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## REASONS THAT KEEP WOMEN FROM DISCLOSING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

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#### **Abstract**

*Up to 75 % of women globally at some point in their lives have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2005). However, 60 % of the survivors suffer in silence (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014), thus cannot obtain help and protection. In order to understand what keeps the women from disclosing IPV, we conducted the study and analysed IPV survivors' non-disclosure reasons and their association with different forms of IPV. Through social media, 127 women survivors of IPV were recruited. The Composite Abuse Scale (CAS) and the Scale of Economic Abuse (SEA) were used together with the list of 12 possible reasons of non-disclosure. We found that the women reported the main reasons they did not disclose or seek help were shame (59.1 %) and wishes to keep it in secret (40.9 %). Moreover, several*

*binary logistic regression models revealed that non-disclosure reasons could be predicted by the severity and frequency of different forms of IPV. For example, the results indicated that the women who experienced physical abuse were kept from disclosing it due to fear of abuser's retaliation. It is possible that better protection of IPV survivors and efforts to reduce impunity substantially, could result in increased help-seeking by IPV survivors. However, analysis suggests that one type of solution is not going to make the needed change. In order to increase help-seeking behaviour, a systemic approach is needed addressing policy, funding and resources available to the providers of help and protection. The findings can serve as guidelines for policies directed towards improvement of practices of various professionals, institutions and organisations in order to increase help and protection seeking of survivors of IPV.*

**Keywords:** *violence against women, intimate partner violence, barriers, non-disclosure, Lithuania*

## Introduction

For centuries, women have been subjected to male violence. However, the phenomenon of violence against women in intimate relationships started gaining more attention in the second half of the 20th century (Walker, 2017). The studies done locally and globally showed that violence against women is spread and has similar rates worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2005), up to 75 % of women in the world at some point in their lives have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV). Laws denouncing and later criminalising IPV started to emerge, specialised complex help centres for IPV survivors were established, and campaigns geared towards attitudinal change in society were held. However, numbers of survivors who felt comfortable to disclose their IPV experiences in surveys and those who reported the abuse to protection or support agencies were quite different in that many more disclosed in surveys than in actuality. Women disproportionately experience much more male intimate partner violence than men do female, therefore, in this study, we focus on male violence against women in intimate relationships.

The National surveys on domestic violence that have been carried out annually since 2014 have shown that help-seeking behaviour from 2014 to 2019 has not changed much (Ministry of Social Security and Labour, 2017; 2019). On average 64 % of victims do not seek help from any source, formal or informal, and if they do it is usually from family members (on average 14.4 %) and police (on average 15.4 %) (Ministry of Social Security and Labour, 2019). It has been reported consistently that women IPV survivors tend to seek help first and the most often from their immediate environment, such as friends and family. Only with the increase of frequency and severity of violence do the women turn to official help sources such as police or help providing organisations (Tengku, Ali, & Salleh, 2015; Vasiliauskaitė, Naudi, Camilleri, Geffner, 2020). Even though unofficial help sources, such as people from the immediate environment, are essential for further help-seeking, family or friends might not be equipped or in some cases willing to help the victim (Estrellado & Loh, 2014; Herman, 2015).

Therefore, reports to official help sources become even more critical as this may lead the women to appropriate intervention and support. The representative study carried out in 28 European Union member States by European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) found that 69 % of the most serious incidents of physical violence and 60 % of sexual violence were never reported to any protection or help providing institution or organisation (FRA, 2014). This can mean that almost exclusively all incidences the women did not consider serious were not reported at all.

Help-seeking of IPV survivor is paramount on many levels. Firstly, the damaging effect of IPV for women's and their children's bio-psycho-social health and wellbeing is immense (Chandan et al., 2020; Vasiliauskaitė, 2015; WHO, 2012). Secondly, male intimate partner violence is considered to be a crime that generates criminogenic behaviour and becomes a cause of other crimes (Piquero et al., 2014; Verbruggen et al., 2019). Thirdly, violence against women affects many people, not only those directly suffering from it. The economic cost of IPV is significant. European Institute for Gender Equality estimates that the European Union loses more than 109 billion euros a year due to intimate partner violence against women (Walby, & Olive, 2014). It is crucial to learn and understand those reasons and find ways to ease help-seeking behaviour for IPV survivors.

