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Comparing four Prevalence Studies on Violence Against Women: Main results, methodology and analytical approaches.

During the last decade several European countries have conducted national studies on (men's) violence against women. The aim has been to gather knowledge regarding a problem that has been on the political agenda for over thirty years, yet highly unknown in depth. In other words there is much left to know about the living conditions of women in Europe. A central question regarding prevalence studies is, however, *what* are we trying to measure with these huge quantitative studies? What do we get to know when asking the women about their experiences? What knowledge can be produced through the surveys, and what limits does the methodology set?

In our presentation we will examine four studies that have been conducted in Europe concerning men's violence against women: The Swedish *Captured Queen* from 2001, the Finnish *Faith, Hope and Battering* from 1997, the German *Health, Well-being and Personal Safety of Women in Germany*, from 2004, and the French, *National Survey on Violence Against Women in France*, from 2001.

Sweden

The "Captured Queen" survey was conducted in 2001. The study is based on a written questionnaire, sent to 10 000 women aged 18-64, of whom 70 percent answered. The questionnaire contained (mainly) questions about violence experienced from the age of 15 by male perpetrators, divided into sections concerning

- men outside intimate relationships (unknown, neighbours, family members, colleagues, friends etc)
- men with whom the woman has or has had a intimate relationship with, but *not* been cohabiting with (boyfriends)
- former husbands and cohabitantes
- present husbands and cohabitantes

The types of violence asked about was divided into

- physical violence
- sexual violence
- criminalised threats

The women were asked to reflect on all questions regarding violence in a perspective relating to events since her 15th birthday, and during the last 12 months.

The main results show that 46 % of the women had at least once experienced violence perpetrated by a man, since their 15th birthday. The most commonly experienced form of violence is sexual violence, which seems to be frequently committed *outside* intimate relationships. 34 % of all women had experienced sexual violence some time after their 15th birthday. Physical violence, 25 % of the women had experienced. From the main results it can be said that physical violence mainly is reported from within a partner relationship, all though 10 % of all women had experienced violence from a man with whom they had no intimate relation.

In Captured Queen we stress the importance of using *analytical tools to interpret the answers*, and not look at the answers/the “results” as mere facts or stating an objective truth about the prevalence of violence against women. In order to determine relevant tools, we have been looking at earlier research on violence against women as of the normalisation process (Lundgren 1985, 1989, 1993) and the difficulties for the subjected women to *interpret violence as violence* as long as she is within the relationship with the perpetrator.

Finland

The Finnish study, *Faith Hope and Battering*, was published in 1997 and based on a written questionnaire, sent to 7000 women aged 18-74, of which 70 % took part in the study. The questionnaire is in many ways similar to the Swedish (which was made after the Finnish).

The main results show that 40 % of the women had experienced violence from a man since their 15th birthday. The Finnish study, as opposed to the Swedish and French, but like the German, puts its main focus on violence in intimate relations. No presentation is thus made regarding different kinds of violence outside intimate relationships, but physical violence

seems, as in the Swedish Captured Queen, to be frequently committed by the woman's partner. Or, to put it in another way: might sexual violence be more difficult to talk about, or to identify as violence, when committed by a partner?

Germany

The German study was published in 2004 and was based on a combined interview and written questionnaire. The age of the women participating was 18-85 and the rate of yield amounted to 52 %, in all 10 264 women. The main results show that 40 % of the women at least once had experienced violence, 37 % report experiences of physical violence, and 13 % of sexual violence. The study's focus is upon violence in *intimate* partner relations, and questions are asked about violence conducted by men and women.

