

# Domestic violence and social services in Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Nigeria: Comparative study

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**Abstract.** Objectives: with regard to neglect, deprivation, false allegations, exposure to traumatic experiences, and other factors, it is reasonable to claim that domestic violence is a major contributor to child abuse in families. Domestic violence also affects the national economy and the probability of poverty. The legal definition of violence and cultural traditions play a significant role in how it is perceived. This study focuses on exploring domestic violence and social services to respond to domestic violence in families with children and examines multidisciplinary approach to domestic violence in families across Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Nigeria. Materials and Methods: based on purposive sampling, 16 in-depth interviews were conducted with professionals from Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, and Nigeria who work with families and individuals who have experienced domestic violence. The data were analysed using ATLAS.ti 5.0 to generate themes and finalised by employing qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) with the software fsQCA 4.0. Results: data showed that several conditions impacted the effective intervention and prevention of domestic violence. Four of these conditions were identified as sufficient causal pathways for domestic violence: tradition for tolerance of violence, lack of or fuzzy national definition of domestic violence, cultural traditions, level of support for women's empowerment, government policies addressing family violence, and multidisciplinary efforts of social intervention professionals. Conclusions. The observed level of violence tolerance provides some explanation for the low rate of self-reported domestic violence and rationale for a greater emphasis on human rights and dignity awareness. The multidisciplinary efforts of social intervention are evident in the services provided in Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, and Nigeria; there are professional referrals to little multidisciplinary collaboration in Nigeria. The example of Nigeria demonstrates that regulations exist to prevent domestic violence, but cultural traditions make it difficult for women to disclose abuse, resulting in many women suffering in silence.

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**Key words:** domestic violence, social services, violence against women, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Nigeria.

## 1 Introduction

The United Nations provides a scientific definition of domestic violence as a recurring pattern of behavior aimed at establishing or maintaining dominance and control over an intimate partner within any type of relationship. According to the United Nations' characterization of domestic violence, it encompasses various forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and psychological actions or threats. Research indicates that globally, approximately one in three women experience domestic violence [40]. Women are significantly more prone to enduring repetitive and severe types of abuse, such as sexual violence, compared to men. Recent data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) in 2020 estimated that 2.4 million adults aged 16 and over experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2022. Among these individuals, 1.7 million were women, and 699,000 were men [24]. The focus of this study is to examine comparatively the factors contributing to the occurrence of domestic violence, as well as those impeding the effectiveness of social services in preventing and addressing domestic violence cases in Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Nigeria. Consequently, the primary emphasis is on women and children as the principal victims of domestic violence. In Africa, a recent meta-analysis conducted by Muluneh et al. (2020) examined studies on gender-based violence in sub-Saharan African countries from 2008 to 2019. The study utilized a random effect meta-analysis and revealed that the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) among African women was 44%, while the non-IPV pooled prevalence was 14%. Emotional, physical, and sexual violence were found to have the highest prevalence rates, at 29.40%, 25.87%, and 18.75% respectively.

Likewise, in Europe, the European Institute for Gender Equality [6] reported that 35% of women who experienced physical and/or sexual violence encountered it within their own homes. Among a sample of 40,357 women who had been in a relationship, the prevalence of physical, sexual, and psychological IPV was 20.0%, 8.4%, and 48.5% respectively [2]. While women are primarily victims of domestic violence, it is important to note that they often have children for whom they are responsible. The consequences of mothers being victims of domestic violence are shared by both the children and the victims themselves. Regrettably, there is limited recent research specifically focused on the exposure of children to domestic violence. However, Carlson conducted a study in 1975 using data from the first National Family Violence Survey in 1984. The study estimated that at least 3.3 million children between the ages of 3 and 17 were witnesses to serious parental violence each year in the United States. Additionally, Lloyd (2018) found in her study on domestic violence and education in the United Kingdom that 50% of domestic violence cases involved child abuse.

