



This is Roks



The National Organisation
for Women's Shelters and
Young Women's Shelters
in Sweden



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Roks, The National Organisation for Women's Shelters and Young Women's Shelters in Sweden, is a national organisation for women's and young women's shelters, whose assignment is to work from a feminist perspective to put an end to men's violence against women, young women and children. This violence includes sexual abuse, assault, harassment, pornography, prostitution, rape, trafficking women and children for sexual exploitation, violence in the name of honour, acts of violence in lesbian relationships and female genital mutilation.

Roks is the only national organisation in Sweden that works exclusively for and with women's and young women's shelters. Roks' member shelters bring together women and young women who have chosen to work on a voluntary basis to support and protect women, young women and children who are victims of male violence, or violence in a lesbian relationship, or who are in need of some other form of support.

Women's and young women's shelters are places of refuge for women, young women and children who need support and safe housing. The shelters also undertake preventive work, educating others about men's violence against women, talking to young people about gender equality and relationships, and engaging in political advocacy.

Roks works on a mandate from the member shelters, all of which are independent associations. Roks offers its members competence development and opportunities to share their experiences at training weekends and conferences. Roks also produces educational material and publishes important research which the shelters can use.

In addition to offering support and service to its women's and young women's shelters, Roks spreads, and draws attention to, the experiences of the shelters by influencing public opinion and disseminating information. One important task Roks undertakes is to monitor bills and proposals related to the issues of the violation of women's integrity and men's violence against women, and to follow up how legislation works in practice. Roks also works externally to reach out into the public domain and make people aware that men's violence against women is still a social problem.

Men's violence against women

The term men's violence against women includes all forms of violence that women and young women are subjected to because of their gender:

- **Sexual violence, such as rape, abuse, prostitution and pornography.**
- **Physical violence, such as beating, kicking or choking.**
- **Psychological violence, such as threats and controlling behaviour.**

- **Economic violence, such as not having access to their own money, or not being allowed to go out to work.**
- **Material violence, such as seeing their possessions destroyed.**

Why Roks is needed

Men's violence against women, young women and children is a serious social problem. A study carried out by Nationellt Centrum för Kvinnofrid (the National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence

What Roks does

Roks' women's and young women's shelters offer support to women and young women living in relationships with men who subject them to violence, lesbian and bisexual women and young women who are subjected to violence in their relationships, young women who are subjected to violence within their families, women and young women who have been sexually assaulted, women and young women who self-harm or contemplate suicide, young women who are seeking support and answers to questions about their body, relationships or other matters. Children who accompany their mothers to shelters are also offered support.



Against Women), “Violence and Health” (2014), shows that one in five adult women in Sweden has been subjected to serious sexual violence at some point in her life.

Twenty per cent of Swedish women have been subjected to repeated and systematic physical violence by a partner or ex-partner. Every year about 17 women are killed by men with whom they are having, or have had, a close relationship, according to the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå).

Only a small percentage of the violence women are subjected to by men is reported to the police. Roks’ women’s and young women’s shelters

also come into contact with the women and young women who choose not to report it. This has given Roks unique knowledge which is based on more than 30 years of experience of meeting women, young women and children who have been the victims of male violence. Roks and the shelters have seen that men’s violence affects women and young women at every level of society. This is why it is important to have independent women’s and young women’s shelters which can provide support to everyone who needs it, regardless of where they live, their economic situation or their contact with the authorities. Roks’ women’s and young women’s shelters

provide support to all women and young women who are victims of violence, regardless of whether the perpetrator is a man or a woman, a family member or a stranger.

The shelters are also meeting places for women and young women who want to work politically for the right of women to a life without violence. It is important that there is somewhere women and young women can meet and work politically without the male preferential right of interpretation, just as it is important to have safe rooms for women, young women and children who are victims of male violence. This is why Roks' women's and

young women's shelters are exclusively for women, as is Roks; in other words, they are associations in which only women and young women are members.

Roks is a feminist organisation which, like the UN, believes that men's violence against women is the ultimate consequence of the gender hierarchy. This is a hierarchy that systematically subordinates women as a group of in favour of men as a group.

