



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

NCK THE NATIONAL CENTRE
FOR KNOWLEDGE ON MEN'S
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

NCK-RAPPORT 2009:1 ENGLISH VERSION / ISSN 1654-7195

Original title: Lättare att söka hjälp
– Kvinnofridslinjens uppbyggnad och första år

The Development of a National Helpline for Women subjected to Violence

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Introduction

Men's violence against women is a societal and public health problem causing great suffering for both the subjected women and their children. Violence against women takes different forms: physical, psychological and sexual. The consequences are, in addition to physical and mental illness, often social, legal and economic.

A national helpline facilitates seeking help for women subjected to violence. The national helpline works as a complement, not a replacement, for the existing public support services and organisations. In Sweden the authorities concerned are required by law to protect and assist women who are subjected to violence.

The helpline is part of the efforts to increase the responsibility of public administration. The Swedish government has therefore given the National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against Women (NCK) at Uppsala University, the mandate to build, develop and operate Kvinnofridslinjen, a helpline for women subjected to violence and their relatives, at Uppsala University Hospital.

In this report the construction and development of Kvinnofridslinjen during its first year in operation, is presented.

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1. Summary

On the 4th of December 2007, the national helpline Kvinnofridslinjen (“Women’s Safety Line”) was launched by the Minister of Integration and Equal Opportunities, Nyamko Sabuni. The event was preceded by a year of extensive preparations at the National Centre for Knowledge on Men’s Violence Against Women (NCK), in Uppsala. The need for a national helpline turned out to be vast. Already during the first month, an average of 100 incoming calls was registered per day, a number that since then has been constant. A total of 37,841 calls were registered during the first twelve months.

Kvinnofridslinjen was commissioned by the Swedish government and is run by NCK. Setting up the helpline was a pioneer work that required knowledge in a range of disciplines and extensive work efforts. A prerequisite for implementing the project was the expertise that had been built up at the Centre for Raped and Battered Women since the start in 1994.

The helpline is targeted towards women subjected to violence who need support, help and information on local support services provided by public administration, as well as NGOs. Relatives or friends are also welcome to call the helpline.

Kvinnofridslinjen is open 24 hours a day, all year around. The callers’ anonymity and privacy are guaranteed. In order to protect the woman’s security, calling Kvinnofridslinjen is free of charge and the call does not show on the telephone bill.

The employees at Kvinnofridslinjen are social workers, midwives and nurses with extensive experience in dealing with people in crisis or difficult life situations. Their task is to listen, give professional support and to inform the women about where they can turn for further help. Prior to the opening, the staff attended a mandatory course drawn up and implemented by NCK.

The staff has access to information on services provided by public administration as well as NGOs locally and nationally. The information has been collected in a database including health care services, social services and specialised units within the police as well as women’s shelters and crime victims’ support organisations. Kvinnofridslinjen offers information on opening hours, addresses, contact information and the type of support that is provided. They also know whether the services are adapted for the disabled, which languages are spoken, if drug abusing women are accepted and if there is knowledge concerning violence in same-sex relationships. The key idea is to ensure that the staff at Kvinnofridslinjen is well informed and equipped to guide the women, as fast as possible, to local help organisations.

The staff at Kvinnofridslinjen is mainly Swedish speaking, but has access to interpretation services in most languages that are represented in Sweden. There is also a text telephone (TTY) for hearing- and/or speech-impaired persons.

In order to make a difference, a national helpline like Kvinnofridslinjen must be known to the target group. Therefore, several nation-wide campaigns were conducted during the first year. The focus of the campaigns was to make Kvinnofridslinjen known and to make the phone number, 020-50 50 50 public. The message was spread through advertising, information materials and through media.

Prior to the opening of Kvinnofridslinjen a website www.kvinnofridslinjen.se was created. The site encompasses information on Kvinnofridslinjen, as well as texts about different kinds of violence and its consequences. The website has turned out to be an important channel in reaching abused women, their relatives and others who are seeking information. Many women visit the website before they make the decision to call. During the first year a total of 79,137 visits were registered on the website.

The calls to Kvinnofridslinjen are documented by the staff and the first year shows that most often it is the abused woman herself, or people closely related to her, that call. The calls come from all parts of the country and concerns violence or problems related to violence. The conclusion is that the need for support and affirmation is great.

