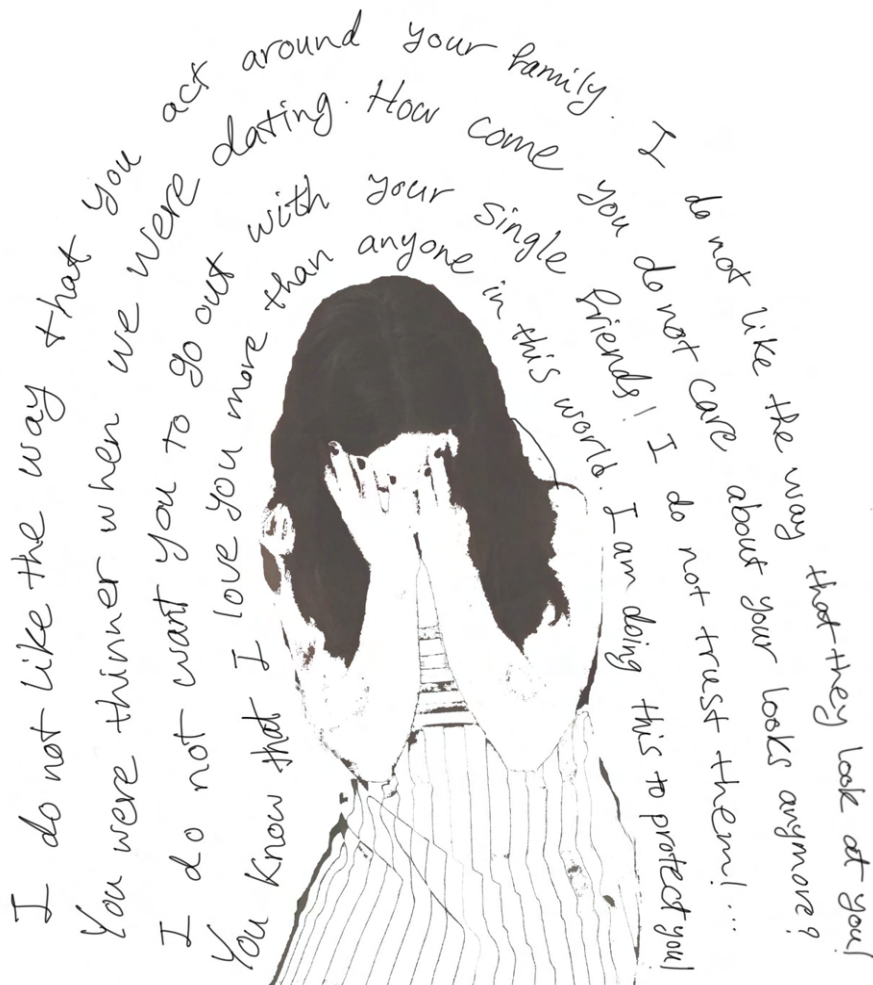


# BEHIND THE WALLS

Exploring how architecture can be a mode of inquiry on questions of intimate partner violence.



Hoda Rajabi Gajin

Master's thesis in Architecture and Planning Beyond Sustainability

Chalmers University of Technology  
Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering

Examiner: Marco Adelfio  
Supervisor: Emilio da Cruz Brandao

**BEHIND THE WALLS.**

*The walls that hide things beyond their surfaces.*

*The walls that keep secrets.*

*The walls contain what is not highlighted, not known, or not talked about.*

*Behind the walls is that secret space.*

*It is the sense of not only walls.*

*It is not only about the physical walls but also about the mental walls that every person builds to protect themselves.*

*They are the obstacles to my thesis because they could not be taken away when I wanted to reach people.*



### **BEHIND THE WALLS**

Exploring how architecture can be a mode of inquiry  
on questions of intimate partner violence.

Master's Thesis in Architecture  
© Hoda Rajabi Gajin  
Gothenburg, Spring 2023

Chalmers University of Technology  
Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering,  
MSc Architecture and Planning Beyond Sustainability

Thesis Direction Design Activism Beyond Borders  
Examiner: Marco Adelfio  
Supervisor: Emilio da Cruz Brandao

## **Abstract**

Every three weeks, a woman is killed by a man in Sweden. In 2021, 38 300 crimes of assault and 8 600 rapes against women and girls were reported which is more than one rape per hour per year.

“ In 19 cases of the confirmed cases of lethal violence in 2021, victims and perpetrators were related by a close relationship (partner or ex-partner), which accounted for 17 percent of all cases of lethal violence. In 2020, the corresponding number was 17 cases (14%)” (Brå, n.d., para. 6).

There are many different types of men's violence against women in an intimate partner relationship. Intimate partner violence (IPV) has a variety of meanings for different researchers. For purposes of this thesis, the definition used for IPV will be defined as any type of violence that happens in an intimate partner relationship. The victim and perpetrator have a history of close relationships with each other as a spouse or partner.

The question asked in this thesis is: How can ethnographic work and architectural design methods make architecture discipline engage with questions on non-physical violence in intimate partner relationships?

In order to answer this question, the theoretical aim has been to understand the psychology of abuse and find behaviors in an intimate partner relationship that causes violence. Its applied purpose has been to explore in which way architectural design can contribute to preventing and intervening in violence. By exploring a design approach that enables speculative visualization that tells narratives of sensitive subjects, the hope is to raise awareness among women and young girls in order to empower them in society.

The studies led to the creation of a methodology working with spatial narratives and collecting stories to unveil and contextualize them. This included creative workshops using architectural instruments such as drawings, clay, surveys, etc. to gather personal experiences with intimate partner violence.

*Intimate partner relationship violence (IPV) | types of domestic violence | non-physical abuse | psychology of abuse | psychological, emotional, and verbal violence*



Graphical **manifesto** by Author

**BE AWARE OF SOCIAL ISSUES.** As architects we must understand the social issues regarding non-physical intimate partner violence in order to spread awareness through design.

**INVOLVE TARGET GROUPS IN DESIGN PROCESS.** The design process must be done in a way that is sensitive to the target **group** so that those who feel ashamed or unwilling to talk are able to share their stories.

**CREATE SAFE SPACES.** We need safe spaces for vulnerable women to gather and socialize as well as exchange experiences.

Written **manifesto** by Author

## About the author

*From Urmia, Iran*

*hodarajabi1987@gmail.com  
+46 (0) 735.09 01 96*



### Position

I was raised in a patriarchal country. Growing up in such a society, I always compared myself to the boys and wondered why I cannot have the same rights to express myself and make decisions about my own life. I have been questioning why girls have half as much value as boys since they are born. Most of the girls I knew could not choose whom to marry or they could not get a divorce, they were not even able to take care of their children, because the law always favors men. I have friends who experienced abuse in their relationships, but they could not speak up since they were women. They were most economically dependent on their husband, or society would judge them if they leave their marriage. Even though I am not in that country anymore, it kept haunting me why women in these societies have no voice.

Unfortunately, this problem is not only for women in developing countries, it is happening all over the world even in such an equal society as Sweden. I have always wanted to do something for women and be able to stop the violence against them. In and with this project, I feel that I can help some women and young girls to improve their lives. When thinking of doing my project, I realized that the most important thing for me is to spread awareness, give women a voice, and empower them. My passion helped me work on this issue and investigate how architecture can contribute to preventing and intervening in intimate partner violence.

### Education

***Master programme of Architecture and planning beyond sustainability***, Chalmers University of Technology  
Gothenburg, Sweden

*Studios: Design and planning for social inclusion, Sustainable architectural design, Residential healthcare - housing for seniors, Thesis direction of Design Activism Beyond Borders*

***Bachelor of Architectural Technology and Engineering***, University of Nabi Akram  
Tabriz, Iran

***2-year programme in Computer engineering***, Azad University (IAU)  
Mahabad, Iran

### Work experience

***Building permit architect***, Gothenburg Municipality 2021-now

***Building permit architect***, Lerum Municipality 2016-2021

***Trainee***  
*Framtidens samhällsbyggare omgång 3, (Framtiden bygg utveckling AB, Lokalförvaltningen Gothenburg municipality, Stadsbyggnadsförvaltningenkontoret Gothenburg municipality planavdelning, bygglovsenheten Lerum municipality)*

***Internship***  
*Semrén & Månsson architectural office, Gothenburg*

## Contents

Abstract.....	5
Graphical manifesto .....	6
Written manifesto.....	7
About the author.....	8
Introduction	
Background and problem setting.....	11
Purpose and aim.....	12
Research questions.....	12
Delimitations.....	13
Method and process of the thesis .....	14
Exploration of the topic of non-physical violence	
Understanding domestic violence.....	17
Intimate partner violence.....	18
Non-physical abuse .....	19
Literature and reference review .....	24
Empirical work	
Deductive work	
Methodological framework.....	27
Research process	
Stakeholders mapping .....	31
Ethnography.....	36
Spatial analysis .....	57
Inductive work	
Fictocritical iteration.....	61
Survival kit.....	75
Discussion.....	84
References.....	88
Acknowledgements .....	90

# INTRODUCTION

*Background and problem setting*  
*Purpose and aim*  
*Research questions*  
*Delimitations*  
*Method and process of the thesis*

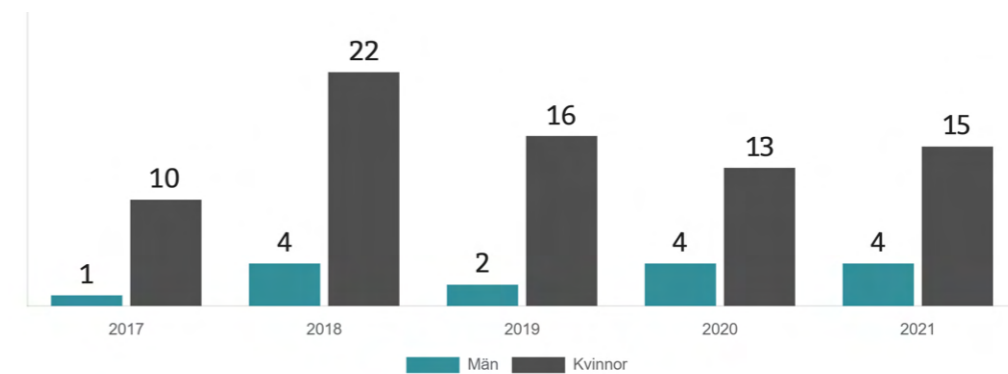
## Background and problem setting

We live in an unequal world where one of the consequences of inequality between men and women is that men's violence against women increases and women are murdered in their close relationships. As we know Sweden is one of the most equal countries in the world but still, statistics show that violence happens daily to women even in this country. This data never comes into statistics or most of the women are too afraid to report the crime, making the statistics even more inaccurate.

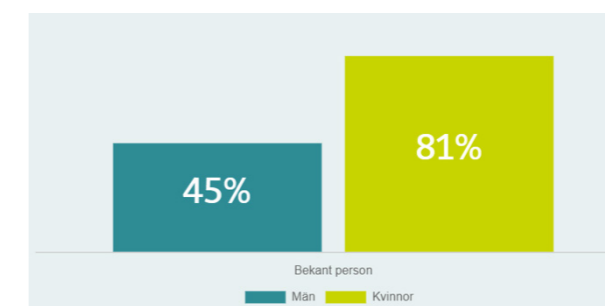
The focus of this thesis is violence that happens in a heterosexual intimate partner relationship where the perpetrator is a man, and the victim is a woman. This violence can even happen with a former partner from a previous relationship.

### Statistics on reported crimes

According to The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, Brå, in 2021, 38 700 cases of assault were reported in Sweden in which the perpetrator knew the victim. Among these reports of violence against women, in 81% of the cases, the crime was committed by an acquaintance.



Number of people who were victims of fatal violence by a partner/former partner 2017-2021  
Source: Recorded cases of fatal violence in 2021. (Brå, 2023)



Assault crimes based on the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, 2022.  
Source: The statistics of reported crimes. (Brå, 2023)

## Purpose and aim

The purpose of this thesis is to raise awareness about non-physical abuse in intimate partner relationships which is as important as physical abuse. Both are the foundation for a healthy life and it should be a priority to promote mental health and well-being. Every human being has the right to have a healthy lifestyle and healthy relationships. An intimate relationship usually contains two people, and an abusive partner has an impact on the victim's health. It is very important to invest in the health of each person to create healthy societies.

This thesis aims to educate people, especially youth from early ages, about the harmful impact of non-physical abuse to prevent future situations and to encourage these discussions in the early stages of life in order to make this topic less taboo. In doing so, this will help create a structure of sustainable families, gender equality, and human rights and promote a culture of peace and non-violence. (United Nations, 2021).

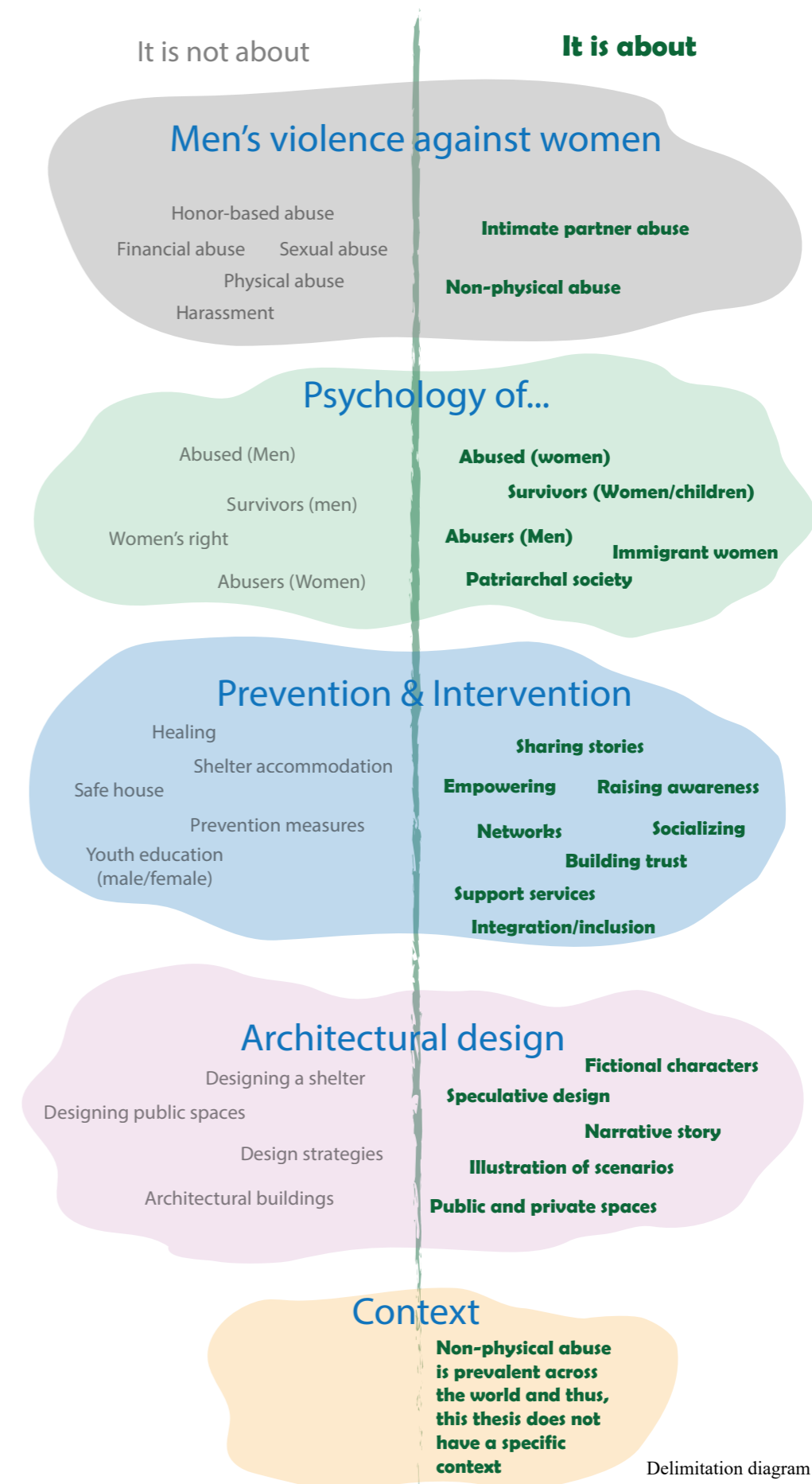
“1 in 5 women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 report experiencing physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner within a 12-month period.” (United Nations, n.d., para. 3).

Unfortunately, there are many types of violence against women in intimate partner relationships which have been normalized or the victims are not aware they are being abused. That is why many of these situations are never reported. The culture of society also makes it hard to talk about this issue openly in order to be able to prevent it. Furthermore, non-physical abuse is often less recognized and thus, this thesis aims to bring awareness to the problem.

## Research Question

*How can ethnographic work and architectural design methods make architecture discipline engage with questions on non-physical violence in intimate partner relationships?*

## Delimitation



## Process and Method Diagram

In order to expand the boundaries for the groundwork of knowledge, literature research on several topics was undertaken. The topics included domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and different types of violence.

The method of this thesis is developing a methodology for further research, and for this reason, the methods will be explained in the methodological framework chapter of empirical work.

