

Seeking Help to Protect the Children?: The Influence of Children on Women's Decisions to Seek Help When Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence

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Abstract Intimate partner violence (IPV) has a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of victims and their children. Situational as well as individual factors shape victims' responses to the experiences of IPV in many ways. This study uses a quantitative approach to examine the factors that influence victims' decisions on whether and where to seek help. The role of (unborn) children has been examined together with other demographic and situational factors to reveal their influence on victims' help-seeking decisions. Two items were used to measure the role of children, including victims' pregnancy at the time of the abuse and children residing with the victim and witnessing the abuse. Relevant findings derived from the analysis of a sub-sample of women interviewed in the process of the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS) 2002/03 are discussed throughout this paper with a specific focus on the role of children. While the presence of unborn children (i.e., pregnancy) had no effect on victims' help-seeking decisions, children witnessing the abuse emerged as the strongest predictor of general and more formalized help-seeking decisions.

Keywords Domestic violence · Intimate partner violence · Child exposure · Victims · Responses · Help seeking

Official statistics and national surveys reveal that intimate partner violence (IPV) is a serious and widespread phenomenon affecting many women and their children worldwide (Hague and Mullender 2006; Hutchinson and Weeks 2004; Mouzos and Makkai 2004; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000; WHO 2005). Identified consequences of IPV are diverse, including various forms of physical injuries, severe mental health problems, such as depression or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as well as drug and alcohol abuse problems (Campbell and Soeken 1999; Clark and Foy 2000; Gondolf et al. 1990; Johnson 2004; McCloskey and Grigsby 2005; Robertiello 2006; Walker 1991). In addition to the impact IPV has on its direct victims, there is a nonnegotiable intergenerational impact on children witnessing abusive behavior between their parents or care takers, ranging from behavioral problems to adverse health outcomes (Edleson 1999; Edleson et al. 2007; Straus et al. 2006).

It has been acknowledged that help and support in stopping the violence and dealing with the consequences of IPV is critical to its direct and indirect victims. Past research has illustrated the significance of interventions for IPV victims in enabling them to end the violence, prevent fatal outcomes, and recover from its physical and emotional impact (Smith et al. 1998; Hoyle and Sanders 2000; Mouzos 1999; Stanko 1997). Despite an increasing number of responses to IPV within communities, most available sources of help, support and advice are still underutilized (Fugate et al. 2005; Kaukinen 2004). Given the perceived 'private' nature of most IPV, it is important to understand how and why victims seek or do not seek help, and support. Experienced barriers as well as factors that encourage women to seek help have, therefore, been revealed for an Australian national sample of over 2,000 victims of IPV.

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Identified barriers and predictors of women's help-seeking behavior covered a number of victim-related factors, including the presence of children.¹ While a number of studies have looked at the negative impact of IPV on exposed children and their increased risk for a co-occurrence of child maltreatment (Edleson 1999; Edleson et al. 2007; Straus et al. 2006), few studies have examined the role they play in relation to their mothers' help-seeking decisions (Ellsberg et al. 2001; Ruiz-Perez et al. 2006).

This paper therefore examines the presence of children in abusive relationships and the role they play in women's responses to the abusive experiences. First, data from the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS) sub-sample will be examined to reveal women's experiences of violence, the involvement of children in these violent relationships and women's responses to these violent relationships. Second, results from bivariate analyses will be discussed for different types of help-seeking to explore the role of children along other victim-related variables within this population-based sample. Third, multivariate results will be discussed to highlight the role of children as a clear predictor of help-seeking when examined along other relevant factors, such as victims' marital status, education, and socioeconomic status, and whether they come from a non-English-speaking background.²

Although many battered women are aware of the detrimental effects that IPV has on indirect victims, such as children, the decision of seeking help to stop the violence is influenced by more than just the desire to protect the children from physical and emotional harm. Concern about children's wellbeing is often accompanied by insecurity about the outcomes of reporting IPV, especially to formal sources. Battered women often fear losing their children to either their (ex-) partner or child safety and family intervention agencies as a result of revealing the abusive present in their home environment (Fugate et al. 2005; Logan and Walker 2004). Although often based on second hand information it is a present fear factor, often fuelled by the abusive partner to prevent the woman from leaving (Henderson et al. 1997; Hoyle and Sanders 2000; Logan and Walker 2004). Additionally, batterers often use threats of harming or abducting the children should their partner decide to leave them (Anderson and Saunders 2003; Henderson et al. 1997; Logan and Walker 2004). Women's fear for their children's

wellbeing, therefore, often goes beyond the actual relationship and may therefore influence women's decisions on help-seeking in different ways.

