, even though it is a constantly violent one. Violence is just viewed as incidental: he just loses control. IN’s friend, for example, when she was advised by her friends to leave her husband, always said, ”No, I do not want to leave him, I love him.” This is like K’s cousin’s case where K said, “Her parents did not allow her to leave her husband because they thought that he was very nice; at that moment he just lost control.” As far “losing control” as a reason, K commented, “Is he losing his control, or is he using his control?”

3.3. Impact of Violence

Research that has been done shows that violence can affect women’s sexual and reproductive lives in direct and indirect ways. The Panos Briefing (1998) identified the following consequences:

- unwanted pregnancy through rape and/or inability to use contraceptives
- unsafe abortion/abortion-related injury after unwanted pregnancy
- pregnancy complications and adverse birth outcomes
- STD (including HIV infection)
- gynaecological problems
- psychological problems / fear of sex / loss of pleasure
Research results show clearly that women who reported physical violence also suffer feelings of depression including feeling nervous, sad, worthless, having suicidal thoughts and or behaviour as well as psychosomatic complaints such as headaches and cold sweat (Gelles/Straus, 1988, cited by Romkens in Foeken, 1990).

From my own research, K who has direct experience of violence said that she had to continue going to psychiatrists for years to talk about her problems. In IN’s mother case, this woman had to retired earlier than normal because of mental illness.

Feelings of worthlessness are the cause and the effect of violence. Woman who feels that she is an unworthy person will think that she has to defend her partner and always please him. This feeling relates to the fear of losing the partner, fear of being alone and of not being able to find another partner. On the other hand, the feeling of unworthiness can also be developed in the woman if her partner always threatens her, never gives compliments or is always making negative comments. K’s cousin, for example, is (according to K) a very beautiful and smart woman, but she always thinks that she is unworthy and so considered her husband is a good catch whom she should not leave.

Being a worthy person is more than a physical or sexual matter. M’s friend was frustrated because her boyfriend only commented about her sexual appearance. She needs more than this from their relationship.

A mother’s character and a mother’s role in the parents’ relationship also play important roles in determining a daughter’s way of building relationships. Some girls imitate their mother’s character, some learn from the mother’s experience, and some try to learn but unconsciously have already imitated their mothers’/parents’ behaviour and perhaps adopt their character. This influence emerges in later life, in the way they colour the image of the man-woman relationship as well as how the relationship is managed.
M and S, and another respondent who never had either direct or indirect experience of violence use the same methods in developing their relationship with their boyfriends. M always tries to make her partner talk openly about everything, while S always discusses everything with her boyfriend. All of them saw their parents’ relationship as very good and equal as well as very stable.

IN, who grow up in a different background, where her mother was a victim of violence, develops her own way to build her relationship with a man. As she said, “I don’t want to open all of my heart. I trust them, but gradually...” She also said that because she does not like somebody controlling her, she tries to avoid that as well. When she meets someone who is the jealous or controlling type, she will lose interest. IN still has a bad feeling about her parents’ divorce, although this feeling is now less strong. For her, the divorce gave her a bad feeling, but it removes a negative influence in her life. When I apologised about having to probe deeper about her parents’ divorce, she answered me; “It is okay now. It was a bad feeling, but now it was a long time ago. If the violence continued, maybe I would be influenced more.”

W, who mentioned the idea of being a “good girlfriend”, said that she got the idea mostly from her mother. It was not communicated in words, but it was more a question of imitating her mother’s character; how she served her husband (W’s father). W stated, “I think I got it (the idea about being a “good girlfriend”) from my parents; my mother gives a lot, really a lot, ... my father is really conservative; he works, comes home at 5 or 6, to a ready-prepared dinner. He has never done anything in the house; during the week end he watches football or plays tennis; he does not call to say if he comes home late, or goes somewhere else ... he simply forgets to call my mother (or he does not think about it). And my mother always says, “Okay, okay, it does not matter”. She never says that if he does not call she will not cook for him. She only regrets that he never sees how much she is doing ... I just hear her sadness.”
On the other hand, her mother’s experience makes W think more about relationships. As she said, she will never ever do as her mother has done. It is therefore ironic that she still seems to be adjusting so much to her boyfriend. Maybe this is a learning process; she said that because of her experience with her former boyfriend she has changed her personality a little, so that with her current boyfriend she adjusts less. She is trying to articulate more her own needs and opinions rather than unconscious imitation of her mother’s way of thinking and doing.