Hence, NCK has reached the initial goal in the commission from the government to start and run a national helpline for women subjected to violence. Now, when the basic structure of the helpline is complete, NCK will focus on further developing the service, which of course will be a continuous work of improvement.

2. The Government Commission

In 2004 the Swedish government initiated an investigation with the mission to inquire and propose procedures for the conversion of the Centre for Raped and Battered Women at Uppsala University Hospital into a national centre. Part of the directives for the investigation was to examine the possibilities of establishing a national helpline at the new centre. The investigator concluded that there was a need for a national helpline targeted at all women who are subjected to violence and their relatives. Such a helpline could provide support, help and information regarding men's violence against women, sexual violence and threats of violence. Furthermore, the investigator recommended that the helpline should be placed at the new centre, NCK, where in addition to a long-standing and well-founded clinical and theoretical experience there was also the experience from having operated a helpline since 1995. Subsequently in connection with the conversion in 2006, NCK received the commission from the government to develop and operate a national helpline for women subjected to violence.

3. Men's Violence Against Women – the Responsibility of Society

The right to a life free of violence is a question of democracy and is a basic human right. Violence and the threat of violence are limiting women's lives and freedom and causing imbalance of power between women and men.

It is now more than fifteen years ago that Sweden ratified the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Since then, changes of the law and improvements within public administration have been made to stop the violence and provide help to the victims. Although, there is still no statistical evidence that the violence against women has diminished in Sweden.

In the year of 2007 there were 27,000 cases of violence against women reported to the police, an average of 74 cases per day.

However, the unreported cases of women subjected to violence are considerable and the reported cases make up approximately 20–25 per cent of the actual violence. About 50 per cent of the women who state that they have been subjected to violence say that they have been so repeatedly. Few women report the violence and few seek help, due to the fact that the perpetrator often is a man with whom the woman has a close relationship and because the woman has feelings of shame and guilt. Another reason is that many victims lack confidence in public authorities and administration and do not believe that they would receive help.

Concerning sexual violence, the unreported cases are of an even greater number. The actual number of rapes is estimated to 40,000 cases per year, in Sweden, which means that it is as common as cardiac infarctions.

Every year, 17 women on average are murdered by a current or former partner. An investigation showed that 42 per cent of the women killed in the 1990s had previously reported to the police that they had been subjected to violence and threats.

The effects of domestic violence, as reflected in public health statistics, go far beyond the immediate physical damage. A victim who does not receive help and support, risks developing various chronic and long-term symptoms, as for example pain, anxiety, depression and posttraumatic stress, health issues that may compromise the victim's ability to work and cause extended sick leaves. Diseases of the stomach and problems related to pregnancy, childbirth and sexual relations are also common in this group. Exposure to violence often affects women's entire life situation, socially, legally and economically.

Certain groups of women are more vulnerable. Disabled, young, immigrant, homeless and drug abusing women are examples of such groups. Society tends to focus on these women's disability, age, foreign descent, homelessness or drug abuse instead of dealing with the violence to which they are exposed. Violence also occurs in same-sex relationships and lesbians are at risk of not getting the help they need, because of lack of knowledge about homosexual persons' life situation.

Violence against women also affects the health and well-being of children. According to the Swedish Save the Children, 100,000 to 200,000 children, annually, are witnessing violence in their home. The Swedish Committee against Child Abuse estimate that 10 per cent of all children have at some time experienced violence in their home and that about half of them experience it often.

The cost of men's violence against women in Sweden amounts to about 2–2.5 billion Swedish kronor (SEK) a year.

In Sweden, the state, county councils and municipalities are responsible for providing shelter and support for victims of violence. Kvinnofridslinjen is a national effort to facilitate the seeking for help and to make sure that women who are subjected to violence and threats receive the assistance they need. The helpline does not replace existing resources but serves as a complement. Kvinnofridslinjen is part of the process in improving accessibility and in increasing the cooperation between different organisations and other societal counterparts in the elimination of violence against women.

4. Making it Easier to Seek Help

Women who are subjected to violence is a large and heterogeneous group encompassing women from all strata of society, at all ages. However, there are common experiences and understanding about what it means to be exposed to violence, the consequences and the needs that arise because of it. This knowledge is the basis for the development of Kvinnofridslinjen.