For the purpose of this study, the involvement of children is understood as either women being physically or sexually abused while being pregnant or women having children reside with them who observed one or more violent incidents. Past research findings on the role of children in victims' help-seeking decisions are inconsistent, with some studies describing the presence of children as a barrier to help-seeking while others describe it as a factor that encourages the outreach for support (Ellsberg et al. 2001; Ruiz-Perez et al. 2006). Consequently, the influence of the presence of (unborn) children on the help-seeking behavior of women in Australia has been reconsidered.

Method

Findings presented in this paper are based on the analysis of a sub-sample identified from the overall International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS) 2003/03 of women who reported having experienced IPV at some point in time ($n=2,276$). The IVAWS is a national survey, based on a random community sample of over 6,600 women residing in Australia at the time of data collection. Women between the ages of 18 years and 69 years were interviewed by phone, using a structured survey.³ Bivariate and multivariate analyses of the existing data have been used to explore factors associated with a range of formal and informal responses to IPV, discussed throughout the course of this paper.

Sample Characteristics

Demographic information is presented for the subsample of women who experienced IPV at some stage throughout their lives ($n=2,276$) as well as the subsample of women who did not report experiences of IPV ($n=4,401$). The data used for this study was collected from women aged 18 to 69 years. The mean age⁴ of the victim sub-sample ($n=2,276$) was 44.36 years of age at the time of data collection, which is identical to the mean age of women who did not report any IPV ($n=4,401$). Table 1 provides detailed information on observed similarities and differences between the demo-

¹ This study is part of a PhD research, consisting of two components. The second component uses qualitative face-to-face interviews with approximately 30 women who have experienced intimate partner violence to gain in-depths information on some of the themes identified in study one as well as women's experiences and satisfaction with different types of help-seeking. Among other factors, the qualitative component examines the complex interplay of factors influencing decisions on help-seeking when children are involved. Findings from that component will be published at a later stage.

² This variable offers no information on victims' current English-skills and/or cultural background.

³ For more detail regarding the original methodology and the study's aim of establishing a prevalence estimation of violence experienced by women residing in Australia and related findings, see Mouzos and Makkai 2004.

⁴ Age is used for descriptive purposes in this study but will not be included in later bivariate and multivariate analysis as it relates to victims' age at time of data collection rather than at the time of the most recent abusive incident.

graphics of women who reported experiences of IPV and women who did not.

Of the victim sub-sample, 12.6% of women reported coming from a non-English-speaking background, compared to 17.5% of the non-victimized subsample. Also, 1.4% of the victim subsample and 0.9% of the non-victimized subsample identified themselves as Indigenous. With regards to marital status, fewer women reported being married if their partner was abusive (66.0%) when compared to women who reported no experiences of IPV (72.1%). Parental status has only been collected in relation to experienced abuse while no information about the presence of children is available for the non-victimized subsample. As shown in Table 1, 80.6% of victims reported having children living with them when last experiencing abuse. In relation to education, both sub-samples show similar characteristics. Just over 55% of victims of IPV and nearly 52% of the non-victimized subsample reported an education level of grade 12 or less, while 44.9% of victims and 48.3% of non-victimized women were either involved in or had already completed tertiary education at the time of data collection. In relation to income, 23.3% of victims and 17.4% of the remaining women reported having a weekly combined household income of less than AUD500, while 74.3% of victimized and 78.4% of non-victimized women reported a weekly combined household income of AUD500 or more. Just over 65% of victims were employed

at the time of the survey, compared to 66.0% of non-victims. Within the victim sub-sample, 27.5% reported not working for pay but receiving other types of income, such as government benefits, compared to 24.4% of the remaining women. In addition, 6.9% of victims and 9.5% of non-victims reported having no income at all. About 99% of women with some type of income in either sub-sample reported that they are involved in the decision of how the combined household income is spent.

The examination of the victim sub-sample in comparison to the non-victim sub-sample showed few significant discrepancies. While the data shown in Table 1 provide some general information about the victim subsample, it offers very little insight in relation to victims' help-seeking behavior. Several studies have examined the relevance of demographic characteristics of victims and offenders to better understand the prevalence of male-to-female perpetrated victimization within intimate partner relationships (Coker et al. 2000a; La Violette and Barnett 2000; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). The focus of this study is to examine factors associated with victims' help-seeking decisions rather than their initial risk of violent victimization. Victim characteristics therefore need to be examined in relation to different responses to IPV observed in the victim sub-sample. Thus, analysis and discussion hereafter is based on the victim sub-sample, including help-seekers as well as

