



# Intimate Partner Violence Reports During the COVID-19 Pandemic First Year in Portuguese Urban Areas: A Brief Report

Marta Capinha<sup>1</sup> · Hugo Guinote<sup>2</sup> · Daniel Rijo<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic raised concerns about the exponential growth of intimate partner violence (IPV), both in numbers and severity. This brief report aims to describe the variation of IPV reports to the police during the pandemic in Portugal. Data were retrieved from a governmental national database. A five-year period was analyzed. Characteristics from the occurrence, as well as sociodemographic characteristics of victims and perpetrators, were described for each year. Data showed a 10.99% decrease of IPV reports to the police in 2020 compared with the average of the previous four years. Periods when more restrictive measures (e.g., lockdown) were decreed by the government corresponded to a higher decrease in IPV reports to the police. Significant differences in the distribution of crime location, crime reporting, type of violence, age of victims and perpetrators, and professional situation and financial dependence of perpetrators, were found between 2020 and previous years. COVID-19 pandemic does not seem to be associated with a raise in IPV reports to the police, nor higher severity of the reported cases. This brief report adds to previous research by providing detailed and systematically collected data about IPV occurrences during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords** Intimate partner violence · COVID-19 · Police reports · IPV prevalence

## Introduction

Changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in our societies were probably one of the major challenges that all countries had to face throughout the last decades. Restrictions imposed by sanitary measures, although necessary, revealed unintended socioeconomic consequences (e.g., the raising of economic uncertainty, unemployment, and social isolation). Also, more time spent at home by victims and their abusers are among these consequences. All of these are known risk factors for intimate partner violence (IPV; Campbell, 2020; Galea et al., 2020; Usher et al., 2020). Furthermore,

evidence gathered by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2020) revealed that previous crises (e.g., other pandemics, natural disasters), have increased the prevalence and severity of domestic violence against women. Therefore, a possible increase in IPV occurrences during the COVID-19 pandemic became a major concern and the United Nations Secretary-General called for countries to prioritize actions to monitor and support victims (Guterres, 2020). Concerns raised by several stakeholders included not only an exponential growth of IPV, but also that these forms of violence would become more severe, and victims would not be able to ask for help (Campbell, 2020; Galea et al., 2020; Konnoth, 2020; Mahase, 2020; Salerno et al., 2020). These concerns were well-founded and, initially, many reports from different countries seemed to confirm them (Boserup et al., 2020; Sharma & Borah, 2020; Usher et al., 2020). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), during April 2020, there was a 60% increase in emergency calls by women victims of IPV in Europe (Mahase, 2020). EIGE (2020) found consistent findings, with most of the support services consulted reporting an increase in demand during COVID-19. The UK reported an increase of 25% in the hotlines' calls for domestic violence (DV), including IPV

✉ Marta Capinha  
marta.il.capinha@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> University of Coimbra, Center for Research in Neuropsychology and Cognitive and Behavioral Intervention (CINEICC), Faculdade de Psicologia E de Ciências da Educação, Universidade de Coimbra, Rua Do Colégio Novo, 3000-115 Coimbra, Portugal

<sup>2</sup> Police Research Center, Higher Institute of Police Sciences and Homeland Security, Rua 1º de Maio, nº3, 1349-040 Lisboa, Portugal

(Kelly & Morgan, 2020), and France estimated an increase of up to 36% in the DV complaints (Reuters News Agency, 2020). In Portugal, an increase of 180% of hotline calls and a worsening of IPV cases previously in attendance were also reported (Agência Lusa, 2020). An online survey focused on domestic violence (Gama, et al., 2021) found that 6.5% of participants (men and women) reported they had been victims of IPV during the pandemic (from up to October 2020). However, it is not possible to compare these findings with those of previous research that estimated national IPV past-year victimization for women around 19% (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2014), due to differences in the assessment methodology and sample composition. The tendency to an increasing in help requests has also been identified in other parts of the world. For instance, Australia described an increase of 40% of help requests to frontline workers (Lattouf, 2020), and Brazil presented estimates of a 50% increase in DV (Campbell, 2020). In the US, calls for DV to the police increased up to 25% during March 2020 (Boserup et al., 2020), and China reported that DV situations have tripled during the lockdown measures (Campbell, 2020). Nevertheless, the large majority of these reports are anecdotal pieces of evidence or gray literature (e.g., Campbell, 2020; Kelly & Morgan, 2020; Peterman et al., 2020; Sharma & Borah, 2020; Usher et al., 2020; Wanqing, 2020).