Even though many good practices were implemented such as the criminalisation of IPV, campaigns towards public and professionals' attitudes towards the survivors of IPV, the establishment of Specialised Help Centres for survivors of IPV in Lithuania that provide trauma-informed, client-friendly and free of charge help, the rates of seeking help in Lithuanian has changed but not that much. Still, many of the women survivors of IPV are not seeking help and protection. It is crucial to find ways to ease help-seeking behaviour for IPV survivors. Therefore, we conducted the study with the aim to understand what keeps the women from help-seeking. We sought to find the answers to: What are the reasons that keep the women survivors of IPV from disclosing their abusive experiences? Are certain abusive experiences associated with non-disclosure behaviour? What abusive experiences predict non-disclosure behaviour best? To our knowledge, there are no studies that analysed this relationship. This knowledge could inform awareness-raising campaigns, improve strategies and policies geared towards increasing the help-seeking of IPV survivors.

## 1. Research methods

### 1.1 Participants and procedures

**Participants.** This study is part of a larger-scale study conducted in 2017–2019. In the study participated 127 women survivors of intimate partner violence who had indicated one or more reasons that at some point of their lives have stopped them from disclosing IPV and seeking help. The participants' age ranged from 18 to 69 years old ( $M = 36.6$ ;  $SD = 11.82$ ). The majority of women had higher education (60.3 %), then secondary (21.4 %) and vocational (18.3 %). The majority (64.2 %) of the women were employed, 15 % were neither working nor studying, some were studying (15.4 %) and just a few studying and working (6.5 %). More than half of participants (56.3 %) lived in cities; others lived in larger towns (23 %) and small towns (20.6 %).

**Procedures.** The participants were recruited through social media in an attempt to reach women who had experienced IPV but might not seek help. The online questionnaire had information about the study's aims in general terms. The potential participants were informed that the questionnaire was anonymous, and all collected data will be presented after statistically processed. It was considered that participants gave their consent to participate by filling in and submitting the questionnaire. As the participation could have evoked strong emotions, at the end of the questionnaire, the list of regional help-providing organisations with their contact information was provided. They were also encouraged to contact those organisations should they want to discuss their experiences more broadly. The ethical issues were presented and discussed at Mykolas Romeris University's Psychology PhD Committee. The procedures utilized were deemed appropriate and acceptable for human participants.

## 1.2. Measures

**Intimate partner violence.** Two multidimensional measures with high internal consistency measured by McDonald's omega ( $\omega$ ) coefficient (McDonald, 1978) were used to determine severity and frequency of eight types of abuse women suffered from an intimate partner. We used the Lithuanian version of *the Composite Abuse Scale* (CAS, Hegarty, Sheehan, Schonfeld, 1999; Hegarty, Bush, & Sheehan, 2005) that measures five types of abuse (Vasiliauskaitė & Geffner, 2020): 1) *Severe Combined Abuse* ( $\omega = .81$ ) is measured by five statements describing incidents of severe violence such as assault with a weapon, being locked in the bedroom, kept from obtaining medical care, 2) *Sexual Abuse* ( $\omega = .71$ ) consists of three questions reflecting sexual violence, such as rape and attempted rape, 3) *Emotional Abuse* ( $\omega = .94$ ) has 11 items reflecting verbal and psychological violence, insults, isolation from friends and family, etc., 4) *Physical Abuse* ( $\omega = .94$ ) consists of seven items that include being hit, slapped, thrown, pushed, etc., and 5) *Harassment* ( $\omega = .85$ ) that has four items describing harassment at work or over the telephone, as well as being followed. Answers are measured in a 6-point Likert like scale from 0 to 5, where 0 meant "Never," and 5 meant "Daily."

