



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC ABUSE IN BALTIC STATES AND ITS IMPACT ON LABOUR MARKET

Ligita Gaspreniene, Ilona Michailovič, Rita Remeikienė*

Vilnius university, Law faculty, Lithuania

Abstract: Domestic violence is a serious problem which is particularly difficult to solve because the cases of domestic abuse often occur at home, and because it requires deep socio-cultural changes in society. This article aims at identifying which types of domestic violence are prevalent in the Baltic States and how their prevalence affects the labour market. The main types of domestic violence include physical and sexual violence (the statistical data on the cases of this violence are available), while the cases of economic and psychological violence are more difficult to detect. Thus, this article focuses on physical and sexual violence against women in domestic environment in the Baltic States. The surveys carried out in the Baltic States reveal that physical injuries are the most common consequence of domestic violence, with a significant number of women feeling that their lives are in danger. Traumas and physical injuries lead to women leaving the labour market or reducing their working time.

Keywords: domestic violence, women, Baltic states, domestic abuse, labour market.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the key objectives in the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 is ending gender-based violence. Domestic violence, defined as a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner and which can manifest as physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person (United Nations, 2024), is a critical health and human rights concern. Although it can affect both genders, the results of previous studies show that the proportion of women experiencing domestic violence is significantly higher than that of men (81 against 19 percent, according to Wathen et al. (2015)), and 27 percent of women of reproductive age (15-

* Corresponding author: rita.remeikiene@tf.vu.lt

Ligita Gaspreniene, ORCID: 0000-0002-5535-6552
Ilona Michailovič, ORCID: 0000-0001-6292-1508
Rita Remeikienė, ORCID: 0000-0002-3369-485X

49 years of age) have been subjected to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner (World Health Organisation, 2024).

According to Purvaneckienė et al. (2019), intimate partner violence is patterned behaviour aimed at controlling another person and abusing one's own power. Most often, it is a man's behaviour with a woman in the context of an intimate relationship. It can take many forms, including but not limited to physical, sexual, psychological, economic violence and social isolation. In most cases, it is a combination of all these forms. All forms of violence are as serious as sexual violence. Domestic violence is one of the leading causes of injury and death among women.

Despite the United Nations General Assembly's 1993 declaration on the “Elimination of Violence against Women” (United Nations, 1993), it continues to be a significant global issue. More than a quarter (27%) of women aged 15–49 years who have been in a relationship report experiencing physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of their intimate partner (White, et. al., 2024). The social and economic costs of domestic violence against women are huge and have ripple effects throughout society. Women experiencing domestic violence can suffer from isolation, they do not participate in regular activities and have limited abilities to take care for themselves and their children (World Health Organisation, 2024).

When women experience domestic violence, their participation in the labour market is also affected: domestic violence reduces their ability to work, undermines work performance, and can lead to loss of wages or loss of job (Docherty, 2022; The Center for Domestic Peace, 2024).

Research on the impact of violence in the workplace is usually focused on 'worker-on-worker' violence, but the impact of domestic violence remains overlooked because it is assumed that domestic and work areas are separate, and domestic problems are not brought to work. Nevertheless, domestic violence as a form of workplace violence is increasingly being recognised and causes scientific interest. Thus far, some authors (Zhang et al., 2012; Ouedraogo & Stenzel, 2021, etc.) have investigated the economic impact of domestic violence, and their estimations include some labour market related findings, but literature on this socially sensitive issue is still scarce.

The major purpose of this research is to identify which types of domestic violence are prevalent in the Baltic States and how their prevalence affects the labour market. To the best of our knowledge, “Eurostat” conducted the first research of this kind in the EU Member States, including the Baltic States. The objectives of the research are as follows: 1) to discuss the potential impact of domestic violence against women on the labour market by analysing the theoretical and empirical findings regarding the relationship between domestic violence against women and employment outcomes, and provide the estimations of the labour-market related economic impact of domestic violence against women; 2) to present a statistical descriptive analysis of the prevalence of different types of domestic violence in the Baltic States; 3) to reveal the reasons why particular Baltic States have a lower level of domestic violence than the others. The methods of the research include systematic and comparative literature analysis, statistical data analysis, statistical descriptive analysis.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ON THE LABOUR MARKET