Above all, it is important to facilitate for the victim to seek help. Many women who are subjected to violence live with a partner who controls them. It may therefore be difficult to seek help, without running the risk of being subjected to further violence. Hence, efforts to help must be adapted to their life situations.

Kvinnofridslinjen is always open, so that women can call whenever they have the opportunity and whenever it is convenient to them, whether it is an emergency situation or if the call is the result of a decision that she has come to over time.

Target group and objectives

Target group

Kvinnofridslinjen caters to all women who are subjected to violence, and their close relatives, who need support and information about institutions and organisations that provide help, whether the violence is physical, psychological and/or sexual. Kvinnofridslinjen sometimes also receives calls from persons who have come in contact with such women and who seek information on their behalf.

Overall objective

Kvinnofridslinjen's overall objective is to give as many women as possible support and help in the process of changing their lives into an existence without violence.

Kvinnofridslinjen will achieve this objective by providing

- Easy accessibility
- Guaranteed anonymity and privacy
- Competent staff
- Practical information
- Professional support and good conduct.

The following is a brief description of Kvinnofridslinjen's measures and guidelines for achieving the above objectives.

Easy accessibility

Kvinnofridslinjen is open to all women who are subjected to violence and their close relatives, in all of Sweden 24 hours a day, all year around. The call is free of charge. Text telephone (TTY) is available, as well as interpreter services.

In order to increase awareness of Kvinnofridslinjen and to spread the phone number, 020-50 50 50, information via posters, calling cards and adverts have been distributed all over the country, as well as over the Internet.

The website www.kvinnofridslinjen.se caters directly to women who are subjected to violence. It gives them the opportunity to get to know Kvinnofridslinjen before calling and may serve as a stepping stone in lifting the receiver and actually making the call.

Guaranteed anonymity and privacy

The staff at Kvinnofridslinjen work under professional secrecy and confidentiality. The callers can remain anonymous and the call does not show on the telephone bill. The staff can not see the telephone number and can therefore not call back.

The website www.kvinnofridslinjen.se gives information on how to conceal a visit to the site.

Competent staff

Nurses, midwives and social workers, who have at least five years of work experience and are used to support people in crisis, work at Kvinnofridslinjen. Prior to the opening, all of the staff attended a university course in the subject of men's violence against women and in telephone dialogue methodology. The course was drawn up and held by NCK.

Practical information

Via Kvinnofridslinjen the caller can receive information about the services and support that are available nationally and locally where the caller lives. The staff has access to a compilation of information on services pertaining to battered women and their children. The compilation of services and organisations is updated regularly.

Professional support and good conduct

The role of the staff at Kvinnofridslinjen is to affirm and support the callers in finding a way forward according to their particular life situation. No issue is too small! The staff's job is to listen and answer questions.

5. A Year of Extensive Preparations

Extensive resources and preparations are required to launch a national helpline with professional staff, which is open 24 hours a day, all year around and which has comprehensive nationwide information about support organisations, pertaining to abused women and their children. By the time Kvinnofridslinjen was inaugurated by the Minister of Integration and Equal Opportunities, Nyamko Sabuni, in the beginning of December 2007, preparatory work had been going on at NCK for about a year.

The establishment of Kvinnofridslinjen was a pioneer work that required knowledge in a broad range of disciplines, in addition to significant amounts of work efforts. A prerequisite for implementing the project was the expertise that had been built up since 1994.

The preparatory work in building up the helpline included the recruitment of personnel, identification of support services covering the entire country as well as the development of technical solutions. A special university course for the staff at Kvinnofridslinjen was designed and held in the autumn, prior to the opening. Simultaneously, the marketing campaign was launched to make the helpline known nationwide. These work efforts are described in detail in the following chapters.

The work was managed by a steering group and implemented by a project group. External competence was consulted for advice on technical solutions, as well as marketing and publicity.

Reference groups and exchange of experiences

An important part of the planning and preparatory work of Kvinnofridslinjen was exchanging experiences with other organisations running helplines or similar services, and with organisations working specifically with women subjected to violence and their children.

NCK convened a reference group in order to discuss experiences and ideas, and to get continuous feedback on the ongoing construction of Kvinnofridslinjen. Their input was valuable for the process. An important goal for the reference group was to establish Kvinnofridslinjen's role as a complement to existing organisations.

Reference group

In the reference group the following organisations were represented.