Table 1 Characteristics of non-victimized and victimized sub-sample

	Non-IPV sub-sample		IPV sub-sample	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Total	100	4,401	100	2,276
Non-English-speaking background	17.5	769	12.6	286
Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander	.9	39	1.4	31
Married to partner ¹	72.1	3,172	66.0	1,502
Children living with victim during violent incident(s)	*	*	80.6	1,825
Education				
Year 12 or less	51.7	2,238	55.1	1,234
Secondary or tertiary education	48.3	2,094	44.9	1,007
Combined net household income				
<\$500 weekly	17.4	766	23.3	530
≥\$500 weekly	78.4	3,459	74.3	1,691
Employment status				
Work for pay	66.0	2,906	65.6	1,491
Unemployed but receiving other types of income (e.g. government benefits)	24.4	1,072	27.5	626
No income of their own	9.5	416	6.9	157
Involved in decision on how income/government benefits are spent ²	98.9	3,615	99.0	1,838

¹ This item refers to marital status at time of data collection for the non-IPV sub-sample and to marital status at the time of the abusive relationship for the IPV sub-sample as the majority of victims reported IPV in past rather than current relationships

² Percentage of women who have some type of income

** Information only collected from women who reported IPV

non-help-seekers. The following sections will provide a brief overview of the nature and extent of IPV experienced by women in the sub-sample, before moving on to the nature and extent of help-seeking and the factors associated with different help-seeking decisions.

Victims' Experiences of IPV and the Related Consequences

Victims of IPV reported a range of different violent experiences as well associated short- and long-term consequences. Physical and sexual violence experienced by the sub-sample of 2,276 women has been measured, using items of the revised Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS-2) (Straus et al. 1996). An examination of the immediate consequences of IPV shows that a total of 40.1% ($n=908$) reported having suffered injuries during the most recent incident with 28.7% ($n=259$) of these women reporting that their injuries required medical attention. These injury-related observations are similar to the ones found in the British Crime Survey and the American component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (Mirrlees-Black 1999; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). Both studies reveal injury rates of 30 to 40%, with approximately one-third of injured victims seeking medical treatment for their injuries.

In addition to physical and sexual violence and the related consequences, victims were asked about mechanisms of intimate partner control. Intimate partner control, including emotional, social, and financial control, has been identified as one of the critical factors often preventing women from seeking social and/or legal support to stop the violence (Hoyle and Sanders 2000; Stanko 1997; Stark 2007). The initial data have, therefore, been used to create a combined measure of intimate partner control, ranging from partners being described as 'never', 'sometimes', 'frequently' and 'constantly' controlling. The majority of victims described their partners as either 'sometimes' (64.1%), 'frequently' (24.6%) or 'constantly' (1.9%) controlling.

Victims' Responses to IPV

Past research suggests that women's perceptions of their individual situation within the abusive relationship can be diverse and are likely to change throughout the course of the relationship (Brown 1997; Ferraro and Johnson 1983; Liang et al. 2005). As mentioned above, women's experiences of violence not only have an immediate impact on their quality of life but furthermore on their long-term physical and emotional wellbeing. It is, therefore, crucial to explore the dynamics between perceptions and responses within the Australian sample. While the IVAWS captures a limited

picture of women's perceptions of and responses to violent experiences due to the collected data relating to one particular point in time (namely the most recent abusive incident), it still provides a starting point to understanding the perceptions and responses of women living in Australia. Based on the identified link between victims' perceptions of their situation and their reactions to particular occurrences of violence in these particular situations in past research (Ferraro and Johnson 1983; Lindhorst and Tajima 2008), women's perceptions of the most recent incident will be examined, followed by women's responses to these incidents.

The first part of Table 2 shows victims' perceptions in relation to the most recent incident of IPV. Participants were asked how serious they perceived the most recent incident, whether they perceived their life to be in danger during the most recent incident and whether they considered the most recent incident a crime. One quarter of victims perceived the most recent incident as not very serious, compared to 32.2% who classified the incident as somewhat serious and a further 42.2% who perceived it as very serious. Almost 31% of victims felt their life was in danger during the most recent incident of IPV and 26.1% regarded the most recent incident as a crime. These descriptive statistics show that victims reported rather high levels of perceived seriousness, danger and wrongness in relation to the most recent incident. However, when examining victims' help-seeking decisions, also shown in Table 2, it becomes apparent that despite the consequences suffered and the perception of IPV as serious, dangerous and even criminal, women's help-seeking approaches, especially from formal sources, are limited.

While 24.5% of victims had not talked to anyone about their experiences, 75.5% indicated they sought some type of help. Past research findings on victims' help-seeking patterns vary greatly, depending on the nature and size of the examined sample. While some studies reveal overall help-seeking rates as low as 20% (Ellsberg et al. 2001), others report similar or slightly higher help-seeking rates to the ones observed in this sample (Coker et al. 2000b; Yoshioka et al. 2003). The majority (57.9%) of help-seekers identified from the current sample responded to the most recent incident by talking to informal sources, such as immediate family, friends or neighbors, other relatives, and co-workers. This finding is similar to results produced by other help-seeking research. Victims of intimate partner violence often talk to informal sources about their experiences without ever talking to formal sources, such as law enforcement or professional counseling services. Formal help-seekers on the other hand more commonly report to formal sources in addition to, rather than instead of, informal ones (Bui 2003; Goodkind et al. 2003; Leone et al. 2007; Moe 2007; Morrison et al. 2006). Over half of the informal help-seekers talked to immediate family (54.5%) and over two thirds talked to friends and/or neighbors