Furthermore, children and women who are victims of domestic abuse face an elevated risk of being murdered. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported in 2020 that 47,000 women and girls worldwide were killed by intimate partners or other family members [38]. Similarly, UNODC statistics from 2019 indicated that 205,153 children aged 0-14 years (59% boys and 41% girls) died as a result of homicide globally. Additionally, between 2008 and 2017, there were 1,691,869 purposeful homicides among teenagers and young adults aged 15-29 (86% male and 14% female). Research suggests that the majority of murders of young children are perpetrated by family members. These incidents can be attributed, among other factors, to gender stereotypes, family violence, and parental mental health issues. Apart from the statistics regarding children who lose their lives to violence

perpetrated by family members, it is important to note that children also suffer emotionally due to neglect, harm, depression, guilt, and other consequences when their caregivers, primarily women, experience domestic violence. These experiences significantly affect the child’s development, growth, and various aspects of their lives. For instance, in cases of homicide, as presented earlier, the consequences extend beyond the direct victims. Surviving children not only lose one parent to homicide but may also lose the other parent to imprisonment. Often, they are compelled to leave their parental home, leading them to live lives they had never anticipated or planned for.

The effects of domestic violence resonate throughout the family system and impact the national economy. Previous studies have suggested that domestic violence influences the beliefs and attitudes of adolescents and emerging adults toward adulthood and marriage. Those who grow up exposed to parental violence face a greater risk of experiencing violence in their own intimate partner relationships. Prior research has linked this to various negative beliefs about marriage, including diminished importance, decreased permanence, and reduced centrality of marriage [27, 41, 28]. Domestic violence is a pervasive problem that affects individuals worldwide and poses a significant challenge to the stability of the family social structure, which serves as the primary social unit and foundation of every society. Moreover, domestic violence has substantial implications for the society and economy. According to the World Health Organization [42], intimate partner violence is estimated to cost the US economy between \$5.8 billion and \$12.6 billion annually, amounting to approximately 0.125% of the national gross domestic product. Similarly, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) estimated that gender-based violence costs the European Union €366 billion per year. Violence against women accounts for 79% of this cost, totalling €289 billion. Using conservative estimates, gender-based violence costs South Africa between 0.9% and 1.3% of its GDP annually [15]. Violence against children costs Nigeria 1.07% of the country’s GDP, and each household spends approximately \$83 US Dollars per incident of intimate partner violence [25].

National policies and societal attitudes toward domestic and gender-based violence play a significant role in either decreasing or increasing the incidence of family violence. The legal definition of domestic violence and the enforcement of related laws, as well as the awareness of these issues among the general population, are crucial factors. The following are the definitions of domestic violence in Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, and Nigeria.

**Table 1.** Overview of forms of Domestic violence definition in Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Nigeria.

| Countries | Forms of DV criminalised | Definition   | Reference                                     |
|-----------|--------------------------|--|---|
| Latvia    | All four forms           | The definition of DV is provided for the purpose of protection orders by Article 250(45) of the Civil Procedure Law: (1) any physical, sexual, psychological or economical violence that occurs between former or present spouses or other mutually related persons regardless of whether a transgressor is living or has lived in one household with the infringed person. (2) cases when violent control is applied to a person - such activity or an aggregate of activities which includes infringement, sexual compelling, threats, debasing, intimidation or other violent activities the purpose of which is to be harmful, to punish or intimidate. (Note: Latvia does not have a specific definition of DV but DV is covered by general provisions of the criminal code). | European Parliament (2020)<br><br>EIGE (2019) |