Different findings emerged from studies based in police reports. Piquero, et al. (2020) identified a brief spike in domestic violence reports in Dallas, Texas, including IPV, followed by a decrease immediately after. However, the authors warn that this increase had already been detected before stay-at-home measures were enacted, and it was not clear that they were associated. Other studies failed to find evidence about the impact of the pandemic-associated measures on the report of IPV crimes (Ashby, 2020; Campedelli, et al., 2020; Payne, et al., 2020). Two scenarios might provide an explanation for this: (1) the lack of impact or the decrease in IPV reports was due to a greater difficulty or fear of victims to report or ask for help during lockdowns (Ashby, 2020), and if that was the case, one would hope an increase (delayed) of reports by the end of stay-at-home and lockdowns measures (Campedelli et al., 2020) or (2) there was a real decrease in the number of IPV occurrences and, therefore, no abnormal increase in IPV reports would be identified by the end of those measures. Despite some limitations (e.g., it has been argued that samples from police records tend to underreport violence cases and/or bias conclusions about the range of the phenomenon by especially identifying more severe forms of IPV) (e.g., Hamel, 2018; Meyer & Frost, 2019), police reports are a relevant contribution to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the prevalence and severity of IPV.

The dissemination of the available evidence about the impact of COVID-19 in IPV is particularly valuable at the moment, to avoid potentially spurious conclusions derived from anecdotal reports. More reliable information will allow for better adjustment of policies and measures to protect victims and intervene with perpetrators. This brief report aims to describe the variation on IPV reports to the police since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, including during and after the period of lockdown and stay-at-home measures in Portugal, in comparison with data from previous years. It is worth mentioning that, in Portugal, IPV is a crime of mandatory report, and it is one of the most reported each year. Almost all reports are made to the PSP and to the National Republican Guard (GNR), both having specialized teams trained to handle IPV situations. The number of complaints made to other police agencies (e.g., Foreigners and Border Service) or directly to the Public Prosecutor's Office is negligible (Sistema de Segurança Interna, 2021). Depending on the outcome of the abuse, the prison sentence can be from 2 to 10 years. Victim support services are provided by both independent NGOs and government-funded offices that cover the entire country and have been operating helplines and hotlines for several years. During the pandemic, these lines were widely publicized through awareness campaigns and a new phone number was set up to allow people to ask for help by text message. On the part of the PSP, a specific email was also released and publicized for this purpose during this period, resulting in 34 reports.

## Method

### Procedures

Data were collected from the Domestic Violence Database managed by the Secretary-General of the Internal Affairs Ministry. These data corresponded to the jurisdiction area of the Public Security Police (PSP), which covers mainly urban areas, more densely populated. PSP is one of the two main Portuguese law enforcement agencies, and it was responsible for monitoring from 48.47% to 40.46% (44.97% in average) of the IPV crimes from 2016 to 2020. This database allowed to analyze data according to the situational characteristics of the crime and the date of occurrence. Five years were analyzed (from 2016 to 2020). This was done considering that the last change in the domestic violence law came into force in November 2015, and that there is a tendency for reported cases to fluctuate annually (IPV tends to increase whenever vacation periods (e.g., summer), or festive dates (e.g., Carnival, Christmas, and New Year's Eve) approach) (Sistema de Segurança Interna, 2021). Variables were extracted based on the date of the crime, even if reported later (Portuguese law allows the report of this crime up to six

months). Observations were grouped fortnightly by month, in each year. According to Portuguese law, violence types are identified as physical (e.g., to hit), psychological (e.g., to humiliate), sexual (e.g., coerce to have sex), economic (e.g., do not allow access to the salary), and social (e.g., defamation via social media). Each occurrence refers to a situation between a couple or former couple (victim and perpetrator) and may include different types of violence. “Occurrences where more than one victim is identified” refers to situations in which other people (e.g., children) were victimized (further than exposed) in that situation.

Sociodemographic characteristics of individuals identified as a victim or as a perpetrator were also described by year. All IPV reports were included, regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of those implicated. Violence between people under 18 years old was not considered because this is the limit for the legal age of adulthood in Portugal.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, exceptional periods with specific measures were decreed by the Portuguese government (Diário da República, 2020): (1) emergency state, and (2) contingency/calamity period. The emergency state corresponded to the more restrictive period and included measures of mandatory stay-at-home, and lockdown (e.g., schools, shops, cafes, restaurants), except for those establishments selling basic needs products, and health and security services. The contingency/calamity period did not include mandatory stay-at-home measures but restricted the normal activity of commerce and movement of people, with curfew and closure of night entertainment establishments after 8 pm, and mandatory curfew on weekends. Data analysis took into consideration these different periods, as they seem to represent real changes in population routines. Indirect indicators (e.g., decreased mobility; PSE, 2021) suggest a

