

**Intimate partner violence in female-headed one-parent households: generating data on prevalence, consequences and support**

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**Intimate partner violence in female-headed one-parent households: generating data on prevalence, consequences and support**

*Abstract:*

This paper aims to explore intimate partner violence (IPV) in female-headed one-parent households, as well as the measures of protection and support taken by mothers and

received from institutions. To generate data and analysis a non-androcentric action research was carried out together with the Federation of One-Parent Families of Catalonia. A survey was designed and distributed through a strategic convenience sampling and received 300 answers from one-parent households. About 96% of them were female-headed and a 42.9% of them reported having suffered IPV once in their lives. Our results show then a high prevalence of IPV among those mothers, especially for women who separated or divorced, with fewer resources and coming from Latin America. However, women with fewer resources more frequently reported such violence, relied more on community-based organisations and applied more for court restraining orders. In any case, public support for women in female-headed one-parent households that suffer IPV is still insufficient.

*Keywords:* Intimate partner violence, gender violence; female-headed households; one-parent households; female-headed one-parent households

*Highlights:*

- The prevalence of intimate partner violence among women heading one-parent households is high.
- For the majority of women heading one-parent households the aggressor was the father of their children. Children are also affected by this violence.
- Violence continued after the breakup for the majority of women, although physical and sexual violence diminished considerably.
- Public support for women in female-headed households that suffer IPV is still worryingly insufficient.

## **Introduction**

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) against women is the most extreme expression of the exercise of power in unequal gender relations (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Yllö and Bograd, 1988). Current research and literature still show that gender-based violence, such as IPV against women, remains as one of the main social problems of our societies (Alhabib et al., 2010; Devries et al., 2013; EU & FRA, 2014). This has terrible social and health impacts on women, their children and the society as a whole (Strauss and Smith, 1990; Campbell, 2002; Butterworth, 2004; Almeda and Di Nella, 2011; Espinar-Ruiz and López-Monsalve, 2014).

According to public data and various studies in Spain (Vives-Cases et al., 2009; Vergés, 2012; ICRS and VIU, 2010; Instituto de la mujer, 2015; INE, 2015; de Miguel Luken, 2015), an average of 63 women are killed by their partners or ex-partners every year. In Spain, 10.4% of women over 16 have suffered physical IPV violence in their lives, 8.1% sexual violence, 25.4% psychological violence and 10.8% an economical one. Most of the women are victims of IPV in their childbearing years and when they have young children. About 60% of them witnessed the violence at home and, among those, about 64% suffered that when being minors. Finally, immigrant women are overrepresented among the victims. Moreover, approximately 27,000 women a year are victims of IPV with a protective order or precautionary measures, even if approximately less than 30% of the cases are reported.

Notwithstanding these alarming figures and with the aim of confronting them, the Spanish state adopted one of the most advanced regulatory frameworks in the world in the field of violence against women (Roggeband, 2012). Spanish law (Organic Act 1/2004 on Integral Protection Measures against Gender Violence), defines Gender Violence as *the violence exercised against women by their present or former spouses or by men with whom they maintain or have maintained analogous affective relations, with or without*

*cohabitation, as an expression of discrimination, the situation of inequality and the power relations prevailing between the sexes.* Therefore, it still only refers to IPV and, even if this had some limitations we also focused in IPV in this work. Not only does this regulatory framework consist of the Organic Act 1/2004, but also of different laws of the Autonomous Communities (Bodelón, 2013). In the case of Catalonia, the Act 5/2008, of April 24, on the Right of Women to Eradicate Gender Violence.

Although the law defines particularly vulnerable population groups, female-headed one-parent households are not among them. As Bodelón (2011) points out, this decision made the relationship between one-parent households headed by women and violence invisible.

This has consequences in terms of generation of public data, research and awareness.

In Spain, as well as in other societies, numbers of one-parent households are growing and the great majority of them are female-headed (Almeda and Di Nella, 2011; Almeda et al., 2016). The percentage of children born outside marriage went from 2% in 1975, to over 26% in 2005 and to almost 45% in 2015 (Indicadores de fecundidad, 2015). In 2015, one-parent households accounted for a 10% of all households, and more than 20% of households with children were one-parent households in 2015. Over 80% of them were female-headed (Encuesta continua de hogares, 2015). One-parent households are generating new challenges for our societies. They question the pillars of our traditional heteropatriarcal family, show the inefficiencies of our capitalist and patriarchal system and, in turn, demand new family policies that respond to their diversity and specific needs (Almeda and Di Nella, 2011). An English translation of our term “monomarentalitat” is not easy. Therefore, for our research as well as in this article, we ought to use the term female-headed one-parent households, with the aim of avoiding a marriage or family centered concept and considering our previous works on the topic. We define that as a group formed by a woman who exercises principally or exclusively the regime of

cohabiting with at least one child of legal age who is not legally emancipated (Authors, 2014; Authors, 2016)