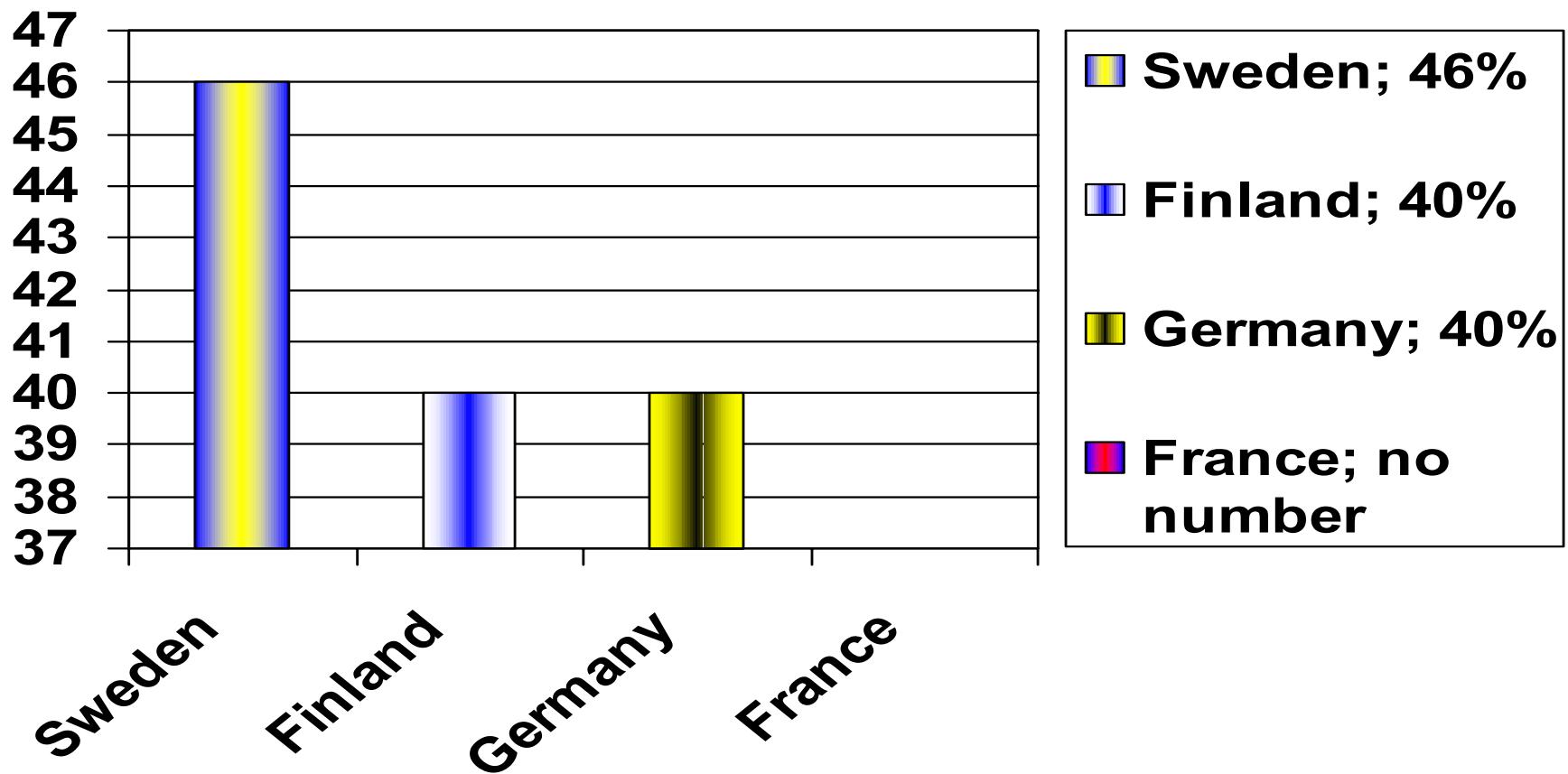
France

The French ENVEFF-study, *National Study on Violence Against Women in France*, was conducted in 2000. The study was based on telephone interviews (using computer assisted telephone interviewing) with a sample of 6970 women aged between 20 and 59. Like the German study, but unlike the Swedish and Finnish, violence perpetrated both by women and men was included. According to the main results, 17 % of the women have experienced physical violence since their 18th birthday, and 11 % had experienced sexual violence since their 15th birthday. The main results from the French study locate violence in three different contexts (intimate relationships, work place and public places) during the previous 12 months, whereas it sets focus on different types of violence – physical and sexual – when the question relates to a life time (post childhood) perspective.