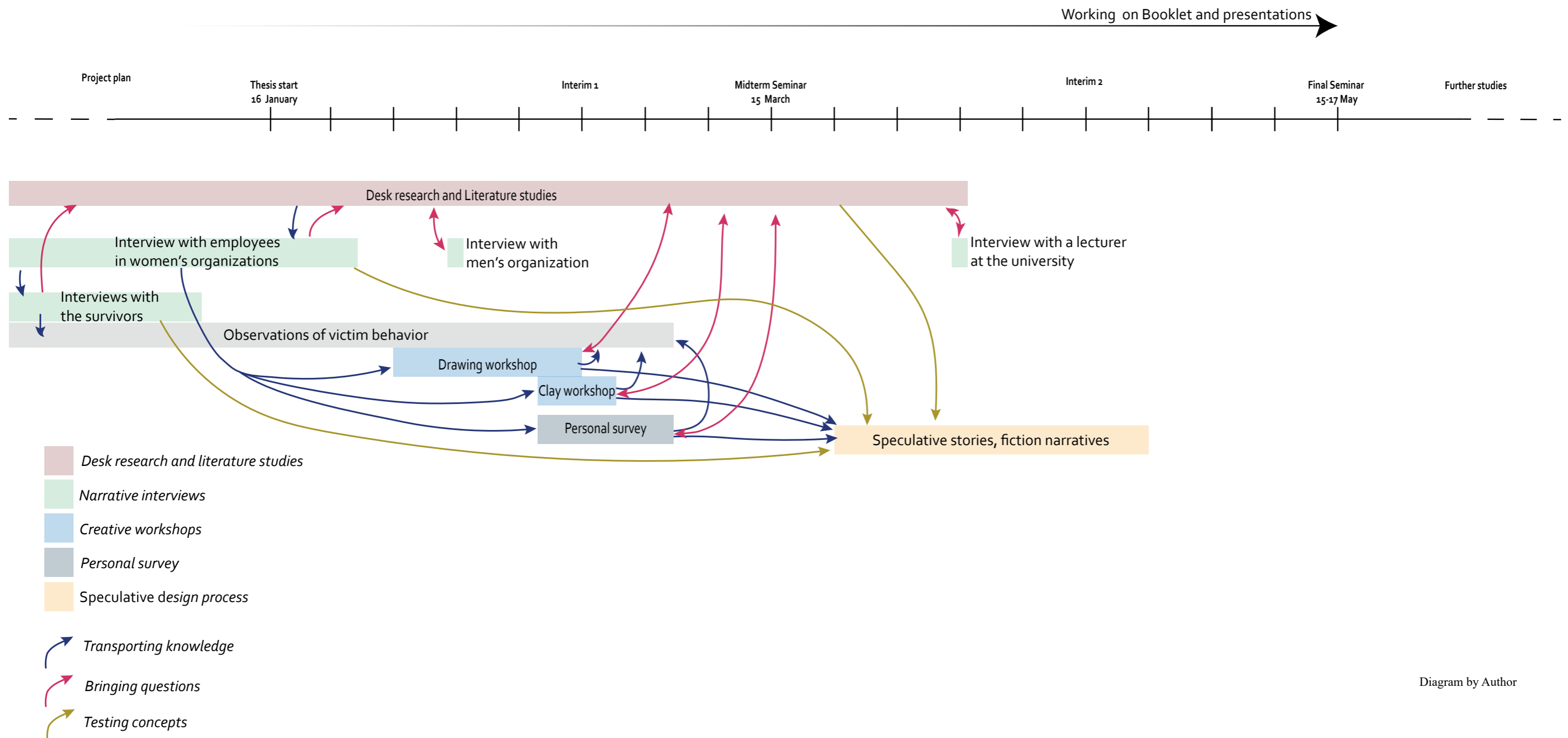


Diagram by Author



# EXPLORATION OF THE TOPIC OF NON-PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

*Understanding domestic violence*  
*Intimate partner violence*  
*Non-physical abuse*  
*Literature and reference review*

This chapter explores the concept of intimate partner violence and its different types. Then it dives more into the non-physical type and presents some reading from literature about it. The learning from literature reading will be utilized later as a basis for the empirical work.

## Understanding domestic violence

Domestic violence is a worldwide problem occurring in households across the globe no matter the culture. It includes honor-based violence which in this case a family member or a relative contributes to forcing someone to marry, and if refused, they will murder the refuser. This violence happens mostly to young girls in families who have immigrated to a western country but in some cases, it also happens to boys (Bates, 2021).

Johnson states that abusive behavior is often exhibited in an opposite-sex relationship where the man controls a woman. “Some people use violence as one of many tactics in a general strategy aimed at taking complete control over their partner... Others may become violent in order to resist their partner’s attempts to control them” (Johnson, 2008).

*“Violence is any act directed towards another person, which damages, pains, frightens or offends, making this person do something against their will or refrain from doing something they want”.*

(Isdal, 2017, p. 34, own translation)

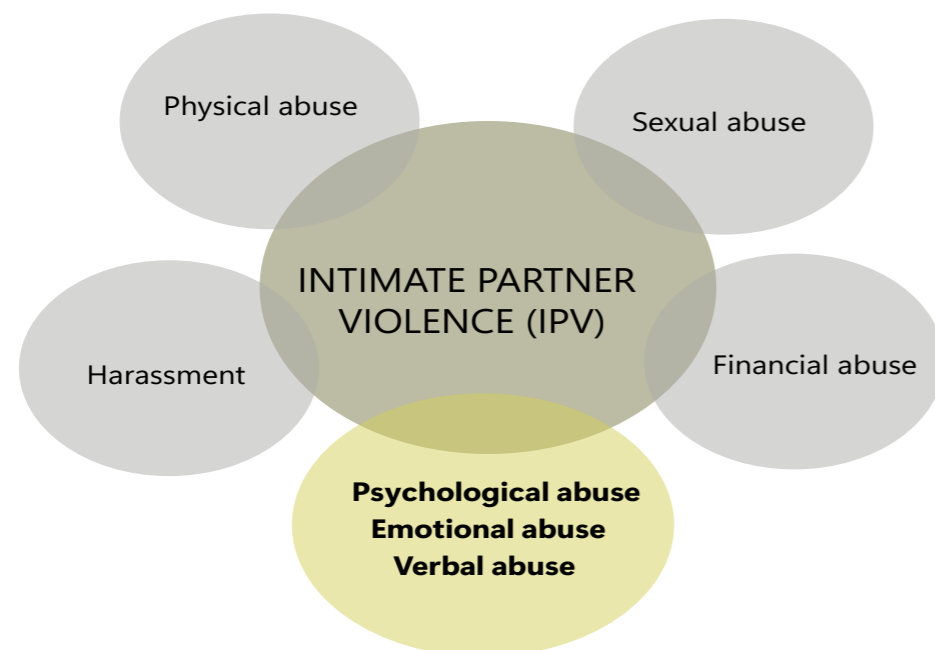
## Intimate partner violence

Depending on the context, the definition of intimate partner violence changes. Furthermore, researchers have categorized the various types of intimate partner violence differently.

Through my research, I have found several key elements in literature that remain the same. Abuse can be categorized as physical abuse, psychological/emotional/verbal abuse, financial abuse, sexual abuse, harassment, etc.

The focus of this thesis will be the psychological, emotional, and verbal abuse carried out by men from current or previous intimate partner relationships against women, which will be referred to as non-physical intimate partner violence (Tolman, 1989).

In this thesis, non-physical abuse includes all behaviors that are similar to psychological, emotional, and verbal abuse which is the most common form and is just as harmful as physical abuse. Some examples include socially isolating the victim, causing fear to gain control, and extreme jealousy.



Different types of domestic violence. Diagram by Author

## Non-physical violence

There are three types of non-physical abuse in intimate partner relationships which are defined as follows.

**Psychological abuse** is when a partner, through a series of actions or words, controls the other person's mind or brain, or way of thinking so eventually, the victim has a mental breakdown. In the long-term period, the result is that the victims become more and more dependent on their abuser, and they are not able to trust their brains anymore. As stated by Outlaw, the purpose of psychological abuse is to "undermine the security of the victim's logic and reasoning. In short, the abuser makes her feel as if she is losing her mind—in some cases convincing her that what is black is white and vice-versa" (Outlaw, 2009, p. 264).

**Emotional abuse** is when a partner intentionally destroys the other person's emotions and self-respect by using language and lying or manipulation to make them feel worthless. Complaints, insults, put-downs, name-calling, public embarrassment, or even accusations are some examples (Outlaw, 2009).

**Verbal abuse** can happen in both written and spoken forms intentionally from a perpetrator against the partner to cause harm to the victim. This can include using a person's past mistakes against them, withholding important information, and making unreasonable demands (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, n.d. ).

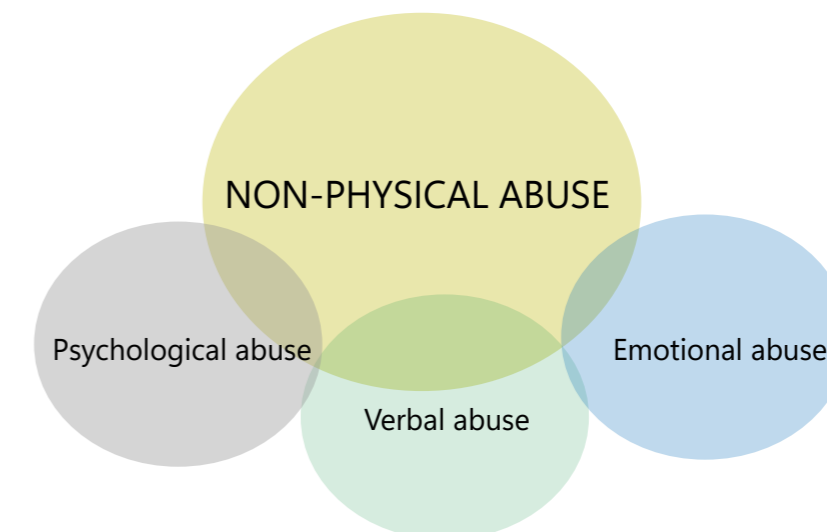


Diagram by Author

## Examples of non-physical violence

### Psychological violence includes, but is not limited to:

- Stalking / criminal harassment
- Not allowing access to a telephone
- Not allowing a competent person to make decisions
- Inappropriately controlling the person's activities
- Use of undue pressure to:
  - o Sign legal documents
  - o Not seek legal assistance or advice
  - o Move out of the home
  - o Make or change a legal will or beneficiary
  - o Make or change an advance health care directive
  - o Give money or other possessions to relatives or other caregivers
  - o Do things the person doesn't want to do

- < Intimidating the person
- < Threats of violence

- < Threatening to hurt oneself if the person does not cooperate
- < Threatening to harm oneself

- < Threatening to abandon the person
- < Threats of abandonment

- < Not allowing the person to have contact with family and friends
- < Socially isolating the person

- < Destroying possessions
- < Destruction of personal property

- < Withholding companionship or affection
- < Using silent treatment

### Emotional violence includes, but is not limited to:

- Jealousy
- Causing fear to gain control
- Threatening to have the person deported (if they are an immigrant)

- < Unreasonably ordering a person around
- < Treating a person like a child or a servant

- < Verbal aggression
- < Yelling

- < Threatening to harm the person or her or his family if she or he leaves
- < Threatening violence against a person or her or his family members

- < Name-calling
- < Name-calling

- < Blaming all relationship problems on the person
- < Telling a person she or he is worthless or nothing but trouble

- < Humiliating or making fun of the person
- < Insulting

### Verbal abuse includes, but is not limited to:

- Recalling a person's past mistakes
- Expressing negative expectations
- Expressing distrust
- Lying
- Swearing
- Withholding important information
- Talking unkindly about death to a person

(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, n.d.)

Diagram by Author

# Effects of Violence on the Body

Violence, with its different types, has a tremendous effect on the body.

The effects are more obvious with physical violence, but non-physical violence impacts the body more in daily life.

*I do not like the way that you act around your family. I do not like the way that they look at you! You were thinner when we were dating. How come you do not care about your looks anymore? I do not want you to go out with your single friends! I do not trust them! ... You know that I love you more than anyone in this world. I am doing this to protect you!*



## Understanding/ exploring/finding agency of space in non-physical violence

### Non-physical violence

- Coercive control
- Expressing distrust
- Blaming
- Humiliation
- Verbal aggression
- Yelling

Lack of sleep

Muscle pain

Tension in body



Physical damage and psychological damage

**Physical violence**

Direct attack

**Obvious spatial agency of violence**

The focus of this thesis

Illustration and diagram by Author

## Literature and reference review

The list below expresses the most influential literature that has been read for the thesis. The right column includes the important takeaways, paraphrased by the author, which have influenced the development of the empirical work of the thesis.

The list of most influential references in this thesis	Important takeaways used as research for the thesis
A typology of domestic violence: intimate terrorism, violent resistance, and situational couple violence.	<b>Intimate terrorists</b> are individuals that strive to control their partner in many ways for example by <b>isolating</b> them from their friends and family. After isolating her, he will start to manipulate her and in the end, she loses her identity and does not trust herself anymore (Johnson, 2008).
Meningen med våld. [The meaning of violence]	In society, <b>it has been normalized to blame the victim</b> for cases of intimate partner violence. Instead, the blame and responsibility should be placed on the perpetrator as he chose to use violence to gain control of his victim (Isdal, 2017).
Discrimination by Design. A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment	<b>The lack of economic independence</b> means that abused women have no choice but to stay in their relationships. When an abused woman is forced to leave the home that she has invested her life in, she will suddenly lose herself (Weisman & Leslie, 1992).
Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Violence to Political Terror	The perpetrator uses different systematic methods to make sure that he has <b>complete control</b> over his victim. The completion is done when she isolates herself from family and friends to show her love to him (Herman, 1992).
Våldsutsatta kvinnor- samhällets ansvar. [Women exposed to violence - society's responsibility]	There are different perspectives expressed by researchers for <b>the reason for the existence of men's violence against women</b> . The gender perspective believes that the reason for this is <b>the inequality in the patriarchal society</b> in which we find ourselves (Heimer et al., 2019).
The Violences of Men.	<b>During and after the separation</b> is the most dangerous time for abused women. If the perpetrator has not been exercising physical violence until then, now he will do that. Furthermore, he can also bring that violation to a new relationship (Hearn, 1998).
A global overview of gender-based violence.	Intimate partner violence is the most normalized form of gender violence in our societies. If this occurred in other parts of society, such as work places, it would never be accepted. <b>Society has legitimized it</b> by providing support to victims instead of acting directly toward the abusers to stop this problem (Heise et al., 2002).
Intimate partner violence: Treating abuser and abused.	<b>Treatments for perpetrators</b> are usually court-ordered and the focus of the therapists is to educate the perpetrators and challenge their perception of their right to be dominant and control their partner which is the result of patriarchal structures in society (Heru, 2007).
Genväg till forskning nr 13 Våldsutövare i nära relationer [Shortcut to research no. 13 Perpetrators of violence in close relationships]	It is necessary that the <b>perpetrators take responsibility</b> for their actions and seek help in order to end men's violence against women. The most commonly proposed solution is that the victim should leave the relationship to stop the violence, which only shifts the problem to the perpetrator's next relationship (Boethius, 2020).
Redefining intimate partner violence: Women's experiences with physical violence and non-physical abuse by age.	There are various definitions of non-physical violence against women in intimate partner relationships. For some scholars, there are some <b>differences between emotional and psychological violence</b> . For example, psychological violence can contain at least one incident of physical and sexual violence as well (Mezey et al., 2002).

# EMPIRICAL WORK

## *Deductive work*

*Methodological framework*

*Research process*

*Stakeholders mapping*

*Ethnography*

*Spatial analysis*

## *Inductive work*

*Fictocritical iteration*

*Survival kit*

This chapter will explain the methods used in this thesis, how they were applied in practice, and the development of a methodology for further research by applying these methods.

# Methodological framework

## About the research methods

The method of this thesis is developing a methodology for the analysis of violence in intimate partner relationships through testing different methods. Different research methods were chosen in order to see how these women express themselves in unique ways. They were therapeutic methods to help these survivors open up and express their emotions so that they may heal afterwards.

The most important thing was to keep these women anonymous while using these methods both through words, art, or storytelling. The reason for anonymity was because survivors did not want to talk face to face and they did not want to have these conversations with someone from the outside. This is how I arrived at these different ideas of gathering information without giving an interview. Expressing oneself does not necessarily need to be verbal, written, or through conversation.

Orienting towards process: The thesis is explaining the problems in society through the use of several methods of architectural analysis. The work is an opportunity to use design and architectural methods to contribute to a field outside of architecture.

## Application of focus group method

It was difficult to find women who were available to participate in this work. It is a very sensitive subject and thus, it was understandable when these women withdrew from participating.

While several women did not wish to continue, their voices and contribution were invaluable. Throughout the project, I contacted and was introduced to survivors at different stages. Each interaction was unique so the strategy used was unique too. Different methods were used for different survivors within the focus group.

## Narrative interviews

Interviews with different organizations such as nonprofit women's organizations, men's organizations, universities etc. were performed to understand the real situation, the rehabilitation and intervention process, as well as to gather experiences and perspectives from experts.

Narrative interviewing with survivors:

Because of the sensitivity of the research topic, narrative interviews were used. The purpose of the narrative method is to reveal sensitive and very difficult stories.

Interviews with survivors of psychological violence helped to find an even deeper understanding of this type of violence. The survivors' stories helped the project to progress by working with narratives and speculative design.

Czarniawska(2014) mentions in her book, *Social Science Research: From Field to Desk*, that an interview should be seen as a normal conversation with a person who can talk to another person. An interview is also a way to produce a narrative. The information told by the interviewees reveals their understanding of reality, not reality. It is their interpretation of what they have deemed to be important.

## Creative workshops

These interactive narrative interviews through workshops were intended to be healing, informative, and personal so that the narratives could be told in a safe space. These workshops then led to other questions which I could research and read more about.

Clay and drawing workshop methods were invented as creative and experimental interviews. The drawings and clay became instrumental in expressing the survivors' experiences.

The instruments in workshops had two different values: 1- Supporting the conversation process in the workshop by guiding the person's thoughts. 2- To produce interpretative and performative results that could be reflected upon in order to understand the role of the instrument.

The purpose of doing the drawing and clay workshop was to have the survivors express how they felt when they were abused.

All the workshops were done individually because of the sensitivity of the topic. None of the survivors met each other. It was very important in this thesis work to keep every single person anonymous for their safety and privacy.

Some other creative workshops were considered, such as audio recordings, cutting words from magazines, and word boards.

## Personal survey

The idea was to gather information without necessarily giving an interview.

The focus group answered a survey with more specific, direct, and personal questions so that they truly had to think and feel to get the most honest answers. In this way, they had time to think on their own without explaining any words face to face.