The scarce studies on IPV that contemplate female-headed one-parent households point to a high prevalence of IPV among them both internationally (Wilcox, 2000; Gennetian, 2003; Butterworth, 2004; Huang et al., 2010; Dalal, 2011; Casique and Castro, 2014) and for Spain (Almeda and Di Nella, 2011; Bodelón, 2011). They point to negative consequences for mothers and their children in terms of health (Butterworth, 2004), economy (Wilcox, 2000; Gennetian, 2003), mothering and well-being (Almeda and Di Nella, 2011, Holt, 2016). Previous research showed that social policies and the economic empowerment of women helped low income single mothers and, therefore, authors stressed the need for a greater and better social and institutional support (Gennetian, 2003; Dalal, 2011; Bodelón, 2011; Holt, 2016), as well as the need for further research to deepen the relationship between female-headed one-parent households and IPV.

Women end up heading one-parent households through several ways and this situation can be dynamic and change over time independently if they are married or not. Some women certainly decided to become mothers without a partner; others find themselves in such a situation after being widowed, migration, hospitalization or the imprisonment of the partner, as well as many others after separation or divorce (Almeda and Di Nella, 2011; Almeda et al., 2016). In the case of many female-headed one-parent households, IPV could be present in intimate relationships even without cohabitation. In others IPV acts as a lead-up to conjugal rupture; that is, a two-parent unit becomes a one-parent household because of IPV (Almeda and Di Nella, 2011).

However, research on post-separation and IPV demonstrates that IPV does not stop necessarily after separation or divorce. Actually, violence could escalate to dangerous levels and those women account for the major proportion of all forms of violence, and the

greatest risk of intimate partner violence (Jaffe et al., 2003; Humphreys and Thiara, 2003; Gennetian, 2003; Casique and Castro, 2014). The risk of physical violence could even rise within the first year after separation. Other kinds of violence continue afterwards and nonphysical violence may increase due to men having less physical access to women (Fleury et al., 2000; Hardesty and Chung, 2006; Campbell, 2002). All this violence affects their children, directly and/or indirectly, as many children witnessed or even suffered violence themselves before and after the separation (Espinar-Ruiz and López-Monsalve, 2014). According to previous research (Perel and Peled, 2008; Holt, 2015), an abusive father cannot be a good father unless responsibility is taken by fathers and the institutions to change the situation. This also impacts on the mother-child relationship and the experience of mothering leading to what Holt (2016) identified as the post-separation mothering paradox. Women support the children's wish, and even the courts and their environment, for co-parenting while they try to protect themselves and their children at the same time. This often results in a too risky paradox and with harmful effects on women and their children, as well as added criticism of mothers (Varceo and Irwin, 2004; Hardesty and Ganong, 2006; Holt, 2016). In this regard, attempts by women to minimize post-separation violence might seem contradictory. On the one hand, they try, for example, to set boundaries and maintain physical distance (Montero et al., 2012; Zeoli et al., 2013). On the other, for example, they cooperate with court orders and social services and help co-parenting, even if they know this might endanger themselves or their children (Humphreys and Thiara, 2003; Hardesty and Ganong, 2006; Harrison, 2008). Women arrive at social services and court being very vulnerable and with many difficulties to overcome. The role of men and fathers in our institutions regarding children is still privileged and this contributes too often to displacing women's safety needs (Montero et al., 2012; Varceo and Irwin, 2004; Holt, 2016). Therefore, institutional violence is still

present and social services and courts do not become as protective as they should be for many women and mothers who suffered IPV (Bodelón, 2011; Humphreys and Thiara, 2003; Holt, 2016). In spite of the difficulties women encounter in accessing court protection some of them find it helpful, therefore more support for women is needed in this regard (Humphreys and Thiara, 2003). Similarly, Gennetian (2003) found that welfare programmes, that included financial incentives and increased employment, decreased reports on intimate partner violence among low-income single mothers.