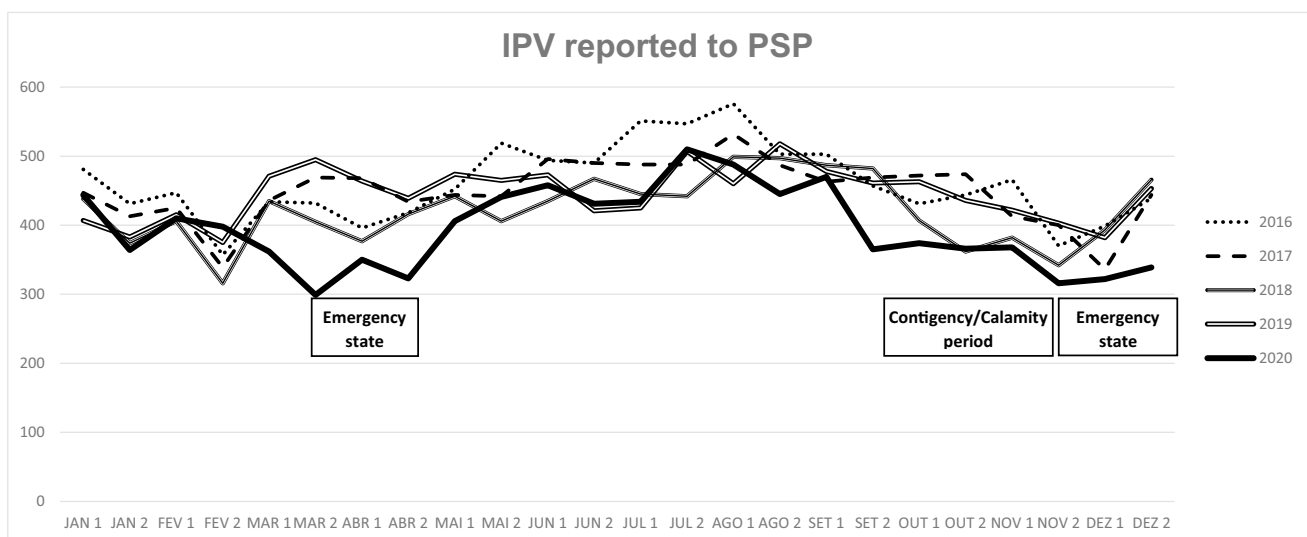
good adherence of the Portuguese population to these measures. In urban areas, during 2020, the PSP made only 424 arrests and applied 3206 fines for non-compliance. The database was lastly accessed on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021. IBM SPSS STATISTIC 22 software was used to compute  $\chi^2$ , Cramer's V, and standardized residual differences, regarding reports characteristics and of those involved. Confidence intervals were also calculated.

## Results

### Variation in IPV reports to the Police

The variation of the total number of IPV crimes reported for the past five years is presented in Fig. 1. An average of 10,654.25 reports was filled between 2016 and 2019 (11,037 in 2016, 10,769 in 2017, 10,121 in 2018, and 10,690 in 2019). In 2020, the total of occurrences (9483) showed a decrease of 10.99% in comparison with the average of the last 4 years. In comparison with 2019 only, the decrease was 11.29%.

Throughout 2020, periods of higher decrease (see Fig. 1) were those when lockdown and stay-at-home measures were implemented, representing reductions with the average of the previous 4-years for the same time intervals of 25.42% in the 1<sup>st</sup> emergency state period (2<sup>nd</sup> part of March and April), 16.32% in the contingency/calamity period (2<sup>nd</sup> part of September to 1<sup>st</sup> part of November), and 19.04% in the 2<sup>nd</sup> emergency state period (2<sup>nd</sup> part of November and December). These periods were followed by an increase in the number of reports close to the occurrences of the previous years, for the same months. In comparison with 2019, a decrease



**Fig. 1** Variation of IPV reports to the police by year. Note. 1 – first half of the month; 2 – second half of the month

of 30.47% was observed in the 1<sup>st</sup> emergency state period, 17.34% in the contingency/calamity period, and 21.08% in the 2<sup>nd</sup> emergency state period, for the same months.

### Characteristics of the Occurrences, Victims, and Perpetrators

Data from the different reports pointed out to significant differences across time for victims' sex ( $\chi^2(4) = 12.15$ ,  $p = 0.016$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.02$ ), age ( $\chi^2(8) = 33.34$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.02$ ), level of education ( $\chi^2(24) = 64.75$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.04$ ), professional situation ( $\chi^2(8) = 25.28$ ,  $p = 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.02$ ), and financial dependence from the perpetrator ( $\chi^2(4) = 36.60$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.03$ ) (Table 1). Significant differences along the analyzed five-years period were also found for the perpetrators age ( $\chi^2(8) = 27.89$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.02$ ), education ( $\chi^2(24) = 82.37$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.02$ ), professional situation ( $\chi^2(8) = 42.71$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.02$ ), and financial dependence from the victim ( $\chi^2(4) = 48.20$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.03$ ) (Table 2).

