

# Violence exposure among Swedish youth

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## Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av medicine doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i Aulan, Utbildningsavdelningen, hiss 8, plan 1, Sundsvalls sjukhus, fredagen den 18 september, kl 13.00.

Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på svenska.

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Umeå 2015

**Organization**  
Umeå University  
Department of Clinical Sciences  
Obstetrics and Gynecology

**Document type**  
Doctoral thesis

**Date of publication**  
18 September, 2015

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**Title** Violence exposure among Swedish youth

## **Abstract**

**Background** Violence is a global public health problem and violence among youth is a matter of high priority. Adolescence and young adulthood are important periods for the foundation of future health. Youth victimization may have serious health consequences, making it important to address the occurrence and socio-medical context for possible interventions against violence.

**Aims** To analyze prevalence, risk patterns and gender differences in emotional, physical, sexual, and multiple-violence victimizations and the associations between violence victimization and sexual ill health, sexual risk behaviors and mental health in Swedish youth.

**Methods** A cross sectional study using two samples, a national sample from nine youth health centers in Sweden and a population-based sample from a middle-sized Swedish city. The questionnaire included standardized instruments addressing violence exposure (NorAQ), socio-demographics, mental and sexual ill-health and sexual risk behaviors, alcohol and substance use. Proportions and crude and adjusted odds ratios with a 95% CI were calculated.

**Results** A total of 2,250 young women and 920 men, aged 15-23, answered the questionnaire at the youth health centers. In upper secondary school, 1,658 women and 1,589 men, aged 15-22, answered the questionnaire.

High prevalence rates with gendered differences both in rates and in co-occurrence of different types of violence were found. Women were more often exposed to emotional violence and sexual violence than men, while men were more often physically victimized. For both women and men, violence victimization before the age of 15 was strongly associated with all types of violence victimizations during the past year.

Strong associations were found between multiple-violence victimization and poor mental health in both genders. Among the sexually experienced students, consistent associations between lifetime multiple-violence victimization and various sexual ill-health and sexual risk behaviors were found in both genders, except for non-contraceptive use.

**Conclusions** High prevalence of violence victimization in youth and strong associations between victimization, especially multiple victimization, and poor mental and sexual health were found. This needs to be recognized and addressed in social and medical settings.

**Key words** violence; adolescent; self-injurious behaviour; suicidal ideation; mental health; reproductive health; youth

**Language**  
English

**ISBN**  
978-91-7601-291-8

**ISSN**  
0346-6612

**Number of pages**  
70 + 4 papers