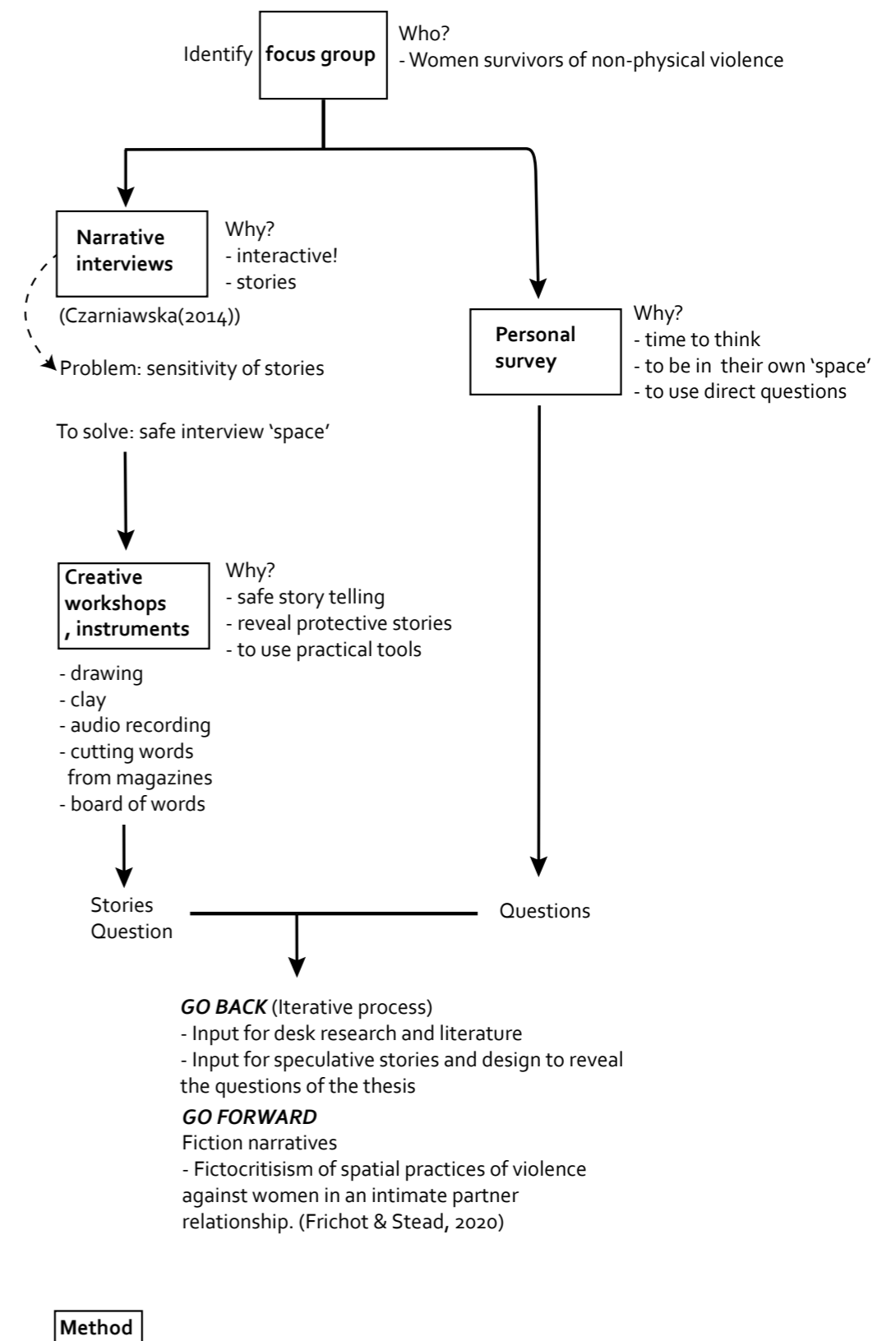
Ordinary surveys are very impersonal and do not include emotion in order to spread awareness. The idea was to connect with these women, have them express themselves, and spread empathy by seeing how these women feel and how they communicate their life experiences. This was also intended to be therapeutic in helping them open up and realize that by expressing themselves, they can heal.

## Speculative design

“ In effect, a design speculation requires a bridge to exist between the audience's perception of their world and the fictional element of the concept” (Auger, 2013, 4 Speculative design: a methodology).

In order to create different scenarios, pragmatic speculation has been done as a method using ficto-criticism and creating fiction as a critical analysis of the research question. Working with personas was a way to detach personally from the problem and work with fictional scenarios. The aim was to showcase typical situations of psychological violence from different perspectives in society as well as tell a real story to raise awareness and empower exposed women.

## Methodological diagram structure and result of testing methods



# EMPIRICAL WORK

## *Deductive work*

*Methodological framework*

*Research process*

*Stakeholders mapping*

*Ethnography*

*Spatial analysis*

## *Inductive work*

*Fictocritical iteration*

*Survival kit*

This sub-chapter includes the research process. It starts with the stakeholders' mapping and highlights the most important takeaways of the interviews with them. Then it presents the Ethnographic work, where different research methods were used with the focus group. Finally, it delves into the spatial analysis that studies where non-physical violence might happen around the city.

# Stakeholders mapping

## Reaching out to stakeholders

At the beginning of my research on this topic, I contacted women's shelters to see if I could interview their staff or somehow get in touch with women who have received help from them. Unfortunately, it was very difficult to get such an opportunity because the topic is so sensitive or the organizations did not have time. I was worried that I would not be able to complete this thesis if I did not have the opportunity to meet someone and gain knowledge on the subject.

While doing my desk research, I read a report on violence in young relationships on The Crime Prevention Council (Brå) website and contacted one of the investigators who had written the report. I had a telephone conversation with that person and got information about their way of working with these issues.

I contacted the women's association, "Hoppet", and read their book where they had interviewed survivors of violence. I wrote some questions by email to the founders of the association and learned about their experience of reaching these survivors and interviewing them.

After awhile, roads opened up for me!

I got information from my supervisor about the "Orange Day" event, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. I attended lectures that week and got in touch with several organizations that work with the issue of violence in relationships. I got their contact details and booked an interview with Victim Support, the Citizens' Office, Lex Femme (a nonprofit organization for women), and UN Women, among others. This was an opening and life-saver for my research.

I was later able to meet a psychotherapist and social worker at the Crisis Center for Women and Cassandra (a nonprofit organization for women) and talked with them about non-physical abuse.

I met a social worker in a shelter through my colleague who was a friend of this person. This meeting was also very crucial for gathering information for further work.

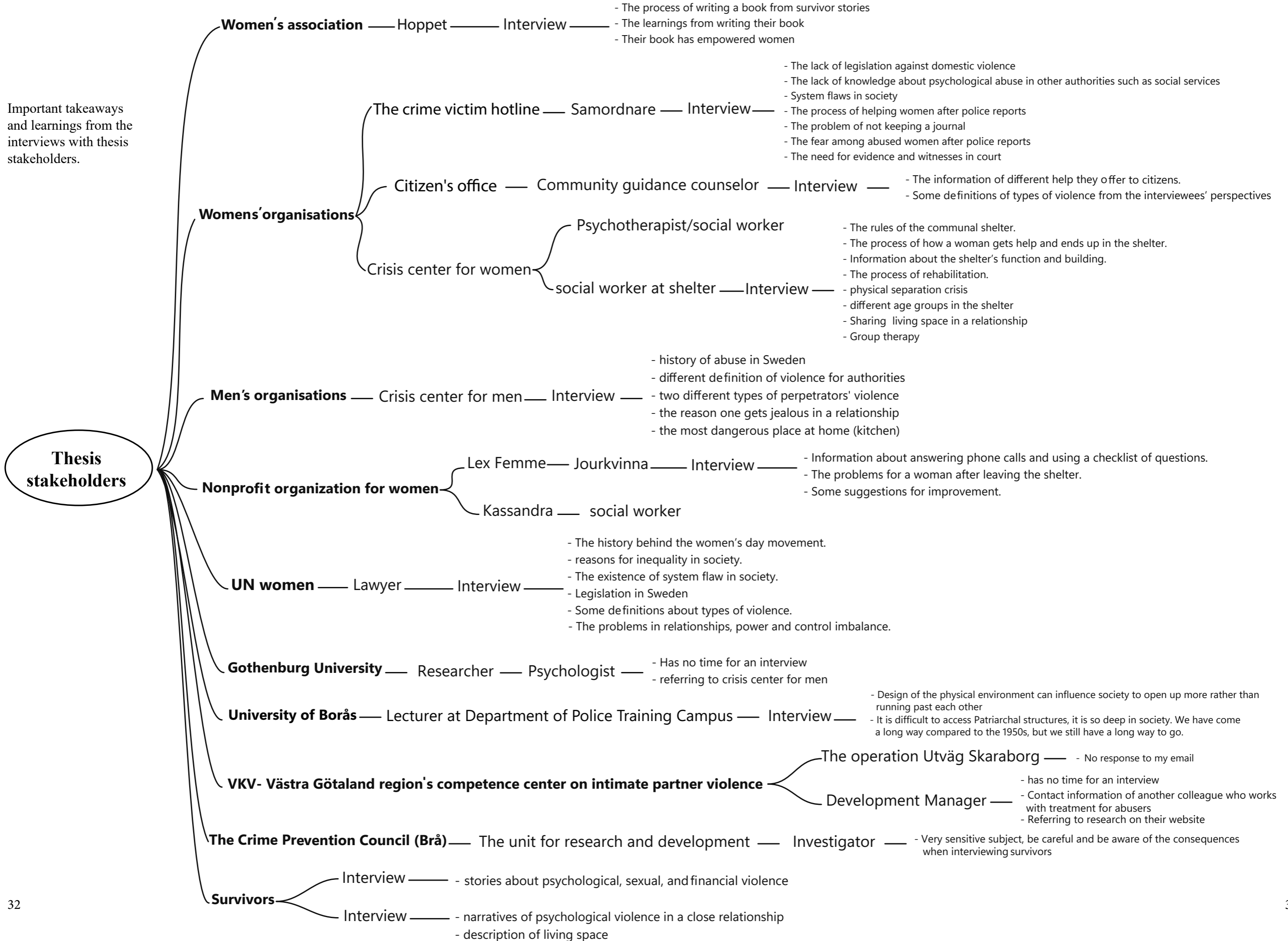
I contacted a psychologist researcher at Gothenburg University who referred me to the Crisis Center for Men and I booked an interview.

I contacted an acquaintance who is a psychologist who connected me to VKV- Västra Götaland region's Competence Center on intimate partner violence but they did not have time for an interview. Instead, they introduced their report to me.

At the end of my thesis work, I interviewed a Lecturer at the Department of Police Training Campus at the University of Borås for gathering further knowledge.



Important takeaways and learnings from the interviews with thesis stakeholders.



## Stakeholders mapping diagram

In order to build up an understanding of the topic of violence against women in intimate partner relationships, contact with different organizations supporting abused women in Gothenburg was made.

Also, some other universities and organizations working on this knowledge were reached out to. A focus group with survivors and victims of violence was also gathered.

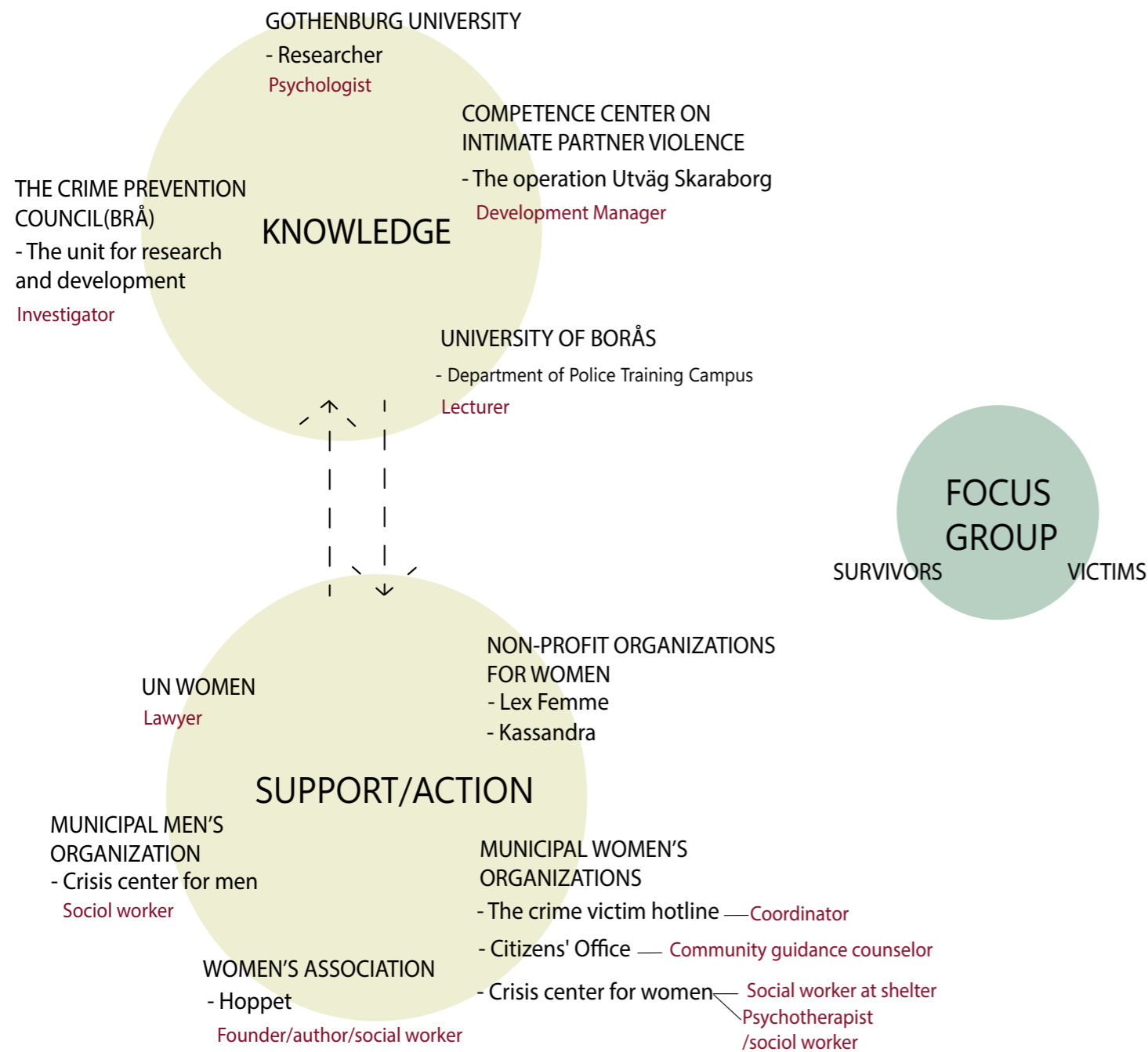


Diagram by Author

# EMPIRICAL WORK

## Deductive work

*Methodological framework*

*Research process*

*Stakeholders mapping*

*Ethnography*

*Spatial analysis*

## Inductive work

*Fictocritical iteration*

*Survival kit*

*"The things people say..."*

*"Oh, really?"*

*"I don't know what to say"*

*"You sure know how to hide it"*

*"I admire your strength"*

*"Thank you for telling me"*

*"I am sorry"*

*"It doesn't show"*

*"I think you should see a therapist" "*

(Amsterdam, 2020, p.190)

# Ethnography

## Different methods used for different survivors in the focus group

The methods used in ethnographic work include interviews, drawing workshops, clay workshops, and personal surveys. By using these different methods different types of information were gathered.

**Names have been changed for privacy and anonymity purposes.**

I got to know **Daniella** at the very start of my research. She did not want to meet so she received an email with the interview questions. In this way, she could respond to the questions in her own time.

I met **Anna** once and I listened to her story and the key points she wanted to talk about.

With **Sandra**, I only had the chance to do one drawing workshop where she drew two situations. In her case, I mixed the illustrative and the personal survey, asking only some of the questions while she was drawing.

**Caroline** is a friend of mine living in another city. I could only send her the questions of the personal survey which she answered and sent back.

I managed to meet **Jessica** at the best time for my project. She completed the drawing workshop and the clay workshop and also answered the personal survey.



The texts inside this box are works and words of the survivors in the focus group

This box is the author's comments, reflections, challenges, and observations



- Interview through email
- Interview through conversation
- Drawing workshop
- Clay workshop
- Personal survey

Through a friend, I got in touch with the first survivor. The survivor was a friend of hers who had experienced a non-physical abusive relationship. She did not want to meet me, which was completely understandable, but she was very helpful. We could email each other and I could send her my questions. It was right at the beginning of my research so I asked quite broad questions to get an idea of her experience and how her relationship was in general. The following questions were chosen because they were relevant to my further work.

Interview through email 2022-10-15

- **How do you define violence in an intimate partner relationship based on your experience?**

For me, violence in an intimate partner relationship is not always as obvious as a slap in the face. There are blurred lines where each experience is its own. Individually, the experience doesn't feel so terrible, but together it builds up and finally, you sit there and understand that what you are exposed to is not okay.

I used to wish sometimes - can he just hit me so that someone sees and can intervene? It felt easier somehow than the daily psychological terror he subjected me to. To answer your question, I would say that the definition of intimate relationship violence is up to everyone, but would say that the line begins when a woman experiences oppression within that relationship. It is more common than it is talked about.

- **How could you describe your sense of your physical surroundings when you were in a certain situation such as feeling isolated or pressured in some way by your abuser?**

I felt very isolated and pressured often by my ex-partner. I knew that the things he demanded, whether it was all the money I had in the account or sex, were wrong. I felt isolated in the way that I wanted to protect my partner's gambling addiction, so I didn't dare to talk to relatives about the situations that arose. I felt the loneliest in the world. Then the pressure became so much that I felt alone - I only had him. When the ultimatum was that I needed to do things for him like give money or sex, because otherwise he would leave - I had to do it even though I didn't want to and knew it was wrong. Because he had slowly taken everything away from me and painted a picture of him being the only one I had left and I believed it. It was easier to do as he wanted than to fight for my opinion, ethics, and morals and in the end he would still win.

The feeling of my physical surroundings was that I didn't belong anywhere. My home didn't feel safe with him in it. To always have a backup plan in case he didn't like what time I came home, for example, where would I go when he threw me out some day like that sometimes out of nowhere? Who can I sleep with this time so they don't notice what's happening? My home was where I laid my head. Felt like I was always on the go & like I said, taking the step to leave was a well-laid plan that started spinning long before I did.