The second measurement was the Lithuanian version of *the Scale of Economic Abuse* (SEA, Adams, Beeble, & Gregory, 2015). The SEA measures three types of economic abuse: 1) *Economic Control* ( $\omega = .93$ ) subscale has 13 items describing abusers' attempts to restrict the women from freely accessing various resources, such as makes her ask for money, keeps financial information from her, etc., 2) *Economic Exploitation* ( $\omega = .89$ ) consists of 11 statements reflecting abusers' actions to deplete the couple's funds or create debt by refusing to get a job, gambling with hers or shared money, paying bills late or not at all, etc., and 3) *Employment sabotage* ( $\omega = .87$ ) with four items suggesting abusers' efforts to restrict a woman from obtaining her own resources through employment, trying to keep her from going to work, threatening to quit a job, etc. The answers are measured in a 5-point scale with responses ranging from 0 – "Never" to 4 – "Quite often."

**Reasons for non-disclosure.** The women were asked to identify the reasons that kept them from disclosing their experience of IPV. The list of 12 possible reasons was pro-

vided. This list included reasons from not considering the abuse being serious enough to fear of retaliation and loss of children (see Table 1).

### 1.3 Data analysis

**Statistical analysis.** Several binary logistic regression models were used to determine whether there was a relationship between a categorical dependent variable (non-disclosure reasons) and a continuous predictor variable (different types of violence). These logistic regression models are special cases of generalised linear models, which assume a binominal distribution and a logit link function. Several models were fitted to determine a relationship between the experience of eight different types of IPV and reasons for non-disclosure. Eight out of 12 models converged. For converged models, a forward stepwise procedure was used to identify the parsimonious models that included solely the significant predictors (see Table 2). For the better graphic presentation of results, see Figure 1. Parameter estimates were considered to be significant when  $p \leq .05$  or approaching significance when  $p < .10$ .

## 2. Results

### 2.1 Non-disclosure of violence

Most of the women indicated only one reason for non-disclosure (34.6 %) (see Table 1). However, there was a woman (0.8 %) who reported up to eight reasons for non-disclosure. As can be seen in Table 1, the most endorsed reasons for non-disclosure were the feeling of shame (59.1 %), wish to keep the abuse a secret (40.9 %), and belief that the women can cope with it on their own (39.4 %). The least endorsed reasons were previous negative experience with police (9.4 %), something or someone stopped them (4.7 %) and did not come to their mind (2.4 %).

**Table 1.** The prevalence of nondisclosure of IPV

Nondisclosure reasons	%
Ashamed	59.1
Did not want anyone to know	40.9
Thought they can cope on their own	39.4
Did not think it was serious	20.5
Afraid of retaliation	18.1
Did not think anything/anyone can help with it	17.3
Did not think anyone would believe	17.3
Thought it was their fault	16.5
Afraid to lose their children	12.6
Previous negative experience with the police	9.4
Something or someone stopped them	4.7
Did not come to my mind	2.4

*Note.* Respondents were able to give more than one answer so that categories may total to more than 100 %.

