



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A DARK CLOUD LOOMING OVER SUMMER

The sun is out and the temperature is rising. The terraces are full, the schools are empty and there is a pleasant atmosphere. There is no doubt that summer this year will bring a lot of fun, drinks and football. Yet there is also a darker side to the favourite season of many Belgians: the figures surrounding domestic violence. Even the European Championship plays a somber factor.



Family annihilation in August

Researchers at Birmingham City University analysed 59 cases of family annihilation between 1980 and 2012. A family annihilation is a situation in which someone kills family members and later commits suicide. Unfortunately, research confirms that women and children are disproportionately victims of this type of murder.

The results of the study showed that almost 20 percent of all cases occurred in August, and almost half of the cases occurred during the weekend. These results are partly explained by the change in structure and planning during these periods. For example, divorced parents often have a specific weekend and/or holiday arrangement, which means that contact with children and (ex-)partners is longer and more frequent. The lack of school and working hours creates a greater risk of frustration and arguments. The summer thus proves to be a 'peak' in family annihilation cases. However, this is not the only family violence trigger that will occur over the next few weeks.

The European Championships

Following the European Championship, several aid organizations in the United Kingdom launched a striking campaign on domestic violence. After a long-term study, the University of Lancaster published the 2014 results on the connection between British football matches and reports of domestic violence. Those results are shocking, with an increase of as much as 38 percent when the male English football team loses. Even when the team wins or draws, the numbers increase significantly.

VRT NWS contacted the non-profit organization Zijn, Beweging tegen Geweld (To Exist, Movement against Violence, notr.) to find out how this translates to Belgian society. Although there are no specific figures for our country, the non-profit organization confirms that we can assume a comparable situation. The non-profit organization refers to the toxic combination that is often present during and after football matches: intense emotions and alcohol.



“Think of frustration and disappointment. Especially together with alcohol, that is a toxic cocktail. Then the smallest incentive can be enough for some to resort to violence, violence that can affect the entire family.”

Koen Dendoncker; Zijn, Beweging tegen Geweld

What about Belgium?

(Intra)familial violence, domestic violence, partner violence: there is no shortage of terms to describe situations in which a (former) partner, parent, family member or friend commits violence. The type of violence can also differ. Consider physical violence and abuse, but also psychological or financial violence. The variety of definitions makes it difficult to find clear figures about the phenomenon. In order to be able to paint a picture of the scale of the problem in our country, we use the figures from helpline 1712. This federal helpline is available for all questions and reports regarding violence, abuse and child abuse.

In 2023, helpline 1712 received a total of 9424 calls. That is an average of more than 25 per day and more than three times as many as in 2012. They identified 12,799 possible victims of violence, with more than 85 percent in family situations. 59 percent of the victims are minors and there are almost twice as many female as male victims.



These are confronting figures, and probably only the tip of the iceberg. The threshold for help is high, and the helpline is not always accessible due to under-subsidization.

The causes of domestic violence are very diverse. For example, jealousy or financial unrest can be a trigger, but a divorce or other emotional event can also fuel violence. It therefore remains important to be alert and seek help if necessary.



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Victim of violence or have more questions? Contact helpline 1712 by telephone, by email or via the chat box on their website.

Suicidal thoughts? Contact the suicide line via 1813.

An emergency? Call the European emergency number via 112.