|           |                |  |   |
|-----------|----------------|--|---|
| Lithuania | All four forms | Article 2 of the Act on Domestic Violence defines violence as physical, psychological, sexual, economic or other form, from which the person is damaged in a physical, material or immaterial way [19]. (26 May 2011 No XI-1425).  | European Parliament (2020). EIGE (2019) |
| Slovakia  | All four forms | Criminal Code, Article 208: The offence of abuse of a close person and a trusted person covers acts causing physical suffering or mental suffering to a close person or to a person in his care or upbringing. Section 199 [30] of the criminal code of the Slovak Republic prohibits rape or sexual violence through force, the threat of force, or taking advantage of 'a woman's helplessness', and punishes perpetrators with 5 to 25 years imprisonment.  | European Parliament (2020). EIGE (2019) |
| Nigeria   | All four forms | Section 18(g) of Protection Against Domestic Violence Law of Lagos State [23], 2007, defines domestic violence to mean physical abuse, sexual abuse exploitation including but not limited to rape, incest and sexual assault; starvation; emotional, verbal and psychological abuse; economic abuse and exploitation; denial of basic education; intimidation; harassment; stalking; hazardous attack including acid both with offensive and poisonous substance; damage to property among others. There are 36 States in Nigeria and definition of Domestic Violence are similar across the country. | Adu & Randle, (2022)                    |

The majority of national definitions of domestic violence, as indicated in Table 1, lack gender specificity and are encompassed within general laws of the respective countries. This suggests that certain countries, such as Latvia [6], do not have dedicated definitions and policies specifically addressing domestic violence. Nevertheless, these provisions offer some degree of protection against gender-based and domestic violence. While the definitions seem adequate, it is noteworthy that the aforementioned countries are characterized by a high prevalence of domestic violence against women and child abuse resulting from domestic violence [35, 43, 21,10]. Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the factors contributing to the occurrence of domestic violence, as well as those impeding the effectiveness of social services in preventing and addressing domestic violence cases in Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Nigeria.

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2021), the European Parliament (2022), and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women (referred to as the 'Istanbul Convention'), which became effective in 2014, all EU Member States have signed the Convention, while 21 states have ratified it. However, there are non-ratifying states, namely Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and three others. Nigeria has neither signed nor ratified the Convention. Nevertheless, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Nigeria are parties to the universal declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The CEDAW is a UN treaty that safeguards women's basic right to equality and protection against domestic violence and violence against women [36]. Furthermore, despite ratifying the Convention at different times, these four countries have approved and ratified the Child Rights Convention: Latvia (1992), Lithuania (1992), Slovakia (1993), and Nigeria (1991). This convention obliges States Parties, parents, and responsible stakeholders to enact legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures to safeguard children from various forms of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation, including sexual abuse (Article 19).

A study review conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2018 highlighted the prevalence of parental neglect and child maltreatment in domestic violence

situations in Latvia. Emotional violence constituted 36-42% of cases in 2016 [17], and nearly 2,260 children aged 0-14 experienced injuries, poisoning, and other consequences of external causes in the same year [3]. Similarly, according to Lithuanian data from 2019 [20], children accounted for 10% of domestic violence victims, while women constituted 77.1% of all domestic violence victims. The Institute for Labour and Family Research (2020) reported that children comprised 11% of injured individuals in cases of domestic violence in Slovakia, with 53% of the victims being women. Furthermore, UNICEF reported in 2018 that approximately 60% of children (6 out of 10) who were victims of domestic violence experienced one or more types of violence before reaching the age of 18.

## **2 Research methods**

### **2.1 Research type and participants**

This study employed a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) research design to examine the research questions. Purposive sampling techniques were utilized to select participants who met specific criteria, which included a minimum of 3 years of experience working with domestic violence victims or perpetrators and educational background in social work, psychology, or family law. The participants consisted of social workers, crisis counsellors, and family lawyers who had accumulated 4-15 years of professional experience in both public and private institutions, such as women's shelters, municipalities, crisis centres, orphan and family courts, NGOs, and police stations. Sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted between September 2022 and February 2023 across Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Nigeria, providing a diverse range of perspectives. Prior to the interviews, participants were presented with a comprehensive ethical consideration code and obtained their informed consent to ensure ethical standards were upheld throughout the study.