Fear of sexual activity was another aspect of C’s difficulty. For a long time, sex became something traumatic for her because she saw sex as a power; she saw it as a man misusing his power against woman.

AN, referring to her last sexual experience with her boyfriend who forced her by making her feel guilty for not having sex, emphasised that she did not enjoy it.

For K, her last experience is not a problem any longer, although she had to spend a long time before she could deal with her problems. She had to talk with psychologists, psychiatrists with whom she had both individual sessions and family therapy treatment for a long time. During the treatment, she learnt both how to see her problems and how to talk about them. K said that her parents enjoyed an equal and stable relationship; they had been married for more than 25 years. She even said that her mother considered herself to be a feminist who had taught her to be a strong woman. When she referred to such bad experiences in her earlier life, she said, “It was not my fault, nobody could blame me. I was just too young and I did not understand anything.”

Another factor is confusion about how to relate to one’s parents. IN and W, for example, are confused about their feeling, how they should think of the parents. IN said that she was always on her mother’s side, but after her father told her what was going on, she changed her position a little. W explicitly mentioned that she could understand her
mother’s feeling, her sadness; on the other hand, she loves her father who is always nice to her. W does not want to hear anything bad about her father from her mother.

It is not only daughters who are affected by parents’ relationship; sons are also affected. My professional experience in Women Crisis Centre shows me that a man who frequently beats his partner is a man who has a father who did the same thing to his mother. It was also mentioned by K in connection with her cousin’s experience.

According to Vogelvang, some of Afra Bodaert’s clients become single mother as a result of violence, either rape or the refusal of the baby’s father to except his responsibility (i.e. abandoning the girl after she gets pregnant). Neither unwanted pregnancy nor abortion was not found in my research since all my respondents who are engaged in relationships (and have sexual intercourse experience) use contraceptives, of which they have a good knowledge and awareness. J, for example, took the morning-after pill three times. She took them when no contraceptive, either pill or condom, had been used. Two of my respondents and their partners even took STD/HIV-AIDS tests.

It is usual for violence to have multiple effects. The story of Dana, mentioned earlier in Fancy, is an example of how a victim of violence can have very complex problems. Dana, (17) who had been raped, had to request an abortion because of the unexpected failure of the morning-after pill (she took it twice as her doctor advised her). Even worse, her friends, her family and her neighbours blamed her for having the abortion. This further victimisation (being stigmatised) by her society was even worse for her. She had thought that after having an abortion she could forget her horrible experience by being raped because there is nothing to remind her of the rapist any more. She was not expecting such reactions.

Vogelvang, in my interview with him, argued that there are three relations between violence and teenage pregnancy. Firstly, a girl could deliberately get pregnant to escape from her parents who abuse her. Secondly, she could get pregnant as a result of violence,
either rape or an irresponsible relationship (a boy’s false promise; a boy persuades a girl to have sex by promising to marry her and then abandoning his promise). Thirdly, since teenage pregnancy is normally unwanted or unplanned, the child who is born will have displacement violence: the mother could be angry with the child’s father and take her anger out on the child. Being a single teenage mother is not easy: the mother has to play the role of both parents, earning money and managing the household at the same time. If she cannot handle all these pressures, the child could be the easiest victim when she channels her depression.

Vogelvang also mentioned that some clients could be the repeated victims of violence. He told me a story of a teenage mother who stayed in their residential centre. One day there was a teenage mother who refused to listen to the group-workers’ advice not to meet her abusive boyfriend outside the centre (clients there are allowed visits from their family or partner). She said that she could handle her boyfriend. She met her boyfriend in a park and she was raped again there.

3.4. Solving the Problem & Seeking help

Not everybody would seek help for their experience of violence by going to professionals, i.e. a psychologist, a psychiatrist, or organisations that specifically exist to help abused women. For some people, telling their experiences to friends or family could be enough to solve their problems. However, whatever choice is made, the victims normally take quite a long time before they decide to tell others. Still others can never bring themselves to talk about their experiences.