Finally, although the causes of economic violence suffered by women who lead households are diverse, surely non-payment of pensions or even debts that were a consequence of IPV represent an essential part of this (Wilcox, 2000). As Bodelón (2011) points out for Spain, although this is an issue covered by law, it is not developed, making it very difficult to know the scope of this form of violence, and it is necessary to quantify its real impact not only on women but also on their children. Also, as numerous studies suggest for Europe, Spain and Catalonia (Wilcox, 2000; Obiol, 2003; Almeda and Di Nella, 2011; Chzhe and Bradshaw, 2012, Almeda et al., 2016) the tendency for female-headed households is towards impoverishment and social exclusion.

Even if post-separation and IPV research gives important insights to understanding the situation of mothers heading one-parent households, we still need to focus on their specific one-parent situation to understand its complexity. As in many other contexts, in Spain we do not have sufficient data and details about this relationship between IPV and female-headed one-parent households. We do not know enough about possible consequences, nor about the measures of protection, care and support taken by the women heading one-parent families themselves and the institutions. This is mainly due to the absence of official data that addresses one-parent households taking into account the

different access to it, as well as the lack of attention to women heading one-parent families in relation to gender violence laws and public data generated in this regard.

In view of this, our research aimed to start filling this gap from a non-androcentric perspective and through an action research approach that, among other methodological strategies, involved designing, distributing and analysing the One-Parent Households and Family Diversity Survey (EMODIF) (Authors, 2014). This survey included a section on IPV, which allowed us to analyse and provide new information about the relation between IPV and the diversity of female-headed one-parent households in our context. Specifically, our objective was to explore IPV in female-headed one-parent households. We inquired about the prevalence of violence against women who head one parent families, who exercised it and what form violence it was, as well as to what extent and how it affected children. In addition, we asked what protective and care measures women took and what kind of support from the state and from their community they received. In doing so, we aim to contribute to an incipient body of research on female-headed one-parent households and IPV. At the same time, we are contributing to previous research on female-headed one-parent households, IPV and gender violence, as well as to literature on post-separation violence.

In the next section, we present and analyse the main methodological strategies applied in the research and the EMODIF survey. Following that, in a descriptive way, we reveal some of its main results that provide us with new details about the relationship between female-headed one-parent households and IPV. Finally, we include a discussion of the results and brief conclusions as final remarks.

## **Methods**

This paper shows part of the results of the project "One Parent Families in the New Century. Challenges and Dilemmas in Times of Change", conducted by the authors,



among other researchers. As mentioned, an important part of this project has been the design and implementation of the EMODIF survey, a questionnaire as a specific measurement instrument on one-parent households. The questionnaire was developed specifically for the study, and it was designed as an action research in collaboration with the Federation of One-Parent Families of Catalonia (FEFAMOCA). FEFAMOCA is the main organization in Catalonia of one-parent households, and one of the most important in Spain. With this tool, we intend to contribute to improving the available system of statistics by means of an instrument that allows measuring the phenomenon of one-parent households from a comprehensive and non-androcentric approach (Authors, 2014).

The EMODIF was a self-administered survey through an online tool (e-survey) and was distributed between October 2012 and March 2013. The survey was sent to 443 individuals heading one-parent families, of whom 300 completed the questionnaire. Of those 287 were women. Among them 280 answered this last part on IPV. The sample was not representative, nor random, and was based on two types of sampling: strategic and snowball sampling. The strategic sample was used with the members of the FEFAMOCA, while the snowball sampling was used to address one-parent households, which were not part of FEFAMOCA. Therefore, 260 responses were obtained through strategic sampling and 40 through the snowball sampling.

Using data from the survey, the current paper seeks to examine the relationship between violence against women and female-headed households. Within the framework of the sociodemographic variables identified as most relevant to the study of one parent families (Almeda et al., 2011), we analyse a) the prevalence of violence perpetrated by a partner at some point in life, b) who it was inflicted by (co-parent or other partner), c) whether it was initiated before or after the breakup or death of the other parent, d) the time elapsed until separation, and e) whether the violence continued after separation. We also examine

f) the prevalence and form of violence reported among the group of women participating in the EMODIF (emotional, psychological, economic, physical, sexual, social or environmental violence), and g) if it differs depending on the cause of entry to one-parent status, the social class or place of origin of the woman. Finally, we inquire h) whether the victims filed complaints and sought protection and care measures against violence, and i) whether they received support from the institutions, as well as about the response of their communities and the institutions.