The situation of women in the labour market is an extremely relevant topic in the context of the European model of social cohesion since the balanced economic development is impossible without the proper use of female human resources. With the increasing efforts to employ women from socially vulnerable population groups (by age, disability, nationality, etc),

the women who experience domestic violence still receive too little attention (Jirsa, 2015). Victims of domestic violence usually sustain costly and long-lasting physical, emotional, and financial consequences, which cannot be compartmentalised or separated from victims' work area, i.e. everything what happens at home is brought to work. Thus, domestic violence against women can marginalize and exclude women from full-fledged labour market participation.

Statistical data show that the main victims in domestic abuse-related crimes recorded by the police are women (73.5% of women vs 26.5% of men as of March 2023) ("Women's Aid", 2024). Due to the limitations of the available data and underreporting of the cases of domestic violence (according to The Center for Domestic Peace (2024), only 1 in 4 cases of domestic violence is officially reported), it is reasonable to suggest that the estimations related to this issue are quite conservative.

2.1. The relationship between domestic violence against women and employment outcomes

The potential relationships between women's employment and domestic violence are explained by invoking some theories which reflect both positive and negative links between the phenomena under consideration. For instance, the theory of social capital suggests that working women get involved in non-household networks, which raises their social capital and decreases the risk of domestic violence (Sanyal, 2009). The household bargaining model proposes that women's employment allows them to acquire social resources and power, which reduce the risk of domestic violence by decreasing the cost of relationship exit and increasing women's bargaining power in their households (Strenio, 2022). Employment is one of the ways for women to leave a violent relationship. Financial security provided by employment can help women escape isolation and maintain standard of living (Rothman et al., 2007). Having conducted the research based on the questionnaire survey and covariation analysis in Turkey, Gedikli et al. (2023) found that intimate partner violence (physical, sexual and psychological) promotes women's participation in the labour market since women exposed to violence see employment as an opportunity to reduce the time spent at home. The positive relationship between domestic violence and women's participation in the labour market was identified for all kinds of paid employment (wage workers and the self-employed).

However, according to the resource theory, women's employment tends to increase the risk of domestic violence by disbalancing the key resources in households, i.e. women's employment distorts traditional resource allocation by gender, and when men feel that their available resources are decreasing, they can use violence to reestablish resource ownership (Goode, 1971).

The results of the previous empirical studies provide evidence that women who experience domestic violence tend to have a disrupted work history, often change jobs, more often undertake casual and part-time work and earn lower income compared to women who do not experience domestic violence (Adams et al., 2012; Jirsa, 2015; Lelebina & Lemiere, 2024). The major negative effects of domestic violence on women's employment, commonly highlighted by previous empirical studies, are discussed below.

Ability to get to work. Galvez et al. (2011) and Wathen et al. (2015) provide empirical evidence that domestic violence can affect a victim's ability to get to work (e.g. through physical restraint) (as noted by more than a third of the respondents experiencing domestic violence). Wathen et al.'s (2015) survey revealed that 12.5 percent of those whose ability to get to work was affected by domestic violence had been late for work, 30 percent were forced to miss work, and 51.4 percent experienced both situations. Docherty's (2022) literature review suggests that an abuse can undertake employment sabotage, for example, an abuser can hide a survivor's

keys, start an argument before work or refuse to care for children, which restricts access to alternative childcare.

Work performance. Swanberg et al.'s (2005) study revealed that domestic violence against women can have a direct negative impact on women's productivity in the workplace (for example, if an abuser calls to work). Wathen et al. (2015) conducted a survey of 8,429 respondents in Canada and found that domestic violence continued at or near the respondents' workplace (usually it manifested itself in the forms of abusive phone calls or text messages). The empirical findings show that an abuser's calls to work and threats to the victim's colleagues can have a negative impact on their work performance (Trades Union Congress, 2014). Work performance of the victims of domestic violence tends to be negatively affected due to distraction and the feeling of being tired or sick (Wathen et al., 2015).