All of my key informants; counsellors in Den Bosch Vrouwen Opvang, the counselling co-ordinator in Bliff van Mijn Lijf Amsterdam, as well as the counsellor from ISIS (Women’s Health Centre in Amsterdam) had the same answer when I asked them how long, on average, it took their clients staying in a violent relationship before seeking help. “Years” was their answer.
Violence by known persons, especially within a relationship, is very difficult to treat. There are several factors involved: a fear of not being trusted, fear of being blamed by others or a feeling of shame are the usual reasons why victims do not want to tell others. A threat by the perpetrator is very often added to these factors. A story of an anonymous girl in the Liefde & Seks section in Fancy below is an example:

Dear Marielle,

There is an extremely attractive guy at my school, but they say that he has abused girls. I did not believe that and thus had sex with him. He caressed my vagina and my breasts and I had a delicious orgasm. But when I put back my clothes on, he grabbed me and threw me on the bed. It hurt a lot. He grabbed my arms and started to tie me to the bed. Then he went down on me. I did not like it and tried to get free. He told me to give him a blow-job and if I refused, something terrible would happen to me. When I could finally free myself, he threatened me and told me never ever to go to the police. I don’t know what to do (Fancy, No.8, August 1999, translated by Wittberger, K.).

For violence within a relationship, love for the partner and a fear of losing partner are additional reasons.

None of my respondents blamed women when they talked about this topic. Although some respondents said that women themselves could also play a role in provoking violent behaviour or a violent attitude in their spouse, all of them agreed that if a woman is treated violently by her spouse, she should just leave him. Nevertheless, respondents who had never had experience of violence were also aware that they could speak about it because they had never been in this kind of situation. S remarked, “I think because I have not experienced it and because of my upbringing (my family are against violence), I think that if I stay in a violent relationship, I will not tolerate it; maybe this is very naive ... but I think I would quickly leave a man who shouted or was violent to me or other people.”
C expressed her opinion about her acquaintance’s relationship; “She had told me that she had a boyfriend who was violent ... once she left him because he beat her repeatedly. Previously, she talked about him romantically, but she was focusing more on problems. However she gave him another chance and they are still together. This is difficult for me to understand because I have never lived in this kind of situation.”

Understanding the problem is not the same as solving it. This is true in the case of C. She followed up her statement above by saying that a relationship should be equal. She said that if the partners can stay in an equal relationship, respect each other and can feel free to talk about everything, violence will not occur. This is in contrast to her previous statement that she does not have the ability to express her own feelings. She herself admitted this ambiguity.

The fear of being blamed for causing violence prevents women (victims) from telling anyone about their sad experiences. C’s experience with a man from the band is an example. Because she kissed him first in the bar, she was afraid to tell others about the sexual harassment she suffered. She was afraid that people would even blame her. She whispered to me, "For a long time I did not tell anybody about what happened, because I thought I was the cause of it; it was my own fault, and in a sense, it is; but I do believe that NO means NO; when somebody say NO, it means NO...." In Dana’s case (the story that appeared in *Fancy*), she even had been stigmatised by her society when they discovered that she had had an abortion; they ostracised her.

It is interesting to note that people can judge the victim for different points of view. In Dana’s case mentioned above, the criticism had a moral focus, while in AN’s case the criticism had a strategic focus; after she told her brother and her best friends, although they did not really blame her, they could not understand why at that moment she could not just simply refuse her boyfriend’s demands.
Mostly women even blame themselves for violence that they experience. Blaming themselves might result from feeling unworthy, that they are not good enough for their partner (either their “performance” or their “services”) or the fear that they have done something unpleasant to their partner. K’s cousin’s feeling that her husband might beat her because she was unworthy is just one small example. On the other hand, sometimes a man makes a woman feel guilty as a way of forcing his will on her without using physical pressure. AN’s boyfriend made her feel guilty for not having sex with him while she had it with others, in order to push her to follow his desire. Both situations illustrate the fact that women themselves rarely ask for help because they do not consider their experience as violence.

The response and support from others influence how a woman seeks help, and can help to solve her problems. K was lucky because she had positive support from her family. Just after her mother found some bruises on her body (when she was taking a shower and her mother suddenly came in to the bathroom), her parents asked her to leave her boyfriend. Her father even threatened to use violence on her boyfriend if he disturbed or contacted her again. Just as important, the kind of help the victim needs has to be examined. K thought that the way her cousin’s parents supported her cousin was questionable. When I asked her whether the parents supported her cousin to solve her problem, she said “yes”, but then directly remarked, “But I do not think it was positive support. They helped her to solve her problem, but they still wanted her to stay with her husband.”