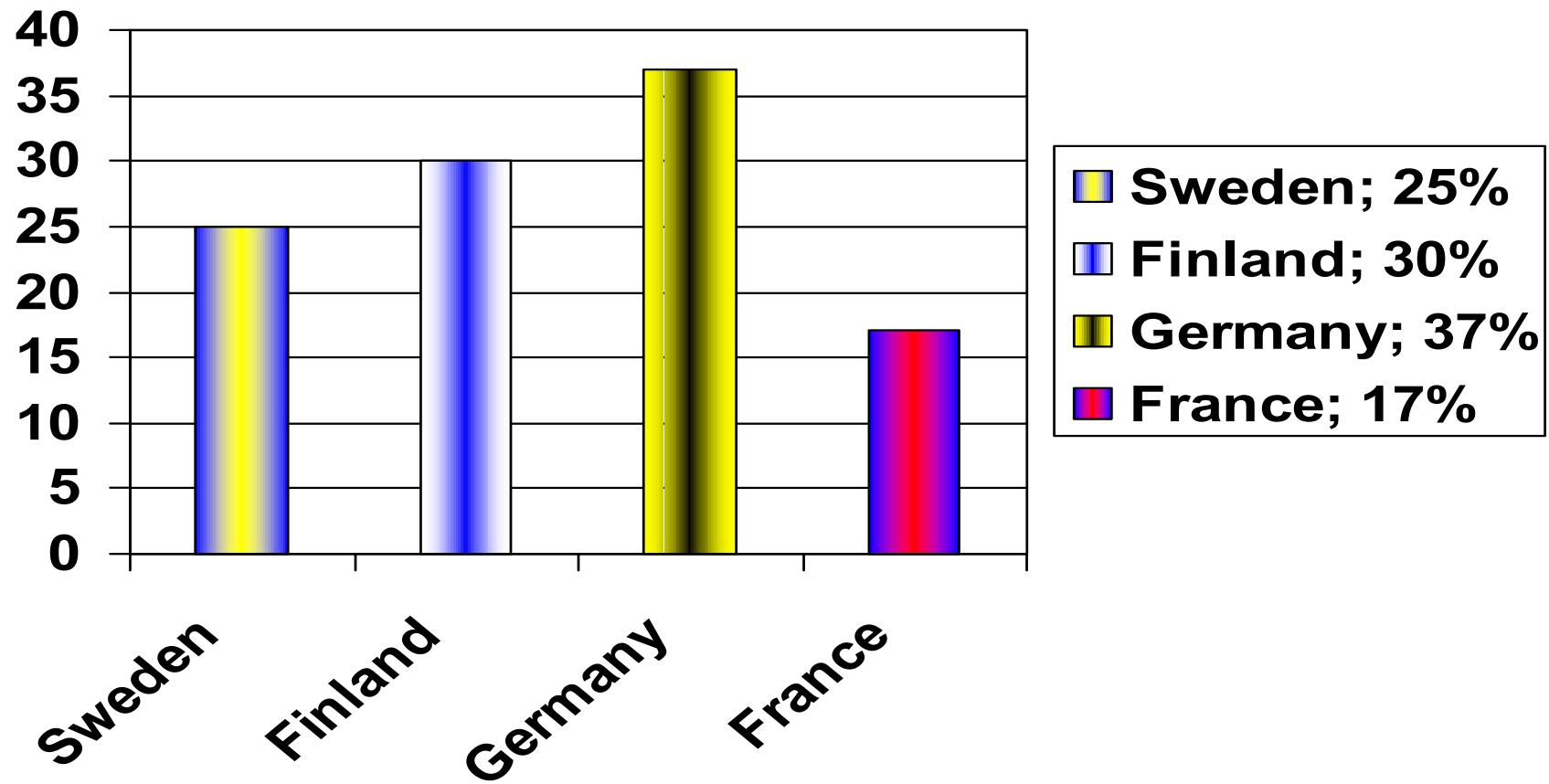
Comment

These four studies all differ, not least regarding definitions and methodology. However; the greatest differences are, we argue, seen in *how the results are understood*: As representing facts, mere answers from the women about the state of violence in their lives, *or* as also representing constructions; interpretations made by the women of the questions and of their own life situations, and – not the least – of the researchers when trying to put the results together to a comprehensive piece of knowledge. These differences relate, we suggest, to different understandings of violence and knowledge, and a shift of focus follows, implicit in the studies. The presentation will elaborate further on these differences, as well as highlighting some similarities between the studies.