- Riksorganisationen för kvinnojourer och tjejjourer i Sverige (Roks), The national organisation for women's and young women's shelters in Sweden
- Sveriges kvinno- och tjejjourers riksförbund (SKR), The Swedish Association of Women's Shelters and Young Women's Empowerment Centres
- Terrafem, Women's shelter and helpline for immigrant women
- Barnens rätt i samhället (BRIS), Children's Rights in Society
- Brottsofferjourernas Riksförbund (BOJ), Crime Victim Support National Association

- Forum Kvinnor och Funktionshinder, Forum Women and Disability
- Juristjouren, National legal counselling service
- Riksförbundet för sexuellt likaberättigande, The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights
- Riksföreningen stödcentrum mot incest (Rsci), National organisation for victims of incest
- Länsstyrelsen i Skåne – kvinnofrid och hedersvåld, Skåne County Administrative Board, the unit dealing with women subjected to men's violence and violence in the name of honour
- Socialjouren i Uppsala, Uppsala municipality social emergency care.

Since the launch of Kvinnofridslinjen, the reference group continues to meet to exchange experiences.

Study visits and consultations

During the construction of Kvinnofridslinjen, the reference group made study visits to several other authorities and organisations, at other women's shelters and to a national helpline for battered women in the Netherlands.

Many other organisations and services were also consulted, such as different units within the health care services, emergency care (SOS Alarm), projects of county councils and municipalities, twelve different organisations for functional and mental disabilities and interpretation services.

The technical solutions were developed in cooperation with a special unit for Medical Information Technology at Uppsala University Hospital.

6. Staff with Genuine Competence

Kvinnofridslinjen is staffed by 18 employees sharing the equivalent of 10.65 full-time positions.

The staff encompasses nurses, midwives and social workers. Since several professional categories are represented, they are able to share their respective specialised knowledge and learn from each other. This synergy gained from the diversity of expertise, not only enhances the competence within the group, but also increases the quality of the service.

The workplace is situated in Uppsala. Technically, it would be possible for the employees to answer the calls from other parts of the country. However, particularly in the initial development phase, it is of great value that the staff meets and interacts at the workplace. In this way, uniform procedures and consistency are achieved.

All employees work both day and night shifts in order to guarantee a consistent quality at all times.

Recruitment

The staff at Kvinnofridslinjen is recruited through advertisements in the daily papers, as well as on several websites covering the whole country.

Qualifications

All the employees at Kvinnofridslinjen have an academic degree, as well as professional experience in supporting people in a crisis situation. A requirement for working at the helpline is a minimum of five-year professional experience. Much emphasis has been placed on personal ability and characteristics, such as stress tolerance, self-insight and ability to work in a team.

Prior to the launch, the staff attended a mandatory university course in the subject of Men's violence against women, designed and held by NCK. The course is described in more detail in the chapter: A Specially-designed University Course.

Tasks

The main task of the staff is to support and help women exposed to violence, by listening, going into dialogue and providing information about support and services available in the vicinity of the caller's home, or if necessary in other parts of the country. The work of the staff also includes administrative tasks.

7. Up-to-date Information on Support throughout the Country

An important part of Kvinnofridslinjen's service is to provide information on victim support around the country. Prior to the launch, a detailed survey of organisations and services was carried out. The survey also documented the special target groups of these organisations and what kind of service they could offer. The information was compiled in a database available to Kvinnofridslinjen's staff, so that they can search for and locate the right information to present to the callers, guiding them to the relevant organisation.

Carrying out the survey required a work effort equal to a fulltime position during two years.

Approach

All relevant service units of every municipality and county council were surveyed along with local and national NGOs. Each service unit and NGO was contacted directly and was informed about Kvinnofridslinjen. Questionnaires were used in order to collect precise data about the different services. The purpose was to create a practical tool that could be used to search for detailed information on support and services suitable for the individual caller.

Categories of services

Three main categories of service units were identified in the survey: social welfare offices, health care services and NGOs. These, in their turn, were categorised according to their target groups: women subjected to violence, exposed children and violent men.

Accessibility, Competence and Orientation

Each service was documented according to its orientation, competence and accessibility. Specific questionnaires were created for each type of service; for example the social welfare offices, women's shelters and specialised clinics within the health care services.