Regarding the analysis of the data and the variables of the questionnaire, the frequencies of the relevant variables necessary for the study were obtained using SPSS, and an analysis of the association between some of them, both categorical and quantitative, was carried out. Finally, there are a number of ethical considerations that need to be made when conducting research that deals with violence against women. Confidentiality has been one of the most regarded issues, plus the need to ensure that the research does not cause any participant to experience further harm (Fraga, 2016). As part of the consent procedure, the participants were informed that the data collected would be held in strict confidence.

## **Results**

The vast majority of the women who participated were heterosexual (94%), born in Spain (85.4%), and did not adhere to any religion (75%). Over half of them (57.8%) answered that they were single, and one in three (34.9%) was separated or divorced. Half (50.02%) of them became heads of one-parent households without having a stable relationship (married or civil partners); 2 in 5 participants (43.6%) did so due to a breakdown of relationship with a stable partner; 2.4% were not in a cohabiting relationship; and 3.8% due to their partner's death. It is noteworthy that more than a half (59.6%) of the participants had postgraduate studies and 62.4% earned less than €1,600 per month. In

terms of social class<sup>1</sup>, almost half (47.7%) were middle class, 1 in 3 (36.2%) were upper class and only 16% were lower class. In addition, 7% had some kind of functional diversity.

**Prevalence of intimate partner violence among women heading their households**

Analysing the EMODIF data, it stands out that 42.9% of the women heading one-parent households who answered this last part of the survey reported having experienced a situation of violence in their relationships, at least once in their lives.

The access pathway to one-parent status had a close bearing on partner violence among the women in the study group. As can be seen in Table 1, the percentages are considerably higher for some of them. Two out of three women who became heads of a one-parent household due to a breakup in the relationship with their stable partner (legal separation or divorce) reported having experienced intimate partner violence. The figure falls by half in the case of women whose one-parent status was due to not having lived with a partner for six months or longer (as is the case of one-parent status resulting from imprisonment, hospitalisation or emigration of the partner, among others). When one-parent status originated from a pregnancy or adoption without a stable relationship, only one in four women reported episodes of intimate partner violence at some time in their lives. In the case of widows, one in ten women reported partner violence.

**Table 1**

IPV by Access Pathway to one-parent household					
	Due to a pregnancy or beginning of an adoption without a	Due to a breakup of a relationship with stable live-in partner	Due to absence of living with a partner for six months or longer	Due to partner's death	Total

<sup>1</sup> The reference to social class is elaborated by the research team through the systematisation of diverse sources, and it is defined through the following variables: labour situation, socio-professional category, and income level. To do so, a cluster analysis has been performed. The lower class corresponds with unemployed individuals with up to 600 euros per month. The middle class corresponds to accountants and administrative workers, employees in catering, technicians and assistance and unqualified workers, with secondary educations or middle level educational cycles and with monthly incomes up to 1,600 euros per month. The upper class corresponds to technicians and scientific and intellectual professionals, directors and managers; with university studies and monthly income of 1,601 to 4,500 euros.

	stable relationship				
Yes	36	80	3	1	120
	25.50%	65.60%	50.0%	9.1%	42.90%
No	105	42	3	10	160
	74.50%	34.40%	50.0%	90.9%	57.10%
Total	141	122	6	11	280
	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

The relationship between social class and having suffered partner violence is also noteworthy in this group of women leading their households. Data reveal that nearly two out of three (60%) lower-class women reported having faced partner violence at some time in their lives; this figure is reduced by half in the case of middle-class women (48.1%), and represents slightly more than one in four (28.4%) upper-class women. As for the perpetrator, partners who are fathers of the interviewed women's children (co-parents) represent the largest proportion of the responses. This is true for two out of three (67.5%) women who reported IPV. Among the women who reported having suffered IPV some time in their lives, violence exercised by the other parent is also proportionally higher the lower the social class is (77.8%, 67.2% and 58.6% respectively). Because these women maintain contact with the aggressor (the co-parent of their children) for child support, this violence represents a greater risk in their lives.

Taking into consideration the place of birth, it should be noted that women born in Latin America reported intimate partner violence more often. Almost two out of three Latin American women (61.5%) affirmed they had experienced intimate partner violence, followed by European women (58.3%), and Spanish women (40.8%). If the focus of analysis moves only to the group of women who report that violence was exercised by the co-parent, the relationship between country of origin and partner violence changes and the proportion increases significantly in women born in Spain, with two out of every

three Spanish women (67%) reporting violence by the father of their children. The proportion is very similar among Latin American (68.8%) and European immigrants (71.4%).

