

Abstract

Interpartner violence (IPV) is a serious public health issue worldwide with relevant consequences to physical, mental and social welfare of women, but also to her safety, life quality and dignity which is extendable to their families and to society. Despite the positive evolution noticed in the understanding of this phenomenon in the past few years, myths and stereotypes about women's role in society, in the family and inside the intimate relationship still endure. These myths have considerable influence on victim's beliefs, holding them off and leading them to stay in the abusive relationship and contributing highly to IPV staying unreported. They can also influence the intervention of some professionals when confronted with such cases.

Thus, the main goal of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of women victims of IPV by characterizing both cognitive and cultural factors that influence their perception and reaction to this violence, considering their evolution in the latest 5 years, in Portugal.

To such, the study took place in the Forensic Clinics Department of the North Branch of the National Institute of Legal Medicine, I.P., in 2010, using a sample of 161 women allegedly victims of IPV, 18 or older, using a questionnaire oriented interview technique, based on the one used by Martínez Garcia (2006) for a similar study. This questionnaire addresses the demographic description of both victims and alleged aggressors, of risk factors, of cognitive and cultural factors as well as the needs felt by women victims of IPV. Data obtain in both studies was compared to understand which were the most significant differences observed in each of the studied dimensions, across the 5 years span.

Results show that women stay in the abusive relationship because they believe the aggressor will change, having, though, less fears and shame to admit their victimization. They also reveal that women report earlier than 5 years ago, with a significant increase of the police as chosen entity to report and of the percentage of women who feel confident and assured when reporting.

Keywords: women; domestic violence; interpartner violence; cultural factors; cognitive factors