Confused feelings about the border between love and hurt is another aspect of the phenomenon of violence; this means that violence within a relationship is very difficult to resolve. Some men who control their spouses claim that they do so to protect them. K’s experience is an example. When I asked her for her partner’s explanation when he did not allow her to do something, one reason she mentioned was that it was for her own good. It is therefore difficult for the woman in this situation to decide whether her partner’s behaviour is really for her own good or is just a way to control her.
The fact that there is “a circle of violence” in a violent relationship leads to even more confusion for the victims. K, as well as K’s cousin, J’s Moroccan friend, and C’s friend experienced repeated violence. K’s boyfriend always gave her sweets, brought flowers or chocolates and asked for forgiveness for what he did. It made her always “forgive” him and made her think that he would be better in the future. In K’s cousin’s case, she and her parents thought that the violent behaviour was just a part of his character. They had this feeling because he was otherwise decent. For this reason, they did not allow their daughter to leave her husband.

A fear of losing the partner and living alone is also mentioned as a reason for not leaving the violent relationship. W expressed herself as follows, “I always try to understand his idea, but he never understands mine ... sometimes I don’t know what I should do; well, maybe I should break up, but then I will break up with all the boys in the world, because it is difficult to find somebody who respects you the way you are.”

Where do they prefer to ask for help?

Since all my respondents are UvA students and this university has its own Psychology Bureau for students, I visited this bureau to ask for some information related to my research topic. Finally, after they had discussed my request and looked through their documentation file, neither the psychologist I met nor her colleague could give useful information. They rarely got clients who suffered from man-on-woman violence. Later, I asked them via the telephone about the average number of consultations for each student. The person who answered me told me that every student had a maximum of three sessions consultation and if they thought that three sessions were not enough, they would refer their clients to RIAGG, a mental health institution.

K was the only respondent who had direct experience of seeking help for her experience of violence. She told me that she had worked for years to solve her problem with both psychologists and psychiatrists, by doing individual consultation as well as family therapy. I asked her why she preferred going to a private psychologist rather than going to
a psychology bureau for students. First, she mentioned confidentiality, not just for herself, but also as a general principle. Later, she remembered that she had not gone to the students’ psychologist because the number of visits was limited. She said, “Oh yes, I remember now, I think I did not go to the Psychology Bureau for students because I knew that they just give me 10 hours or something ... it is not enough if we have a complex problem.” Her decision to use a private service was also supported by the fact that the costs of her consultation sessions were covered by insurance.

It is also rare to find students who seek help with Vrouwen Opvang. Bastians, the Counselling Co-ordinator in Blijf van Mijn Lijf Amsterdam explained why: As a student it is very difficult to stay in a shelter for a long time. They have to study and it is difficult to do that if they have to share a room or stay in a communal house. She said that they had some clients who were students, but they normally did not identify themselves as students since they knew that people who stay in the shelter are mostly from a low education socio-economic background. When I asked about Dutch youth, Bastians pointed out that as young “original” Dutch people (with an established family base in the Netherlands), they still had another choice to stay or run away from their violent partner. Bastian’s explanation was supported by Schie, a counsellor in Elias Huis, who said that more than 50% of women who stay in their shelter are immigrants. First of all, Dutch people do not like to stay in a communal room, and secondly, they have other choices to solve their problems.

Generally, most respondents said that they prefer to discuss their problem with somebody they know, their boyfriends, best friends or family. It will be different if they think that their parents, boyfriends or family cannot solve their problem or even they are a part of the problem itself. M prefers to discuss her problem with her friends instead of telling her mother: she thinks her mother could not keep a distance from the problem because of her emotional ties as her mother, and therefore it will make her suffer. However, although the respondents would ask for advice from their friends, they would make their decision themselves.
When I asked what they would do if they had a serious case like an experience of violence, some of them said that they would choose friends as the first preference before they sought help from professionals because they think that their friends can understand the context of their problem and are really motivated to help them. By contrast, if their problem was really serious, some of them said that they might go to a professional because they do not want to bother their friends or give them a heavy burden. The most important thing is, nevertheless, to be sure that the person who has been asked for help has the capability to solve their problem. On the other hand, nobody would like to interfere if the one who has problem does not ask for help. Since the respondents knew that in the Netherlands they can get almost all kinds of services and they are used to getting all the information easily, most of them were sure that an organisation to help them must exist in this country although not all of them knew exactly the name of an organisation that could help victims of violence. Moreover, some respondents, who know exactly the name of such organisations like Vrouwen Opvang, Blijf van Mjn Lijf, etc., are the ones who had direct or indirect experience of violence or the ones who have been informed about these organisations, either from sexual education, from seeing it on television or reading about it in newspapers as well as because their parents work in relatively similar organisations. W knew the name of Blijf van Mjn Lijf because her friend’s mother stayed in this shelter, while M knew about it because her parents work for a child abuse shelter.
particularly about contraceptives. Their low education makes it difficult for them to understand their own problems.