### **Partner violence perpetrated by the co-parent**

Among the women who reported having suffered violence from an intimate partner at some point in their lives, in the vast majority of cases — two out of three women (67.5%) — the violence was exercised by the other parent of their children. The analysis reveals that four out of five women (80 %) who reported partner violence and who entered lone motherhood as a result of a breakup with their partner, affirmed that the aggressor was the father of their children. These extremely high figures are noteworthy because of what they represent in terms of the latent risk factor for the women and their children. By contrast, among the women who became heads of one-parent households as a result of a pregnancy or adoption without a partner, 36.1% of the violence was exercised by the other parent. This may be due to the fact that in this group of women maternity is not related to their partner, except in some cases.

**Table 2**

<b>Forms of Violence Perpetrated by the Partner</b>				
	<b>Violence Exerted by the Other Parent Initiated Prior to the Rupture ( 67 women)</b>		<b>Violence by Another Partner (a total of 39 women)</b>	
	Incidence	%	Incidence	%
Economic	27	<b>40.3</b>	6	<b>15.4</b>
Sexual	20	<b>29.9</b>	8	<b>20.5</b>
Physical	26	<b>38.8</b>	19	<b>48.7</b>
Psychological	62	<b>92.5</b>	34	<b>87.2</b>
Social	42	<b>62.7</b>	18	<b>46.2</b>
Environmental	33	<b>49.3</b>	15	<b>38.5</b>

In the case of women who reported violence by the other parent, almost nine out of ten (89.3%) suffered violence before the breakup. It should be noted that in only one out of

three of these cases (37.7%) the rupture of the relationship occurred within the first year of violence. This indicates that most women continued their relationship with the aggressor for more than a year after the onset of violence, being exposed to the dangers and consequences of violence. Specifically, one out of three of these women (31.1%) separated between one and three years after the violence had begun; one out of ten (9.8%) did so between three and five years later; 16.1% within five and ten years; and 4.9% separated more than 10 years after the onset of the violence by the father of their children. Among women who reported experiencing situations of intimate partner violence, the most prevalent form of violence (Table 2) is *psychological violence*, including harassment, denigration, insults, or threats. More than nine out of ten (92.5%) women who reported co-parent violence that had begun before the separation indicated that they had experienced psychological abuse. This figure is very similar in the case of women who suffered violence by a partner other than the father of their children. *Social violence*, which involves developing strategies of separation from family and social network, was reported by two out of three women who had already suffered co-parent violence before the rupture, and by almost half of the women who declared violence by another partner. *Physical violence* — such as beatings, pinching, kicking or hair pulling — was reported by four out of ten women who had suffered co-parent violence before the separation, and by nearly one out of two women who experienced violence by a different partner. *Environmental violence* was reported to a lesser extent. Breaking objects or destroying plants, assaulting domestic animals or imposing an order in the relationship was communicated by half of the women experiencing co-parent violence initiated before separation, and by just over two out of three women who suffered violence by another partner. *Sexual violence* — including imposition of unwanted sexual practices, use of force in sexual relations, or use of sex to resolve conflicts — was reported by two out of

three women in the first group, and by one out of five women in the second group. Lastly, *economic violence* — such as cancellation of credit cards, blocking of joint accounts, non payment of child allowances or misappropriation of personal accounts — occurred mainly in the case of women suffering co-parent violence that started before the separation.

Therefore, as shown in Table 2 above, when partner violence had begun before the break with or death of the other parent, the forms of intimate partner violence included in the first place psychological violence, followed by social violence, environmental and economic violence, and to a lesser extent physical and sexual abuse.

**Table 3**

<b>Forms of Violence after Breakup (Separation or Divorce)</b>		
	Incidence	% among 42 Women
Economic	24	57.1
Sexual	3	7.1
Physical	6	14.3
Psychological	41	97.6
Social	18	42.9
Environmental	10	23.8
Lawsuits or Threats to Remove Custody Rights	17	40.5

For most women whose situation of violence began before separation, the abuse continued after the breakup in two out of three women (62.5%), although with some variations regarding its form. As can be seen in Table 3, the patterns remain similar, however, a new form of violence should be added — demands or threats to remove custody rights over children, in many cases by the so-called "parental alienation syndrome". We considered important to point this out as a different form of violence due to the fact that in Spain abusers use the so-called syndrome in order to harm their ex-partners, so it needs to be visible. Moreover, although they do not disappear, physical and sexual violence diminish considerably. We believe that this can be the result of separation

and probably, as we will be discussed later, of the measures of protection and support. Once again, psychological violence has the highest prevalence in this group, followed by economic violence, which increases due to conflicts over child support allowances. Social violence is the third most prevalent form of violence, almost in the same proportion as threats to remove custody rights over children, with four out of ten women reporting it.