Roks' feminist viewpoint includes a belief that it is possible to change the structures that create and sustain gender hierarchy. Roks has a

vision of a society in which the human rights and living space of young women, women and children are respected; a society in which all young women, women and children can live without being subjected to violence, intimidation and oppression. For this reason, Roks works to promote the equal value of young women and women on all levels of society.

The women's shelters

Each women's shelter is an independent association and has its own way of working. But Roks' shelters have some things in common:

- ***They have a helpline that women and young women can call.***
- ***Everyone who contacts the helpline has the right to anonymity.***

- ***Women's shelters are women only areas, to ensure safe havens for women and children who are victims of male violence. This means that only women work at the shelters.***

- ***The majority of shelters provide safe accommodation for women and children who need protection from violence.***

The staff at the shelters provide support based on the situation of the individual woman. This may involve counselling to talk about what she has gone through or her relationship, or answering questions about legal matters, the authorities' responsibilities and how to report a crime. In addition to counselling and safe housing, the shelters can assist the woman in her contacts with, among others, social services, the



police and medical services. The women's shelters also provide support to the children who live in shelters with their mother.

Some shelters cater specifically for women from other countries, while other shelters cater for families who have experienced incest. There are also helplines that deal specifically with legal questions.

Young women's shelters

Some young women's shelters are independent associations, just like the women's shelters, while others belong to the local women's shelter. The following applies to all Roks' young women's shelters:

- *They provide support to young women via live chat, email, telephone, meetings and so on.*
- *Everyone who contacts the helpline has the right to anonymity.*
- *The young women's shelters are places where young women and girls come together and work for change, on their own terms, not those traditionally applied by men. That is why only women and young women work in the young women's shelters.*
- *There is a list of all the young women's shelters in Sweden on [Tjejjouren.se](https://tjejjouren.se).*

The staff at the shelters listen to, and give advice and support to, young women who are, or have been, subjected to physical, psychological or sexual violence, who do not feel good about themselves and self-harm in different ways, or have questions about, for



example, their body or relationships. They answer questions about what rights young women have in Sweden, about what the law says and where young women can turn if they need more support. No question is too small or too large for a young women's shelter. The staff can also accompany and support young women in their contacts with, for example, youth clinics, the police or school.

A large part of the work of the young women's shelters is preventive, and takes place in schools and youth centres. The young women's shelters have developed their own material and methods for talking to young people about gender equality, gender roles, relationships, violence and living space.

How the shelters started in Sweden

The first women's shelters started in the mid-1970s. The first young women's shelter was set up in 1996. The women's and young women's shelter movement, which has grown considerably, was started by women and young women who wanted to work together to support women and young women. The work is still based on voluntary efforts. Today, about 120 women's and young women's shelters are members of Roks.

The process of normalising violence

Eva Lundgren, a professor of sociology, has coined the term “the process of normalising violence”. This means that violence is normalised, both by the perpetrator and by the person being abused.

The process of normalising violence often begins with romance and strong feelings, which then develop into jealousy and controlling behaviour. The partner criticises his or her girlfriend, prevents her from spending time with friends and insists she adapt to the partner’s needs. The woman is gradually isolated, and her self-esteem is broken down. After a while, her

partner starts to threaten her and use violence, and the vulnerable woman is forced to adapt even further in order not to be subjected to more violence. The partner often also demands sex, even when the woman is unwilling, or in a way that she does not want. Many women and young women in the women’s and young women’s shelters describe the same experiences.

Why does she not leave?

Just as in other relationships involving two people, a relationship that ends in assault begins with falling in love.

The violence does not come at the beginning of the relationship, when it would be easy to walk away, but only when the relationship is stable. And when the first blow comes, it is often followed by loving behaviour, with expressions of remorse and promises that it will not happen again. It is through this move between violence and affection that the violence creeps into the relationship.

Being beaten in a close relationship is a humiliating and shameful experience.

When you are also isolated and controlled, it is harder to get out of the relationship. It can be dangerous for the woman to end the relationship. The woman's attempt to end the relationship becomes a serious threat to her partner's control, which can lead to more violence – and in the worst case, her death.