Accessibility includes everything from opening hours and catchment areas, to whether there is a fee, as well as whether the place is accessible to disabled people, whether they have text telephone and whether pets are allowed in the shelters. In the case of health care services, it can be a question of whether referral or appointments are required. Different types of competence within the service also affect the accessibility. For example, knowledge on the life situation of gay, lesbian, bi- and transsexuals, as well as language proficiencies or knowledge about vulnerable groups increases the accessibility to certain people.

Some services have a broad focus, such as the Crime Victim Support Organisations whose target group are all victims of crime. Other services have more specialised focus such as violence in same-sex relationships, sexual violence or girls and women who are subjected to violence in the name of honour.

User-friendly and up-to-date

The objective has been to make the database as user-friendly as possible. The staff is able to search for services by different criteria such as geographical location, category of service, particular needs and so forth. This means that every search can be specified according to the individual needs of the caller. For example, a shelter in southern Sweden where pets are accepted and where support groups for children are available; or a rehabilitation centre in Stockholm with separate living for women or a Spanish-speaking helpline for legal counselling.

The staff may also give the caller information about alternative services in the area where they live, for example different women's shelters, counselling services or clinics within the health care services.

Services and organisations change and develop continuously and the information needs to be updated. This is done in two ways: either through direct contact with the services and organisations or via contact persons at a central level in the municipalities, county councils and national organisations in order to find out whether there have been any changes.

Annually, each organisation is requested to answer a questionnaire whether the information at Kvinnofridslinjen is still valid.

Examples of services

Municipalities and county councils

Social welfare offices, family law units, women's shelters, helplines, shelters for homeless people, rehabilitation centres, services offering counselling and advice as well as special police units.

Health care services

Emergency care, gynaecological clinics, specialist clinics, psychiatric clinics, children and adolescent psychiatric clinics, children's emergency wards, family planning clinics and youth contraceptive counselling services.

NGOs

Women's and girls' shelters and crime victim support organisations.

8. Five Telephone Lines

Kvinnofridslinjen has its own telephone exchange which is connected to Uppsala County Council's switchboard. The telephone exchange currently has five telephone lines and a queue system that allows two calls in line. The staff can see how many calls there are in the queue and for how long they have been waiting.

Before the call is answered, the callers first hear a recorded message greeting them welcome to Kvinnofridslinjen. If all the lines are busy, the call is placed in line, and if the queue is full the caller is asked to call back later, or in case of emergency, call 112. There is also a separate line for the text telephone.

The technology is continuously reviewed, and a special system administration group has been formed. In order to increase availability, the number of lines may be increased in the future.

9. A Specially-designed University Course

During the autumn of 2007, the staff at Kvinnofridslinjen started their employment by attending the university course Telephone Support to Women Subjected to Violence (7.5 course credits). The course was drawn up and implemented by NCK.

Objective

The objective of the course was to provide knowledge on the subject of men's violence against women, in addition to knowledge about the support available at the social services, healthcare and NGOs. The participants should gain insight and understanding of the life situation of women subjected to violence, and learn the methods of support and advice over the telephone.

Goal

The goal was to make sure that after the course each participant should be able to:

- Identify and analyse the caller's needs and give adequate advice.
- Have good knowledge about services to women subjected to violence and be able to handle the database created for this purpose.

Course plan

The structure of the course was based on the interdisciplinary university course that NCK has been running every year since 2001. The cornerstone in this type of education is the insight that the course must include knowledge of the actual subject as well as opportunity for the participants to reflect and talk to the teachers and with each other about their own attitudes and values.

Prior to making the course plan, the Swedish organisation Barnens Rätt i Samhället, BRIS (Children's Rights in Society) was contacted. BRIS has a long-standing experience of training volunteers for the Children's Helpline and was therefore of great help in planning the course. Some American training programmes were also studied.

Content

The course was divided into three main themes: basic knowledge on men's violence against women, including vulnerable groups; dialogue methodology and administration in addition to documentation.

Basic knowledge

In this unit the following was incorporated:

- Violence against women – a global problem
- UN Declarations and Conventions
- Violence against Women in Sweden – Criminal statistics, Prevalence studies
- Consequences of violence, for battered women and their children
- The Swedish Prison and Probation Service's Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme, (IDAP)
- Legislative questions, Secrecy, Confidentiality and the Obligation to inform public authorities
- Documentation and Evidence Collection
- Sexual abuse of children
- The responsibility of public authorities and administration, health care services, social services and the judicial system
- Vulnerable groups: violence during pregnancy, violence in the name of honour, violence against gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gendered persons, violence against disabled women, violence against immigrant women, violence against drug abusing women and homeless women.