### **2.2 Data collection**

During the interviews, the participants reflected on their experiences working with domestic violence victims, the availability of family resources, government policies, social workers' resources and ethical principles, social workers' skills and resources, and social workers' engagement with families, among other relevant topics. The interviews took place at locations chosen by each participant and were conducted in a dialogue format. An interview guide was utilized, including questions such as: How do clients or service users access your services? When and how do social workers engage with individuals or families experiencing domestic violence in their respective countries? Please describe the characteristics or qualities of clients you have worked with who have experienced domestic violence, including their level of education, social status, age range, and any common situations you may have observed. What are your perspectives on government involvement in social services in cases of familial domestic violence in your country? Additional follow-up questions were posed to further explore participants' responses. The interviews lasted between 35 and 60 minutes and were digitally recorded for transcription and subsequent analysis.

### **2.3 Data analysis**

The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis, following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012). Initially, all sixteen interview transcripts were thoroughly read multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of

the content. Relevant words, sentences, or paragraphs (referred to as meaning units) that pertained to the study’s objectives were identified within the material. These meaning units were then condensed, coded, and organized into themes and subthemes. The coding process was conducted collaboratively within the research group, and any discrepancies were thoroughly discussed and resolved, resulting in a consensus among the researchers regarding the grouping and naming of themes. Ultimately, the analysis yielded six overarching themes. In the final stage of the analysis, a comparative analysis approach was applied. The FsQCA software, as described by Legewie (2017) and Pappas and Woodside (2021), was utilized to identify and examine the relationships between the themes. This comparative analysis led to the identification of four overarching themes that were deemed significant in relation to the prevention of domestic violence in the four countries under study. In this comparative study, we employed both statistical and document analysis in addition to analyzing qualitative interviews.

## 2.4 Findings

This study aims to investigate the factors that contribute to domestic violence as well as those that hinder the effectiveness of social services in preventing and responding to domestic violence cases in Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Nigeria. The findings of the analysis revealed that six conditions exerted an impact on the effective prevention of domestic violence in the studied countries. These conditions include the tolerance for violence, limited awareness of national and international treaties concerning domestic violence, unhealthy cultural traditions, the level of support for women’s empowerment, government policies addressing cultural influences, and the lack of multidisciplinary collaboration among social intervention professionals. However, after conducting the comparative analysis, it became evident that only four of these conditions constituted sufficient causal pathways for domestic violence. Specifically, the identified conditions were the tradition of tolerance for violence, the absence, or ambiguity of a national definition of domestic violence, cultural traditions, the level of support for women’s empowerment, government policies addressing family violence, and the collective efforts of social intervention professionals from various disciplines.

**Table 2.** FsQCA Calibration table.

| S/N | Conditions (Thematic analysis - Themes) | Criteria                               | Abbreviation | Calibration (Fuzzy-set)   | Scores |
|-----|---|--|--------------|---|--------|
| 1   | Tolerance for violence                  | Rate of tolerance                      | TVol         | High to Zero (1, 0.67, 0.33, 0)   | 0.67   |
| 2   | Unhealthy Cultural Traditions           | Traditions intensity, power difference | unCT         | High (1), moderate (0.67), Low (0.33), None (0)                         | 1.0    |
| 3   | Support for women’s empowerment         | Level of Gender-Based support          | SupwoE       | tangible support (1), social support (.67), emotional esteem (.33), and | 0.33   |

|    |   |                                       |         |  |      |
|----|---|---------------------------------------|---------|--|------|
| 4  | Multidisciplinary effort of social interventions providers  | Level of collaboration                | MulProf | Strong (1), moderate (.67), Low (.33), None (0)                                      | 0.67 |
| 5a | Awareness of domestic violence treaties and social services | Awareness level                       | AWtSOS  | High (1), moderate (.67), Low (.33), None (0)  | 0.33 |
| 5b | Established national definition of DV and VAW               | Comprehensiveness and criminalization | NatDV   | Available (1.0 - .67)<br>Listed in other laws Policies (.33)<br>Not available (0.00) | 0.33 |
| 6  | Government policies addressing DV                           | Public policies and expenditures      | GovP_F  | High (1), moderate (.67), Low (.33), None (0)  | 1.0  |
|    | Outcome: DV Prevention                                      | Prevention level                      | PreDV   | Universal (1), Selective (.67), Indicated (.33)<br>no effect (0)                     | 0.33 |