Concerning different characteristics of the occurrences along the five-years period under investigation, significant differences were found in the distributions by different categories of the following variables: crime location ( $\chi^2(12) = 97.79$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.03$ ), ways of reporting the crime ( $\chi^2(16) = 218.54$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.03$ ), who contacted the police ( $\chi^2(4) = 10.54$ ,  $p = 0.032$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.01$ ). Significant differences across the five years were also found for the proportions of physical ( $\chi^2(4) = 29.57$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.02$ ), psychological ( $\chi^2(4) = 10.31$ ,  $p = 0.035$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.01$ ), sexual ( $\chi^2(4) = 15.92$ ,  $p = 0.003$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.02$ ), economic ( $\chi^2(4) = 15.29$ ,  $p = 0.004$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.02$ ) and social violence ( $\chi^2(4) = 31.73$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.03$ ), and concerning the severity of injuries ( $\chi^2(8) = 91.54$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.03$ ) (Table 3). The presence of children ( $\chi^2(4) = 16.26$ ,  $p = 0.003$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.02$ ) and the identification of more than one victim in each occurrence ( $\chi^2(4) = 278.28$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.07$ ) also showed significant differences across the five-years period (Table 3). All the remaining comparisons were non-significant.

Standardized residuals (SR) were analyzed to identify what contributes to the significance of the chi-square statistic in each comparison (Agresti, 2002). In agreement with the goal of this work, only significant differences between 2020 and any of the previous four years were highlighted. The confidence intervals reinforcing these significant differences were also identified (Table 3). In comparison with previous years, in 2020 a higher percentage of crimes occurred at the residence (SR = 3.2; CI [79.94–79.10]) and fewer in public street (SR = -3.3), commercial spaces (SR = 5.3; CI [2.45–3.14]), or other locations (SR = -2.7), fewer reports

were presented in person (SR = -2.9; CI [49.56–51.60]) and by phone (SR = -3.5), and a higher percentage of reports were presented through community policing (SR = 3.6; CI [39.68–41.69]) and other means (e.g., via NGO's or hospital reports) (SR = 6.5; CI [1.91–2.52]). A higher proportion of reports were filled in without reporting physical violence (SR = 2.0), and fewer reports were presented without psychological violence (SR = -2.2). A higher percentage of reports identified social violence (SR = 4.2; CI [22.38–24.09]) and fewer reports were presented without reporting it (SR = -2.2; CI [22.38–24.09]). In 2020, there was a higher percentage of reports with more than one identified victim (SR = 9.5; CI [72.38–74.17]), and a lower percentage with only one victim (SR = -5.1; CI [72.38–74.17]). Also, a higher percentage of reports described no injuries (SR = 4.1; CI [61.83–63.79]) and fewer described the existence of lightly injured (SR = -5.0; CI [35.69–37.64]). More perpetrators (SR = 3.5) and victims (SR = 4.1) were identified between 65 and 115 years old, and less with 1 to 4 years of schooling (SR = -3.2 and SR = -2.2, respectively), than would be expected when compared to the previous 4 years. Considering the same comparison, a higher percentage of perpetrators were identified with 10 to 12 years of school (SR = 2.2), and a lower percentage was unemployed (SR = -2.1) or financially dependent of victims (SR = -4.3), than would be expected.

### Discussion

This brief report assesses the variation of IPV reports to the PSP during the COVID-19 pandemic in Portugal, in comparison with the previous 4 years. Findings are different from those of other countries (Ashby, 2020; Campedelli, et al., 2020; Payne, et al., 2020), showing a decrease in the overall number of IPV reports to the Police during the pandemic period in 2020. This decrease of IPV reports in Portuguese urban areas, is aligned with the decrease of 5.5% in total reports regarding IPV in Portugal during 2020 (Sistema de Segurança Interna, 2021), pointing to an overall tendency across the country. Fluctuations in the reports are expectable (Sistema de Segurança Interna, 2021) and were found across all years for the different analyzed variables. Regarding the year 2020, important differences to be noticed are a higher percentage of crimes occurred at home, and an increase in the occurrences where more than one victim is identified. These findings are congruent with the social context of lockdown and stay-at-home measures, in which families tend to pass more time together, at home. In comparison with the previous years, there seems to be a higher percentage of older victims and perpetrators. This finding reinforces the hypothesis of greater vulnerability of older people during the pandemic, urging for special attention to these age