Dialogue methodology

The course encompassed the basics of dialogue methodology including practical training and role play.

Data administration

The staff was taught to handle Kvinnofridslinjen's database on support services, and they were also trained to document and to collect statistical information.

Implementation

The course was held during a five week period in cooperation with the unit of Uppsala University Education.

Examination

The examination consisted of three parts: a written assignment; performance during practical training, individually and in groups; and an individual examination in dialogue methodology.

Evaluation

At the end of the course both an oral and a written evaluation were carried out. The course was highly rated by the participants. In June 2008, yet another evaluation of the course was carried out as a follow-up on what the employees felt that they had gained from the course,. Once again, it was confirmed that the education had been of value in the work at Kvinnofridslinjen.

10. Spreading the Word about Kvinnofridslinjen

A helpline must be well-known to be of use. Consequently, NCK launched a nationwide information campaign about Kvinnofridslinjen in cooperation with an advertising agency and a public relations agency. The goal was to reach as many women subjected to violence as possible. The campaign was first and foremost focused on making the name Kvinnofridslinjen known and on exposing the telephone number, 020-50 50 50. Since then, the message has been spread via advertisements in newspapers, magazines and over the Internet, as well as by means of information materials, media coverage and the website www.kvinnofridslinjen.se.

Strategies

The core of the campaign was to convey that Kvinnofridslinjen provides reliable service and offers adequate support and correct information, emphasizing that men's violence against women is a common problem in society. Men's violence against women is a complex issue that often provokes strong emotions. The objective of the campaign was above all to inform, not to start a debate that in the worst-case scenario would interfere with the objective to reach women who are exposed to violence. The purpose of the guidelines for design, text and images was consequently to awaken public concern, not to upset. The campaign was designed to make the receiver feel sympathetic and think: "It could have been me". Or, "This describes me or someone I know. It is a good thing that Kvinnofridslinjen exists."

It is important that women subjected to violence recognise themselves and that they identify Kvinnofridslinjen as a service that is targeted towards them.

The name Kvinnofridslinjen

The name of the new helpline was to convey the purpose of the service and at the same time it should be easy to say and remember. After having considered various alternatives everyone agreed on the name "Kvinnofridslinjen". The name is a combination of the two words "kvinnofrid" and "linjen". "Kvinnofrid" is an old Swedish concept that roughly means women's safety, protection or peace. "Linjen" stands for line as in helpline or telephone line.

The logotype

The design of Kvinnofridslinjen's logotype was to signal expertise and credibility without being too formal or bureaucratic. The result was a logotype combining the name and a symbol that can be perceived as a stylized ear or possibly a visual illustration of a ring signal.

The colours of Kvinnofridslinjen's logotype are red and grey matching NCK's and Uppsala University's graphic profiles.

Information materials and adverts

Adverts and information materials were produced by an advertising agency in close cooperation with NCK.

The adverts were published in morning papers, weekly and monthly magazines, on the Internet, as well as on buses and in the subway. The advertising campaign was conducted during three different periods of the year. Reader surveys in popular media showed that the adverts had attracted the attention of many readers and that they received high overall ratings. The banner adverts on the Internet also proved to be effective. The number of readers that clicked on adverts to get more information about Kvinnofridslinjen was considerably larger than the average on several other websites.

In order to spread the information about Kvinnofridslinjen, posters, calling cards, postcards and brochures were produced.

The calling cards have the same size as a credit card and can easily be presented in small card racks placed on tables or counters. At the launch, calling cards and card racks were distributed to all pharmacies, police stations, different units within the health care and to many NGOs. Since 2008, the card is also included in the evidence collection kit nationally used by the health care, in cases of rape and sexual assault.

The posters are based on a visual message symbolising violence against women. One of the posters is targeted towards women in older age groups and aims to illustrate violence within the family, portraying a coffee cup that has been dropped and spilled, in an otherwise orderly home environment. The other poster is aimed at younger women and illustrates a fashionable handbag and a mobile phone that has been dropped on a rainy and dark sidewalk.

Brochures, posters, calling cards and postcards can be ordered free of charge via the website www.kvinnofridslinjen.se.