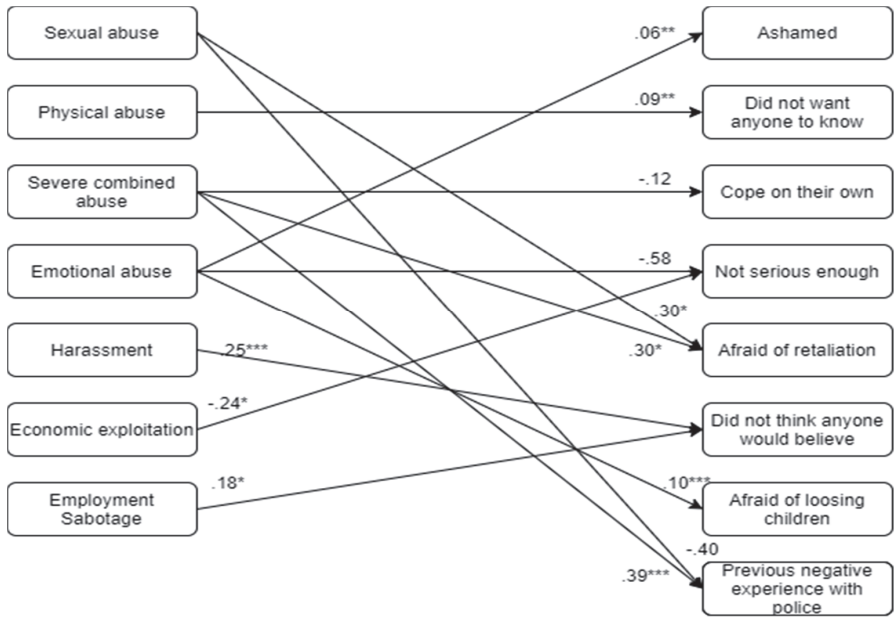
## 2.2. Association between different forms of IPV and non-disclosure reasons

**Ashamed.** The logistic regression model that relates being ashamed as the reason of non-disclosure of IPV to the eight predictors measuring different types of violence explained 23 % (Nagelkerke pseudo r-square = .23) of the total variation in the responses. However, in the model, most predictors were statistically insignificant ( $p > .05$ ). As we can see from Table 2 and Figure 1 the parsimonious model included only one significant main effect which measured the experience of emotional abuse. This one predictor model explained 15 % ( $R^2 = .15$ ) of the total variance in the responses. The odds ratio (1.06) indicated that for every additional incident of emotional abuse, the odds of not disclosing the abuse because of *feelings of shame* increased by 6 %. Moreover, the 95 % confidence interval for this odds ratio ranged between 1.03 and 1.10. This showed that non-disclosure of IPV due to shame with every new incident of emotional abuse increased between 3 % and 10 %.

**Table 2.** Association between different forms of IPV and nondisclosure reasons

	Type of abuse	B	Std. Error	P-value	Odds ratio	95% C. I. of Odds Ratio	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Ashamed	Emotional	.06	.02	.001	1.06	1.03	1.10
Did not want anyone to know	Physical	.09	.03	.003	1.10	1.03	1.17
Thought they could cope on their own	Severe combined	-.12	.06	.059	0.89	0.79	1.01
Did not think it was serious	Economic exploitation	-.24	.11	.036	0.79	0.63	0.99
	Emotional	-.58	.03	.053	0.94	0.89	1.00
Afraid of retaliation	Severe combined	.27	.08	.001	1.31	1.12	1.53
	Sexual	.30	.14	.028	1.35	1.03	1.76
Did not think anyone would believe	Harassment	.25	.07	.000	1.28	1.13	1.46
	Employment sabotage	.18	.09	.039	1.19	1.01	1.41
Afraid to lose their children	Emotional	.10	.03	.000	1.11	1.05	1.16
Previous negative experience with the police	Severe combined	.39	.10	.000	1.48	1.22	1.79
	Sexual	-.40	.21	.055	0.67	0.45	1.01

*Note.* B – parameter estimate, Std. error – standardised error, p-value – the level of significance,  $p < .05$ , C. I. – confidence interval.



**Fig. 1.** Graphic presentation of parsimonious models and their associations between different forms of IPV and nondisclosure reasons

Note. Different levels of significance:  $p < .05^*$ ,  $p < .01^{**}$ ,  $p < .001^{***}$ .

**Did not want anyone to know.** The parsimonious model included only one significant main effect measuring the experience of physical abuse. This one predictor model explained relatively little ( $R^2 = .11$ ) variance in the responses. The odds ratio (1.10) indicated that for every additional incidence of physical abuse, the odds of not disclosing the abuse because *not wanting others to know* increased by 10 % and could range up to 17 %. This indicated that the women who experienced physical violence were most concerned with keeping their IPV experience to themselves.