**Table 1** Sociodemographic characteristics of IPV victims from 2016 to 2020

	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	n	% [95% CI]	n	% [95% CI]	n	% [95% CI]	n	% [95% CI]	n	% [95% CI]
<b>Sex</b>										
Female	9318	84.43 [83.73–85.10]	9100	84.50 [83.80–85.18]	8551	84.49 [83.77–85.19]	8904	83.29 [82.57–84.00]	7905	83.36 [82.59–84.10]
Male	1719	15.57 [14.90–16.27]	1669	15.50 [14.82–16.20]	1570	15.51 [14.81–16.23]	1786	16.71 [16.00–17.43]	1578	16.64 [15.90–17.41]
<b>Age group</b>										
18–34	3424	31.02 [30.16–31.90]	3346	31.07 [30.20–31.95]	3131	30.94 [30.04–31.85]	3298	30.85 [29.98–31.74]	2876	30.33 [29.40–31.26]
35–64	6986	63.30 [62.39–64.20]	6841	63.52 [62.61–64.44]	6466	63.89 [62.94–64.82]	6729	62.95 [62.02–63.86]	5956	62.81 [61.83–63.78]
65–115	627	5.68 [5.26–6.13]	582	5.40 [4.99–5.85]	524	5.18 [4.75–5.63]	663	6.20 [5.75–6.68]	651	6.86 [6.36–7.39]
<b>Education level (years)</b>										
No read or righ	103	1.09 [0.89–1.32]	110	1.18 [0.97–1.42]	97	1.10 [0.90–1.34]	79	0.85 [0.67–1.05]	83	1.01 [0.80–1.25]
One to four	1459	15.48 [14.76–16.23]	1303	13.96 [13.27–14.68]	1261	14.34 [13.61–15.09]	1223	13.11 [12.43–13.81]	1080	13.11 [12.39–13.86]
Five to six	1687	17.90 [17.13–18.69]	1730	18.54 [17.76–19.34]	1544	17.56 [16.77–18.37]	1607	17.23 [16.46–18.01]	1414	17.16 [16.35–17.99]
Seven to nine	2479	26.31 [25.42–27.21]	2481	26.59 [25.69–27.50]	2295	26.09 [25.18–27.83]	2543	27.26 [26.36–28.18]	2248	27.28 [26.33–28.26]
Ten to twelve	1973	20.94 [20.12–21.77]	2081	22.30 [21.46–23.16]	1986	22.58 [21.71–23.47]	2201	23.59 [22.73–24.47]	1889	22.93 [22.02–23.85]
College degree	1315	13.96 [13.26–14.67]	1235	13.24 [12.55–13.94]	1254	14.26 [13.53–15.01]	1304	13.98 [13.28–14.70]	1191	14.46 [13.70–15.23]
Other	407	4.32 [3.92–4.75]	391	4.19 [3.79–4.62]	358	4.07 [3.67–4.50]	372	3.99 [3.60–4.40]	334	4.05 [3.64–4.50]
<b>Professional situation</b>										
Unemployed	2640	24.16 [23.36–24.98]	2467	23.13 [22.33–23.94]	2218	22.12 [21.31–22.95]	2337	22.06 [21.28–22.87]	2135	22.78 [21.93–23.64]
Employed	7463	68.31 [67.43–69.18]	7446	69.80 [68.92–70.67]	7117	70.99 [70.09–71.87]	7452	70.35 [69.47–71.22]	6533	69.71 [68.77–70.64]
Retired	822	7.52 [7.04–8.03]	754	7.07 [6.59–7.57]	691	6.89 [6.40–7.41]	803	7.58 [7.08–8.10]	704	7.51 [6.99–8.06]
<b>Financial dependency</b>										
No	9321	84.45 [83.76–85.12]	9260	85.99 [85.32–86.64]	8791	86.86 [86.19–87.51]	9287	86.88 [86.22–87.51]	8107	85.49 [84.76–86.19]
Yes	1716	15.55 [14.88–16.24]	1509	14.01 [13.36–14.68]	1330	13.14 [12.49–13.81]	1403	13.12 [12.49–13.78]	1376	14.51 [13.81–15.24]

Note. Missing values ranged from 12.73% to 14.62% in educational level, and 0.92% to 1.17% in job situation