Employment (in)stability. Employment stability is referred to as “the amount of time a woman has been employed throughout several months or years” (Showalter, 2016, p. 40). The review of 20 previous studies by Showalter (2016) revealed that domestic violence not always has an impact on women's employment stability: it can remain unchanged (Beck et al., 2014), and sometimes can cause employment overtime (Adams et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the literature review by Docherty (2022) suggests that trauma from violence (manifesting as anxiety and depression) can affect a survivors' ability to sustain employment, achieve advancement at work, and can potentially affect a survivor's employment stability or career progression for a number of years.

Working time. Showalter's (2016) findings indicate that domestic violence may lead to workplace time reductions (women tend to work fewer hours), which is in line with the results provided by Swanberg et al. (2005) (domestic violence tends to prolong victims' time off, as reported by 5 percent of the respondents). Wathen et al. (2015) found that 39.5 percent of the respondents took time off because they were dealing with health/medical issues related to domestic violence or attended counselling. The estimations by The Center for Domestic Peace (2024) show that the survivors of intimate partner violence lose a total of 8.0 million days of paid work each year.

Job loss. Seven studies in Showalter's (2016) literature review confirm that domestic violence can be associated with women losing their jobs: women report unemployment as a result of abuse. 27 percent of female victims in Swanberg et al.'s survey (2005) and 8.5 percent of the respondents in Wathen et al.'s (2015) survey reported having lost a job due to domestic violence. As noted by Docherty (2022), victims of domestic abuse can quit employment because of constant disruption, stress and harassments, the feelings of shame or because of the number of missed days or the poor productivity and performance. Jirsa's (2015) survey in Serbia disclosed that 75 percent of the female victims of domestic violence had been legally employed, but were dismissed after the decision of an employer (as indicated by 28.6 percent of the respondents), left employment because of worsening health or suffering violence for many years (as noted by 28.6 percent of the survey participants). Gedikli et al. (2023) found that women who have lost their jobs and become unpaid family workers, tend to involve into working in small scale family farms with other family members in rural areas, which generates personal income for self-reliance.

Loss of life. The Center for Domestic Peace (2024) provide the statistical data from The Center for Disease Control 2003, U.S. General Accounting Office, which indicate that 142 women were murdered in their workplace by their abuser between 2003 and 2008. 78 percent of women were killed in the workplace during this timeframe.

2.2. Estimations of the labour-market related economic impact

Estimations of the economic impact of domestic violence (e.g. spousal violence) is a way to measure tangible and intangible effects of this phenomenon.

Day et al. (2005) present the results of the national survey used by the Institute for Women of Andalusia, Spain (2003) to compile over 100 indicators which represent the effects of violence against women and children. 25 of the indicators represented the health, judicial, social, educational, employment, and psychological components. The total cost, including pain and suffering, were estimated at approximately US\$ 2.9 billion.

The Center for Domestic Peace (2024) provides the estimations which indicate that the cost of intimate partner violence exceeds \$8.3 billion per year in the United States.

Zhang et al. (2012) estimated tangible and intangible costs of domestic violence (domestic violence in their study included crimes defined in the criminal code, such as murder, sexual assault, assault, robbery and criminal harassment, and other equivalent violent acts, such as being threatened, pushed, grabbed, beaten, choked, threatened with a gun or knife, or forced into sexual activity) in Canada in 2009. The authors estimated that the total economic impact of domestic violence was \$7.4 billion, or \$220 per capita. The most direct economic impact was found to be borne by primary victims and estimated at \$6.0 billion (this amount covers the costs of medical attention, hospitalizations, lost wages, missed school days, and stolen/damaged property). The intangible costs, including pain, suffering and loss of life, accounted for 91.2% of the total victim costs. The remaining tangible costs were estimated at \$525.0 million. When analysing the costs related to the labour market, it can be noted that work loss costs due to domestic violence against women were estimated at \$98,178,631, productivity loss costs - at \$37,125,687, lost wage costs - at \$20,943,599, lost education costs - at \$259,081. The estimations also indicate that employers tend to lose nearly \$52,123,343 every year as a direct result of domestic violence against women.