**Thought they could cope on their own.** One marginally significant predictor ( $p = .059$ ) of not disclosing abuse because the women *thought they could cope with it on their own* was severe combined abuse (See Table 2 and Figure 1). However, the parameter estimate was negative. This indicates that the women who experience more frequent severe combined abuse are less likely to think that they can cope with the abuse on their own. This predictor model explained very little variance in the responses ( $R^2 = .05$ ).

**Did not think it was serious.** One significant and one marginally significant predictor of not disclosing abuse because of *not thinking the violence was serious enough to be disclosed* were economic exploitation and emotional abuse. Moreover, the analysis revealed a negative association. It indicates that the women who experienced more frequent economic exploitation and emotional abuse were less likely to report that the reason for

non-disclosure was not considering violence was serious enough. In other words, results suggested that only lesser experience of economic exploitation and emotional abuse could be the factors predicting this reason of non-disclosure. This two-factor model explained 29 % of the total variance in the responses ( $R^2 = .29$ ).

**Afraid of retaliation.** The model analysing IPV association with *fear of retaliation* identified two significant predictors: severe combined abuse and sexual abuse. This indicates that the women experiencing severe combined and sexual abuse were stopped from disclosure because of their fear of abuser's retaliation. One additional incident of severe combined and sexual abuse increased odds of non-disclosure due to fear of retaliation by 31 % and 35 % respectively. Moreover, this two-predictor model was one of the best at explaining total variance in the responses ( $R^2 = .39$ ). That suggests that the women, survivors of severe combined and sexual violence were mostly discouraged from seeking help by fear of retaliation.

**Did not think anyone would believe.** The model retained two significant predictors of non-disclosure predicted by the fear that *others would not believe the woman*. The women experiencing harassment and employment sabotage are the most concerned that others will not believe their disclosure. This model explains almost half of the total variance in the responses ( $R^2 = .46$ ). Furthermore, with every additional incident of these forms of abuse, the odds of non-disclosure because of the fear of disbelief increase by 28 % and 19 % respectively.

**Afraid to lose their children.** The analysis revealed that experience of emotional abuse was the best predictor of non-disclosure of abuse due to *fear of losing children*. Therefore, the more severe and frequent emotional abuse the women experienced, the more women fear losing their children, and that stopped them from disclosing IPV ( $R^2 = .32$ ). With every incident of emotional abuse, the odds of not disclosing abuse due to this fear increase by 11 %.

**Previous negative experience with the police.** The model retained one significant, and one marginally significant predictor of not disclosing abuse because of *negative previous experience with police*, and these were severe combined abuse and sexual abuse. For every additional severe combined abuse incident, the odds of not disclosing abuse due to past negative experience with police increased by 48 %. However, the more frequently the women experienced sexual abuse, the less likely they were indicating that that was the reason of non-disclosure. Even though it seems like contradictory results, but this model explained 31 % of the variance in total responses, suggesting that the previous negative experience plays a significant role in help-seeking.

### 3. Discussion

In the present study, we analysed IPV survivors' non-disclosure reasons and their association with different forms of IPV. Comparing our study's and FRA (2014) results, we found that - the top five most identified reasons for non-disclosure in both studies were similar, but not the endorsement. Our findings revealed that the respondents were most discouraged to disclose the abuse by *shame* (59.1 %) and wish *to keep it in secret*



(40.9 %), while on average European Union (EU) women were more *relying on their own or their family to deal with abuse* (41 %) or *did not think that abuse was serious enough to report it* (34 %).