Daniella

*The survivor was very excited when I first reached out to her. I got to know her from one of her best friends who I know. She encouraged me, saying that this is a very important topic to work with in my thesis. From the beginning, she didn't want to meet and she only wrote to me; I emailed her my questions and she was happy to answer. I am very grateful for the information she shared with me. Throughout the thesis, I contacted her and asked if she would like to continue with some distance workshops but she did not feel comfortable with that.*



- Interview through email
- Interview through conversation
- Drawing workshop
- Clay workshop
- Personal survey

This image shows what a healthy relationship versus an abusive relationship looks like. In an abusive relationship, the perpetrator gradually steps into his partner's living space without permission. In the end, the woman does not have any space left for herself "to even breathe".

In one of the lectures on "Orange day 2022" (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women), I met the second survivor and listened to her experience of her former abusive relationship.

Noted from the interview. Subject: "Living space"

2022-11-25

He would control your behavior and decision gradually. It can look like a behavior that gives you a wrong signal that he loves you, he might start with, don't look at them look at me, you make me jealous.

Then very slowly he will step into your living space without you noticing it. By saying, do you have to go out and see your friends today? can you stay with me instead? I have bought popcorn, it would be nice if we sat together. He will make it look like he loves you and he pays a lot of attention to you, that you are so important to him.

He will make you willingly stop meeting your friends and family. He would say that your father is a bit of a pain, so I do not want to meet him today. Then next time he would say, your mother, did you see how she complained about me the other day? you understand that I can't go to their house and if I can't go, you can't go there either.

It will continue to every decision in your daily life. Are you going out with that shirt? With those pants?

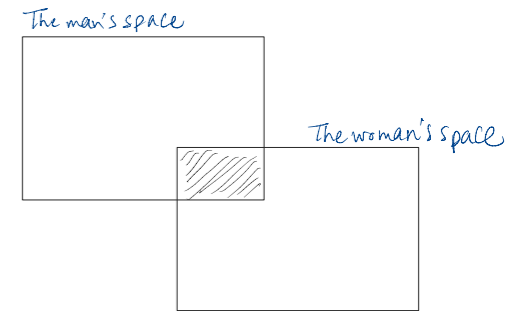
What do you think when you play this music?

Anna

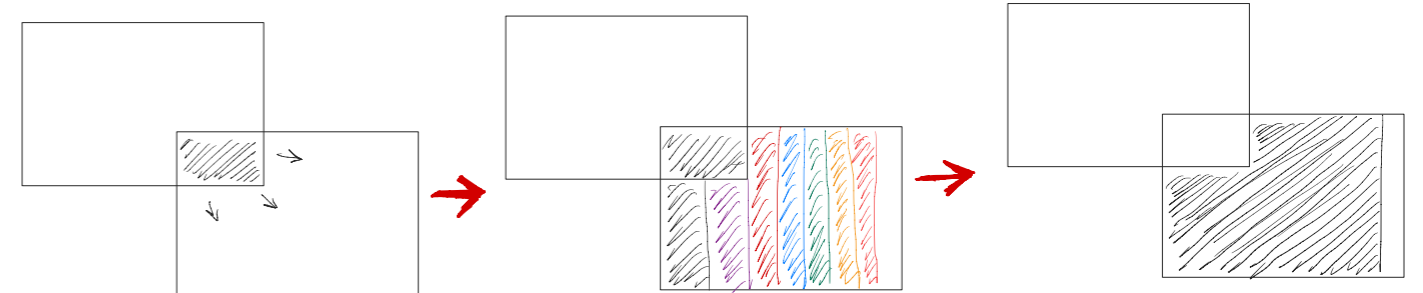
## LIVING SPACE

### Healthy relationship

When you meet a guy, you will share this little space together and you have asked for permission before you step into each other's living space.



### Abusive relationship



Don't look at those guys, look at me!

Do you have to go out and meet your friends today? You can stay with me instead.

I have bought popcorn, it would be really nice if we watched a movie together this weekend.

Did you see how your parents complained about me the other day? You understand that

I can't go and visit them and if I can't go then you can't go there either!

Are you going out with your colleagues and that guy is coming as well?

Should you go out with that shirt and those pants? I know what's in your mind.

What do you think when you listen to that song?

The author's sketches are a way of visually understanding the stories.

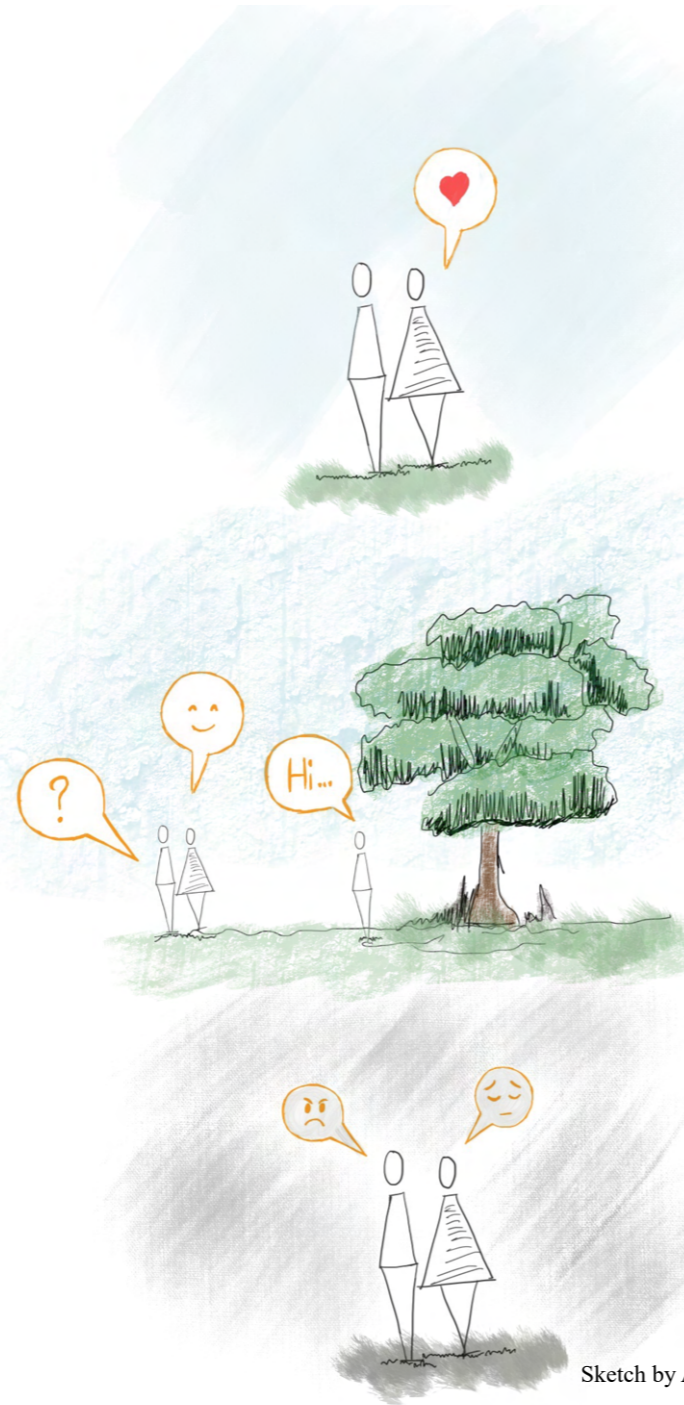
Sketch by Author

Noted from the interview.  
Subject: "Extreme jealousy"

Everything was as I wished at the beginning of the relationship, but then out of nowhere, little weird things started to happen. Once, while we were on a walk in a public park, I ran into an old friend and we said hello. After we left, my partner asked, 'Have you had sex with him? I saw you smile at him.'

Then, it continued more and more. He started commenting on how I interacted with people, and I began to feel trapped. After that incident, I hardly dared to look at guys. If I was sitting on the bus and someone looked at me, I could feel like it was my fault and that I had done something wrong. He had an incredibly strong psychic power over me. It felt like he could make me do whatever he wanted. I was so in love with him that I would go along with anything he wanted, no matter what.

Anna



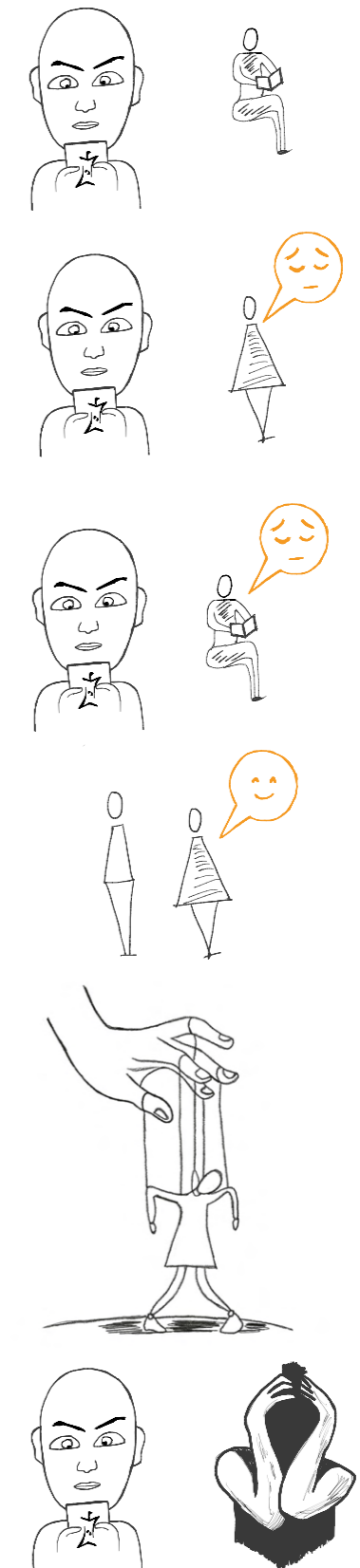
Noted from the interview.  
Subject: "Silent treatment"

He gave me the silent treatment once. Instead of getting angry and shouting, he became completely silent and refused to communicate. He didn't look at me; he just stared at his phone. I tried talking to him a few times, but he didn't respond. It went on for almost a whole day.

Later that night, when I tried talking to him again, he put away his phone and looked at me. I thought I had finally regained my human dignity, but the only thing he said was... And he did it because he knew he had the power in the situation since I had been craving his attention all day, so he knew I would do anything to get it.

After it was over, he continued to ignore me, and I was left feeling confused.

Anna



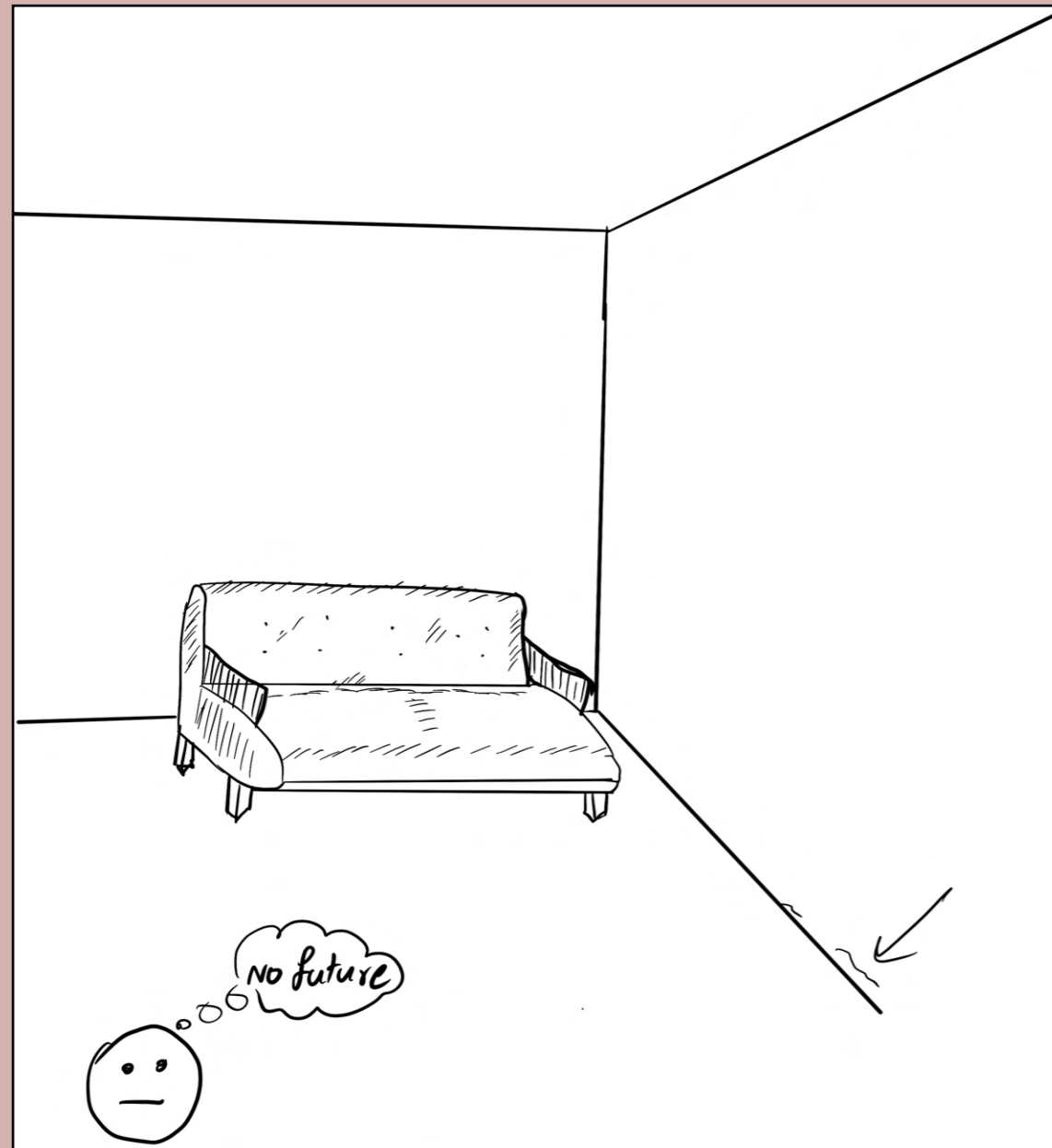
*The survivor was sharing her experiences of psychological violence, which she had thought about repeatedly in her head and shared with others. It was evident that she had healed and moved on from the ordeal, as she spoke about it in a composed manner. She is a strong woman who willingly shared her story to raise awareness.*

I had a drawing workshop with Sandra. We talked for about 30 minutes and these are the drawings that she made while she was telling her story. She also answered some of the questions from the personal survey while she drew these two abusive situations from her past relationship.

### Drawing workshop combined with personal survey

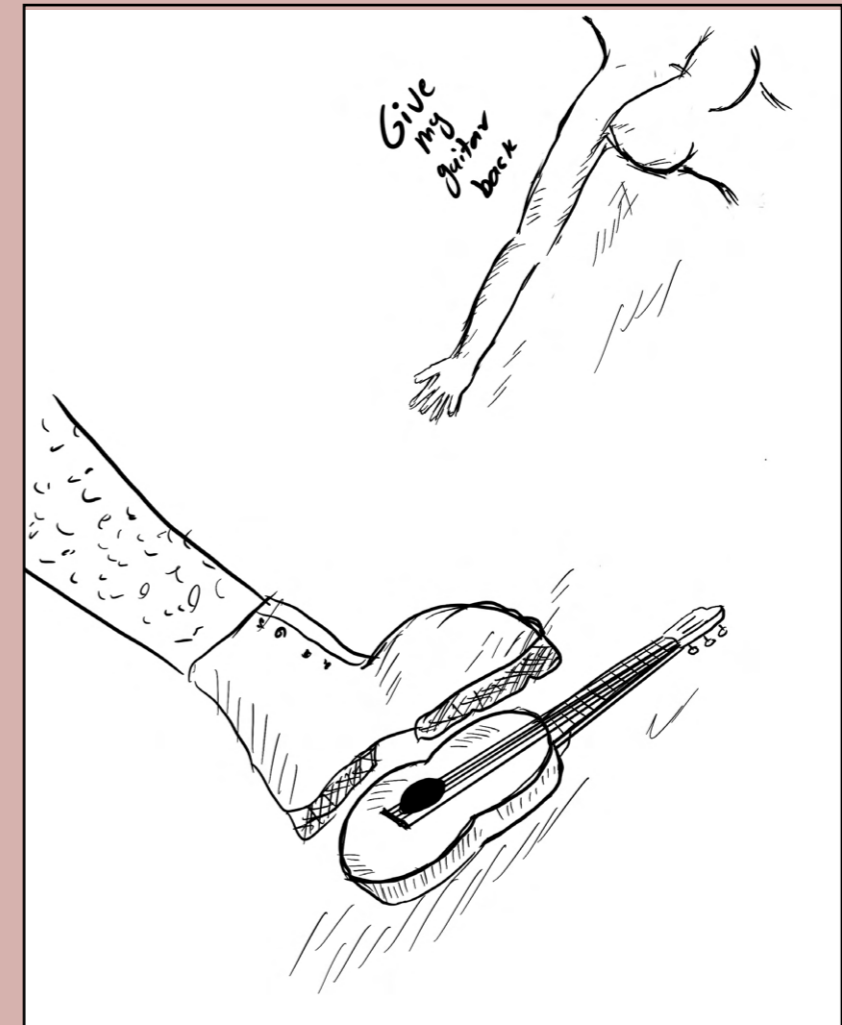
2023-02-04

*“Abuse is Black.  
I felt hopeless.  
My abuser was angry and expressed aggression toward me.  
What he told me was that I was worthless and not caring.  
I wished my abuser would understand that I could have another point of view than him, and I wanted him to respect me as a human and his partner.”*



Text and drawing by Sandra

*“He did not show respect for what I liked.  
He gave me the feeling that I was cheating on him if I played guitar in front of others.  
He forced me to put my talent away”*



Text and drawing by Sandra

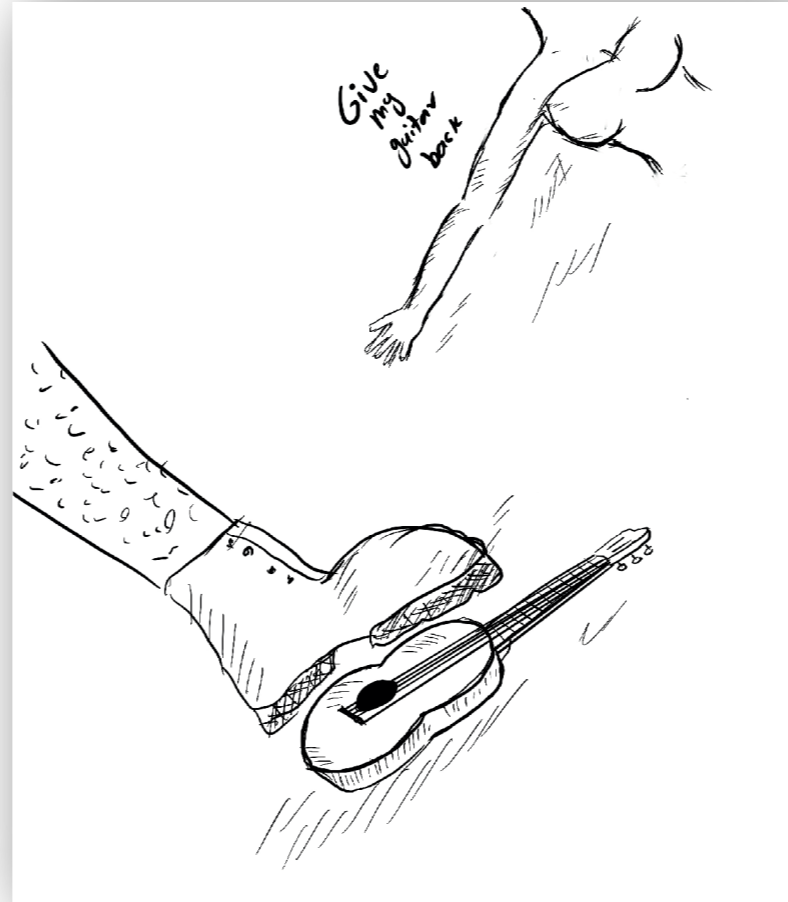
*The survivor was comfortable sharing her story during the drawing workshop. Even though I had informed her that she didn't have to explain her story verbally and could instead draw and answer the questions in writing, she chose to tell her story. It seemed like she was okay with sharing her experience, however, after the workshop, I was unable to continue with her again. I believe that despite appearing comfortable, she was not ready to share her experiences. It appeared that she had not fully healed from those events in her life.*

The images and texts below are an interpretation by the author based on the abusive situation shared by Sandra during the drawing workshop.