Table 2 Perceptions of and responses to the most recent violent incident

	Total	
	%	<i>n</i>
Victims (total)	100	2,276
Perception of seriousness		
Not very serious	25.3	576
Somewhat serious	32.2	733
Very serious	42.2	960
Perceived life in danger	30.8	700
Regarded incident as a crime	26.1	593
No help-seeking	24.4	556
Any help-seeking	75.4	1,716
Help-seekers (total)	100	1,716
Informal only	57.9	993
Immediate family ¹	54.5	935
Friends/neighbours ¹	69.6	1,194
Other relatives ¹	17.6	302
Co-workers/ co-students ¹	10.1	173
Any formal in combination with informal HS	34.4	591
Any formal only	7.7	132
Particular groups of formal HS		
Police in combination with other HS	17.9	308
Police only	1.2	21
Shelter or transition home in combination with other HS	2.4	37
Shelter or transition home only	.2	4

¹ Item allowed selection of multiple types of informal HS

(69.6%) about the most recent incident. Other relatives and co-workers or co-students were less likely to be approached for support, with 17.6 and 10.1% respectively.

Table 2 also shows that less than half of the help-seeking victims (42.1%) talked to a formal source. Formal sources include the police and judicial authorities, such as courts, as well as professional staff, agencies and institutions, such as psychologists or psychiatrists, counselors, crisis lines, women or community centers, medical staff (including doctors and nurses), women's refuges, and transition homes. The number of victims seeking formal help decreases even further when focusing on help-seeking within the criminal justice system. A mere 19.1% of help-seekers ($n=329$) has been in contact with the police in relation to the most recent incident.⁵ Out of these 329 women, the vast majority had talked to the police in addition to another source of support. Only 21 victims talked to the police without disclosing the most recent abusive incident to anyone else. The formal help-seeking patterns discussed above are in line with overall observa-

tions identified by past research. These studies reveal a clear under-reporting of IPV to formal sources, with the cases going to court only representing the tip of the iceberg (Felson and Paré 2005; Fleury et al. 1998; Straus et al. 2006; Wolf et al. 2003).

While a total of 18.2% of victims had contact with the police, not all of these women necessarily initiated the contact themselves. Information regarding police contact has been generated using the question whether the victim or someone else had called the police in relation to the most recent incident. While the data does not show exactly how many women had self-initiated police contact, all 329 women would have talked to the police about their experiences at some stage. In addition, findings from past research reveal that out of the IPV cases reported to the police, the majority are reported by victims themselves rather than by a third party with an approximate ratio of 2:1 (Felson and Paré 2005; Felson et al. 1999; Fleury et al. 1998). Overall, the observations made about police help-seeking in the current sample are similar to the ones made in the Canadian component of the National Violence Against Women Survey (Gartner and Macmillan 1995) as well as the US component (Felson and Paré 2005). Both national surveys report that just over 15% of victims had talked to the police in relation to their experiences of IPV.

⁵ Thirty of these women (9.1%) had also contacted a court in relation to the most recent incident. Due to the small number of victims with IPV-related court contact, this type of help-seeking has not been examined separately.

Table 3 Presentation of results from chi-square analysis with 2 discrete groups of help-seeking (HS)

	Type of help-seeking (HS)				χ^2 (df)	p	Phi
	No HS		Any HS				
	N	(%)	N	(%)			
Married to abusive partner					.124 (1)	.725	.008
Yes	362	65.5	1,138	66.4			
No	191	34.5	576	33.6			
Combined net household income per week **					7.698 (1)	.006	−.060
<\$500	104	19.4	424	25.4			
≥\$500	432	80.6	1,245	74.6			
Highest level of education**					7.452 (1)	.006	−.059
≤year 12	275	50.0	958	56.8			
Tertiary education	275	50.0	729	43.2			
Non-English-speaking background					.598 (1)	.439	−.018
Yes	76	13.7	211	12.3			
No	480	86.3	1,505	87.7			
Children witnessed any IPV**					89.611(1)	.000	.223
Yes	81	18.0	591	43.0			
No	368	82.0	783	57.0			
Pregnant at the time of the most recent incident					.015 (1)	.903	.005
Yes	26	4.7	85	5.0			
No	526	95.3	1,629	95.0			

* Groups are significantly different ($p < .05$)

** Groups are significantly different ($p < .01$)

The final formal response displayed in Table 2 is victims' utilization of residential services, such as shelters and transition homes. While seeking refuge may only be a temporary step in the help-seeking process due to the complex processes of change that victims go through in their attempts to stop the violence, shelters play an important role with regards to provision of housing, safety, emotional support, and advice on available avenues on shelter exit (Anderson and Saunders 2003; Brown 1997; Tutty 2006). However, less than 3% of help-seeking victims chose this avenue of support in relation to the most recent incident.