The results provided by Ouedraogo and Stenzel (2021) (their research covered 18 sub-Saharan African countries and more than 440,000 women representing sub-Saharan Africa's female population) suggest that an increase in domestic violence against women by 1 percentage point tends to reduce the level of economic activity by 9 percent. The lower economic activity is considered to be determined by a significant drop in female employment due to physical, psychological, and emotional violence. The authors also present the data from previous studies which indicate that domestic violence leads to a 1-2 percent decrease in GDP in a given economy. They note that this drop in economic potential in the short term is associated with shorter working hours and lower productivity generated by women experiencing domestic violence. In the long term, domestic violence can have a negative impact on women's education and the acquisition of skills and lead to a decrease in the number of women in the workforce.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data on violence against women at the global level are very limited because they are not accumulated on a regular basis. Some gender data are accumulated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, World Bank Group. The Eurostat database provides the statistical information on violence against women only for 2021, which did not allow to analyse the

dynamic trends of this phenomenon[†]. The EU authorities and Member States could confirm their commitment to regularly collect data on different types of violence against women. The data could be useful when developing national and regional policies and actions. The *Eurostat* and its expert groups could contribute to this process; in addition, the *Eurostat* could provide the data to the specialised monitoring bodies of the UN and the Council of Europe, as well as the European Institute for Gender Equality (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014).

This article considers the following domestic violence-related data representing the situation in three Baltic States (according to the Eurostat):

Prevalence of Violence by a Domestic Perpetrator Among Women by Type of Violence;
Type and Frequency of Intimate Partner Violence Experienced by Ever-Partnered Women;

Ever-Partnered Women Who Have Experienced Intimate Partner Violence, by Person or Support Service to Whom Violence Was Reported;

Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence Among Ever-Partnered Women;

When analysing the Prevalence of Violence by a Domestic Perpetrator Among Women by Type of Violence (see Fig. 1), it can be seen that physical violence (including threats) was the most common in all Baltic States in the period under consideration. Physical violence is followed by sexual violence. The greatest number of the cases of physical violence against women was recorded in Estonia - 14.5 percent, in Latvia - 12.3 percent, and in Lithuania - 11.5 percent. Estonia also had the greatest number of the cases of sexual violence (11.8 percent), followed by Lithuania (5.5 percent) and Latvia (4.6 percent).

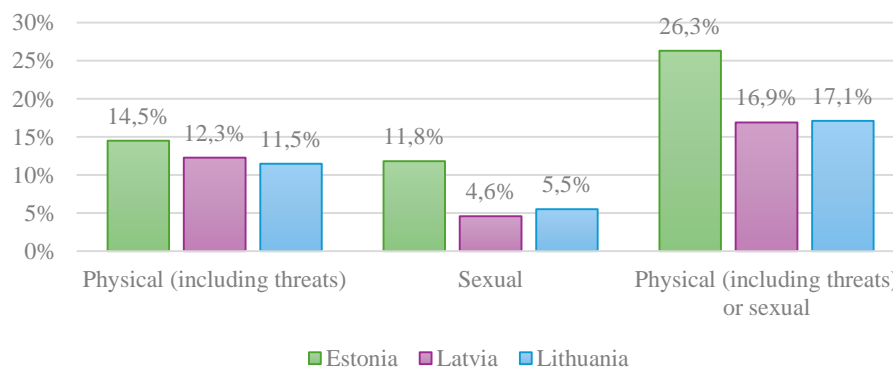


Figure 1. Prevalence of Violence by a Domestic Perpetrator Among Women by Type of Violence, in percent (Eurostat)

The data on the frequency of the crimes under consideration (see Table 1) indicate that an intimate partner tends to repeat his violent actions, and this tendency is observed in all Baltic States, so violence is not a one-time act.

Table 1. Type and Frequency of Intimate Partner Violence Experienced by Ever-Partnered Women

Country	One time	Repeated
Estonia	1.4%	9.3%
Latvia	1.1%	10.4%
Lithuania	1.0%	9.1%

[†] No score is provided to the Baltic States regarding the domain of violence due to the lack of the comparable EU-wide data.