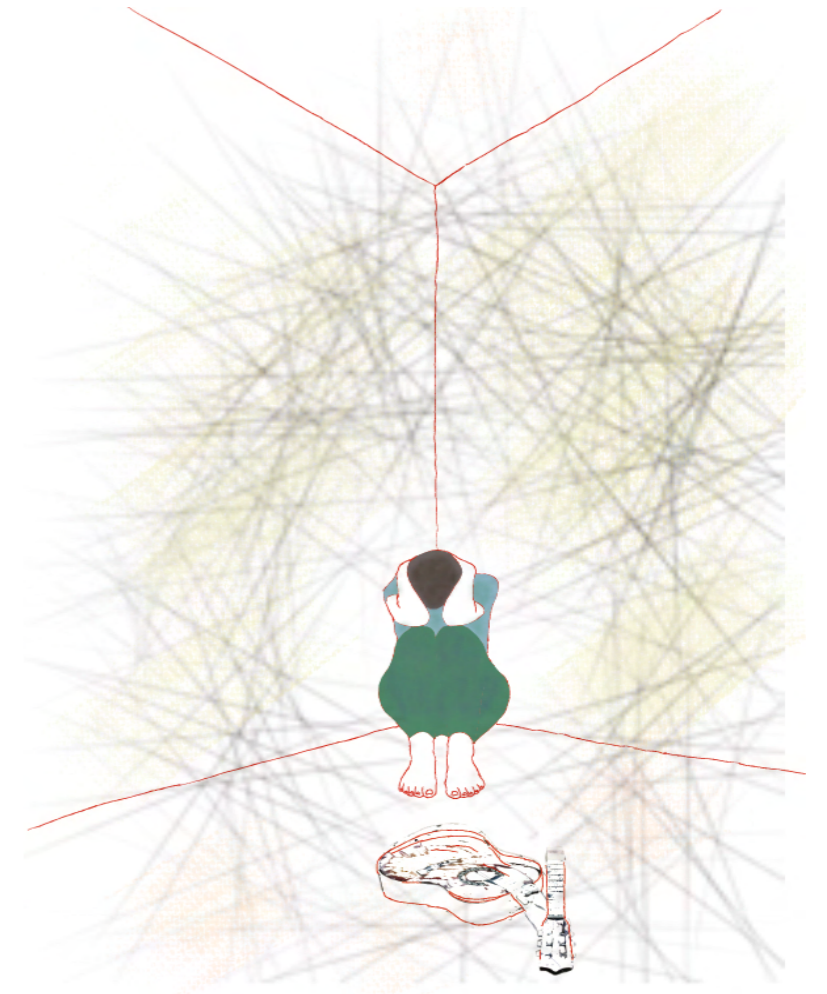
Before:  
I used to be a happier person, as I loved playing the guitar and did so frequently before this person entered my life. However, after meeting him and allowing him into my life, things changed. He disapproved of me playing the guitar in front of others, including my friends. He often questioned me and asked if I played it to seek attention from other guys.

**Drawing by the author and text is paraphrased and interpreted based on the conversation**



Eventually, he did what he had been wanting to do all along - he broke my guitar. I felt disrespected by his actions, as he showed no regard for my passion for playing the guitar. He made me feel guilty, as if playing the guitar was a betrayal to him. His destructive act took away my talent and robbed me of the joy that came with playing music.

**Drawing by Sandra, text paraphrased from the conversation**



After:  
I never felt like myself again in that relationship. It seemed like every day, he took a part of me. I became very small, and I was fragile. The whole space was pushing me into the corner of my room.

**Drawing by the author, text paraphrased from the conversation**

**The question was:** How do you describe the process of your abusive relationship through sculpture-making?

**Workshop process:** The author brought the instrument (clay) and explained to Jessica beforehand what the workshop was about so that she could prepare her thoughts on the question.

Clay workshop

2023-02-23

*"I always felt that I am a flexible, easygoing person..  
I wouldn't impose myself on others, or force them to accept my ideas or opinions.  
I always felt that he didn't accept me as I am.  
He always did not respect my existence and tried to put me in a mold that suits him.  
I fought, I did not surrender.  
But I became fragile, even though I resisted,  
I confess that he damaged some parts of me and I still have a long recovery journey ahead."*

Text by Jessica



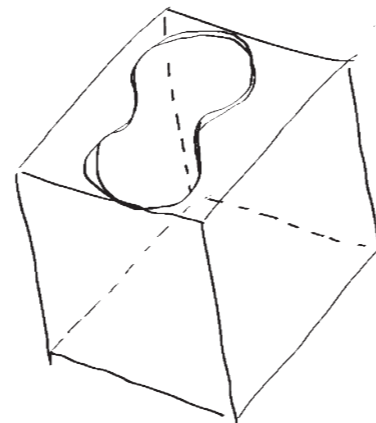
The result

Photograph by the author



**This is how she describes herself:**  
Soft, flexible, and easygoing. organic, smooth

Sketch by the author



**This is how she describes him:**  
He had a pre-made mold and preconceived perspective of how I should be.

Sketch by the author



**This is how she describes her relationship:**  
Trying to get rid of his effect

Sketch by the author



The result

Photograph by the author



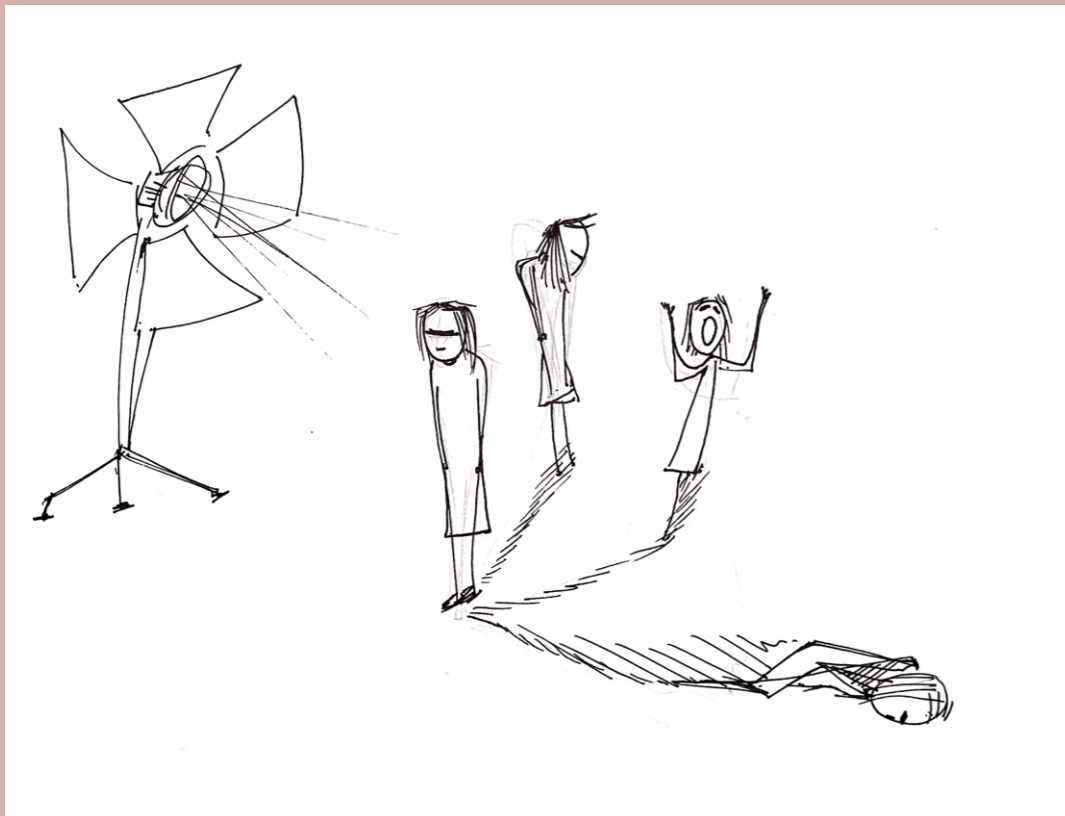
A drawing workshop was done with Jessica where she also wrote some sentences explaining her feelings when the abuse was taken. One of these drawings gave input for the next chapter of the thesis.

## Drawing workshop

2023-02-24

*“1. Weak-Broken  
2. Angry-Burning  
3. Dead-powerless  
Out of my body,  
seeing myself as an actor cause I can't even believe I am in this situation,  
confused, don't know how should I exactly respond...,  
so in the end, I just don't react...,  
or ... maybe just cry...”*

*“- mostly in the house...  
But I remember it ones in a supermarket...  
I felt that everyone will look at me,  
I felt ashamed, guilty,  
I blamed myself for putting myself in this situation.  
I want to scream, ask for help... I wanted to run... wanted to disappear ...  
I just did noting, asked him to lower his voice and calm down...”*



Text and drawing by Jessica

*“I feel that space is squishing me, the whole world disappears...  
I only feel my existence in the room...  
The room is tight, becoming tighter,  
I am trapped in my body,  
I even don't want or can't run away...  
I realize that the world is bigger, nicer,  
but I can never feel it by then...”*



Text and drawing by Jessica



Caroline

- Interview through email
- Interview through conversation
- Drawing workshop
- Clay workshop
- Personal survey

The personal survey had more specific and personal questions. It was useful in a way that the survivor got the questions and then had time to think and answer them on her own without needing to speak about it face to face.

2023-03-01

Personal survey

- **What words describe how you felt?**

Guilty - Choked - Confused

- **When was abuse taken what behavior hurt you the most?**

Blaming me for everything

- **What words hurt you the most?**

You are irresponsible, stupid, liar, ugly

- **What actions hurt you the most?**

Ignoring me, treating me badly in front of others, manipulating me

- **What was the strongest emotion you felt?**

The fear

- **What did you wish your abuser would understand?**

That I was very tolerant of him, and that I neglected myself while I was taking care of him.

- **If the abuse was a color, what would it be?**

Brown

Jessica

*The survivor was extremely helpful and willing to do as much as she could to assist with my project. She participated in multiple workshops and mentioned that they helped her realize things she had not thought about before. Through these workshops, she was able to reconnect with her feelings and process them in a healthy way, allowing her to move forward. She continued to show interest in this thesis work and asked about its progress.*

2023-02-23

Personal survey

- **What words describe how you felt?**

Sad. Desperate.

- **When was abuse taken what behavior hurt you the most?**

When we argued over silly things. Also, we had a huge age gap and he was embarrassed by it.

- **What words hurt you the most?**

“I can’t do this anymore.”

- **What actions hurt you the most?**

He used my love for him against me.

- **What was the strongest emotion you felt?**

Desperation.  
I was in love but it was toxic I think.

- **What did you wish your abuser would understand?**

Every time he threatened me with leaving, it contributed to my eventually walking away from the relationship.

- **If the abuse was a color, what would it be?**

Black, like a great abyss where you just keep falling into a never-ending hole.

Caroline

*After sharing her story, the survivor became quite shy. She is a friend of mine who had only recently disclosed her background to me after learning about my project topic. She had never thought about her relationship as being abusive and did not think that her story was related to the topic enough.*

# Learnings from the application of methods in ethnographic work

## Narrative interviews

### Interview through conversation

- Survivor led the discussion
- She decided what incidents to bring up
- Few questions were asked by interviewer
- Personal experiences with non-physical violence

- More personal connection
- Verbal interaction
- I felt strong emotions
- I could picture the events in my mind

### Interview through email

- Opportunity for survivor to feel emotions
- Helps survivor better understand past
- If survivor has not healed, it is a chance to reflect and seek support

- Had time to think about the questions
- No stress about any time constraint
- More descriptive answers
- No need to have face-to-face conversation
- Easier to share experiences

### Interviews with women's organizations

- Interviewees highlighted their work role
- Gave most important answers about victims
- Learned about different phases in aid process
- Employees had different stories from victims and survivors
- Interviewees were affected differently in work

- Different information depending on organization
- Various missions
- Verbal interaction
- More factual discussions

## Creative workshops

### Clay workshop

- Instrument to help survivor express feelings
- Texture of clay is soft
- Survivor felt the memory of abuse in another way
- Survivor could express her anger towards her abuser

- Instrument helped to unlock the storytelling through touch
- Sculpture created moments of questions
- Very therapeutic

### Drawing workshop

- Writing down feelings
- Drew an abusive situation that came to mind
- Quality of drawing was not the focus
- Focus was on how survivor felt while drawing
- Product was discussed afterward

- No need for a specific subject
- No pressure to tell story face-to-face
- Product created questions

## The personal survey

### Personal survey

- Personal questions about feelings
- Survivor had time to think
- Survivor had her own space
- Survivor felt safe and comfortable while answering survey

- Useful to get a deeper understanding of survivor's life and the situation
- Direct questions

Method

Takeaways

## Summary of the learnings from the content in ethnographic work

### Victims

- **The victims were ashamed** of telling their stories to their friends and family which had made it difficult for them to get help.
- **They were all manipulated by their abuser** and they had not understood the limits of abuse.
- They were all isolated and **their reality was what their abuser had told them about things**.
- Most of them were **economically dependent** on their abuser and **had lost their self-esteem and self-confidence**.
- They were blaming themselves for being in that situation and **they were blamed by their abusers about everything that went wrong around them**.
- They all had resisted a lot at the beginning of their relationship but eventually, they had lost energy and **had chosen to not argue because the abusers would always win anyways**.
- These women **had hoped to change their abuser's behavior** because they loved their partner at some point but they had eventually lost themselves and did not see the chance for a better life anymore.
- **When they leave the relationship**, it is the **most dangerous time** of their lives, because these **abusers do not give up**.
- It is not easy for women to stand up for themselves if **they have been told by society and authorities that the abuse to some extent is their fault**.
- The abused woman has been **the victim of several crimes** and **has had to fight just to be able to stay and live with this shame and guilt**.
- It is **not so easy for many of these women to tell their stories** until they have really come out of it and **regained their self-esteem**, their confidence and the power that the men had taken from them.
- **It's not the women's fault**, even if they think that and they blame themselves.
- The hardest thing is that **they don't realize that they are exposed**.
- The majority of these women, are usually those who **have temporary residence permits** and are exposed and **are afraid of not being allowed to stay in Sweden**.
- The women can't tell anyone because **they haven't put it into words themselves and it is painful** to talk about how scared they are sometimes.

### Abusers

- Often the relationship is not **controlling** from the beginning, or it is **packaged in a "nice" way** - giving excuses and other ways to **take away the woman's independence(life)**.
- He presents it with **an idea of "love"** first.
- The perpetrator **slowly almost invisibly** makes the victim more and more **dependent on him**.
- The **violence is escalating** all the time.
- The abuser often **blames the victim**.
- The biggest factor in the violence from the abuser is **the need and desire for control**.
- There is a **systemic flaw from birth**, not only that men learn to become violent, but women have also **"learned" to accept violence as "normal"**.
- These perpetrators are often very charming and it is a part of the crime that they **hide the reality of their actions against their wives**.
- There is a lack of sufficient knowledge in authorities regarding non-physical violence in close relationships about the **perpetrator's behavior in front of others** and how this could be handled. In addition, it is also not always clear **how an exposed woman should be treated** now that she has dared to open up and tell her story.
- It is a **system flaw not to think about the whole structure of society**. There must be more **focus on educating the perpetrator and putting more pressure on them**.
- This is very common in such relationships that he puts the victim high up, and then after a while he puts her at the bottom. In whole relationship she just struggles and she never gets back up.
- These **abusers use violence consciously**. They can be calm and nice when they are violent, it can be when the woman does not follow the instructions, what he gave her, so **he wants to put her in her place**, it is planned violence, it is systematic and **it is used to ensure that his power lasts**.
- These abusers **have been exposed early to violence as a method of control by their parents**, and they know how violence works.
- He thinks he has the right to use violence as a method of control. She has to behave in a certain way, **it's his responsibility to make sure it's the right way**.