Some of them have potential difficulties in forming relationships with men. They do not know how to shape a relationship and they are also very submissive. Lacking knowledge about relationship-building and how to communicate assertively make the condition worse.

A number of these teenage mothers were mistreated or abused by their parents. Getting pregnant is a way to escape from their house. Alternatively, acting in a dependent way towards the partner is designed to get them the necessary attention. It is just this dependency which can drive the man to be violent towards his partner.

Another contributing factor is alcohol, mentioned by one respondent, K, who had boyfriends who used to beat her, said that this normally happened when they got drunk. But K also thinks that alcohol is not the only factor. She thinks that something else has pushed them to drink. W on the other hand, who had boyfriends and some male friends who frequently used drug and drank alcohol, never saw this as a cause of violence. At the same time, she made sure that she controlled her own and her partner’s alcohol intake. Alcohol is mentioned in the case in Fancy’s section on date rape; the perpetrator takes advantage of his date’s was alcoholic state.

My respondents, on the other hand, did not think that men were the only ones responsible for violence. They said that women themselves also bore some responsibility for violence. In the case of IN’s parents, IN said that she was always on her mother’s side; she always blamed her father for everything that happened. Nevertheless she also sees that her mother has a way of speaking that can really anger other people. She made her statement with reference to certain quarrels between her mother and IN’s brother and father. IN stated, “When there was a horrible situation, his temperament ... he can really get angry and she ... she can say things that can make people angry.”
A similar statement was made by C; “E (her boyfriend)’s ex-girlfriend for example. Her current boyfriend is violent towards her. E told me that he could understand if her (present) boyfriend beats her. She can behave in a way that make a man lose his temper, and her present boyfriend is a man who physically reacts to it.”

A weak personality on the woman’s part might also be a conducive factor in violence. For example, K told me that she had previously had contact with psychologists and psychiatrists for reasons besides her violence problems. Something happened to her when she was under 18 that according to Dutch law forced her to seek help (either a stay in a mental hospital or regular visits to a psychologist / a psychiatrist). She did not mention exactly what her problem was, and I did not myself want to probe further either. She implied that she had a lot of problems when she was younger; she even said that her experience of violence was just a small problem in her life.

One respondent thinks that biological factor play a role in aggression. According to C (repeating what her boyfriend’s doctor had said), low blood-sugar level when combined with emotional factors could stimulate aggression. C’s boyfriend is diabetic and when he is very angry, during their arguments for example, he can be an aggressive person. Normally he slams the door, then goes to the kitchen and gets something to eat to rise his blood-sugar level.

The relationship between sin and violence was also mentioned by one respondent. H, from her Christian perspective, sees violence as a manifestation of sin; perhaps as a punishment for previous sin. “As a Christian, I see that all people are just sinners; it is not just God’s influence, but also Satan’s too; I do believe that Satan has an influence on daily life, and that can affect these things we do,” she explained.

One important thing which colours the violence within a relationship is love. J explained it thus, “If you fall madly in love with someone, then it does really make a difference; you can be blind, you know; you can forgive a lot.” Love, according to some respondents, is
Chapter IV
Discussion

I started to conduct research on private life violence in the Netherlands because of my curiosity as to whether this kind of violence still occurs in a country that is considered as modern and Western. Since I think that some taboos regarding sexuality are absent and women and men are equal in this country, I assume that this kind of violence is less prevalent compared with countries which are coloured by sexual taboos and other cultural norms. If violence does exist, I want to know about its various forms and about the specific culture that makes violence within a relationship still occur. However, the limitations of this study (especially time and respondents), cannot allow me to make broad generalisations or examine hypotheses.

Research on human violence has been based on one of two typical models. The first model (the catharsis model) suggests that all groups have an innate level of aggression that must be periodically channelled in some way, whereas the second model (the cultural pattern model) suggests that some societies have a basic set of values and beliefs that emphasise aggression and violence (Levinson and Malone, 1980 and Sipes, 1973, in Levinson, 1989:40).