Following Naudi et al. (2018) conceptualization, were help-seeking barriers were categorised into external and internalised. External barriers, that are considered to be the main reasons for non-disclosure, were associated with three systems: (1) informal system (people from the immediate environment like family, friends and the perpetrator himself), (2) formal system (official sources such as help providing organisations, therapeutic services), and (3) justice system (law enforcement agencies, courts). Internalised barriers include myth acceptance, lack of awareness by survivors or society at large. It appears that Lithuanian women in our study were more affected by internalized barriers, where EU women were more concerned with external barriers. Both findings are reflective of a broader context both at the local and international level. At the time when FRA collected data for its study, most of the EU Member States had not signed, ratified or implemented the Istanbul Convention (The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence) (Council of Europe, 2020). Lithuania was one of them that signed it but not ratified it. However, it already had a progressive Protection from Domestic Violence law (2011), and Specialised Help Centres that were providing proactive, free of charge, and State guaranteed help and assistance for the survivors. It is possible that for some countries at the time, protection from IPV and help provision were more complicated. Therefore, the EU women were reporting reasons related to more external barriers. Lithuania has a help and protection network, however. For the past several years, Lithuania was ranked as one of the most victim-blaming countries in EU (Eurobarometer, 2010; 2016). Our findings show that Lithuanian women were endorsing more internalised barriers, illustrating the effect the internalised stigma has on IPV survivors' help-seeking behaviour.

We found that most of the specific reasons for non-disclosure were predicted by a specific form of IPV. Previous studies showed that emotional and economic violence is rarely identified as such by survivors (Grigaitė & Karalius, 2018; Parker, 2015). Failure to recognize such forms of violence, leads the women to look for an explanation of the abuse within themselves and their own actions, even though no action or personality trait can cause someone else to be violent; that is the choice and responsibility of the perpetrator. We found that the women who experienced emotional abuse did not disclose abuse largely because of *shame* (59.1 %) and *fear of losing children* (12.6 %). However, both reasons for non-disclosure could have been a consequence of the poor institutional response to IPV. Child Protection Services (CPS) too often does not differentiate between the abusive and non-abusive parent. This negative practise puts the women and the children at even a greater danger, as their focus should be on protecting the child and the non-abusive parent. Instead, this intervention shifts to putting the women at the centre of the interventions and not restricting the abusive parents' behavior (Alaggia, Jenney, Mazzuca, & Redmond, 2007; Vasiliauskienė, Dirmotaitė, & Vasiliauskaitė, 2017).

The findings in the present study also suggest that internalised non-disclosure reasons such as the belief that the women *can cope with it on their own* (39.4 %), or that *the*

*abuse was not serious enough to be reported* (20.5 %), were highly endorsed. However, all had low or marginal significance as well as negative associations with IPV. It could be that the women who experience more frequent severe combined and emotional abuse are less likely to think that they can cope with the abuse on their own or that the abuse was not serious enough. Furthermore, the survivors of *sexual abuse* and *severe combined abuse* did not feel safe to disclose abuse due to fear of retaliation, similarly to survivors of *physical violence*, who were concerned about others knowing about their abusive experience. This is worrisome as these women might be in serious life-threatening situations, but are not seeking help due to possible IPV stigma. On the other hand, research shows that up to 70 % of femicides are perpetrated by male intimate partners during or pending separation (Office of the Chief Coroner Province of Ontario, 2019). Therefore, the risk of violence after disclosure is high. It is possible that the women did not trust the law enforcement to protect them and refer them to adequate help sources.

Contradictory results were obtained analysing another justice system barrier, *previous negative experience with the police* (9.4 %). On the one hand, every additional severe abuse incident reduced odds of the women reporting the abuse by almost 50 %. However, results show that the experience of severe and frequent sexual violence would not stop the women from disclosing the abuse even if they had a negative experience with police. It could be that when it comes to sexual abuse, the women might sustain injuries that need professional attention and cannot be explained in any other way. Therefore, the disclosure might be more motivated by the need of specific help and assistance, then by believe that disclosure would help them to escape abuse and improve their current situation.