**Table 2** Sociodemographic characteristics of IPV perpetrators from 2016 to 2020

	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	n	% [95% CI]	n	% [95% CI]	n	% [95% CI]	n	% [95% CI]	n	% [95% CI]
<b>Sex</b>										
Female	1609	14.58 [13.92–15.25]	1555	14.44 [13.78–15.12]	1481	14.63 [13.95–15.34]	1658	15.51 [14.83–16.21]	1433	15.11 [14.40–15.85]
Male	9428	85.42 [84.75–86.08]	9214	85.56 [84.88–86.22]	8640	85.37 [84.66–86.05]	9032	84.49 [83.79–85.17]	8050	84.89 [84.15–85.60]
<b>Age group</b>										
18–34	2896	26.24 [25.42–27.07]	2903	26.96 [26.12–27.81]	2677	26.45 [25.59–27.32]	2826	26.44 [25.60–27.28]	2481	26.16 [25.28–27.06]
35–64	7401	67.06 [66.17–67.93]	7143	66.33 [65.43–67.22]	6786	67.05 [66.12–67.96]	7057	66.01 [65.11–66.91]	6241	65.81 [64.85–66.77]
65–115	740	6.70 [6.25–7.19]	723	6.71 [6.25–7.20]	658	6.50 [6.03–7.00]	807	7.55 [7.06–8.07]	761	8.02 [7.49–8.59]
<b>Education level (years)</b>										
No read or right	141	1.60 [1.35–1.88]	120	1.39 [1.16–1.66]	124	1.39 [1.27–1.81]	112	1.31 [1.08–1.58]	126	1.65 [1.38–1.97]
One to four	1662	18.81 [18.00–19.64]	1532	17.77 [16.97–18.59]	1411	17.29 [16.48–18.13]	1407	16.49 [15.71–17.29]	1201	15.77 [14.95–16.60]
Five to six	1956	22.14 [21.28–23.02]	1902	22.06 [21.19–22.95]	1849	22.66 [21.76–23.59]	1784	20.90 [20.05–21.78]	1636	21.48 [20.56–22.42]
Seven to nine	2145	24.28 [23.29–25.19]	2245	26.04 [25.12–26.98]	2049	25.11 [24.17–26.07]	2340	27.42 [26.48–28.38]	2014	26.44 [25.45–27.44]
Ten to twelve	1498	16.96 [16.18–17.76]	1480	17.17 [16.38–17.98]	1476	18.09 [17.26–18.94]	1540	18.05 [17.23–18.88]	1434	18.82 [17.95–19.72]
College degree	888	10.05 [9.43–10.70]	826	9.58 [8.97–10.22]	813	9.96 [9.32–10.63]	884	10.36 [9.72–11.02]	807	10.59 [9.91–11.31]
Other	544	6.16 [5.67–6.68]	516	5.99 [5.49–6.51]	437	5.36 [4.88–5.87]	467	5.47 [5.00–5.98]	400	5.25 [4.76–5.78]
<b>Professional situation</b>										
Unemployed	2590	23.81 [23.01–24.62]	2459	23.24 [22.44–24.06]	2214	22.31 [21.49–23.14]	2183	20.80 [20.03–21.59]	1986	21.30 [20.47–22.15]
Employed	7328	67.37 [66.47–68.25]	7216	68.20 [67.30–69.08]	6890	69.42 [68.50–70.33]	7392	70.43 [69.55–71.31]	6499	69.71 [68.77–70.64]
Retired	960	8.83 [8.30–9.37]	906	8.56 [8.04–9.11]	821	8.27 [7.74–8.83]	920	8.77 [8.23–9.32]	838	8.99 [8.42–9.59]
<b>Financial dependency</b>										
No	9767	88.54 [87.93–89.13]	9660	89.74 [89.74–89.16]	9105	90.00 [89.40–90.57]	9658	90.39 [89.81–90.94]	8660	91.37 [90.79–91.93]
Yes	1264	11.46 [10.87–12.07]	1104	10.26 [9.69–10.84]	1012	10.00 [9.43–10.60]	1027	9.61 [9.06–10.19]	818	8.63 [8.07–9.21]

*Note.* Missing values ranged from 19.39% to 20.17% in educational level, 1.44% to 1.94% in job situation and 0.04% and 0.05% in financial dependence



groups. It is also worth noting that, while fewer complaints were filed in person or by telephone than in previous years, a higher percentage of complaints was filed through community policing and other means. Concurrently, emergency and contingency/calamity periods have the lowest numbers of IPV reports of the past five years. At first, these data do not allow ruling out the possibility that victims had difficulties asking for help during the pandemic period. The suggestion that the pandemic could exacerbate the use of strategies to control the victims, preventing them from pressing charges, could explain the decrease of IPV reports. On the other hand, stay-at-home and lockdown measures and circulation restrictions, with the existence of mandatory curfew, promoted easier control from perpetrators over victims, once both should have remained in the same space for a longer time. That could appease the need to resort to overt control strategies, thus diminishing conflicts, meaning a real decrease in some types of violence. Even so, this does not mean the resolution of dysfunctional dynamics within these couples, nor the eradication of violence. When analyzing the period after the end of lockdown measures, there are increases in IPV reports. These increases do not surpass the numbers of previous years, considering the same months. To be notice that the increases in IPV reports after the lockdown periods, cannot be attributed to occurrences during the lockdown, because this work analyzes reports based on the date of occurrence and not on the date of the contact with the police. Therefore, more complex explanations about the lower number of IPV reports to the police should be drawn. First, this decrease in IPV reports while more restrictive measures were in place could reflect the decrease of physical violence, but not necessarily the decrease of other types of violence. Indeed, the percentage of police reports in 2020 seems to point out less physical violence, but more psychological and social violence (that seems to be the type of violence that increased the most, in proportion, in 2020). Also, the periods with higher decreases in IPV reports overlapped with the periods when lockdown measures restrained the activity of entertainment spaces (e.g., restaurants, bars, clubs). The absence of alcohol consumption in these social settings and/or fewer interactions that might trigger jealousy, known to be risk factors for IPV (Capaldi et al., 2012), might help to explain, at least partially, this overlap. Another important remark is that most of IPV reports to the police in the previous years were done by the victims and the same occurred in 2020, despite fears that victims would not be able to call for help during lockdown periods. However, the lower proportion of reports being made in person or by phone, and the higher percentage of complaints filed