Membership (full-1; cross-over point-0.67; Fullynot-0.0). **Main findings:** Cultural traditions, government policies addressing family violence, tolerance of violence, and multidisciplinary efforts of social intervention professionals.

### 3 Discussion of findings

#### 3.1 Cultural traditions

The participants’ descriptions of their professional experiences with victims of domestic violence highlight the impact of cultural traditions. These traditions not only affect the effectiveness of the interventions they provide but also hinder efforts to prevent domestic violence within the community. For instance, a participant from Nigeria shared a distressing case where a woman was fatally battered for daring to argue with her husband. The participant explained that men often expected women to agree with them on any matter, creating a power imbalance within relationships. The participant stated: *“a case where a woman was battered to death because she tried to argue with the husband on a particular issue, the men always want her to agree to anything he says in the home all he want is yes yes, I agree from the woman”*. Throughout the narratives, participants consistently pointed out the presence of power disparities, controlling behaviour and traditional myths when reflecting on their experiences and providing examples of cases. A participant from Slovakia highlighted the patriarchal nature of these relationships, characterized by rigidly defined gender roles. The participant stated: *“It is often very patriarchal and there is a strict division of roles”*. Men were expected to be assertive, strong, and the primary breadwinners, while women were expected to be nurturing, caring, and focused on domestic duties.

The participants also recognized stereotypes as a significant cultural tradition that impacts the prevention of domestic violence and the provision of supportive services. A participant from Latvia emphasized the societal expectations placed on women, stating that they had to conform to these expectations while managing relationships, raising children,

and maintaining connections with relatives and friends. The participant stated: *“But she has to dance to the expectations of the society.....she’s not alone but in relationships, raising own and other children and sometimes have a lot of relatives, family or friends. So it’s kind of role what we are playing.”* Similarly, a participant from Lithuania noted that in most Lithuanian families, traditional roles persisted, with fathers as breadwinners, mothers responsible for household chores, and children attending school and learning. The participants unanimously acknowledged that cultural traditions also play a significant role in deterring individuals from reporting cases of abuse within their families. Many participants, particularly those from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), shared instances where clients sought help privately but were unwilling to report their situations openly. The participants observed that many domestic violence victims displayed a traditional tolerance for violence and were hesitant to seek assistance.

### **3.2 Tolerance of violence**

Furthermore, the participants noted that a considerable number of their clients had experienced childhood maltreatment and other forms of abuse. These experiences had shaped their acceptance of and adaptation to violence, leading to a prolonged tolerance for such behaviour. As an example, a participant from Latvia highlighted that some victims considered violence to be normal due to their upbringing, where they were subjected to spanking, punishment, and other forms of abuse. Consequently, they lacked exposure to alternative ways of maintaining non-violent marriages or raising children, and they often resorted to the same methods they were familiar with. Another factor contributing to tolerance for violence was substance abuse, particularly among male spouses. Some participants mentioned that their clients reported instances where the violent behaviour was attributed to the perpetrator being under the influence of alcohol or unconscious due to substance abuse. This further complicated the dynamics within the family, as the violent actions could be directed towards their partners or other members of the household.

