



EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF FINLAND
EVANGELISCH-LUTHERISCHE KIRCHE FINNLANDS
CHURCH COUNCIL
KIRCHENAMT

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Contribution of the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
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Background

The Lutheran Church of Finland is a majority church. 82.4 percent of Finns are members of the church. The activities of the church therefore affect nearly every Finn in one way or another.

In its brief contribution to the review, the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland focuses on the issues of violence against women and children and the poverty of children and families with children.

Violence against women and children

Violence against women is still a widespread problem, despite the efforts undertaken by the state to combat violence, especially domestic violence.

According to a survey published in 2006, 43.5 percent of the women had at least once experienced a man's physical or sexual violence or the threat of it after having reached 15 years of age. Nearly 20 percent of the women reported to have experienced violence or the threat of it in their current partnership. Compared to a similar study published in 1998, women's exposure to violence and threats has increased in the case of threats as well as sexual violence and harassment occurring outside a partner relationship, whereas there has been a slight decrease in partnership violence in threats, physical violence and sexual violence.

Although it has become somewhat more common to rely on official help and treatment, about two thirds of the women who had become victims of violence stated that they had not sought help from any official body. They rely rather on informal social support: more than half the respondents mentioned that they had talked about the violence with a close friend, both when it comes to partner violence and also violence outside a partnership. When official help is sought, it is most frequently sought from the police and health service providers. (Heiskanen, Kääriäinen, Piispa, 2006) Annually some 30 women die as a victim of violence, of which 9-15 as a victim of partner violence.

Violence against children is one of the most serious obstacles to the full implementation of the rights of the child. According to the above-mentioned statistical study published in 1998, 17 percent of Finnish children have witnessed violence in their homes (approximately 190 000 children). Of these children, 10 percent had themselves been victims of violence. According to Ensi- ja turvakotien liitto (the Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters) every third of their child clients (n = 2450) who have witnessed violence have themselves experienced violence. Annually some 10-15 children die as a result of violence (the number includes suicides). It is known that violence against children is more common in families with alcohol problem. Although information on violence against children is gathered from various sources, there is no reliable and comprehensive monitoring system for violence against children. However, the research unit of the Police College of Finland and the Criminological Unit of the National Research Institute of Legal Policy are planning a special child victim study. The study is hoped to provide a framework for a permanent monitoring system of violence against children in Finland.

According to the results of the inquiry collected the Ministry of Justice, various measures have been taken and projects carried out both by the state and NGOs to combat violence against children and youth. The actions have not been coordinated, however, and information about them is not easily available. Also the general principle of the best interests of the child is often not taken into account and the knowledge of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is not yet sufficient in Finland. There are also gaps in the services provided for the victims of violence, especially in rural areas. (Ministry of Justice, 2007)

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has visibly participated in prevention campaigns and actions relating to violence against women and children. These actions have included, inter alia, publication of the document "Churches say no to violence against women" and the Decade to Overcome Violence going on at present.

Poverty

Relative poverty has risen since the mid-1990s in Finland. At the same time poverty has become more severe. Unemployed households are the most vulnerable group of the population. Another vulnerable group is families with small children. The poverty rate among these families has risen much faster than the poverty rate in the whole population.

According to a study carried out in 2002 by Stakes (National Research Center for Welfare and Health), the poverty of children and families with children has doubled during the last ten years. Approximately every tenth family with children belongs to the group of economically most disadvantaged. There appears to be polarisation in the financial situation of families with children. While the income development of families with two parents and one or two children has been relatively positive, the situation of single parent families, families with more than three children and families with children under age of three has deteriorated.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church has reacted to this problem by putting more emphasis on diaconial work centered around families. It has resulted in adoption of new working methods and training of parish workers on supporting children who live in families with difficulties. The Church also actively contributes to public debate on the issue.