through community policing, might indicate that greater control was exercised over the victims by the perpetrators, and victims had to resort to other available means to seek for help. Additionally, the number of occurrences without previous reports is also the lowest number of the five years under study, pointing to a decrease in new IPV cases in Portuguese urban areas during 2020.

Regarding violence severity, and despite data from police being known for identifying the most severe cases of violence, most of the occurrences reported did not result in injuries in any of the analyzed years. Even so, the percentage of reports without injuries was significantly higher in 2020 than in previous years, and the percentage of reports identifying minor injuries was lower. Furthermore, no differences were identified regarding the percentage of occurrences where there was a need to transport the victim to the hospital. These findings do not seem to support the concern that the severity of IPV would increase during 2020. Nonetheless, the psychological and emotional consequences of non-physical forms of violence are not to be ignored or minimized, and the rise of social violence should be tackled.

Some methodological limitations of the current work should be taken into consideration when analyzing the findings. The observational study design does not provide evidence of causal inference between the COVID-19 measures and variations in IPV reports, due to the presence of potential confounding factors (e.g., people working at home vs people having to go out to work; the lowest proportion of IPV cases reported to the PSP in 2020, considering the national total). Regarding significant differences found concerning the characteristics of occurrence and of those involved, it should also be noted that only low effect sizes were present, and some CI overlapped. Therefore, the findings of this brief report should be seen as indicative and should be validated against survey-based measures of victimization and/or qualitative data on victims' experiences during this period. It is also fundamental to recognize that conclusions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic over IPV reports to the police is still a work in progress, once current daily routines are still far from the pre-pandemic way of living.

Despite the identified limitations, this brief report adds to previous research by providing detailed and systematically collected data about IPV occurrences during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic in Portugal. It also allows for comparisons within 5 years, as opposed to anecdotal reports that do not include these comparisons and/or ignore the usual fluctuation in crime reports across time. Finally, this study's findings may prompt future research allowing for a greater understanding of the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown/stay-at-home measures, and IPV reports to the police.

