

Intimate partner violence and witness intervention

The EU has long recognised that violence against women is a violation of human rights and a form of gender-based discrimination that has a major negative impact on victims and significant costs for society. Women are most likely to face violence at the hands of someone they know, with one in five having experienced violence at the hands of an intimate partner.

As women are disproportionately affected by intimate partner violence, EIGE's report focusses on women victims. While the principal duty to protect women from violence lies with the state, the perception that intimate partner violence is 'a private matter' needs to change across society, on an individual level as well as in the private, professional and public spheres.

The report examines the factors that encourage witnesses of intimate partner violence to intervene (including reporting the violence to the relevant authorities). It draws on EU-wide desk research and in-depth qualitative research in Denmark, Germany, France and Portugal.

As the desk research found a lack of data and evidence examining witnesses' support for victims of intimate partner violence, the report provides new evidence on when witnesses intervene and in which types of environment.

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What encourages witnesses of intimate partner violence to intervene?

Witnesses often want to intervene. They can include:



Friends and family



Neighbours



Colleagues



Health and social care workers

This is what encourages witnesses to intervene:

- ✓ **Cooperation and consent of the victim**
- ✓ **Understanding of intimate partner violence and how to support victims**
- ✓ **Possibility to report and give evidence anonymously**
- ✓ **Professional obligation to report**

This is what stops them:



Negative perceptions of the police and judicial system



Witnesses' fear for their own safety



Misperception that violence is a private matter

Witnesses' help is crucial. This is what they can do:

Talk to the victim

Help the victim access support services

Help the victim report

Report the violence to the authorities themselves

Factors that enable witness intervention

Witnesses have a **strong desire to intervene**, but not necessarily to report violence to the police.

Friends and family are a key group for supporting victims of intimate partner violence through intervention. **Neighbours and others in the local community** also show a strong desire to intervene. Co-workers are less likely to intervene.

Securing the **cooperation and consent of the victim** is a key enabler of witness intervention. Witness intervention can include talking to the victim, helping them access support services, or assisting in reporting the issue to the authorities.

Understanding intimate partner violence and knowing how to support victims motivates witnesses to intervene. This highlights the importance of awareness-raising campaigns that build understanding, enable witnesses to spot the signs of intimate partner violence (in particular non-physical violence), and provide guidance on how to assist victims.

The **ability to report and give evidence** on intimate partner violence anonymously encourages witnesses to report it to the authorities, particularly neighbours and co-workers, who tend to have a less close relationship with the victim and perpetrator.

In healthcare and social-care settings, **professional obligation** is a factor requiring witnesses to report intimate partner violence to the authorities. However, these obligations vary across countries and the perceived conflict between the obligation to report the issue and patient–client confidentiality can deter witnesses from reporting.

Some factors can act as both enablers of and barriers to witness intervention. For example, witnesses are generally more likely to report intimate partner violence to the authorities if dependent children are involved. However, this is not always the case as some witnesses are concerned about children being separated from their parents, or experiencing trauma as a result of a police investigation.

Negative perceptions of the police and judicial system, fears for their own safety and the misconception that this type of violence is a private matter are all factors that act as barriers to witness intervention.

There is a great need to raise awareness and implement measures aimed at encouraging witnesses to act. More information and guidance is necessary for professionals who are under the obligation to report intimate partner violence.

It is crucial for police and justice authorities to reinforce their efforts to handle reports of intimate partner violence in a manner that protects both victims and witnesses.

Further research is needed to ensure relevant measures and policies are evidence based. Measures to encourage and enable witness intervention, such as awareness-raising campaigns and helplines/hotlines, must be funded and their impact monitored and evaluated to maximise their effectiveness.

[Report: Intimate partner violence and witness intervention: what are the deciding factors?](#) →

[Press release: Covid-19 wave of violence against women shows EU countries still lack proper safeguards](#) →

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