### **The other victims: their children**

It should be added that in some cases children were also victims of intimate partner violence, as confirmed by 11.7% of the total sample. In one out of four (25%) cases in which the mother suffered violence it was also experienced by the children. It should also be noted that in most cases this violence began before separation — almost two out of three (58.6%) women who reported that their children suffered violence from the aggressor of the mother indicated that it had begun before separation, and an equally high percentage stated that violence towards the children had started after separation.

**Table 4**

<b>Forms of Violence Suffered by Children</b>		
	<b>Incidence</b>	<b>Total % of Violence against Children</b>
Sexual	1	3.3
Physical	5	16.7
Psychological	29	96.7
Social	5	16.7

As in the case of the mothers, psychological violence had the highest prevalence and occurred in almost all reported cases (see Table 4), followed in much lower proportion by physical and social violence, and in one case the aggressor had sexually abused the children. This begs the question of the consequences of partner violence on children, given that 41.7% of women who suffered violence also stated that their children had



witnessed violence against them. It is also noteworthy that 34.1% of women indicated that their ex-partner had used their children after separation to harm them.

Although the majority of women who have experienced intimate partner violence considered it had no impact on their care of, and assistance to, their children, a high percentage (35%) believed that it did have consequences in this regard.

**Table 5**

<b>Impact of Violence on Care and Support for Children</b>		
	Incidence	% among 42 Women that Report Impact on their Children
Feel more concern for their children and offer them more care	27	64.3
The process they are going through (or went through) in terms of legal issues prevents them from attending to their children as much as they used to	8	19.0
The psychological process they are going through (or went through) prevents them from attending to their children as much as they used to	16	38.1
It has affected me physically or psychologically, which in turn affected my children	2	4.8
It has affected my children because the abuser has used them to hurt me	1	2.4
My children have suffered psychological effects: depression, fear, apathy	4	9.5
My children reject the aggressor	1	2.4
Overprotection in some cases, in others neglect, ill temper, sadness, lack of play or little patience	1	2.4
I am afraid that the person who attacked me will try to harm my child	1	2.4

The consequences reported by women are diverse (Table 5). One of the possible consequences pre-established in the survey was for the women to be more concerned about their children and to offer them a more assiduous care, which proved to be more prevalent than other consequences, given that approximately two out of three women (64.3%) reported that violence had repercussions on their children and confirmed having greater concern for them. Other consequences included the fact that the psychological process did not allow them to care for their children as much as they used to, as reported

by two out of five (38.2%) women, or that the legal process prevented them from giving attention to the children, as confirmed by one out of five (19%). In addition, respondents added that children suffered depression, fear or apathy in one out of every 10 cases (9.5%); physical or psychological consequences in one out of twenty (4.8%), and in one case that the aggressor used the children to harm her; or that the children rejected the aggressor, or that there was overprotection or lack of attention, lack of play, ill temper or little patience.

Therefore, intimate partner violence in the case of female-headed households also has serious consequences for children, which presents a major challenge for their parents, especially mothers, but also for the society and our governments.

### **Protection and care measures, response from the community and state support**

Some of the individuals suffering intimate partner violence introduced important changes in their lives as measures of protection and care. In this respect, one out of three women (35.5%) moved from their neighbourhood or even the city as a result of violence. A tendency can be observed as the lower the social class was, the one in which change of residence took place more frequently (Table 6). Only 15.4% of upper-class women changed their neighbourhood or city, while this happened in two out of five (41.4%) middle-class women and a similar proportion (43.5%) of lower-class women.

**Table 6**

<b>Change of Residence by Social Class</b>								
	Lower Class		Middle Class		Upper Class		Total	
		%		%		%		%
Yes	10	43.5	24	41.4	4	15.4	<b>38</b>	<b>35.5</b>
No	13	56.5	34	58.6	22	84.6	<b>69</b>	<b>64.5</b>
Total	23	100	58	100	26	100	<b>107</b>	<b>100</b>

In terms of place of origin, Latin American women tended to move more frequently — approximately half of them (46.2%) — and to a lesser extent, European women (33.3%) and Spanish women (34.1%). Greater vulnerability, lack of roots and support by the family of origin of many of the Latin American women could explain it, although it could also indicate greater freedom of movement for them and, in this sense, more possibilities to overcome the violence.