### Society

- Often in court, police, social services, etc. **everyone forgets that the relationship is based on love**, where the **woman still hopes to change the man**.
- **The woman receives double shame**, from her partner and society.
- Even if women are encouraged to testify, it is often the case that the man is not even convicted. **Usually the woman is questioned**, asked why she doesn't leave, etc.
- most of the women withdraws the accusation, and **the men receives no punishment**.
- Something is happening in society where **violence is increasing**.
- Violence was **a natural part of our culture in the past** and has always existed as a mean of control in Swedish culture.
- What makes people not want to intervene when violence occurs outdoors is the so called **bystander effect**, they think that someone else will do something. If there is another witness in place, **people think that someone else will solve it**.
- **Social sustainability** is about being **free from various types of violence and oppression**.
- **The whole society needs to see intimate partner violence as a real problem**, one way is to draw attention to it and to hope that more and more people will do something. If everyone helps, everyone does a little part we will get closer to a sustainable society.
- **Patriarchal structures start forming early**. Little boys are told that they shouldn't cry and be strong and fast.

# EMPIRICAL WORK

## Deductive work

Methodological framework

Research process

Stakeholders mapping

Ethnography

Spatial analysis

## Inductive work

Fictocritical iteration

Survival kit

# Spatial analysis

## Examples of types of spaces

**What the world see versus what is actually happening.**



At home

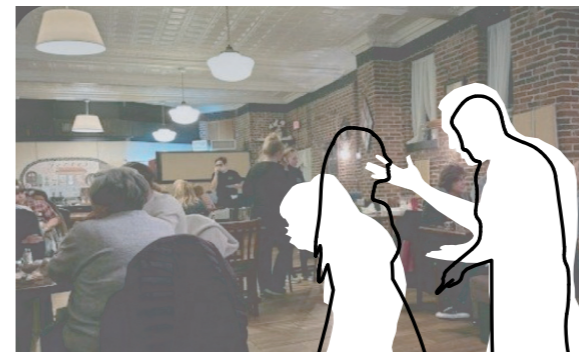


In the train station

These images serve to illustrate that this type of violence occurs everywhere, often invisible to others. Even when the violence is visible, society and individuals may view it as a private matter and choose not to intervene.

Comparative between emotions shown in the home and public spaces.

The role of circumstantial spaces gives more tone to the aggression expressed because the reaction from the woman is more limited in a public space- there is a shame.



At a restaurant



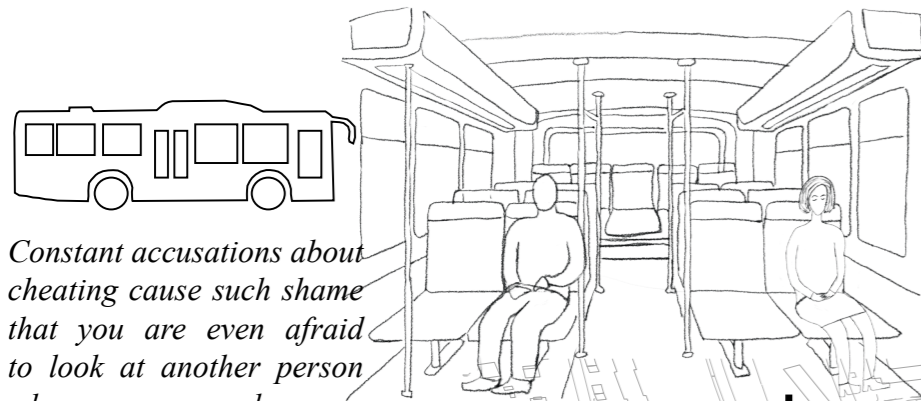
In the city

*A House Is Not A Home.*

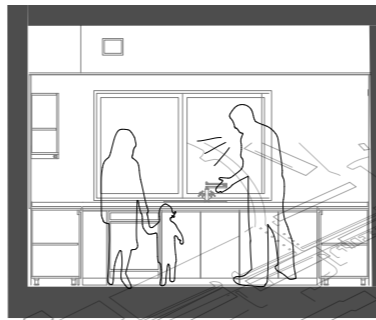
(Weisman, Leslie, 1992, p.113)

# Areas in Gothenburg have been chosen to showcase different examples where non-physical violence may occur.

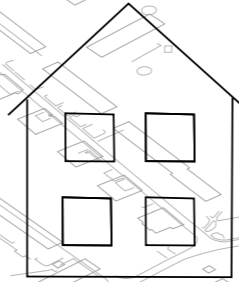
These images were inspired by the interviews with survivors. The places are taken directly from the interviews to show that abuse can happen anywhere no matter how many people are around.



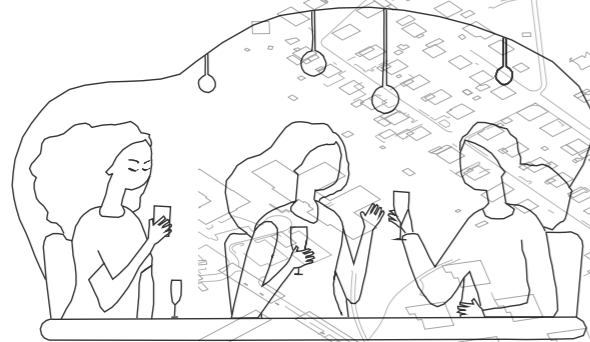
Constant accusations about cheating cause such shame that you are even afraid to look at another person when you are alone on the bus for fear of doing something wrong.



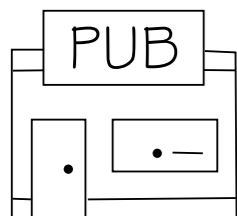
At home, your partner yells abusive things in the presence of your child without considering the emotional damage the child can have.



Smiling at an old friend in a park leads to accusations from your abusive partner about having had sexual intimacy outside the relationship.



Having drinks with friends while receiving non-stop texts and calls from your abusive partner to make sure you are not with another guy



In a supermarket, you add some items to the cart that he does not want. He starts yelling angrily which makes you feel guilty for having gotten yourself in that situation.



# EMPIRICAL WORK

*Deductive work*

*Methodological framework*

*Research process*

*Stakeholders mapping*

*Ethnography*

*Spatial analysis*

*Inductive work*

*Fictocritical iteration*

*Survival kit*

*“I am not a rare species  
I am one of the common birds  
that didn't make it  
I am your warning signal  
I am just the tip of the iceberg,  
a grain in the landslide  
we call patriarchy”*

(Amsterdam, 2020, p.191)

# Fictocritical iteration

## Fictional story composed of fictional characters

In this sub-chapter, a story of an abusive relationship and the leaving process of an abused woman will be revealed. The characters are fictional and the process is one of the possible ways an abused woman can get support from women's organizations.

The story of two fictional characters that I started to work with from day 65 of my thesis work onwards.

You will be introduced to two fictional characters, an abusive man and an abused woman.

Then you will get some information about their relationship.

You will follow the abused woman's leaving process via a running narrative of unfolding events. Further, quotes from first person perspective along with an expert's comment on this process are also provided.

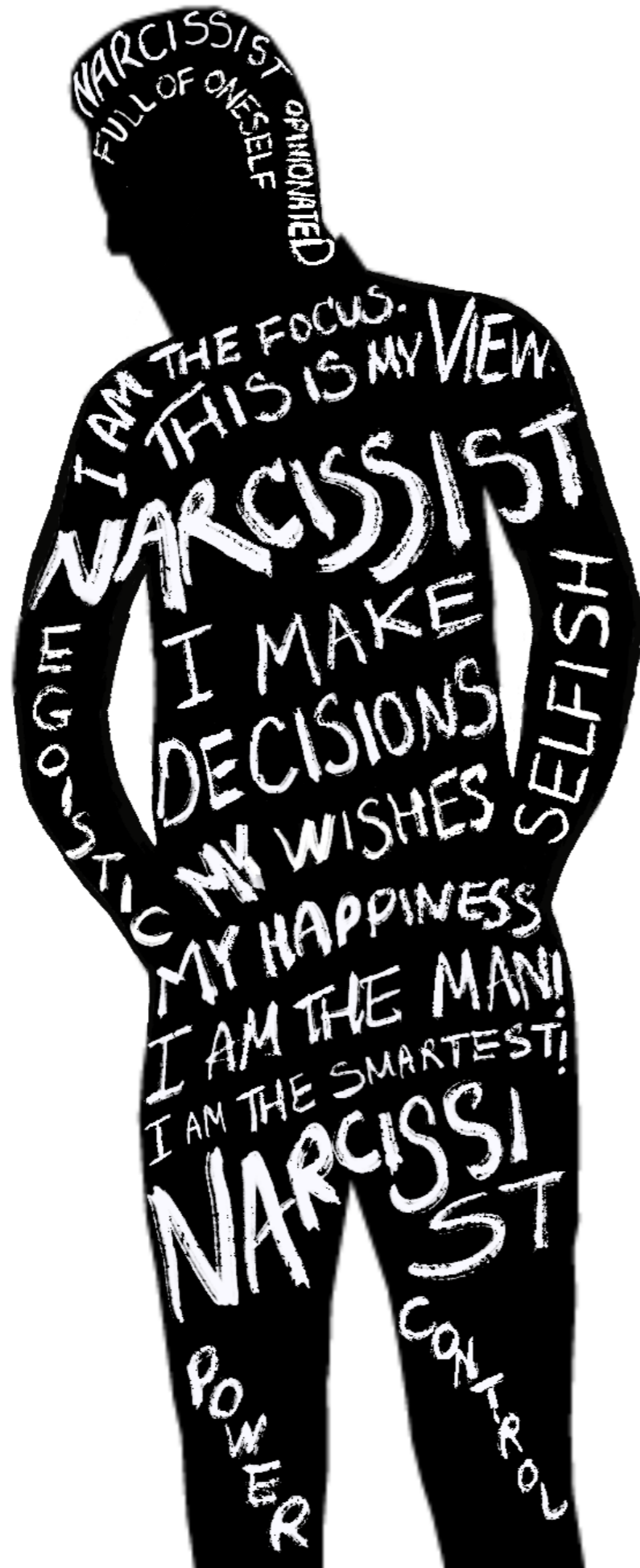
In the end, there will be illustrations of a typical situation in a public space with alternative scenarios from different person's perspectives.

*In this bubble with the woman talking will contain notes from the interview with a social worker in a shelter in Gothenburg who explains the process of aid.*



## Who is the story's fictional abuser character

Daniel, here. I am 37 years old. I am a very intelligent man and am quite knowledgeable about it! I have accomplished several goals in my life that I set for myself when I was very young. I studied very hard to become an engineer and I am successful in my career. I do like to be listened to and want to make others, around me happy. I seek respect from others and I always want to make other people love me. It makes me feel very good and powerful. I am a very nice guy, and everyone adores me at my workplace also my friends admire me because of my personality.



## Who is the story's fictional abused character

I am Hanna. I am a nurse and 35 years old. My personality and enormous heart make an immediate impression on everyone I encounter. I am a calm, gentle, and loving person who gives a lot of thought before speaking. I act from the heart in that I never speak to someone if there is a chance that they might get hurt. I am confident in my personality, but sadly, I also suffer from the actions of those around me. When I observe that other people are only interested in themselves and don't care about my perspective on life, I often find that life is difficult.

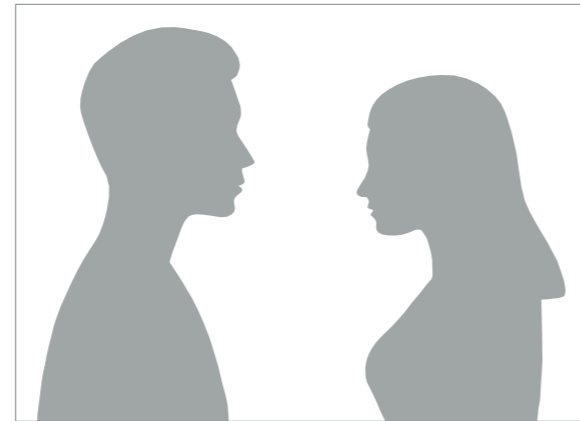




## How is their relationship

### How is Hanna and Daniel's relationship with each other?

Daniel is literally the man of the castle! He has complete control over every movement that Hanna makes. He is the one who takes care of the finances at home, which means that Hanna must transfer her salary to a joint account that Daniel takes care of and so Hanna gets pocket money for the household. If she needs to buy something for herself, she gets money from Daniel for that specific amount. Daniel thinks that she cannot manage to take care of her money and there is a risk that she will waste it, therefore he has taken this responsibility. Daniel also took the parental allowance that Hanna received when she was on maternity leave so that he could use it in the best way. Hanna resisted a lot at the beginning of the relationship, but she no longer has the energy to resist...!

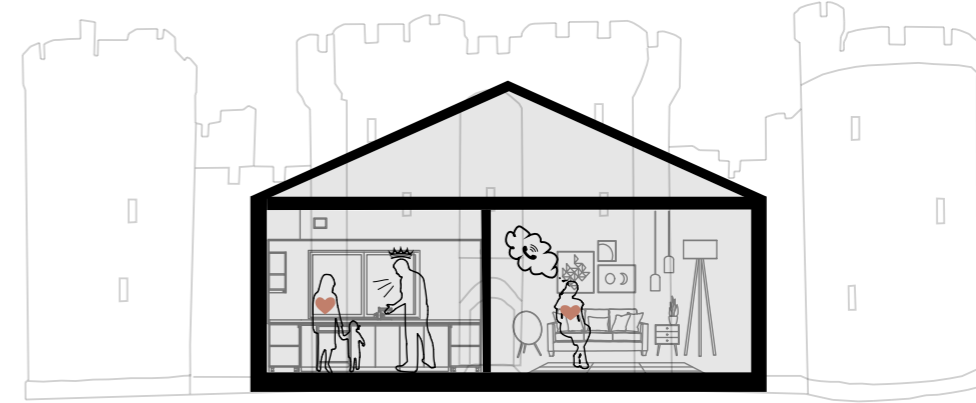


### How do the others around them see their relationship?

They are such a lovely couple. Daniel is a very nice person; he cooks and makes lunch boxes for Hanna to take to work. He always drives her to and from work, so she doesn't need to take public transport. He takes care of his family in every way; Hanna doesn't even have to think about paying bills as he has taken responsibility. He cares a lot about the family and especially Hanna!

**Noted from the interview with a coordinator at the Crime Victims Emergency:** *It is very difficult for outsiders who do not have that knowledge to know what is happening. Most of the time these men tend to be sociable and nice so that friends may say 'what a great boyfriend you have, he seems to care about you a lot!'. At the same time, her experience is completely different.*

## Hanna's leaving process



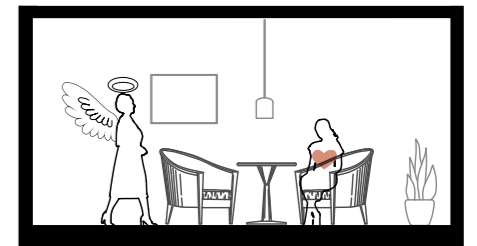
Daniel has proven to Hanna that he can do whatever it takes to maintain power and control over "his" wife. Hanna has become weaker and weaker, and she does not want to argue with him too much, as she has a child who hears and can understand things. She has adapted to Daniel's needs and has tried to avoid fussing since they had their little one, which has given Daniel even more room to exercise his power. Hanna has previously found out from the health centre that she can get help from a women's shelter and free herself.

*Hanna: Another fight today, in the kitchen in front of our 1 year-old baby girl. I am so tired of his behavior, he yells without considering that our baby is around, I am afraid of its effect on her. I hate him when he does this... I am done with this... Today I will call the Women's shelter when he leaves home and hopefully, I will get an appointment.*

### At the women's shelter

She meets a saving angel, a social worker, who will help her on this journey. She has now received information about what she needs to do. The first step is for her to contact the social services in the area where she lives.

Hanna tells the social worker that she has thought about leaving for a very long time and tried to make a plan for it, but it has been impossible as she has not, for example, been allowed to save any money for herself and her child's future.



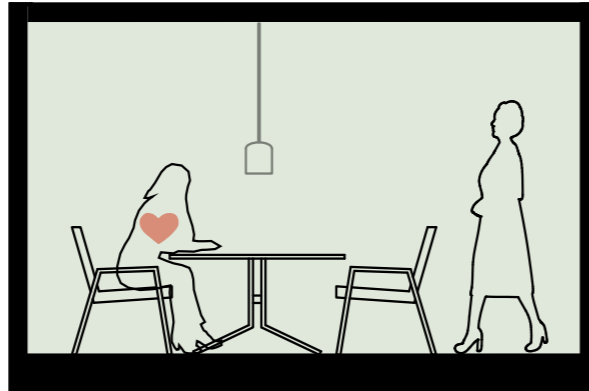
*Hanna: I came back home after the meeting full of hope and plans for the future, I will get help soon, and I am now able to dream of a life with my child without him. I can save our lives from this hell now!*



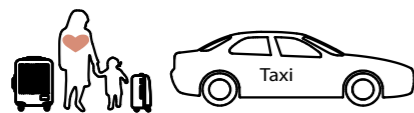
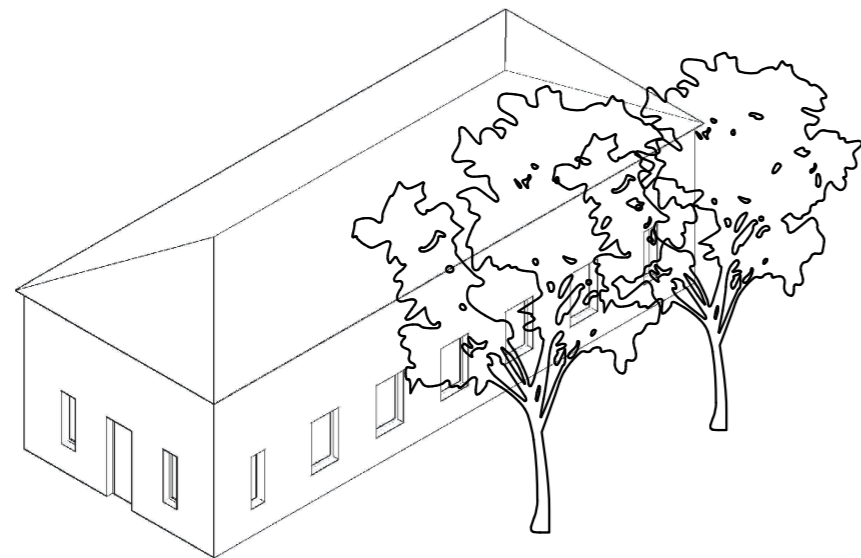
### At the Social Services

After contacting the Social Services Hanna got an appointment with a social worker. The woman helps her find a place in sheltered housing and plans her move. The next step for Hanna is to pack her and her child's necessary things and move to the accommodation.