As seen in Table 2, women's responses to IPV can be rather diverse. While some victims reported never having talked to anyone about their experiences, a relatively large number of victims talked to persons within the closer social environment, such as friends or family members. The number of those talking to formal sources of support in general and law enforcement in particular, again differs from the previous group of informal help-seekers, with the number of formal help-seekers being significantly lower than the number of informal help-seekers. The differences in victims' responses to violence raise a number of questions. For example, do these

women differ in their demographic make-up, or are there differences in their situational circumstances that may offer an explanation of why some women do not talk about their experiences at all while others seem to choose different avenues of seeking support? The analysis of between group differences, discussed in the next section, highlights a range of factors associated with different types of help-seeking.

Individual Group Comparisons

An examination of between-group differences has been chosen based on the study's main research question, namely which factors are associated with women's differing responses to experiences of IPV? A comparison of the following groups of help-seekers has been included in the bivariate analysis: (1) Women who sought no help at all in relation to the most recent incident compared to those who did; (2) Women who sought informal help only compared to those who sought informal as well as formal support; (3) Women who talked to the police compared to those who did not; (4) Women who sought refuge in a shelter or transition home compared to those who did not.

Table 4 Presentation of results from chi-square analysis with 2 discrete groups of help-seeking (HS)

	Type of help-seeking (HS)				χ^2 (df)	p	Phi
	Informal HS		Formal HS				
	N	(%)	N	(%)			
Married to abusive partner**					59.793 (1)	.000	.196
Yes	576	58.0	456	77.3			
No	417	42.0	134	22.7			
Combined net household income per week **					13.945 (1)	.000	-.096
<\$500	209	21.5	173	30.1			
≥\$500	764	78.5	402	69.9			
Highest level of education					.779 (1)	.377	-.024
≤year 12	549	56.5	344	58.9			
Tertiary education	423	43.5	240	41.1			
Non-English-speaking background					.026 (1)	.871	-.006
Yes	121	12.3	70	11.9			
No	863	87.7	519	88.1			
Children witnessed any IPV**					105.607 (1)	.000	.292
Yes	232	30.8	303	60.2			
No	521	69.2	200	39.8			
Pregnant at the time of the most recent incident					1.590 (1)	.207	.035
Yes	39	3.9	32	5.4			
No	953	96.1	558	94.6			

* Groups are significantly different ($p < .05$)

** Groups are significantly different ($p < .01$)

All four between group comparisons examine differences based on victim-related variables.⁶ Victim-related variables include marital status, combined household income, the victim's education, whether she considered herself from a non-English-speaking background,⁷ whether children lived with the victim who had witnessed any violent incidents (including previous ones), and whether the victim was

pregnant during the most recent incident. General between group differences will be discussed throughout the text while particular values from chi-square analyses can be identified from the relevant tables following each comparison.

Comparing Non-Help-Seekers to Help-Seekers

Comparison of the first two groups, non-help-seekers and any type of help-seekers in general, produced a broad range of significant between group differences. As shown in Table 3, help-seekers more commonly reported a lower level of education and a lower combined net household income, compared to the non-help-seeking group of victims. Victims who disclosed the most recent incident to someone also more commonly reported that children living in the household witnessed the abuse.

Comparing Informal to Formal Help-Seekers

The second group comparison examines differences between victims who limited their help-seeking to talking to

⁶ The overall PhD research furthermore examined between group differences based on partner-related variables and violence-related variables. For the purpose of this paper, only victim-related variables are included in the discussion due to the key focus on the role of children. Bivariate and multivariate findings relating to violence-related variables will be published as part of a theoretical paper, examining the applicability of Walker's 'Hypothesis of Learned Helplessness' and Gondolf's 'Survivor Hypothesis'.

⁷ Indigenous Status has been excluded from the following discussion due to the previously mentioned lack of statistical significance and a range of low cell counts. Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander status only produced significant results for differences between refuge- and non-refuge-seeking women, with a greater number of Indigenous/Torres Strait Islander women seeking refuge when compared to Non-Indigenous women living in Australia. Still, these differences need to be regarded with care as more than 25% of cells had expected counts less than 5 due to the small number of Aboriginal/ Torres Strait Islander victims found in the overall sub-sample ($n=31$).