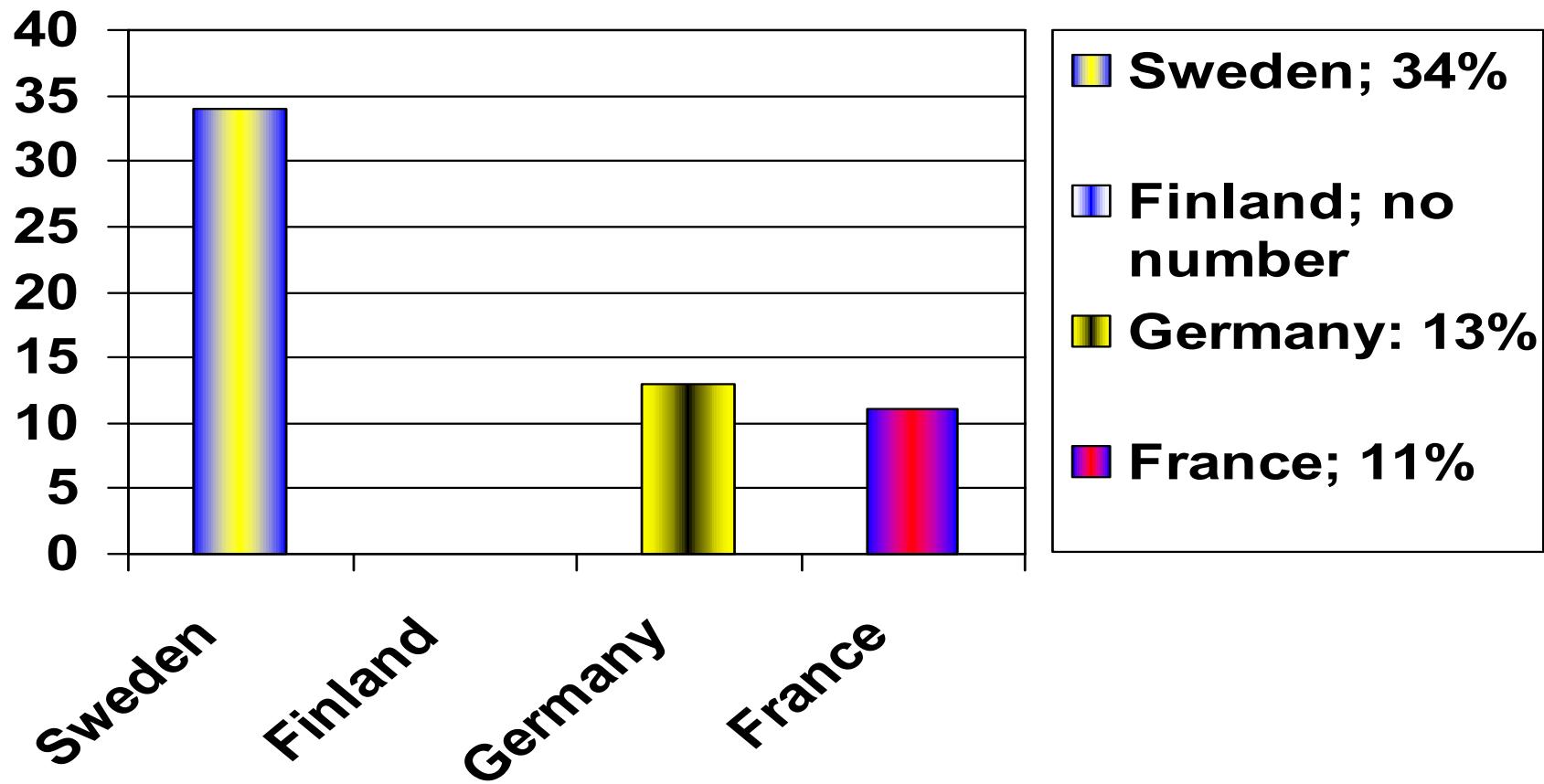
Total lifetime experience of violence



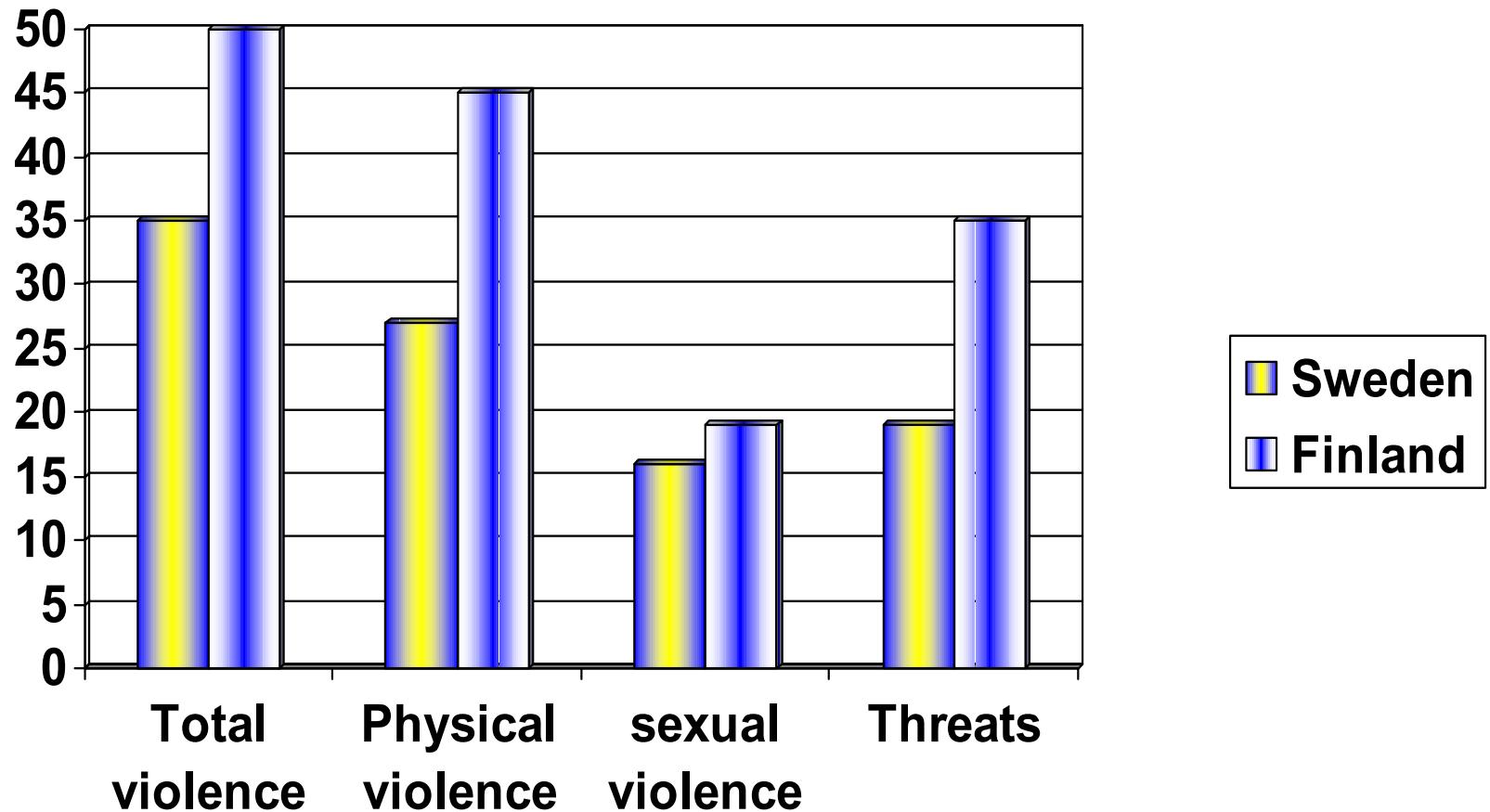
Indicators of physical violence since age 15 or 18



Indicators of sexual violence since age 15



Violence by former husband/cohabitant partner



Violence by present husband/cohabitant partner