The Website

The website www.kvinnofridslinjen.se is an important complement to the helpline and is directly addressed to women who are subjected to violence. The website offers an opportunity to get familiar with Kvinnofridslinjen, and may be a step on the way to actually making the call.

There are also short but comprehensive facts about men's violence against women and violence in same-sex relationships, which may be of use to those who hesitate to call.

Some of the information is directed to friends and families of abused women, as well as to those who meet subjected women professionally.

The website is translated into English, and a brief presentation of Kvinnofridslinjen has been translated into an additional eleven languages, including the national minority languages.

11. Development and Improvement

The development of Kvinnofridslinjen is a pioneering work, which in many respects is still ongoing. During the first year, the documentation focused mainly on whether the calls came from the target group and to register variation in frequency of the calls during day and night. The purpose of identifying the frequency was to optimise the number of answered calls.

In 2008, NCK assigned Uppsala Clinical Research Center, (UCR) at Uppsala University to compile monthly statistics.

Documentation

Every call that is answered at Kvinnofridslinjen is registered and documented in a special form.

The callers can remain anonymous and they convey only the information they want to. The information that may be documented encompasses age, background history, type of violence, previous measures, type of help requested and measures suggested by the staff. All information is confidential.

Interpretation and follow-up

The exactness and completeness of the documentation vary according to how much information the caller conveys. The material must therefore be interpreted with caution and cannot be used as a base for comprehensive statistics.

Altogether, the calls increase the knowledge on the life situation of abused women, concerning what questions they have and what type of help they request. This knowledge is collected and analyzed by NCK, and serves as an important asset in the work for change, and in improving the situation and the support for women who are subjected to physical, psychological and sexual violence.

12. The Calls to Kvinnofridslinjen

4 December, 2007–3 December, 2008

37,841 incoming calls

During the first twelve months a total of 37,841 incoming calls were registered, including answered as well as missed calls. Every fifth caller hung up within 10 seconds, in other words already during the recorded message welcoming you to Kvinnofridslinjen. Of the remaining calls 73 per cent were responded to. The largest number of calls was registered in June (3,598), July (3,467) and October (3,464).

Most often the exposed woman herself is calling

In three cases out of four the exposed woman was calling. Around every tenth call was from a close relative or friend.

The remaining calls were from other agencies, employers of subjected women or persons seeking information about the issue of domestic violence.

Distribution over time

(per cent of all calls)

50 per cent at daytime (08–18)

33 per cent in the evenings (18–24)

17 per cent at night (00–08)

Duration of the calls

The average duration for a call was 14 minutes.

At night (00–08) the calls were fewer but on average longer.

Age of the callers

Barely half of the women told their age. The youngest person stating her age was 13 years old and the oldest 87. The average age was 38.

Geographical distribution

The caller can remain anonymous and does not have to tell from where she is calling. However, a compilation of data shows a geographical distribution all over the 21 counties of Sweden.

Visits to www.kvinnofridslinjen.se

During the first twelve months Kvinnofridslinjen's website had 79,137 visitors. The number of visits increased substantially in periods of media attention and advert campaigns.