Table 5 Presentation of results from chi-square analysis with 2 discrete groups of help-seeking (HS)

	Type of help-seeking (HS)				χ^2 (df)	p	Phi
	No police HS		Police HS				
	N	(%)	N	(%)			
Married to abusive partner**					25.173 (1)	.000	.107
Yes	1,242	64.1	258	78.4			
No	696	35.9	71	21.6			
Combined net household income per week **					10.949 (1)	.001	-.072
<\$500	428	22.6	101	31.3			
≥\$500	1,466	77.4	222	68.7			
Highest level of education *					5.372 (1)	.020	-.050
≤year 12	1,033	54.1	200	61.2			
Tertiary education	877	45.9	127	38.8			
Non-English-speaking background					.108 (1)	.743	.009
Yes	242	12.5	44	13.4			
No	1,687	87.5	285	86.6			
Children witnessed any IPV**					107.170 (1)	.000	.244
Yes	489	31.8	183	64.2			
No	1,049	68.2	102	35.8			
Pregnant at the time of the most recent incident					.157 (1)	.692	.011
Yes	93	4.8	18	5.5			
No	1,845	95.2	310	94.5			

* Groups are significantly different ($p < .05$)

** Groups are significantly different ($p < .01$)

informal sources only and those who extended it to formal help-seeking. While these two groups have in common that both accessed informal sources, the second group is expected to differ due to their additional utilization of formal sources. The second group will be referred to as ‘formal help-seekers’ hereafter as this is a key issue that distinguishes them from the purely informal help-seekers. Findings presented in Table 4 reveal that formal help-seekers more commonly reported a combined net household income below \$500, compared to informal help-seekers. In addition, formal help-seekers more commonly reported being married to their abusive partner and having children living with them who witnessed one or more of the violent incidents.

Comparing Victims Who Did and Did Not Talk to the Police

The third group comparison examines differences between women who talked to the police in relation to the most recent incident and those who did not. Results presented in Table 5 reveal the relevance of family make-up in relation to help-seeking from the police. Victims who talked to the

police more commonly reported being married to their partner and having children who witnessed one or more of the abusive incidents. In addition, victims who disclosed the abuse to the police more commonly reported lower levels of education and a lower combined net household income, compared to victims who did not talk to the police about the most recent incident.

Comparing Non-Refuge- and Refuge-Seekers

The fourth comparison examined differences between women who sought refuge in a shelter or transition home and those who did not. This comparison has been chosen to shed some light on the significant underutilization of shelters and transition homes. As indicated earlier, only 2.4% of help-seeking victims had sought refuge in relation to the most recent incident. This makes them a very distinct group of help-seeking victims.

Similar to help-seeking from the police, family make-up played a significant role in victims’ decision to seek refuge. As shown in Table 6, refuge-seeking women more commonly reported being married to the abusive partner and having children that witnessed the abuse compared to

Table 6 Presentation of results from chi-square analysis with 2 discrete groups of help-seeking

	Type of help-seeking				χ^2 (df)	p	<i>Phi</i>
	No refuge		Refuge				
	<i>N</i>	(%)	<i>N</i>	(%)			
Married to abusive partner**					7.237 (1)	.007	.069
Yes	1,103	65.9	35	87.5			
No	571	34.1	5	12.5			
Combined net household income per week **					16.358 (1)	.000	−.103
<\$500	403	24.6	22	53.7			
≥\$500	1,235	75.4	19	46.3			
Highest level of education					3.065 (1)	.080	−.047
≤ year 12	930	56.4	28	71.8			
Tertiary education	718	43.6	11	28.2			
Non-English-speaking background*					4.515 (1)	.034	.057
Yes	201	12.1	10	24.4			
No	1,463	87.9	31	75.6			
Children witnessed any IPV**					20.281 (1)	.000	.126
Yes	560	41.9	31	79.5			
No	775	58.1	8	20.5			
Pregnant at the time of the most recent incident ¹					.000 (1)	1.000	.981
Yes	83	5.0	2	4.9			
No	1,590	95.0	39	95.1			

¹ 25% of cells have expected counts less than 5* Groups are significantly different ($p < .05$)** Groups are significantly different ($p < .01$)

the group of non-refuge-seekers. In addition refuge-seeking women were of lower socioeconomic status and more commonly considered themselves from a non-English-speaking background than their non-refuge-seeking counterparts. While English language skills at the time of the abuse could not be determined by this item, its lack of

significance in relation to any other response than seeking refuge suggests that being of non-English-speaking background may be associated with a lack of social networks that can provide a safe place to stay when required rather than potential language barriers. This is supported by past research findings, indicating that women of foreign decent

Table 7 Significance of independent variables for any HS ($N=1,744$)

Independent variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Non-English-speaking background	.098	.177	.311	1	.577	1.103
Education	-.123	.119	1.069	1	.301	.884
Combined net household income*	-.335	.141	5.629	1	.018	.716
Married to abusive partner*	-.270	.131	4.267	1	.039	.764
Children witnessing IPV**	1.249	.143	76.602	1	.000	3.487
Constant**	1.238	.161	59.157	1	.000	3.450
-2 log likelihood	1,841.447					
Nagelkerke R	.085					
χ^2	102.202					
p	.000					
Model prediction rate	75.5					