Approximately two out of three women who suffered violence (36.4%) sought support from non-governmental organisations such as women's groups or social organisations. The higher the social class, the fewer the women who sought support from non-governmental organisations or social entities. Only 15.4% of women from upper social class sought help, in contrast to two out of five middle-class women (41.4%) and half of the lower-class women (47.8%) who did so. In terms of place of origin (Table 7), it can be observed that Latin American women were less likely to seek support from organisations (approximately one in five women from Latin America), which may be due to lack of information and less knowledge of where to go for help. They were preceded by Spanish (almost two out of five) and European women (50%).

**Table 7**

<b>Search for NGO Support by Place of Origin</b>				
	Spain	Europe	Latin America	<b>Total</b>
Yes	33	3	3	<b>39</b>
	37.5%	50.0%	23.1%	<b>36.4%</b>
No	55	3	10	<b>68</b>
	62.5%	50.0%	76.9%	<b>63.6%</b>
Totals	88	6	13	<b>107</b>
	100%	100%	100%	<b>100%</b>

Separation proves to be difficult and still continues to hold moral connotations in the patriarchal society we live in. This puts pressure on women, who are judged more often than men for separating just as much as for delaying it. In this regard, almost one out of

three women who suffered violence (29.5%) reported that they felt judged for having separated from their partner as a result of violence. Likewise, taking into account the observations above with regard to the time between the onset of violence and the separation, about half of the women (44.8%) stated that they felt judged for not having separated earlier from their ex-partner or spouse.

Among those who suffered violence, only one in three women (29.2%) reported the perpetrator to the police. Latin American women tended to report the perpetrators less. One out of four (25%) of them did so, followed by Spanish women (28.9%), and European women (42.9%). By contrast, there are minimal differences with regard to social class, although with a slightly greater prevalence of complaints filed by lower-class women.

As regards applying for restraining orders, approximately one in five (18.9%) women who suffered violence did so, against 81.3% did not. In addition, only three women who had suffered violence had been granted an official restraining order. Both figures are very low and beg a question about why it happens, although the survey does not enable to explore it. There is a tendency towards higher number of applications the lower the social class, with very similar figures between the upper class (18.5%) and the middle class (17.2%), and 22.7% for lower-class women. Once again, with regard to the place of origin, individuals born in Latin America file less for protective orders (14.3%) than the Spanish (17.2%), and much less than other Europeans (33.3%).

The little support received by these women from the government is truly worrying. In this sense, approximately one in four women (27.5%) who suffered violence at some time in their lives received some type of state aid such as access to social housing, support in obtaining employment or vocational training, extraordinary economic benefits, access to reception and recovery facilities, or psychological and police support. The vast majority

(72.5%) affirmed they were not granted state aids for not having previously reported the perpetrator.

## **Discussion**

In this work we aimed at exploring IPV within female-headed one-parent households in particular. We sought to investigate the prevalence of IPV in those one-parent households headed by women, the form of violence suffered and by whom, as well as to what extent their children were affected. Moreover, we asked what protective measures women took and what kind of institutional and community support they looked for or received. Our results provide new information for Spain and therefore contribute to the scarce previous international literature on the topic. Moreover, this has important implications for social and public policies towards one-parent households and women who suffered IPV.

Our data indicate a relevant relation between IPV and female-headed one-parent families, and thus is consistent with previous research (Gennetian, 2003; Butterworth, 2004; Almeda et al., 2011). In other words, we observed a high prevalence of gender-based violence among women heading households. Our figure (42.9%) is far above the average in general, which ranges between 25 and 30% in Spain and around 27% in Catalonia (Ruiz-Pérez et al., 2010, Sanz-Barbero et al., 2014) and more similar, but slightly lower than other international previous research among lone mothers (Gennetian, 2003, Butterworth, 2004).

There were significant differences depending on how women become heads of one-parent families, social class and origin and/or nationality of the women within this group. Mothers heading one-parent households from lower class and Latin American were at greater risk of suffering IPV. Again this shows consistency with literature that investigates low-income single mothers (Gennetian, 2003). These findings confirm previous research that found prevalence of partner violence among immigrant women,

partly because of the accumulation of vulnerabilities, both in terms of employment as well as being uprooted or discrimination (Menjívar and Salcido, 2002; Vives-Cases et al., 2009). This shows that further research is needed to better understand intersectionality of gender, origin and class in relation to IPV, at least for our context.