Survivors of *harassment and employment sabotage* were the most concerned about not being believed (17.3 %). This fear of disbelief can be seen as rational and could be closely related to lack of legislation criminalising these specific forms of abuse as well as publicising it widely. Economic violence, as mentioned before, is rarely recognised by the women themselves as well as law enforcement or other professionals. Additionally, Lithuania was one of the few EU countries that have not criminalised harassment or stalking (Van Der Aa, 2018). It was only after women's grass-roots organisations led by the nongovernmental organisation Vilnius Women's House have brought up the issue to the decision-makers of Lithuania, the overwhelming resistance to criminalisation of stalking was lowered. Now the law to criminalising stalking in Lithuania has been drafted and presented to the Parliament.

## Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that there are several reasons that kept women from disclosing their experience of various forms of IPV. We also found that the Lithuanian women who participated in the present study have similar concerns regarding non-disclosure of IPV when compared to other European women. Moreover, we found that non-disclosure reasons can be predicted by the experience of different forms of IPV. Several logistic regression models relating nondisclosure reasons to different types of IPV, such as *fear of not being believed* (46 %; Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.4$ ), *fear of retaliation*

(39 %;  $NR^2 = 0.39$ ), *previous negative experience with police* (31 %;  $NR^2 = 0.32$ ), *fear of losing children* (32 %;  $NR^2 = 0.26$ ), and *not thinking IPV was serious* (29 %;  $NR^2 = 0.21$ ), explained a large part of the total variation in the responses. This revealed that depending upon the woman, five major issues worked in conjunction to keep the women from IPV disclosure. Hence, the analysis revealed that the issue of non-disclosure is much more complex, therefore, this requires many different wide-reaching strategies to address all of the issues. For example, awareness campaigns are needed to stress the seriousness of any form of IPV as well as where to turn for help and protection. In order to promote help-seeking from help providing organisations, the State should assume the reasonability of sufficient and continued funding as the organisations should be well-staffed so they can provide needed help. They also need funding to publicize the services available to help the women become more aware of the issue and the importance of seeking help. To encourage disclosure, the experiences of reporting IPV must be more positive. Fear of retaliation, as well as fear of disbelief and negative attitudes about police interactions and experiences are the reasons that stop the women from help-seeking. Police interactions should be changed to be more positive by reviewing the practices and ensuring consistent specialised training of law enforcement and as well as any professionals that may come in contact with IPV survivors. Training programs should be constructed to enforce the change of the attitudes towards the women survivors of IPV, to ensure humane, honourable, client-friendly and trauma-informed help and protection practices as well as to halt the impunity. Moreover, the training programs should be prepared and facilitated by nongovernmental organisations providing help and assistance to IPV survivors as they are experts in IPV phenomenon, its causes, dynamics and consequences as well as the issues IPV survivor face. Moreover, the resources of the police as well as the help providing organisations should be reinforced, starting with sufficient funding. In addition, implementation is needed of various instruments that help law enforcement to protect the women, such as emergency barring order and immediate consequences for its breach, along with high rates of prosecution and adequate punishments. Finally, the fear of losing children should also be addressed by reviewing CPS' procedures, as well as the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child of the Republic of Lithuania that all the procedures and measures created to protect children would not be turned against non-abusive parents (i.e., the women). Therefore, all the reasons related to non-disclosure should be addressed through policy, funding, and resources approach in order to have an impact and much-needed change.

The present findings can serve as guidelines for policies directed towards speedy and increased help-seeking from various professionals, institutions and organisations. For example, the results indicated that the women who experience physical abuse were kept from disclosing it by fear of abuser's retaliation. It is possible that better protection of IPV survivors and efforts to reduce impunity substantially could result in increased help-seeking by IPV survivors if they were also aware of this. Also, many of the women endorsed reasons that could be conceptualised as internalised barriers, which suggests there is a high endorsement of victim-blaming attitudes and other IPV myths by society and themselves. Moreover, results suggest that a systemic approach for policies, funding,