* Variable made a unique statistically significant contribution to overall model ($p < .05$)** Variable made a unique statistically significant contribution to overall model ($p < .01$)

Table 8 Significance of independent variables for formal HS ($N=1,201$)

Independent variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Non-English-speaking background	-.255	.190	1.810	1	.179	.775
Education	.070	.135	.273	1	.601	1.073
Combined net household income*	-.310	.140	4.921	1	.027	.733
Married to abusive partner**	.540	.157	11.796	1	.000	1.716
Children witnessing IPV**	1.024	.132	60.431	1	.000	2.786
Constant **	-1.037	.175	35.075	1	.000	.355
-2 log likelihood	1,499.137					
Nagelkerke R^2	.126					
χ^2	117.922					
p	.000					
Model prediction rate	64.7					

* Variable made a unique statistically significant contribution to overall model ($p<.05$)

** Variable made a unique statistically significant contribution to overall model ($p<.01$)

often report a lack of social support due to family members commonly still living overseas (Bui 2003; Yoshioka et al. 2003).

Emerging Factors Associated with Help-Seeking

Findings discussed above show a number of between group differences that appear significant for more than one type of help-seeking. In particular, motherhood, marital status, and income are factors associated with victims responses to IPV. Help-seeking women in general and more formal types of help-seekers in particular more commonly report being of lower socioeconomic status, being married to the abuser, and having children living with them that witnessed one or more of the abusive incidents. In the next step of analysis, statistically significant results from between group comparisons are examined using logistic regression analysis.

Predicting Victims' Different Help-Seeking Decisions

Bivariate results discussed above have been used to further explore their influence on the likelihood that respondents would seek any help in general as well as certain types of help in particular.⁸ The victim-related model combines five independent variables, including level of education, combined net household income, non-English-speaking background, marital status, and children witnessing the abuse. Pregnancy during the most recent abusive incident is no longer included in the analysis as it did not prove to be significantly associated with any examined type of help-

seeking during bivariate analysis. The model has been examined for the same types of help-seeking assessed through bivariate analysis, namely the likelihood of seeking help in general, seeking help from formal in addition to informal sources, seeking help from law enforcement agencies, and seeking refuge in a shelter or transition home.

Predicting Any Help-Seeking

Table 7 presents the results from logistic regression analysis for any type of help-seeking, regardless of the source approached for support. Findings reveal that victims who sought help can be distinguished from those who did not on a number of independent factors. The most prominent predictor of any type of help-seeking in relation to IPV was the involvement of children. Women who reported that children had witnessed one or more violent incidents in the past were three and a half times more likely to seek any type of help than women who did not report children witnessing any of the violent incidents. Being married to the abusive partner had a negative effect on victims' likelihood to disclose the abuse in general. Similar observations were made the reported combined net household income. Victims who reported a combined income of AUD500 or more per week were significantly less likely to disclose the abuse.

Predicting Formal Help-Seeking

Findings for victims' likelihood of seeking formal support are very similar to the ones reported for any help-seeking, as income, marital status and children witnessing the abuse all predicted changes in victims' likelihood of seeking formal in addition to informal support. As shown in Table 8, children witnessing the abuse had the largest effect on victims' likelihood of disclosing the abuse to a formal

⁸ Similar to the first part of statistical analysis, multivariate analysis also incorporated partner- and violence-related variables in addition to victim-related variables. Only results from logistic regression analysis of the victim-related model will be discussed here due to the particular focus of this paper.

Table 9 Significance of independent variables for police HS ($N=1,744$)

Independent variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Non-English-speaking background	.000	.205	.000	1	1.000	1.000
Education	-.284	.153	3.464	1	.063	.753
Combined net household income	-.274	.149	3.394	1	.065	.760
Married to abusive partner	.136	.183	1.540	1	.459	1.145
Children witnessing IPV**	1.259	.147	73.670	1	.000	3.520
Constant**	-2.083	.197	112.190	1	.000	.125
-2 log likelihood	1,416.317					
Nagelkerke R	.105					
χ^2	110.468					
p	.000					
Model prediction rate	84.1					

* Variable made a unique statistically significant contribution to overall model ($p<.05$)

** Variable made a unique statistically significant contribution to overall model ($p<.01$)

source of support with an *OR* of 2.79. Victims' likelihood of seeking formal support was furthermore influenced by their marital status. While being married to the abusive partner decreased victims' likelihood of seeking help in general, it increased the likelihood of seeking formal support within the help-seeking population. Victims' reported combined net household income had a similar effect as the one revealed for any help-seeking as a reported income of AUD500 or above per week significantly decreased their likelihood of talking to formal in addition to informal sources.