### **3.3 Discussions: Cultural traditions and tolerance of violence**

Overall, this study shed light on how cultural traditions shaped the experiences of professionals working with domestic violence victims. These findings aligned with a recent study conducted by Su, McDonnell et al. (2022) in China, which revealed that the tendency to view domestic violence as a “family affair” stemmed from deep-rooted cultural influences in China, such as traditional Confucian values emphasizing social harmony and societal norms discouraging interference in others’ affairs. According to their findings, this cultural attitude posed a significant obstacle to the advancement of domestic violence research in China and hindered a comprehensive understanding of the extent and nature of domestic violence among the public and policymakers. Consequently, it was crucial to develop interventions that addressed power imbalances, challenged stereotypes, and promoted equality within relationships and communities. Furthermore, the present study uncovered that power imbalances, including patriarchy, contributed to domestic violence. This finding supported the research of Dobash and Dobash (1979), Kandiyoti (1988), and Kim et al. (2007), who had shown that spousal abuse was often deemed justifiable when a wife failed to conform to culturally accepted behavioural norms, reflecting the concept of familial patriarchy. Moreover, the study revealed that cultural traditions played a role in the reluctance to report abuse within families. Victims often demonstrated a traditional tolerance for violence, which stemmed from their own experiences of childhood maltreatment, abuse, and prenatal alienation [11, 12]. This result aligned with a recent study by Greene et al. (2020), which focused on intergenerational transmission and parenting



practices. Their research indicated that parents who had experienced physical abuse or witnessed violence in their own childhood were more likely to engage in abusive or neglectful parenting. Additionally, substance abuse among male spouses exacerbated the occurrence of violence. Understanding these factors was crucial for developing effective interventions and support services that addressed cultural influences and helped victims break free from cycles of violence.

### **3.4 Government policies and spending towards family violence**

Support from the government plays a crucial role in addressing violence within society, including domestic violence. In an ideal society, policies and laws guide people's activities and interactions, serving as checks against excesses and protecting the vulnerable. When asked about government initiatives or policies demonstrating attention to families and addressing domestic violence over the past five years, the majority of participants struggled to identify significant examples. This is concerning, considering that domestic violence has been shown to contribute to homicides and impact the national economy. Some participants mentioned initiatives prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic that focused primarily on preventing domestic violence. The lockdown measures implemented during the pandemic inadvertently contributed to increased domestic violence incidents within households. However, most of the initiatives identified by the participants were more than a decade old, indicating a lack of recent efforts. This highlights the need for policy reviews that reflect the evolving nature of societal dynamics. For instance, a participant from Latvia mentioned limitations imposed by policies that hindered their ability to provide adequate support to their clients. Additionally, a recent case of partner-perpetrated homicide in Latvia revealed constraints faced by the police in protecting victims of domestic violence who reported abuse. A Latvian police officer, Armands Ruks, pointed out the principle of double impunity that restricts the prosecution of individuals with previous convictions. Ruks stated: *"The fact that in Latvia since 2013, recidivism has been excluded from the Criminal Law - this means that the principle of double impunity is respected, that is, if a person has served a sentence for one offence, he cannot be prosecuted, especially in cases of criminal offences, if the conviction is expunged. Even though the man is now wanted, the law also makes it difficult to search internationally for persons accused of criminal offences."* Insufficient government expenditure towards family support is another significant issue. For example, in Nigeria, there are limited resources available for social workers to assist domestic violence victims. Bureaucratic processes within government institutions, determining how victims are admitted and attended to, pose additional barriers to reporting and seeking help. Delays in consultations or receiving social services reports, especially when legal involvement is necessary, further complicate the situation. The participant stated: *"The case can be reported and could take time before the victim will be invited for consultation or to receive social services report, and when it has to do with the court, it becomes even messier."* Similarly, in Slovakia, women's crisis centres are heavily guarded, preventing access by anyone other than workers and victims. While this practice ensures security, it may also lead to victims feeling isolated and confined within shelters.