*Hanna: The social worker is a very understanding person and listens to me with her full attention. I don't have to explain myself because she seems very experienced and keeps nodding as I tell my story. She says she will help me. If I have decided to go ahead and move to an accommodation, she will arrange a place for me.*



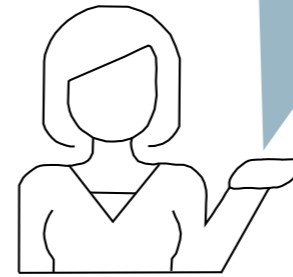
Finally, the promised day comes. Hanna and her child get the opportunity to move to a collective shelter, they have packed their suitcases and are ready to get the support they need.



*Each victim of violence that we meet experiences the situation differently, some women come to the shelter urgently, in connection with an incident of violence, and some women have been planning to leave their relationship for a while.*

*The residence period in the shelter is a maximum of 4 months. In the beginning, we structure a plan for these 4 months together with the woman and the social worker from Social services. What are the needs of this specific woman, what can be done by the shelter, what social services can do, and what the woman herself must do? These are very individual plans, but still quite similar depending on whether the woman has her children with her or whether she is alone.*

*We have conversations with the woman about what she has been through, we talk about the consequences of violence and what leaving process is like. The women are in different phases in this situation, some are very clear that they want to leave their relationship immediately, and some are very ambivalent and don't know if they should leave or maybe go home and try one more time. Social worker, January 16, 2023*

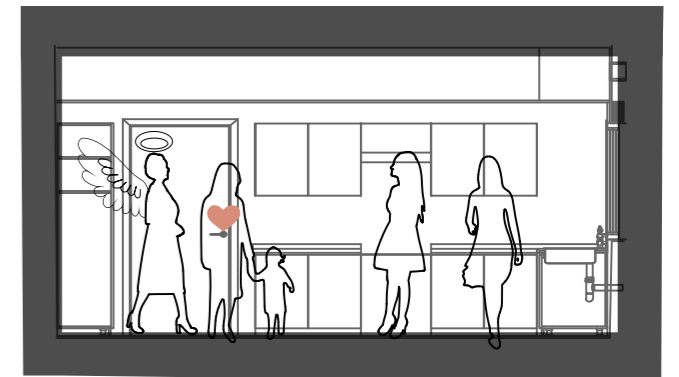


### At the Shelter

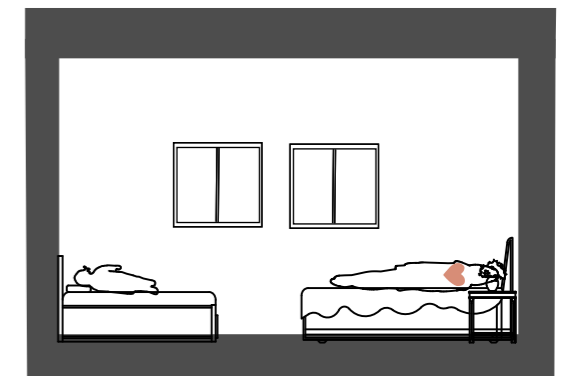
*I have now started having meetings with a social worker about my plan for the coming 4 months. I will meet Hanna: her for healing sessions as well as sessions where we will discuss what I will do when it is time to move from the shelter. I will search for accommodation for myself and also plan to go back to work and find a kindergarten for my daughter.*



In the collective shelter, there are some common spaces such as a communal kitchen where the women can gather and cook together or make their food for themselves. They have the opportunity to chat with each other and share their stories. There are also specific rooms for kids to play as well.



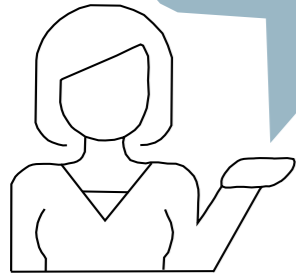
Hanna and her child have gotten their room with a bathroom.



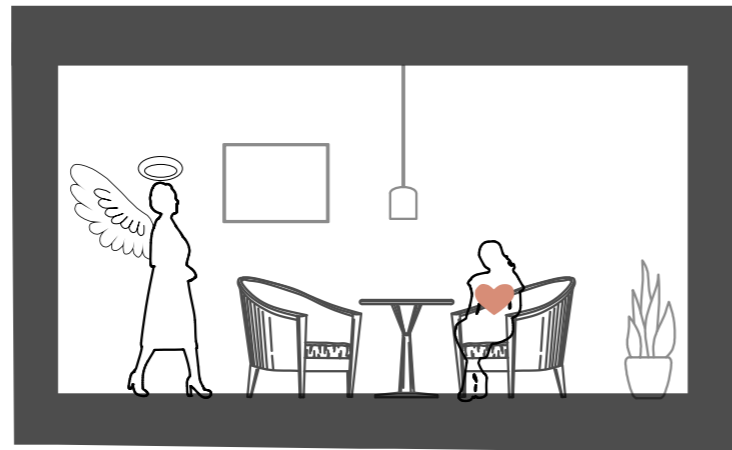
*In the counseling sessions, we talk about different laws and all the legal processes such as property division, custody, residence, and visitation rights. If she has children together with the perpetrator, she contacts a lawyer and requests custody.*

*Many women report the violence to the police, but not all of them. There are a lot of processes that start at the same time in these situations.*

*We work with both the acute cases and then also the long process when the woman starts to realize what she has been through. The women always have a lot of different questions and thoughts around their relationships. Such as why didn't I leave earlier? Could I have left earlier? There is a lot of guilt and shame in this, and we try to calm them down and say you leave when you can. We usually respond that you must be kind to yourself. Social worker, January 16, 2023*



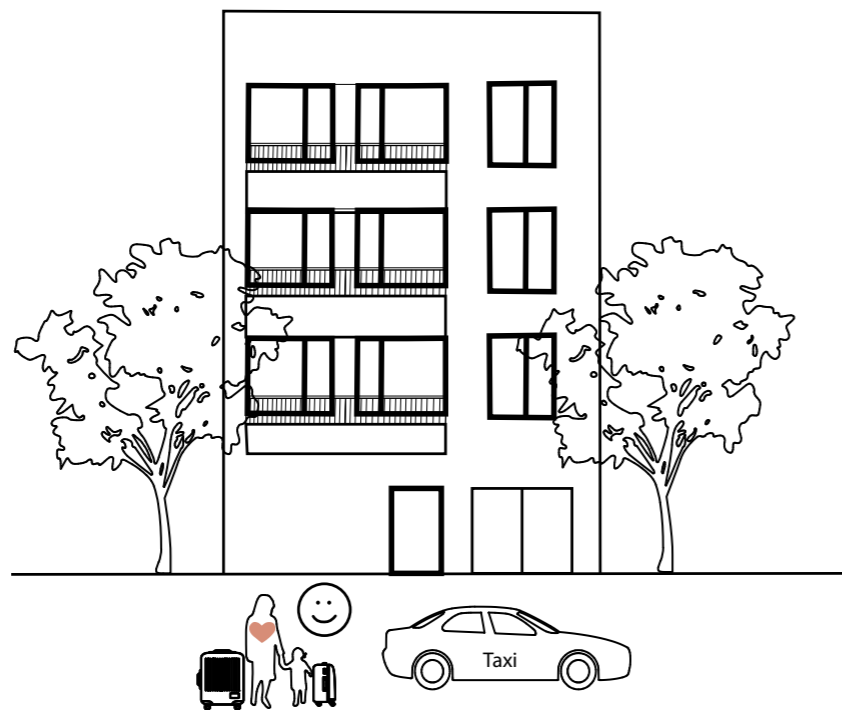
Hanna gets help from Social Services to find a home for herself via The Exploitation Administration. She goes back to her job after the treatment. She is now independent and has regained her self-confidence. She and her child are now living happily.



*Hanna: I could never imagine being this happy, even though the last 4 months have been so stressful.*

*We have got a new place to stay in for the next 1,5 years and I will try to do my best to be able to keep this apartment.*

*I am hoping that my daughter will find good friends here. Unfortunately, her dad still is allowed to meet her in the presence of the social worker, but I am happy that I do not need to see him again.*



In the four coming pages, some scenarios are showing the different perspectives that can exist in a non-physical violent situations in public spaces.

The scenario is a part of the story told by one of the survivors.

The reactions and perspectives were speculated by the author based on the literature and the knowledge gained from the interviews.

The abuser's perspective.

The abused woman's perspective.

The perspective of people around them. (society)

## A typical abusive situation in a public space

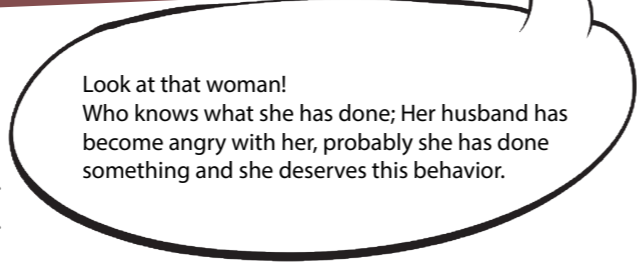
Each of these boxes is a different perspective from each character.

The left one is the abused woman's perspective, the right top is the abuser's perspective, and the right down is society's perspective.

All of these show the worst outcome for that character in such a situation.



*The extreme scenario: The worst thing that can happen to the abused woman was feeling alone in this situation, feeling ashamed, guilty... (This situation is taken from one of the drawing workshops with one of the survivors I met.)*



*The extreme scenario: The worst thing that can happen to the abuser; is that he gets imprisoned in a cage because of his behavior and people around make fun of him...*



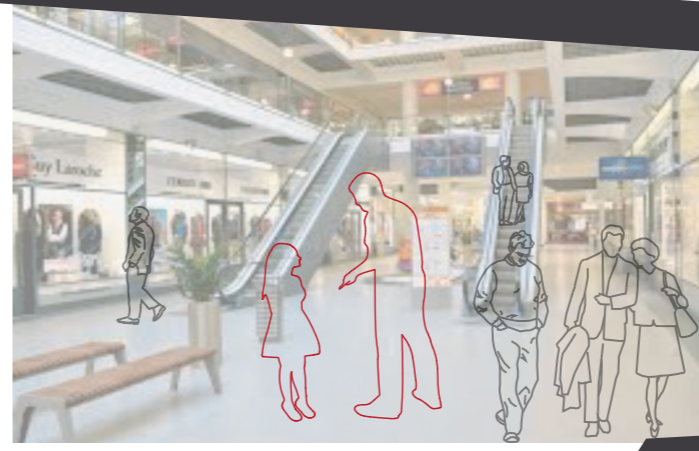
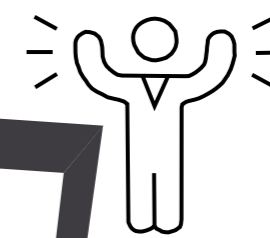
*The extreme scenario: The worst thing to happen in such a situation is that people just ignore what is happening around them. they talk about their own plans and let the abuse happen. They perceive it as a private matter as the man and woman are transparent in their own life's bubble.*

## A typical abusive situation in a public space

Each of these boxes is a different perspective from each character.

The left one is the abused woman's perspective, the right top is the abuser's perspective, and the right down is society's perspective.

All of these show the ideal outcome for that character in such a situation.



*What is the best thing that can happen to the abuser? That everyone around is transparent, he can continue doing what he wants without worrying that someone will intervene. He gets bigger and bigger; stronger and stronger.*



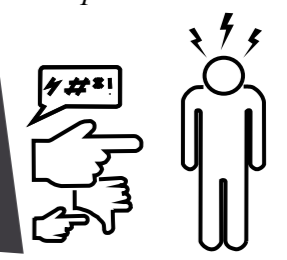
*The ideal thing that could happen to the abused woman, everyone around is behind her for support so that she gets the strenght to stop him.*



**A TYPICAL ABUSIVE SITUATION**



*The ideal thing that one wants is that everyone pays attention to what happens at least in public spaces. So that by being silent you don't give the signal to the abuser that he has the right to do whatever he wants to his partner.*



# EMPIRICAL WORK

## *Deductive work*

*Methodological framework*

*Research process*

*Stakeholders mapping*

*Ethnography*

*Spatial analysis*

## *Inductive work*

*Fictocritical iteration*

*Survival kit*

*“I am done  
wearing your shame  
like an oversized fur coat  
in the middle of summer*

*But this is your shame  
I am done wearing it  
It was never mine  
to begin with*

*I am done  
carrying your guilt  
like a ton of bricks  
in my stomach*

*This is your guilt  
And I am done carrying it  
against the core of my being*

*I am done  
staying silent  
about the sins  
you committed*

*I cannot keep them  
hidden”*

(Amsterdam, 2020, p.189)

## Survival kit

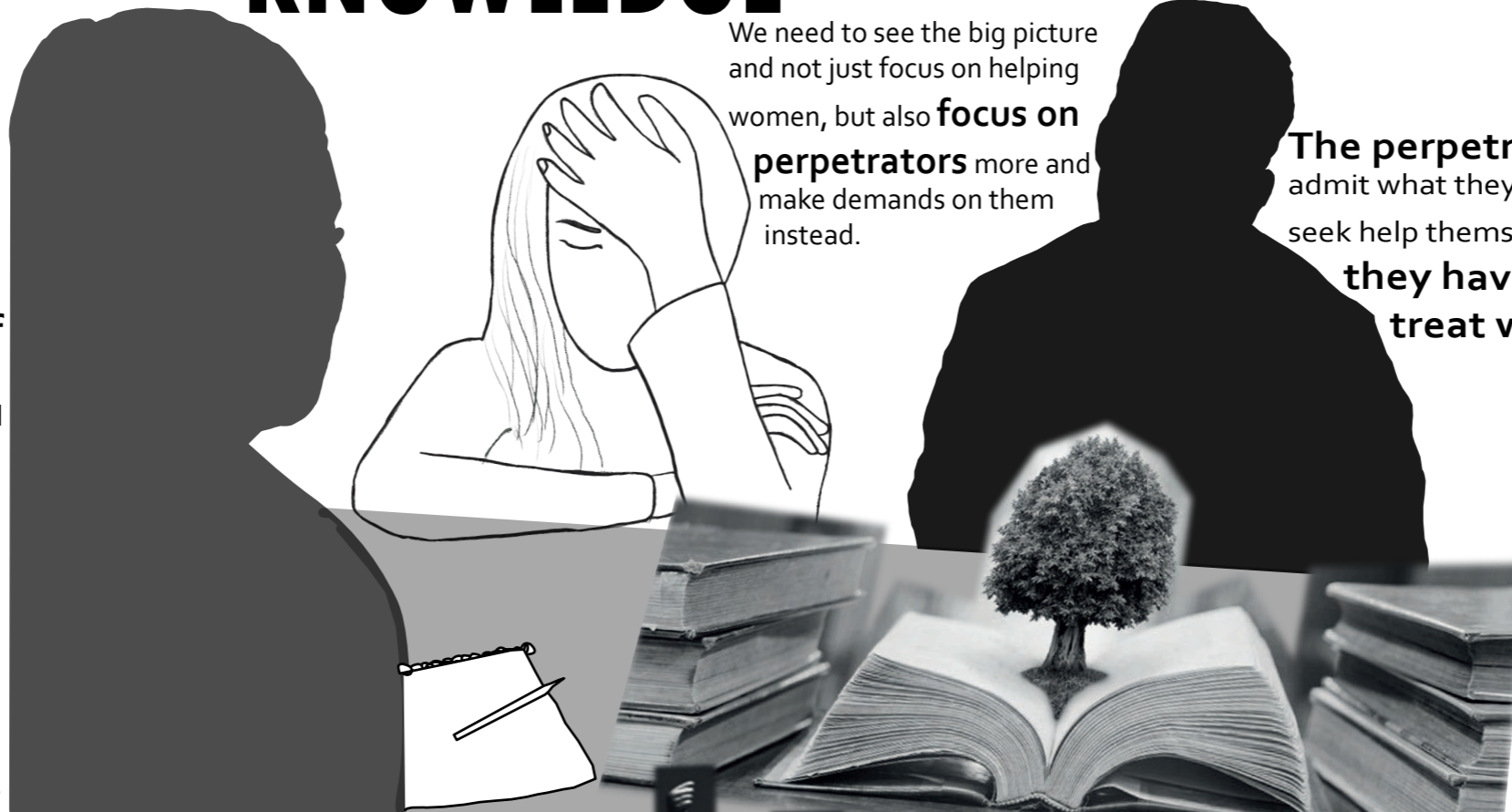
These four coming collages are one of the several possible interpretations that I have extracted as takeaways from the interviews with stakeholders, other interpretations might also be possible.

# KNOWLEDGE

We need to see the big picture and not just focus on helping women, but also **focus on perpetrators** more and make demands on them instead.

**The perpetrators** will never admit what they do, they will never seek help themselves as they **think they have the right to treat women poorly.**

There is a **lack of sufficient knowledge** in authorities regarding non-physical violence in intimate relationships in terms of knowledge of the **perpetrator's behavior** in front of others and how this could be handled. In addition, it is also not always clear **how a victim woman should be treated** now that she has dared to open up and tell her story.



The abuser's view of women and his mentality is what he shows as jealousy in the beginning but it's not love, it's about his need for **power and control.**

# INFORMATION

The abused women need information before they take the first step and make contact with, for example, the police, women's shelter or social services. They need to know **what opportunities they have after the separation** in terms of applying for sole custody, housing and visitation rights and the difference between these.

These abused women need to know all the **legal information regarding family matters.** They need help to understand what rights and obligations they have. They should not be afraid that social services will take their children from them if they report the abuse.

Even more support is needed when an abused woman leaves her relationship. She shouldn't just be taken to another location where she doesn't know anyone at all. Authorities must help her to feel safe so she can stay and **not think about returning to violence because of security,** housing and so on.