Warning signs in your relationship - before the first blow

- ***Does your partner have a negative attitude towards other women?***

Making disparaging comments about women in general, how they dress or behave, can be a sign of a negative attitude towards women that can lead to attempts to restrict you.

- ***Do you sense a change in your partner's personality?***

Has your partner's mood worsened, does he or she flare up easily, is he or she disappearing and controlling? You do not need to accept being treated badly.

- ***Does he or she complain about your clothes, your friends, or a lack of attention?***

This can be an early warning signal and part of the normalisation process designed to make you gradually adapt to his or her will.

- ***Is your partner jealous?***

There is nothing romantic about excessive jealousy! You should not have to feel anxious, restrict your life and, for example, stay home from a party because of your partner's jealousy.

- ***Does he or she read your text messages, go through your bag or your pockets?***

This is a sign of jealousy and the need to control, and in addition to being a warning sign, it is a violation of your integrity.

- ***Does your partner become angry over small things, break things, or treat your pets badly?***

You should not have to be on your guard, or be afraid that he or she will break something that belongs to you, or have to experience your pet being subjected to violence or neglect.

• ***Does he or she threaten you with violence, treat you roughly or strike you?***

Threatening to use violence is the same as using violence, and it is also a criminal act.

If your partner has subjected you to any form of violence:

• ***Tell someone*** you trust. It's good if someone else knows.

• ***Keep a diary*** of when your partner humiliates, threatens or hits you, to help you remember. Write down a description of your injuries and

photograph them. If you seek medical treatment, you can ask the staff to photograph and record your injuries as documentation, even if you do not want to make a complaint at the time.

• ***Call a women's shelter***

or young women's shelter, or the equivalent, and talk to a woman or young woman who understands violence in close relationships. They will listen to what you say and will not query your story.

They can provide advice and support, and you can remain anonymous.

• ***Do not believe*** that your partner will not hit you again, or that his or her behaviour will change. People who have hit someone with whom they

are in a close relationship will almost always do it again. And someone who considers they have the right to exercise power and control over the person they are in a long-term relationship with needs long-term professional help to change.

- **Prepare a way out,** make sure you have somewhere where you can go if he or she subjects you to violence again. Ask the women's shelter, emergency social services, friends or family to help you find somewhere you can go at any time.

- **Report it to the police.** Violence in close relationships is a crime. Report it, both for your own sake and to make your partner under-

stand that it is a criminal act. The women's shelter or young women's shelter can support you through the process of making a police report.

When you think someone close to you is being beaten

If you see the signs of violence, or any of the warning signs we have described, and your questions are met with evasive answers, then you can do the following:

- **Ask!** Ask a direct question: Is your partner hitting you? Are you being stopped from spending time with whoever you want? Is he or she a very jealous person? But do not ask when her partner is nearby.
- **Listen.** Tell her you are



there, that you will listen, even if she does not want to tell you right now. Show her that you are there and ready to support and help her when she is ready.

- **Do not question** her judgement or why she “accepts it”. That is shifting the focus of the problem; remember that it is the person using violence who is in the wrong, not the victim. Reactions which blame or reproach the victim include encouraging her to change her behaviour in order to avoid violence, or implying, or saying straight out, that she has chosen to be a victim of violence because she “doesn’t just break up” with her partner. Understanding what the process of normalis-

ing violence involves makes it easier for you to understand and avoid this kind of mistake.

- **Call for help.** If the situation becomes acute, if someone’s life is in danger, or if a child is being abused, do not hesitate to call the police or social services.

- **Call a women’s shelter** or a young women’s shelter or the equivalent. A shelter can also offer advice and support to friends and relatives.



If you suspect that someone you do not know particularly well is a victim:

Maybe someone who lives on the same staircase as you, or someone at work that you have never spoken to? It can be a good idea to order posters or business cards from a shelter, or women's helpline, or the equivalent, to put up in stairwells, utility rooms or shared toilets. It can send a signal, and when the woman feels ready to seek support, she has somewhere to turn.

• ***If you can, tell her that you see or hear what she is going through.***

Not in a questioning or doubting way, but as a statement:

"I see what you are going

through and it is a crime.

If you want to talk or need help, I'm here." Then she knows that there is someone who is willing to listen.

**For more information,
visit our website:
www.roks.se**





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