Table 3 Occurrences' characteristics of IPV reports from 2016 to 2020

Occurrences' characteristics	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	n	% [95% CI]	n	% [95% CI]	n	% [95% CI]	n	% [95% CI]	n	% [95% CI]
<b>Crime location</b>										
Residence	8142	76.65 [75.84–77.45]	7860	75.75 [74.92–76.57]	7355	75.77 [74.90–76.62]	7851	76.44 [75.61–77.26]	7248	79.94 [79.94–79.10]
Public street	1747	16.45 [15.75–17.17]	1755	16.91 [16.20–17.65]	1615	16.64 [15.90–17.93]	1586	15.44 [14.75–16.15]	1333	14.70 [13.98–15.45]
Commercial spaces (e.g., bars, shops)	421	3.96 [3.60–4.35]	431	4.15 [3.78–4.56]	373	3.84 [3.47–4.24]	457	4.45 [4.06–4.87]	252	2.78 [2.45–3.14]
Others	312	2.94 [2.62–3.28]	330	3.18 [2.85–3.54]	364	3.75 [3.38–4.15]	377	3.67 [3.32–4.05]	234	2.58 [2.26–2.93]
<b>Crime reporting</b>										
In person	5717	52.94 [52.00–53.89]	5591	53.03 [52.07–53.99]	5252	52.99 [52.00–53.97]	5689	54.07 [53.11–55.03]	4714	50.58 [49.56–51.60]
Phone	1047	9.70 [9.14–10.27]	782	7.42 [6.92–7.93]	703	7.09 [6.60–7.62]	637	6.05 [5.61–6.53]	594	6.37 [5.89–6.89]
Community policing	3885	35.98 [35.07–36.84]	4042	38.34 [37.14–39.27]	3829	38.63 [37.67–39.60]	4052	38.51 [37.58–39.45]	3791	40.68 [39.68–41.69]
Email	11	0.10 [0.05–0.18]	9	0.09 [0.04–0.16]	10	0.10 [0.05–0.19]	5	0.05 [0.02–0.11]	15	0.16 [0.09–0.27]
Others (e.g., hospitals)	138	1.28 [1.07–1.51]	119	1.12 [0.94–1.35]	118	1.19 [0.99–1.42]	138	1.31 [1.10–1.55]	205	2.20 [1.91–2.52]
<b>Contact to the police</b>										
Victim	8717	78.98 [78.21–79.74]	8476	78.72 [77.94–79.49]	8099	80.05 [79.25–80.82]	8535	79.88 [79.11–80.64]	7462	78.70 [77.86–79.52]
Others	2320	21.02 [20.26–21.79]	2291	21.28 [20.50–22.06]	2019	19.95 [19.18–20.75]	2150	20.12 [19.36–20.89]	2020	21.30 [20.48–22.14]
<b>Previous reports</b>										
No	8439	76.46 [75.66–77.25]	8323	77.29 [76.64–78.08]	7719	76.27 [75.43–77.09]	8224	76.93 [76.12–77.73]	7343	77.43 [76.58–78.27]
Yes	2598	23.54 [22.75–24.34]	2446	22.71 [21.92–23.52]	2402	23.73 [22.91–24.57]	2466	23.07 [22.27–23.88]	2140	22.57 [21.73–23.42]
<b>Violence type<sup>1</sup></b>										
Physical	7728	70.02 [69.15–70.87]	7501	69.65 [68.78–70.52]	7031	69.47 [68.56–70.37]	7196	67.32 [66.42–68.20]	6421	67.71 [66.76–68.65]
Psychological	9768	88.50 [87.89–89.90]	9553	88.71 [88.10–89.30]	8938	88.31 [87.67–88.93]	9528	89.13 [88.52–89.71]	8494	89.57 [88.94–90.18]
Sexual	340	3.08 [2.77–3.42]	317	2.94 [2.63–3.28]	262	2.59 [2.29–2.92]	374	3.50 [3.16–3.86]	272	2.87 [2.54–3.22]
Economic	1006	9.11 [8.58–9.67]	947	8.79 [8.27–9.34]	859	8.49 [7.95–9.05]	827	7.74 [7.24–8.26]	839	8.85 [8.28–9.44]
Social	2235	20.25 [19.50–21.01]	2266	21.04 [20.28–21.82]	2086	20.61 [19.83–21.41]	2289	21.41 [20.41–22.20]	2203	23.23 [22.38–24.09]
<b>Children's presence</b>										
No	7174	65.00 [64.10–65.89]	7059	65.56 [64.66–66.46]	6807	67.28 [66.36–68.20]	7135	66.77 [65.87–67.66]	6304	66.48 [65.52–67.43]
Yes	3863	35.00 [34.11–35.90]	3708	34.44 [33.54–35.34]	3310	32.72 [31.80–33.64]	3551	33.23 [32.34–34.13]	3178	33.52 [32.57–34.48]
<b>Other victims</b>										
No	9013	81.66 [80.93–82.38]	8608	79.93 [79.16–80.69]	7956	78.61 [77.80–79.40]	8052	75.32 [74.49–76.14]	6949	73.28 [72.38–74.17]
Yes	2024	18.34 [17.62–19.07]	2161	20.07 [19.31–20.84]	2165	21.39 [20.60–22.20]	2638	24.68 [23.86–25.51]	2534	26.72 [25.83–27.62]
<b>Injuries</b>										
No injuries	6292	57.03 [56.10–57.96]	6330	58.80 [57.86–59.73]	5925	58.59 [57.62–59.55]	6503	60.90 [59.96–61.82]	5951	62.81 [61.83–63.79]
Minor	4668	42.31 [41.39–43.24]	4391	40.79 [39.86–41.72]	4139	40.93 [39.97–41.89]	4121	38.59 [37.66–39.52]	3473	36.66 [35.69–37.64]
Severe	73	0.66 [0.52–0.83]	45	0.42 [0.30–0.56]	49	0.48 [0.36–0.64]	55	0.52 [0.39–0.67]	50	0.53 [0.39–0.70]
<b>Transportation to hospital</b>										
No	10,953	99.24 [99.06–99.39]	10,679	99.16 [98.97–99.33]	10,055	99.35 [99.17–99.50]	10,618	99.33 [99.15–99.47]	9413	99.26 [99.07–99.42]



Table 3 (continued)

Occurrences' characteristics	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	n	% [95% CI]	n	% [95% CI]	n	% [95% CI]	n	% [95% CI]	n	% [95% CI]
Yes	84	0.76 [0.61–0.94]	90	0.84 [0.67–1.03]	66	0.65 [0.50–0.83]	72	0.67 [0.53–0.85]	70	0.74 [0.58–0.93]

Note. Missing values ranges from 3.65% to 4.39% in crime location, 1.58% to 2.17% in crime reporting, 0.05% to 0.15% in violence type, none to 0.04% in children presence, and 0.03% to 0.10% in injuries

<sup>†</sup>These categories are not mutually exclusive

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