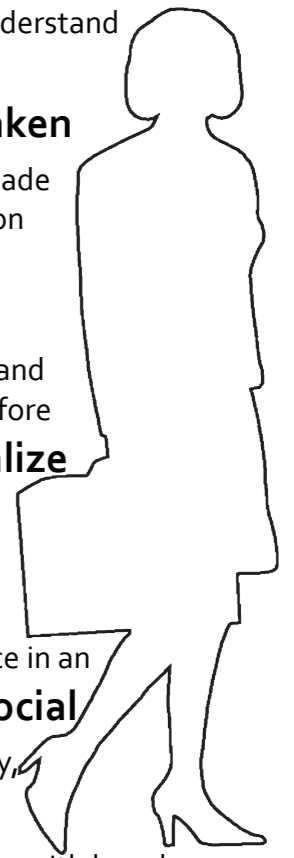


# AWARENESS

The abused woman herself does not understand that she is involved in this as **the perpetrator slowly has taken everything from her** and made her believe that he is the only person she has left.

When a woman becomes a victim of violence, friends and family can help and remind her how she was as a person before this relationship. **She needs to realize that she is not the same person anymore.**

An ordinary person can suffer psychological violence in an intimate relationship, **it can happen in all social classes and professions.** It goes very slowly, everything happens gradually, and **it is not noticeable** because the woman has fallen in love with her abuser.



# FRUSTRATION

The feminist movement in the 70s which said that violence against women is a political issue, has been weakened. **It has once again come back to the point that women must take responsibility for the violence to end,** although it should be the responsibility of this society.

When a **police report** is made and they start to investigate, only then do the women understand that several crimes took place, but **the evidence is still needed and most crimes in close relationships are dismissed.**

These women are **hurt in the legal process by those who are supposed to protect them.**



The abused woman is stuck in her relationship from the beginning because **she is in love with some characteristics of her abuser.** She has given her heart and invested her life in him. She has told everyone how kind and attentive he was at the beginning of the relationship.

# LOVE

**He blames her** for being the one who makes him angry, the one who can't handle him, and she takes responsibility because she loves him.

The perpetrator still buys her flowers sometimes and says he loves her; he's been playing between **hot and cold behavior** all the time. He is a good father, and she has a responsibility for her child, she doesn't want to ruin her child's life.



# GUILT

It is a shame and guilt for a woman to be exposed to violence, **she becomes alone and isolated,** and has no one left that can help her to get out.

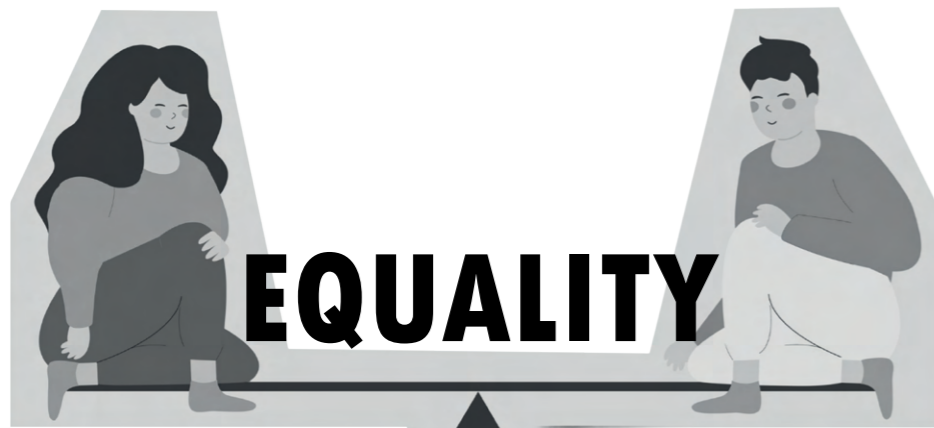
It is painful, **she has failed to have her dream family.** She can't describe and understand what

There is a predetermined notion of how a woman should take care of her husband and children. **Society blames her** and asks why she didn't take the initiative to leave earlier.

happened to her. In such relationships, **she feels that everything is her fault, he blames her all the time.** With all this, it becomes difficult to leave when he tries to control her every movement.



## Facts!



An **equal society** does not only mean that women get power and control over their own lives, but it **also means that men get less power and control over women's lives.**

It is the society that puts pressure on both boys and girls how to behave in a relationship. **It is a system flaw from a young age**, not only that boys get power over girls for themselves, but it also means that women learn to accept this.

This malfunctioning system also means that for example **the law on violation of women's rights is not exercised** due to a lack of resources at the police center. We are in Sweden, the world's most equal country, but it turns out that even if women seek help, they usually don't get all the support they need.



Women and girls are systematically exposed to violence based on structures where **women are subordinate to men.** Power and control are big factors in the functioning of our societies.

Non-physical violence means that in the end, an **abused woman cannot breathe, feels suffocated,** has been suppressed, and has no space left for herself.

## EMPOWER

We know that **it takes a lot of strength** to get out of this relationship and it becomes even more difficult when a woman has lost herself.



The **violence is shameful.** Most people do not go and tell everyone that they are victims of violence.

# EDUCATE

More male resources are needed who can educate young people in schools because **abuse can start from a young age**, and raising awareness is important even in adult education.

It is **more effective if men educate**

**men** because it affects them differently.

Municipal organizations such as the Men's Crisis Center and the Women's Crisis Center should **work more with prevention and education for young people.**

# INVEST

There must be **more laws and regulations that protect women and children** to ensure that women will have faster ways out of violent relationships.

State help is needed to **allocate money to stop violence in intimate partner relationships.**

The municipalities **need to work more** on men's violence against women in intimate partner relationships **with the politicians and reach out to as many people as needed.**

regulatory / reg  
'regjələtɔ:ri/ adj  
regulate(1): regula  
**regulation** /,regju  
action mad

P  
L  
A  
N

# PLAN

These abused women have been exposed to non-physical violence for years without knowing or noticing. They **have doubted themselves and their judgment of the reality** of what they have been through.

These abused women are in crisis, **they need time to heal.** It is not easy for them to find housing after 4 months, taking into consideration that they might have lost their jobs, family, and friends.

The abused women have now taken the step to seek help and it is the social services that has the task of helping them. Now the social services must plan better for them and not just place them in a shelter where the timelimit is 4 months. It is good that the **politicians believe that there should be available emergency places**, but they should also **form a plan for these women to follow afterwards.**

# DISCUSSION

*"Architects are not acting for themselves but on behalf of others, and this means acting ethically. It is to ethics that we now turn."*

(Till, 2009, p. 170)

This research was the best thing that could have happened to me in my whole life. It was very educational and I have developed as a person throughout the whole process. The first and most important thing I can mention is that this research started at the same time as the "Woman, Life, Freedom" revolution in Iran. This was exactly the reason I had planned to undertake this thesis several months before Mahsa Jina Amini was murdered in my home country. I wanted to be the voice of women, especially for my country. It was very challenging for me as a person to go through this difficult topic, while working as an activist on social media to be the voice of women in Iran. There were a lot of ups and downs. I gained the strength to stand on my feet every time I saw women protesting on the streets of Iran when women were beaten and continued to protest for their free lives without any other control. The research started out like this, and it continued as I met women from different origins than mine and I saw how strong they were for leaving their toxic relationships during which someone else had taken over control of their lives. These survivors are heroes for their children because they overcame their toxic relationships and started new lives. Yes, it was very up and down when I was reading books and articles about such relationships and reading survivors' stories online and these women gave me strong motivation to continue. I want to raise awareness among women about such relationships and empower them whilst at the same time empowering myself. I wanted to do this research to help women discover what they are holding inside and get them to talk about it if they are unable to do so.

Being a female architect from Iran (a patriarchal country) and working on such a difficult subject had its challenges. I had my first experiences from university in my home country which then continued in Sweden with a completely different educational system. I could see that patriarchal structures existed even in this country in terms of male architects, the number of men in the construction industry, and the male decision-makers in urban planning. It was a point of disappointment and frustration when I saw that many architects had not even addressed the issue of how to stop domestic violence with the design of homes and other spaces in mind. Fortunately, I had a supervisor and examiner who encouraged me when I first mentioned that I was interested in working on this topic in my thesis. Fortunately, male architects like them see how important this issue is to achieve a sustainable society.

Working on this thesis with this topic had its challenges, such as finding people willing to help. It was not an easy topic to casually talk about with people. I did not tell many people that my thesis is about non-physical violence. I was worried that I would be judged and that people would keep asking questions. The reactions that I got from some who got to know about the topic were not encouraging; they were critical and made comments judging the survivors' stories. This goes to show that this topic is even more important so that society understands and is more empathetic toward women who have experienced non-physical violence. Not many people even know this violence exists as it has become so normalized. No one goes around talking about it in their everyday life to raise this awareness. I could not contact the target group through the organizations due to the fact that it was a sensitive subject. However, most things worked out for my thesis in one way or another. I got the chance to collect stories and knowledge from both women exposed to violence and those who work with them.

Architecture is about performance, instruments, methodology and operations, and I drew on these aspects throughout my process. Architecture is more than creating buildings and spaces, it is also about creating psychologically and mentally safe spaces for abused women. Architecture is not just about the physical aspect of the design of buildings, it is also about creating safe spaces mentally. Through this, I have continued to use architecture because I have listened to women and then I have designed different workshops where they felt comfortable and, in this way, I gathered information. Architecture is not just physical. It is about performance; it is about the instruments that were designed and used in different workshops throughout the process such as clay and drawings. When the women were doing the drawing and clay workshops, they were performing. Architecture is about the methods that was developed. I employed different methods in all of my thesis work, gathering different information, having different interviews and creating safe spaces for the workshops. Architecture is operational, which means that all the methods were used to gather information. Architecture is not only about design but also about being able to understand who and what design affects and being able to implement the architecture on a small scale and on a big scale.

The research question was revealed to be difficult because firstly, architecture is a very practical discipline. It is about different types of spaces, and it does not often engage the questions where spatial agency is not the primary field of discussion. This has been revealed to have been a difficult process, still, I find it very important to continue these explorations with architectural engagements because architecture needs to move from its way, which is a very patriarchal discipline, to a more post-disciplinary way of thinking. It needs to dare to come into fields of uncertainty and difficult questions. This thesis highlights architectural design methodologies, an understanding of analysis of space and communicating critique of stories and more practical methods of composition, drawing, et cetera. On different levels, the way of using instruments to gather information has proven that architecture has a relevant future on this topic.

Numerous organizations support oppressed women, whereas there is not a single organization that works on these questions of violence to either educate or stop men from this behavior. The only men's organization I found was working with men seeking help after a divorce. We need to be more pedagogical towards men and educate them, asking the question of why these things even happen. Some of these people grow up in certain cultures where abuse is more normalized, which only nurtures the problem.

Design activism is not just about protesting something, it is about reacting to the problem or suggesting a reaction. This thesis does not suggest a solution but raises awareness about non-physical abuse in intimate partner relationships such as suggested alternative scenarios shown in the empirical work. This thesis is a way of working towards a solution by opening up architecture to engage and converse about these problems. The development of the various methods is also the purpose of this work. I tested the research question through the empirical process and then I reflected on the results by allowing for iteration and dialogue, identifying the challenges and continually asking why it is so important to further invest in this type of work.

The outcome of this thesis is the process of how I gathered information and how that information was analyzed. Thus, I applied architectural thinking constantly to add more value to the research. I was using visualization for dialogue as an architect which is not often used by non-architects, which shows that architects have an important role because of these skills. My thesis was about breaking down these stories with my method of analysis and spatial analysis. But the metalevel of this thesis overall was understanding how these different methods that designers use are useful to break down these topics in a non-obvious agency of space.

Architecture is a profession where non-physical violence exists, often from men over women because men are the leaders of the offices and women are subalterns. One of the reasons violence is normalized is that men often design all the spaces. Would the spaces have been designed in different ways had they been designed by women? For example, in the past, women were the ones who stayed at home, taking care of the home and the children. Therefore, women would have had a different perspective in designing the home.

With this thesis work, I hoped to motivate someone else to undertake a thesis that involves creating a center to change these men from being abusers. The center needs to be disruptive and make an architectural spatial proposal that is very radical because of the analysis made from this thesis.

This thesis has focused on abuse and intervention, but it is important to note that abuse does not just come from anywhere. Abuse is argued to be systematic and there are various factors that play into abuse such as the culture, economic situations, opportunities and childhood abuse. To prevent this, we must look beyond the post-disciplinary areas to say what is causing abuse. Is it that we need more opportunities for families, do we need to change cultures, or do we need to get more access and more education to people? If we focus on the underlying problems of education and equality then not only would we have a world without abuse against women but also, we could have a more productive world. We need to think about challenging how our society is now and explore what the world and societies could look like.

# REFERENCES

- Auger, J. (2013). Speculative design: Crafting the speculation. *Digital Creativity*, 24(1), 11–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14626268.2013.767276>
- Bates, L. (2021). Honor-Based Abuse in England and Wales: Who Does What to Whom? *Violence Against Women*, 27(10), 1774–1795. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801220952168>
- Boethius, S. (2020). *Genväg till forskning nr 13 Våldsutövare i nära relationer [Shortcut to research no. 13 Perpetrators of violence in close relationships]*. Västra Götalandsregionen, Göteborg. [www.valdinararelationer.se/genvag](http://www.valdinararelationer.se/genvag)
- Brottsförebyggande rådet, Brå. (2023, april 20). *Våld i nära relationer*. <https://bra.se/statistik/statistik-utifran-brottstyper/vald-i-nara-relationer.html>
- Brottsförebyggande rådet, Brå. (n.d.). *Murder and manslaughter*. <https://bra.se/bra-in-english/home/crime-and-statistics/murder-and-manslaughter.html>
- Czarniawska, B. (2014). *Social Science Research: From Field to Desk*. SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529799613>
- Frichot, H., & Stead, N. (2020). *Writing Architectures: Ficto-Critical Approaches* (1st ed.). Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350137936>
- Government of Newfoundland and Labrador(n.d.). *Facts about Violence*. Violence Prevention Initiative- <https://www.gov.nl.ca/vpi/about/facts-about-violence/>
- Hearn, J. (1998). *The Violences of Men*. London: Sage Publications.
- Herman, J. (1992). *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Violence to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books.
- Heimer, G. Björck, A. Albert, U. Haraldsdotter, Y. (2019). *Våldsutsatta kvinnor- samhällets ansvar [Women exposed to violence - society's responsibility]*. Studentlitteratur
- Heise, L., Ellsberg, M., & Gottmoeller, M. (2002). A global overview of gender-based violence. *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics*, 78, S5–S14. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0020-7292\(02\)00038-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0020-7292(02)00038-3)Environment, University of Illinois Press
- Heru, A. M. (2007). Intimate partner violence: Treating abuser and abused. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, 13(5), 376–383. <https://doi.org/10.1192/apt.bp.107.003749>
- Isdal, P. (2017). *Meningen med våld [The meaning of violence]* (2. uppl.). Gothia Fortbildning AB.
- Johnson, M. P. (2008). *A typology of domestic violence: intimate terrorism, violent resistance, and situational couple violence*. Northeastern University Press
- Kvinnofridslinjen. (n.d.). *Vad är våld*. <https://kvinnofridslinjen.se/om-vald/>
- Mezey, N. J., Post, L. A., & Maxwell, C. D. (2002). Redefining intimate partner violence: Women's experiences with physical violence and non-physical abuse by age. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 22(7/8), 122–154. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01443330210790120>
- Outlaw, M. (2009). No One Type of Intimate Partner Abuse: Exploring Physical and Non-Physical Abuse Among Intimate Partners. *Journal of Family Violence*, 24, 263–272. doi: 10.1007/s10896-009-9228-5
- Reach beyond domestic violence. (n.d.). *What is Domestic Violence*. <https://reachma.org/get-educated/what-is-domestic-violence/>
- Socialstyrelsen. (2023, march 8). *Våld i nära relationer*. <https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/kunskapsstod-och-regler/omraden/vald-och-brott/vald-i-nara-relationer/>
- Till, J. (2009). *Architecture depends*. Library of Congress Cataloging- in- Publication Data
- Tolman, R. (1989). The development of a measure of psychological maltreatment of women by their male partners. *Violence Vict.* 4, 159–178.
- Våld i nära relationer.se. (2021, januari 5). *Vad är "nära relationer"?* <https://www.valdinararelationer.se/tand-halso-sjukvard/om-vald/vad-ar-nara-relationer/>
- van Amsterdam, N. (2020). On silence and speaking out about sexual violence: An exploration through poetry. In A. Pullen, J. Helin, & N. Harding (Eds.), *Dialogues in Critical Management Studies* (pp. 185–192). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S2046-607220200000004011>
- Unitednations. (n.d.). *THE 17 GOALS*. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- Unitednations. (n.d.). *Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*. <https://unric.org/en/sdg-5/>
- Unizon. (n.d.). *Mäns våld mot kvinnor*. <https://www.unizonjourer.se/vara-sakfragor/mans-vald-mot-kvinnor/>
- Weisman, Leslie. (1992). *Discrimination by Design. A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment*. University of Illinois Press Urbana and Chicago

## Acknowledgements

Words cannot express my gratitude to my examiner for his invaluable patience and feedback. I also could not have undertaken this journey without my supervisor, who generously provided knowledge and expertise. Additionally, this endeavor would not have been possible without the generous support from the survivors within my focus group and the organizations I got to interview, who supported my research.

I am thankful to the brave women of Iran for strengthening me and encouraging me so that I can be their voice. I am also grateful to my colleagues, Ester and Zoe for their insightful comments, and moral support. Thanks should also go to my best friends for always being up for discussing my thesis. Thanks to my friends who did the last proofread of my thesis.

Lastly, It would be remiss of me not to mention my family, my mother who supported me mentally throughout my thesis in very difficult situations. My father's soul for being with me all the time and the memories of his encouragement throughout my whole life before he passed. The fact that he always believed in me has kept my spirits and motivation high during this process. I would also like to thank my cats for all the entertainment and emotional support.





**CHALMERS**  
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

© Hoda Rajabi Gajin  
Master's Thesis in Architecture  
Gothenburg, Spring 2023