Psychological violence was reported by the vast majority (almost all) of the women who experienced partner violence at some point in their lives. The forms of violence reported by women in this group differed depending on the aggressor. Thus, for instance, economic violence was reported by almost half of the women who suffered intimate partner violence by their children's father, which, in turn, began before separation. This same violence continued after the breakup. Meanwhile, almost half of the women who suffered violence by other partner reported physical violence. It should be noted that children were also affected by violence in all its forms but, above all, by psychological violence.

The data also show that separated and divorced women represented the highest rates of IPV and that the aggressor was mostly the co-parent. Moreover, only for 1 out of every 3 woman separation did appear to work. Therefore, IPV did not always stop after separation or divorce as much research on post-separation and IPV already demonstrated (Campbell, 2002; Holt, 2017). However, observing the types of violence important changes appear. Even if all forms of IPV persist, severe forms such as sexual or physical violence decrease after separation. In spite of that, new forms of violence related to lawsuits and threats to remove custody appear. According to some post-separation research women do not always find protection, even when there is legal and institutional intervention (Humphreys and Thiara, 2003).

Actually, more than 60% of the women surveyed separated more than a year after the violence started. Their social environment in this regard criticized most of their decisions. Even if some of them were questioned for separating, many more were criticized for

separating too late. This might be another sign of the contradictions and difficulties that women heading one-parent households encounter in trying to access support and protection from our institutions and communities. In any case, women who suffered violence had to make important changes in their lives as measures of protection, as well as seeking support from social organisations. Fewer changes and less support seeking were observed among upper-class women, and less social support among Latin American women. Physical separation from the abusive partner, where they change cities or even countries, is one of those changes, but this can also have effects on women's social networks and support. Research demonstrates how social support increases the well-being of women who suffered IPV (Beeble et al., Kamimura, 2013). However, our results suggest that women heading one-parent families in our context seek and receive very little social support. This has implications for public and social policies, as well as for non governmental organizations.

Finally, even though the data do not allow us to delve deeper into the causes, it is remarkable how rarely women requested support from the state and public institutions, as the figures show very low percentages of complaints and requests for restraining orders. In Spain, little support is given without a report to the police and even after this the level of support shows little increase. Despite the prevalence and severity of IPV among those women surveyed, only 3 of them received a favourable restraining order. As Humphreys and Thiara reveal (2003), the effect of this failure of intervention is not neutral and leaves women and children vulnerable and unprotected. Actually, in Catalonia, there is a higher rate of imposed co-parenting, as well as restraining orders being declined and a lower rate of IPV related convictions than in the rest of Spain. This could be recorded as a form of institutional violence (Bodelón, 2015), since 66% of restraining orders were denied in Catalonia in 2014, as compared to 43% in the rest of Spain (CGPJ, 2014). Women might

know or have encountered difficulties in accessing institutional support. As previous literature has shown (Humphreys and Thiara, 2003) women might find neither justice nor protection when trying to access law protection. The little support that women heading one-parent households who suffered IPV received from our institutions is serious and worrying, and contravenes all national and international norms and provisions of human rights.

## **Conclusions**

This paper aimed at contributing to further research on gender violence, specifically IPV, as well as on female-headed one-parent households and the relation between the two. In so doing, this work virtually represents the only existing study that analyses in some detail the relationship between IPV and female-headed households in our context — which allowed us to detect the high prevalence of IPV— considering different forms of violence and different social groups. Our results also revealed some of the needs of the women at the head of one-parent households in this regard, as well as some consequences that IPV has on them and their children. In addition, it allowed us to point to the insufficient role that social organisations and the state are playing in supporting these women, as well as to contribute to a growing body of research on post-separation and IPV.

However, it should be noted that our paper suffers from some limitations that should be addressed in the future. On the one hand, the analysis is based on the EMODIF survey, which was primarily administered in the Federation of One-Parent Families of Catalonia and, therefore, has limitations regarding the geographic scope and possible biases associated with the profile of the affiliated families. On the other hand, our sample is not statistically representative of the female-headed one-parent households of Catalonia or Spain and, therefore results cannot be generalized. Finally, the introductory and descriptive nature of the analysis of the survey does not allow us to delve into some causes



and consequences of the violence, even though it generates new questions that have not yet been clearly answered and further research is needed.

Therefore, the relationship between IPV and one-parent households should be examined still further. Above all, research using qualitative analysis should be expanded, including studies in other countries and comparative analysis. It is equally important to continue exploring why women request and receive so little support from our institutions. The ultimate objective should be to formulate, design and implement measures to make visible, improve and transform the situation of those women who lead one-parent households taking into consideration their specific circumstances and desires.

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