The women experiencing domestic violence in the Baltic States usually turn for help to close people (71.4 percent in Estonia, 68.9 percent in Latvia, and 66.9 percent in Lithuania) or to any other person or service (75.6 percent in Estonia, 76.5 percent in Latvia, and 73.1 percent in Lithuania) (see Fig. 2). The smallest number of women turn for help to the support service (9.1 percent in Estonia, 7.0 percent in Latvia, and 6.9 percent in Lithuania).

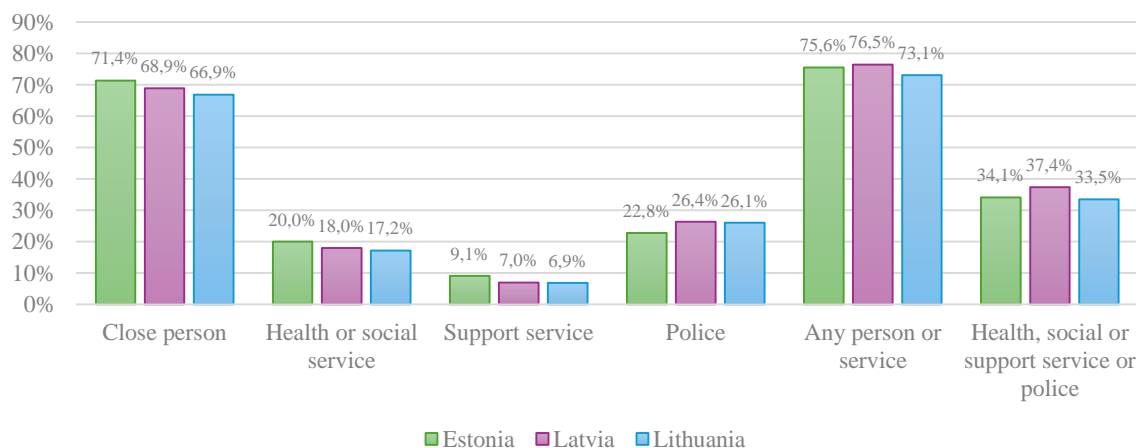


Figure 2. Ever-Partnered Women Who Have Experienced Intimate Partner Violence, by Person or Support Service to Whom Violence Was Reported, percent (Eurostat)

The more frequent consequences of domestic violence against women were physical injuries, with a slightly lower percentage of women feeling that their lives were becoming dangerous (see Fig. 3).

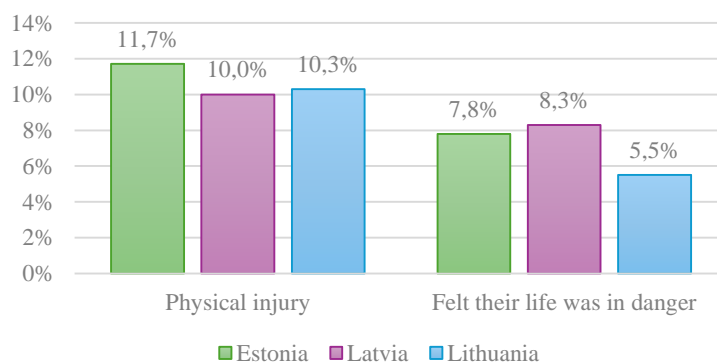


Figure 3. Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence Among Ever-Partnered Women, percent (Eurostat)

The reasons why certain types of violence are more common in one of the Baltic States are discussed in the following subsection to reveal the plausible impact of domestic violence on women's participation in the labour market.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lithuania is the European Union country that has signed the Istanbul Convention on June 6, 2013, but not ratified it yet in the Parliament. Estonia ratified the Istanbul Convention on 26 October 2017, and the Latvian Saeima ratified the Istanbul Convention on 30 November 2023.

According to the Population and Social Statistics Department of Statistics Estonia (2024), the survey results indicate that 39 percent of women have experienced psychological violence, 13 percent have faced physical violence (including threats), and 9 percent have been subjected to sexual violence. Younger women, aged 18–29, are the most likely to have encountered violence, while older women, aged 65–74, are the least likely to have experienced it. The current data show that physical violence against women in Estonia decreased by 1.5 percent, sexual violence – by 1.8 percent. The major cause of these two types of violence is the consumption of alcohol.