### **3.5 Level of support for women's empowerment**

Continuing on the topic of government support, it is evident that women's empowerment programs are not receiving adequate funding and promotion. During the data collection process for this study, we observed that many women's shelters lack sufficient plans and funding from the government to empower and provide skills training for women residing in these shelters. This raises the question of why women without a source of livelihood would

not return to their abusive partners after leaving the shelter, thereby perpetuating the cycle of abuse. However, it is worth mentioning that some shelters reported making efforts to assist their clients in job searches. While this theme had a score of 0.33 when analysed using the FsQCA. It was rejected as an independent cause of domestic violence or a comprehensive solution to addressing it. However, it remains an important factor to consider in combating domestic violence within families and society as a whole.

### **3.6 Discussions: Government support and women's empowerment**

The study highlighted the insufficiency of recent government initiatives and policies addressing domestic violence. This finding aligned with the conclusions presented in a report on violence against women in the United Kingdom by Sen and Kelly (2007), stating that “government approaches in terms of policy, research, and provision on domestic violence remain inadequate. There is a failure to recognize the connections between different forms of violence in terms of their dynamics, consequences, and underlying causes” (pp. 10). Thus, to combat domestic violence effectively, policy reviews, increased government expenditure, and streamlined bureaucratic processes are needed. Furthermore, it was essential to strike a balance between security measures and providing victims with the necessary support and empowerment. Comprehensive assistance should aim to address the root causes of domestic violence while ensuring that victims felt supported and empowered. The study also revealed that inadequate funding and promotion of women's empowerment programs presented challenges in breaking the cycle of abuse, particularly intimate partner violence. This finding aligned with a study conducted by Kabir and Khan (2019), which demonstrated that women who lacked empowerment were more likely to experience intimate partner violence in American society. This implies that insufficient support and resources for women in shelters could contribute to their vulnerability and hinder their ability to establish independent livelihoods.

Governments must prioritize and invest in comprehensive empowerment programs targeting the root causes of domestic violence. These initiatives should offer survivors the necessary tools and resources to reconstruct their lives and escape from abusive cycles. Research has indicated a link between substance abuse and domestic violence, aligning with findings from Lori's (2011) research on “What works to prevent partner violence.” One of her study conclusions highlighted that implementing strategies to reduce alcohol availability in the United States, Greenland, and Australia had led to a reduction in domestic violence.

### **3.7 National definition and awareness of treaties and social services for domestic violence**

When policies and laws have clear descriptions and definitions, people tend to appreciate and respect them. However, in the countries studied, there is a lack of clear definitions for domestic violence and violence against women (VAW), with Lithuania being the only country that has some level of clarity on these issues. The majority of citizens in the studied countries are not well informed about government-ratified treaties, especially in Nigeria. A participant from Nigeria expressed, “They do not know that they can be protected if the case is reported...many men are aware of the consequences of their actions until they are jailed.” When professionals were asked about how people access their services, it became apparent from their narratives that many victims are unaware of the available services that could help them. Most participants mentioned that the majority of their clients come to them through police referrals, while only a few seek help independently. This theme also had a score of 0.33 when analyzed using the FsQCA and was rejected as an independent

cause or comprehensive solution to domestic violence. However, it remains essential to consider because having clear laws to obey and guide behaviour is crucial. Additionally, it is important for people to be aware of and have access to social services in their communities when they are in need.

### **3.8 Multidisciplinary efforts of social intervention professionals**

Domestic violence is a complex issue that affects various aspects of individuals' lives, including children within such families, especially when the violence escalates and leads to divorce. Many participants explained their efforts to collaborate with other professionals, but they encountered various barriers in the process. These barriers included unprofessionalism, conflicts of interest, organizational cultures, staff shortages, and bureaucratic challenges. As a participant from Nigeria noted, "*Absence or weak collaboration among social workers that could support DV survivors can lead to multiple victimizations.*" This is evident in several narratives where inadequate follow-up or failure to assess the client's ecological system and provide support from appropriate professionals resulted in recurring abuse. Insufficient collaboration among professionals represents a significant causal pathway for domestic violence, particularly in terms of sustainable support for victims and the effectiveness of intervention and prevention services. However, when analyzed using the FsQCA, this factor scored 0.67 out of 1.00, indicating that it plays a partial role in causing domestic violence and impacting the effectiveness of prevention interventions and services.