The first model is useful in understanding how my respondents explain the cause of violence. Some of them said that the man who is violent has an aggressive behaviour and the violence occurs because he cannot express it in different ways.

Five hypotheses have been derived from the second model (the cultural pattern model). Levinson (Levinson, 1989:41-43) explains it as follows:
1. The subculture of violence hypothesis; this suggests that violence is a learned behaviour pattern that is shared by members of a group whose value system encourages the use of violence
2. The culture consistency hypothesis; this suggests that cultural values, on the surface seemingly unrelated to family violence, may create norms governing family life that both lead to and perpetuate violence between family members.

3. The family socialisation into violence hypothesis; this suggests that violence between family members is passed on from one generation to the next by individuals who were victims of or who witnessed family violence in their childhood.

4. The cultural slipover hypothesis; this suggests that "the more a society tends to endorse the use of physical force to attain socially approved ends (such as order in the schools, crime control and international dominance), the greater the likelihood that this legitimisation of force will be generalised to other spheres of life where force is less socially approved, such as family and relations between sexes."

5. The full-blown culture pattern itself; this suggests that societies exhibit either many forms or few forms of violence.

Such models can help in understanding some of the phenomena covered in my research. How parents' relationship and behaviour can influence their children's way of building and managing their relationships, can be explained by the cultural pattern model of violence. For daughters, the influence is more on how their mother’s character and mother’s role in the parents’ relationship influence the way they shape their relationship. It explains why it is usual to find women victims whose mother were also victims of violence. It is also mentioned by Schie and Bastians. Both of them said that some clients have stayed in shelters before when they were children because their mothers were victims of violence as well. For sons, the influence of how their fathers treated their mothers may make them behave violently to their spouses. With these influences, it is no wonder that the complexity in a committed relationship, either within or outside marriage, is the same.

Hanmer and Saund suggest another model: the public-private perpetuation model of violence against women. This model suggests that fear of attacks from strangers forces women to become dependent on men whom they know, which it makes easier for these
men to assault the women (Hanmer and Saunder, cited by Levinson, 1989:43). My research shows that the victims (either my respondents or respondents' family or respondents' friends from whom they got indirect experience of violence) suffered their experience of violence from a non-stranger; the perpetrator was an acquaintance, a date, or a committed partner (boyfriend, fiancé or husband). This fact is not believed by most people, which make it more difficult to combat the problem.

It is also interesting to note that, according to Brown (Brown, in Counts, et.al., 1992:2), psychological reasons for wife-beating and wife-battering are largely independent of cultural variables. She said that a full explanation of aggression against wives must include not only socio-cultural but also psychological variables. It must indicate whether the violent behaviour is the result of psycho-physical factors (alcoholism or neurological disorder) or is the result of a particular life history. Western social sciences, which I think also influence my respondents' way of thinking, have developed a variety of hypotheses to explain the occurrence of wife-beating: broad categories of psychological hypothesis and socio-cultural hypothesis. Campbell cited cross-cultural studies showing that there is no simple linear correlation between female status and rates of wife-assault (Campbell, in Counts, et.al. 1992:233-234). Researchers have also suggested psychoanalytic and neuro-psychological reasons, but this analysis is less used, especially by feminists, because its tool seem to give an excuse for the perpetrator and even blame the victims.

The basic premise of feminists on wife-battering is that wife-battering is allowed and encouraged by a patriarchal society which mandates women's dominance by men. Male sexual jealousy, for example, is considered to be an expression of a societal norm that women are men's property. Thus, the attitude is followed by other attitudes; controlling by using economic coercion or social isolation (Campbell, in Counts, et.al. 1992:234). The respondents' opinion about the cause of violence falls between these premises. It is understandable that they adopt the common Western approach to it; seeing it from both sides, but with more emphasis on individual psychological factors than seeing culture,

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5 Wife-battering implies more frequent and more severe than wife-beating
especially patriarchal culture, as a cause of it. As an outsider, when I see it from my own “cultural” point of view, the way they explain it also gives a picture of their cultural background. They place more emphasis on individual factors, which fit general perceptions of Western society which is viewed as individualistic than Eastern society. Although, then, it is discussible if we contrast to the fact that feminist’s idea which view violence against women as a result of patriarchal culture came also from Western society.