and resource availability should be employed in order to remove the barriers keeping the women survivors of IPV from help-seeking. All of the above-mentioned issues need to be addressed, and more needs to be done to stop domestic violence against women. More resources for proper help, protection and support need to be available. These and other important issues are addressed in the Istanbul Convention, and Lithuania would gain tremendously by ratifying it. In addition, more research is needed for determining the effects of IPV stigma on help-seeking. Future research should involve a larger sample of women who have disclosed and not disclosed abuse so that more in-depth analyses might help determine better ways to address the issues in both prevention and earlier intervention. A qualitative approach can provide more of this in-depth knowledge about the reasons that kept the women from disclosing their experience. Thus, the current findings do bring new insights into the issue of non-disclosure of IPV and its relation to a specific form of IPV. Additionally, the results revealed multi-layered issues associated with different types of abuse and reasons for non-disclosure.

The sample of the study was not representative, thus, the findings cannot be generalised to all women IPV survivors and should be interpreted accordingly. However, representative samples in this research field are rare and almost unachievable. Another limitation could be lack of knowledge whether these reasons noted above stopped the women from disclosure *per se*, or were the outcome of the negative experience of help-seeking or attempted disclosure.

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## REASONS THAT KEEP WOMEN FROM DISCLOSING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

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### **Summary**

*Up to 75 % of women globally at some point in their lives have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2005). However, 60 % of the survivors suffer in silence (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014); therefore, they cannot obtain help and protection. The damaging effect of IPV for women's and their children's bio-psycho-social health and wellbeing is immense (Chandan, Thomas, Bradbury-Jones, Taylor, Bandyopadhyay, & Nirantharakumar, 2020; Vasiliauskaitė, 2015; WHO, 2012). Moreover, violence against women affects many people, not only those directly suffering from it. Therefore, it is crucial to learn and understand those reasons and find ways to ease help-seeking behaviour for IPV survivors.*

*We conducted the study with the aim to understand what keeps the women from help-seeking. We sought to find the answers to: What are the reasons that keep the women survivors of IPV from disclosing their abusive experiences? Are certain abusive experiences associated with non-disclosure behaviour? What abusive experiences predict non-disclosure behaviour best? In order to understand what keeps the women from disclosing IPV, 127 women survivors of IPV were recruited through social media. The Composite Abuse Scale (CAS; Hegarty et al., 1999; Hegarty et al., 2005) and the Scale of Economic Abuse (SEA; Adams et al., 2015) were used together with the list of 12 possible reasons of nondisclosure. This list included reasons such as not considering the abuse being serious enough, being fearful of retaliation, fearing to lose their children, and others.*

*Our findings revealed that the respondents were most discouraged to disclose the abuse by shame (59.1 %) and wish to keep it in secret (40.9 %), while on average European Union (EU) women were more relying on their own or their family to deal with abuse (41 %) or did not think that abuse was serious enough to report it (34 %). It is possible that Lithuanian women were facing more internalised barriers, while EU women were more exposed to external barriers. Moreover, several binary logistic regression models revealed that non-disclosure reasons could be predicted by the severity and frequency of different forms of IPV. For example, the results indicated that the women who experienced physical abuse were kept from disclosing it due to fear of abuser's retaliation. Additionally, several logistic regression models relating nondisclosure reasons, such as fear of not being believed (Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.4$ ), fear of retaliation ( $NR^2 = 0.39$ ), previous negative experience with police ( $NR^2 = 0.32$ ), fear of losing children ( $NR^2 = 0.26$ ), and not thinking IPV was serious ( $NR^2 = 0.21$ ),*

to different types of IPV, explained a large part of the total variation in the responses. This revealed that depending upon the woman, five major issues worked in conjunction to keep the women from IPV disclosure.

The analysis revealed that the issue of nondisclosure is much more complex, then it was believed to be, and one type of solution is not going to make the needed change. In order to increase help-seeking behaviour, a systemic approach is needed addressing policy, funding and resources available to help and protection providers. For example, it is possible that better protection of IPV survivors and efforts to reduce impunity substantially could result in increased help-seeking by IPV survivors. The findings can serve as guidelines for policies directed towards speedy and increased help-seeking from various professionals, institutions and organisations.

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