### **3.9 Discussion: National definitions and multidisciplinary efforts**

The research findings pointed out the absence of clear national definitions for domestic violence and violence against women (VAW) in the countries under investigation. This lack of clarity, coupled with limited awareness of ratified treaties and available services, creates significant challenges in effectively addressing domestic violence. In a recent report, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association presented a comparable viewpoint (CPA) UK (2021). The report underscored the necessity for comprehensive legislation that encompasses prevention, prosecution, protection, and support services for survivors. It emphasized the importance of harmonizing legislation with existing laws and conducting a thorough review of the legislative landscape. According to the report, legislation alone cannot eliminate completely gender-based violence. However, having a strong and all-encompassing domestic legislative framework is a vital step in curbing impunity for perpetrators and unequivocally conveying the message that violence against women is unacceptable (pp. 4). Additionally, a recent study by Jethá et al. (2021) revealed the absence of a specific national DV database in the country under examination. Establishing clear laws and promoting awareness of social services are essential in combating domestic violence within families and society as a whole.

## **4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this exhaustive study has provided valuable insights into the factors that contribute to domestic violence and the difficulties encountered by social services in Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Nigeria in addressing such cases. The research has provided insight into how cultural traditions influence the experiences of professionals working with victims of domestic violence, highlighting the role of power imbalances, including patriarchy, in perpetuating abusive behaviours. Cultural norms and reluctance to report abuse within families further complicate this issue. In addition, the study has

highlighted that there are insufficient recent government initiatives and policies intended to combat domestic violence. Inadequate funding and support for women's empowerment programmes impede efforts to break the cycle of violence, particularly in intimate partner relationships. Furthermore, the research has revealed that the examined nations lack distinct national definitions for domestic violence and violence against women. This lack of clarity, along with limited awareness of available services and ratified treaties, presents significant obstacles to effectively addressing domestic violence. The study also emphasised the significance of multidisciplinary efforts in assisting victims of domestic violence. Various professionals, such as social workers, psychologists, lawyers, and doctors, must work together to address the diverse and complex requirements of individuals in crisis. In light of these findings, it is clear that addressing domestic violence necessitates a multifaceted strategy that includes cultural sensitivity, robust policies, adequate funding, and coordinated professional efforts. By recognising and addressing these obstacles, societies can create secure environments for all individuals and effectively combat domestic violence.

#### **4.1 Conflict of interest among authors**

We, the six researchers involved in this research project on the topic of domestic violence and social services, hereby declare that we have diligently examined and discussed potential conflicts of interest. We are proud to affirm that throughout the course of this study, we have successfully managed to maintain a high level of transparency and open dialogue, ultimately arriving at unanimous consensus on all matters. Despite our diverse backgrounds and affiliations, which span across different countries, we have strived to foster an environment of collaboration and unbiased exploration. Our discussions and interactions have consistently focused on the pursuit of knowledge, disregarding personal interests or external influences that could compromise the integrity of our findings. We are firmly committed to ensuring the credibility and objectivity of our work. Each researcher involved in this study has actively disclosed any potential conflicts of interest related to financial associations, professional connections, or personal beliefs that could have influenced our research process or results. By openly addressing and discussing these potential conflicts, we have taken necessary precautions to eliminate any biases that may have compromised the validity of our findings. We affirm that the absence of any conflict of interest has characterized our collaboration on this research project. Our ongoing discussions, combined with our ability to find common ground and reach consensus on all aspects of the study, have further bolstered the credibility and reliability of our findings.

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