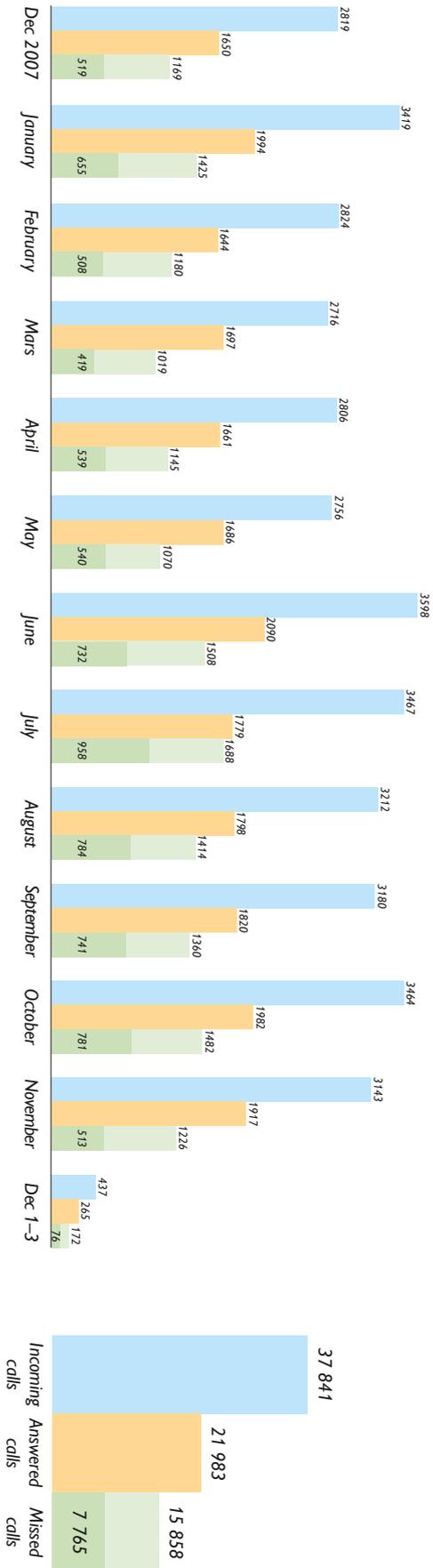
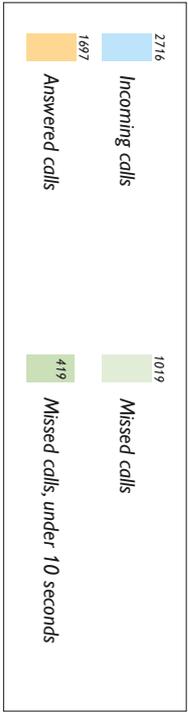


Diagram: distribution per month from 4 December, 2007 to 3 December, 2008

13. Conclusion

Kvinnofridslinjen has now been in function for several years and the expected number of calls was achieved already in the first year. The documentation of the calls show that the callers are women who are subjected to violence, or persons in their vicinity – relatives, colleagues or human resource officials – who contact the helpline. The calls come from all parts of the country and deal with violence or problems related to violence. The need for support and affirmation is immense.

Thus NCK has achieved the initial goal of the commission from the Swedish government, which was to start and operate a national helpline. As the basic structure is now complete, NCK can focus on further developing and improving the helpline, a task that will be part of the continuous efforts to assure the quality of Kvinnofridslinjen.

The experiences from the helpline increase the awareness of the life situations of abused women and their needs. This knowledge is compiled and analysed by NCK and passed on to public authorities. It is also of great importance for NCK's endeavour to develop methods so that women subjected to violence can get better help and increased legal security.

Findings

- **Easy accessibility is a necessity.**

The fact that the calls are spread over all hours, show that women who are subjected to violence need support at all times of the day and night. Kvinnofridslinjen is always staffed, regardless of time. Many callers have expressed that they appreciate being able to call at the very moment when they have the possibility or when they have the energy to act.

Queues are sometimes unavoidable. However, in accordance with the statistics of the frequency of calls, NCK adjusts the staffing so that in the future as many calls as possible can be answered.

- **Support over the telephone works.**

The possibility to call anonymously and free of charge is of great importance and sometimes it makes all the difference to a woman who is about to contact Kvinnofridslinjen. The fact that the caller can remain anonymous often makes the dialogue more honest and open. Knowing that the call is not registered on the phone bill further enhances the woman's security. The number of calls to women's shelters around Sweden has not decreased since the launch of Kvinnofridslinjen. This proves that there is a continuous need for a national helpline that offers support, information and the possibility to discuss different alternatives for a vulnerable group of women who previously lacked this opportunity.

- **Information campaigns and media are important in reaching the target group.**

Kvinnofridslinjen's posters and cards in pharmacies, health care clinics, police stations and many other public places have been of great value. Media attention and advertise-

ments in papers, magazines and on the Internet has also been of importance in reaching the target group. In connection with advertising campaigns, there is an increase of calls from abused women to Kvinnofridslinjen. Many of them say that they recognised themselves and that they understood that the helpline was there for them. This shows how important it is to inform and advertise continuously, in order to keep awareness of the helpline up-to-date and to make sure that the telephone number is easy to find whenever needed.

- **A single call can be crucial.**

A single call to Kvinnofridslinjen can be crucial for the individual woman and may spare her further suffering. It is important that society signals that men's violence against women is an issue of high priority and that there is a desire to help and to offer solutions. A national helpline combining accessibility and competence is an efficient and cost-effective way to help women subjected to violence and their relatives all over the country.