Sexual abuse seemed to occur less within a committed relationship among my respondents. Hofstede (Hofstede, in Hofstede, et al., 1998: 173) said that the Netherlands is considered to be a feminine culture. According to him, in a feminine culture sex is seen as a relationship, while in a masculine culture sex is seen as exploitative. He used the differences to examine why sexual harassment is more an issue in the United States than in the Netherlands. Although he is maybe right in saying that when sex is seen as a relationship, it reduces sexual violence, it should be remembered that the issue of sexual violence, especially when it occurs within a relationship or is from a known perpetrator (sexual harassment normally comes from a known perpetrator) is very difficult to speak about. There are additional factors, such as an unconducive environment (e.g. justice system, judgmental society) which make it more difficult for victims to tell or report their experience of violence. When sexual violence does occur, the feminine culture also involves women taking responsibility and even feeling guilty about the sexual violence of men. It is partly this responsibility and guilt which give men power over women and space to violate their bodily integrity.

Hofstede’s remark corresponds to my own experience in the study: my respondents talked quite easily about their sexual activity. In fact, sexual activity is not a taboo subject for the Dutch. Just one of my respondents, who still holds strongly to her religious beliefs, said that she never had experience of sexual intercourse. In Dutch society, discussion about sex is more than who is taking the initiative or whether force is being used. Having sexual pleasure, which is one of the Reproductive Rights, is also an important issue.
Since sexual activity is common, also between unmarried partners, the taboo against losing virginity does not exist in this society, except for certain groups who still stick closely to their religious norms. In my own society, where virginity is still an important factor in choosing a marriage partner, this issue plays an important role in the case of violence between committed unmarried partners. When a girl loses her virginity, normally she would not leave her partner because she is afraid that she will not able to find another boyfriend. Otherwise she risks being blamed by her later partner for having sex before. This creates dependency on her boyfriend, which can lead to a violent relationship. The absence of this taboo means that Dutch women can leave their partner easily when the boys are abusive; this does not, however, eliminate the vulnerability of staying in a violent relationship. Although I know that my research data does not allow me to make a generalisation, it seems to me from my respondents’ answers that the reason for girls to stay in their relationship, even in a violent one, is the fear of not having a partner, of not having someone to rely on. An additional factor is that love - in this society which values rationality -, is still considered as something irrational, something that cannot be explained. Moreover, the concept of the “good girlfriend”, normally considered very out-of-date, still exists in this society, a heritage of the parents’ generation.

Attention must also be given to the lack of specific research to explain the correlation between violence and abortion. Nevertheless, the impact of violence is not just the risk of getting pregnant. Avoiding pregnancy reduces the further impact of violence, of course, but the psychological effects of violence - trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder - have to be taken into account as well.

To understand violence, especially violence within a relationship or by a known person, I prefer to use an integrative approach. I do not deny that certain biological factors such as low blood-sugar in my respondent’s (C’s) boyfriend’s case, do cause aggression, the idea that aggression should target a woman is questionable. Thus, we can combine the
"Western scientific" explanation (the catharsis model or the cultural pattern model) and feminist perception.

If we assume that behaviour, including violent behaviour, is transferable from one generation to the next, from the parents to their children, and that children can learn and imitate such behaviour from their society and family while they are young, we should develop a culture of non-violence in the early part of a child’s life if we want to eliminate such influences.

It is supposed that the Netherlands has a successful sex education programme. However, we know from research that some young Dutch people said that the sex education is given too late and too mechanical (Went :3 and Keeting:15). They said that when they get sex education (around 13–16 years) they have already known about it from the mass media or their parents. To answer this, those responsible for the programme point out that they have to balance their teaching, that not every young person under 16 is sexually active (Went:3). This answer seems to forget the important fact that young people do not need to be sexually active to benefit from sex education.

We can understand that the purpose of sex education is to prevent or reduce the number of teenage pregnancies; its very often therefore that only mechanical information is given, e.g. how to put on a condom, how to take the Pill, how to deal with an unplanned pregnancy. Nevertheless, the need to show young people how to deal with factors like love, control of situation, etc., has been highlighted by Keeting.