In 2021, the Lithuanian Parliament adopted a new version of the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, which established the warrant for protection against domestic violence. These amendments entered into force on July 1, 2023. According to the law, if there is a risk of domestic violence, an adult who poses a risk of violent behaviour may be obliged to temporarily move out of the place of residence, not to visit a victim's place of residence, not to approach this person and other people living together. A domestic violence protection warrant would be issued by a police officer for a period of 15 days, when, after receiving a report of possible domestic violence and carrying out a risk assessment, a risk of domestic violence has been identified.

According to Human Rights Monitoring Institute (2023) in the first weekend when the warrant was in effect, the police received 353 reports of possible domestic violence. In 91 cases, a pre-trial investigation or a material clarification procedure has been initiated. In another 262 cases, the police assessed the situation individually and issued 147 warrants obliging the potential perpetrator to move out of the residence and not to seek contact with the person at risk of violence.

Domestic and intimate partner violence was criminalised in Latvia and considered an aggravating factor in certain criminal offenses. There were penalties for causing “minor” bodily harm when the survivor and perpetrator were spouses, former spouses, or civil partners. Penalties ranged from fines to imprisonment. The law allowed the police to investigate domestic violence without a survivor's prior approval and criminalised stalking. The law allowed survivors of domestic violence to request that police officers issue an order for the eviction of the perpetrator for eight days. Upon receiving such a request, police had to react immediately. Only courts could issue restraining orders and were required to respond to such requests within one business day. Once a restraining order was issued, it remained in force until a court revoked it (Latvian Human Rights Report, 2023, pp. 16-17).

Women who experience domestic violence often face significant barriers to entering or remaining in the labour market. The literature analysis suggests that physical and sexual violence can result in injuries or trauma that require time off work and potentially lead to job loss or decreased productivity. The implementation of domestic violence protection laws, such as those in Latvia and Lithuania, plays a critical role in stabilising the labour market participation of women. By ensuring that abusers can be removed from the home, these laws help survivors maintain a safe environment, which is crucial for their ability to work and earn a livelihood. In Latvia, for instance, the criminalisation of intimate partner violence and the ability to request immediate eviction of the abuser helps protect women from the effects of violence on their employment. The reduction of violence, as seen in Estonia where physical and sexual violence against women decreased by 1.5% and 1.8% respectively, may correlate with increased labour market participation among women. Fewer instances of violence can lead to fewer work absences, higher productivity, and greater overall economic participation by women, thus contributing to economic growth.

5. CONCLUSION

The relationship between women's employment and domestic violence is complex, with theories suggesting both protective and risk-enhancing effects. On one hand, employment can empower women by increasing their social capital and bargaining power, thereby reducing the risk of domestic violence. However, the resource theory suggests that women's employment might provoke violence by disrupting traditional gender roles and resource distribution within households. Empirical studies show that domestic violence negatively impacts women's work performance, stability, and ability to maintain employment, often leading to job loss. Additionally, domestic violence can result in severe consequences, including loss of life, which highlights the critical need for supportive interventions.

Estimations of the economic impact of domestic violence reveal significant tangible and intangible costs, including billions in lost productivity, wages, and societal costs. Domestic violence not only directly affects victims through health and economic losses but also has broader economic consequences, such as reduced female employment and slower GDP growth. Addressing domestic violence is essential not only for the well-being of individuals but also for sustaining economic stability and growth.

The analysis of domestic violence against women in the Baltic States reveals that physical violence, including threats, is the most prevalent form of this type of violence, with Estonia having the highest rates of both physical and sexual violence. The data also show that domestic violence is recurrent rather than a one-time act across all three countries. While many women seek help from close contacts or other services, few turn to formal support services. Physical injuries are the most common consequence of domestic violence, with a significant number of women feeling that their lives are in danger.

The implementation of domestic violence protection laws in Latvia and Lithuania, along with the observed reduction in violence in Estonia, plays a crucial role in stabilising and enhancing women's labour market participation. By ensuring a safer environment, these legal measures help women maintain employment, which contributes to fewer work absences and a greater economic input. Consequently, addressing domestic violence against women is essential for individual well-being, sustainable economic growth and societal resilience.

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