Predicting Police Help-Seeking

Next, the model was examined in relation to women's likelihood of talking to the police. Table 9 reveals the presence of children as the key predictor of victims' likelihood of disclosing the most recent incident to the police. None of the other victim characteristics were able to predict a change in victims' likelihood of talking to the police while victims whose children witnessed the abuse were three and a half times more likely to talk to the police.

Predicting Refuge-Seeking

Findings from the last step of multivariate analysis are presented in Table 10. Similar to prior logistic regression results, children witnessing the abuse had the largest effect on victims' decision to seek refuge. Victims were over seven and a half times more likely to seek refuge if their children had to witness the abuse. The other statistically significant predictor of refuge seeking was income. Victims who reported a combined net household income of \$500 or more per week were significantly less likely to seek refuge in a shelter or transition home than those reporting less than \$500 per week.

Emerging Predictors of Victims' Help-Seeking Decisions

Results from logistic regression analysis revealed a range of predictors across the different types of help-seeking, including income, marital status, and involvement of children. The most consistent predictor across all examined types of help-seeking was victims' perception that children had to witness any of the violent incidents. While it

Table 10 Significance of independent variables for shelter HS ($N=1,746$)

Independent variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Non-English-speaking background	.705	.420	2.817	1	.093	2.024
Education	-.504	.444	1.289	1	.256	.604
Combined net household income*	-.858	.354	5.887	1	.015	.424
Married to abusive partner	.155	.568	.075	1	.785	1.168
Children witnessing IPV**	2.026	.476	18.101	1	.000	7.586
Constant**	-4.687	.607	59.722	1	.000	.009
-2 log likelihood	304.989					
Nagelkerke R	.142					
χ^2	45.736					
p	.000					
Model prediction rate	97.9					

* Variable made a unique statistically significant contribution to overall model ($p<.05$)

** Variable made a unique statistically significant contribution to overall model ($p<.01$)

increased victims' likelihood of seeking all examined types of support, it was especially important for victims' decision to talk to the police and to seek refuge. It was the only victim characteristic that predicted a change in victims' likelihood of talking to the police. In addition, it had the largest effect on victims' likelihood of seeking refuge. While univariate and bivariate analysis showed a clear underutilization of this type of support, victims were over seven and a half times more likely to seek refuge if their children witnessed the abuse. These findings illustrate victims' protective attitude towards their children in violent situations.

Discussion

Findings discussed throughout this paper helped to identify a range of factors associated with women's responses to IPV. While the majority of identified factors seem to act as an encouragement to reach out and seek help to stop the violence, some factors, such as higher socioeconomic status emerged as a barrier for most examined types of help-seeking. The most consistent finding of this paper relates to its overall focus on the role of children. Two relevant findings emerged. While the involvement of unborn children (i.e., abusive experiences during pregnancy) had no effect on victims' help-seeking decisions, children who resided with the victim and directly witnessed the abuse had the largest effect on all examined help-seeking decisions. Victims' perception that their children had to witness any violent incidents even increased the likelihood of approaching sources that are usually significantly underutilized, such as the police and refuges or transition homes. This is a positive observation as it shows victims' protective attitudes towards more vulnerable parties involved in the cycle of violence. While victims may not necessarily always seek the help they require to protect themselves, their likelihood of accessing different sources of support increases when their children have to witness the abuse. Another family-related factor associated with some help-seeking decisions was victims' marital status. Victims who reported being married to the abusive partner were more likely to seek any help as well as formal help in general. This does not necessarily mean that unmarried victims of IPV respond by passively enduring the violence. However, it indicates that experiencing violence within a marital relationship increases victims' likelihood of actively seeking support to stop the violence.

While the discussed findings begin to highlight the role of children as a predictor of different types of help-seeking, they raise questions about the background of this protective attitude. Do children increase the likelihood of seeking help simply because women are aware of the negative intergenerational effects of IPV, or rather because a partner has

started to extend his abusive behavior towards the children? Were help-seeking mothers in the current sample afraid of the outcome of potential child safety interventions and/or custody battles and did this affect their decision on when and where to seek help? Further, responses to IPV observed in the IVAWS data only offer a snapshot of help-seeking decisions at one particular point in time, namely in relation to the most recent violent incident. These and other factors associated with victims' help-seeking decisions are currently explored through face-to-face interviews with a small sample of victims in the greater Brisbane area ($n=29$). Women's in-depth accounts of violent experiences and related responses over time allow a more detailed exploration of changes in women's response patterns as well the factors associated with these changes. However, it is recommended that future research explores the complex role of children within a larger sample of IPV victims. In addition, victims need to be empowered through accurate information about child safety interventions and possible outcomes of custody battles. Women's help-seeking decisions need to be influenced by a reasonable risk assessment rather than a range of fears, often fuelled by their abusive partners' threats and misleading information.

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