“In reality, however, society is rather ambivalent about teenage sexuality. Parents often tend to dissuade and discourage youngsters from becoming sexually active. They like to keep control over their children’s’ behaviour, instead of helping and enabling them to gain control over their own feelings and behaviour. But having control over their own situation and possessing the self-confidence and behavioural skills to act responsibly is precisely what youngsters need to become effective contraceptive users. This requires open and
honest discussions on such topics as the meaning of love and attraction, the feelings involved, and how to communicate and interact in intimate encounters.” (Keeting:14)

We again come back to the fact that the forms of violence are not just physical or sexual. Emotional violence is also very important in making a human being lose their worthiness. As shown in my own research, as well as Frenken’s and others’ findings, violence also occurs everywhere, whether or not by strangers; it seems therefore necessary to give young people knowledge and skill in respecting others in general (not just the partner). More attention could be paid to Frenken’s recommendation, as mentioned earlier in the Introductory Chapter, that youth should be taught themes, like forming a relationship, sexual norms and values, and how to control aggression. This could be included under the general heading “Relationship Capabilities”. This could be additionally combined with feminists’ idea that education should reconstruct patriarchal ways of thinking about women’s and men’s relationship and position.

All the services available in the Netherlands seem to have more the function of curing rather than preventing violence. Unless an environment can be created which is conducive to responsible relationships between men and women, either within a relationship or not, organisations like Vrouwen Opvang, Blijf van Mijn Lijf, etc. will become more numerous.
Appendix I
Respondents’ Profile

All my respondents were University of Amsterdam (UvA) students who are 20 – 25 years old.

1. K, age 22
K has almost finished her study. She spent some of her life abroad because of her parents’ job.
She had both direct and indirect experiences of violence. Her direct experiences were from her last two boyfriends, who abused her both physically and emotionally. Her indirect experience was about a cousin who was beaten by her husband.
Her parents stay in a stable and equal relationship. They encouraged her to leave her abusive relationships.
She had spent a lot of time with psychologists and psychiatrists to solve her psychological problems.
She is Jewish, but this does not influence her problem.

2. S, age 24
S’s parents are mixed nationalities. She had just indirect experience of violence. She and her sister helped her friend who ran away from her boyfriend. She seems to me have a very strong personality. She and her family do not tolerate violence, either towards themselves or towards other people. Her parents are a stable couple. Because of her life principles, she always tries to avoid involvement with a partner or a friend who is violent.
She also stayed abroad for some time.

3. J, age 22
She is a Catholic (technically at least). Her parents stayed abroad for some time so that she had to follow them. She had just indirect experiences of violence. Two friends of hers were physically and mentally abused by their boyfriends.
4. C, age 24
She had a direct sexual violence experience; the perpetrator was a band player. She also had two indirect experiences: with her aunt and her friend. Her boyfriend is diabetic. Although he was sometimes quite aggressive, she never considered it as violence. She had her own explanation; it was because of his low blood sugar, which according to his doctor makes someone become aggressive.

5. AN, age 24
She was sexually active but then she stopped sex activity after 18, when she started to put Christian teaching into practice. She was forced to have sex by her boyfriend but she did not consider it as violence. She thought that she could say “NO”, but finally she allowed him because she felt guilty.

6. H, age 22
She did not have direct experience of violence; she had just indirect experience. Her neighbours were sexually abused by their own father. For her, violence could be connected to sin.

7. IN, age 23
Her father used to beat her mother; now they are divorced. She also had a Moroccan friend who was beaten by her husband. Because of her last experience, she always tries to avoid a man who has a very jealous character; this is, according to her, one of the causes of violence.

8. W, age 21
She always goes along with her boyfriend because she wants to be a good girlfriend. Sometimes she does not feel happy with what he did. Moreover, she never considered what her boyfriend did towards her as violence. W said that she got the idea about “what is a good girlfriend” from her mother. Her mother was crying a lot because of her father’s behaviour, but the mother never told her husband about her sadness.
9. M, age 24
M did not have direct experience of violence. Her indirect experience was got from her friend who was psychologically “abused” by her boyfriend, in the sense that he would only give her compliment for her body and sexual things.

10. X, age 25
Her sister was sometimes psychologically and physically abused, but her sister does not want to leave her husband. She did not have direct experience, and she is staying in a positive relationship with her boyfriend.

11. Y, age 25
She did not have any experience of violence, either direct or indirect. Her parents stay in a very stable relationship; they have been married for more than 30 years. She “marked” her boyfriend as 9 out of 10; she is happy with her relationship. She and her boyfriend always discuss all matters of their relationship openly.
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