

A Psychological Exploration of Help-Seeking in Intimate Partner Violence: Findings from a Scoping Review

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Researchers in various countries have identified that intimate partner violence affects victims of all ages. The process of psychological recovery from experiences of intimate partner violence must commence with the victim seeking help. The present review was conducted in accordance with the methodological framework proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and reported using the PRISMA-ScR checklist (Liberati et al., 2009). In order to be considered as eligible, the studies had to meet the following criteria: they had to be published in English between 2020 and 2025; they had to be peer-reviewed; and they had to examine the experience of seeking help among victims of intimate partner violence in the context of heterosexual relationships, with a minimum age of 15 years. A total of 40 articles that met the specified inclusion criteria were identified through a comprehensive search of three major databases. Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar. The results of this scoping review reveal an interplay between findings across four main themes: The following factors must be considered: the complexity of victim dynamics; social and cultural identities and systemic inequalities in experiences of and responses to violence; the psychological landscape of individuals seeking psychological support; and preferences and the roles of informal and formal networks sensitive to cultural and community contexts. These findings have the potential to provide insights for future psychological research and practice by highlighting the importance of developing informal support networks rooted in cultural and community contexts.

Keywords: help seeking; intimate partner violence; scoping review; mental wellness

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INTRODUCTION

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a significant global public health concern with consistently high prevalence rates (Le & Nguyen, 2024; Newberry et al., 2025). According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), approximately one in three women worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner during their lifetime. Although IPV can affect individuals across demographic groups, women remain disproportionately affected by intimate partner violence. The burden of IPV begins early in life, with adolescent girls representing a particularly vulnerable group. An estimated 24% (approximately 19 million girls aged 15–19 years) have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner (Sardinha et al., 2024).

Intimate partner violence is a global issue that affects both high- and low-income countries. For instance, 36.4% of women in the United States have reported experiencing physical, sexual, and stalking violence at the hands of an intimate partner (Breiding et al., 2014). In Australia, 23–27% of women reported experiencing physical or sexual violence at the hands of their partners (Vicard-Olagne et al., 2022). White et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review in Asia, finding prevalence rates of 20–42%. In Europe, the lifetime prevalence of IPV ranges from 20–32%, though this varies between countries (Bacchus et al., 2022). In Indonesia, 289,111 cases of violence against women were reported through various channels, with a significant proportion occurring within personal relationships. Dating violence accounted for thousands of cases annually, with psychological violence being the most frequently reported form, followed by physical, sexual and economic violence (Komnas Perempuan, 2023). However, these figures likely underestimate the true magnitude of IPV, as many incidents remain unreported due to stigma, cultural norms, fear of negative consequences and limited access to formal protection mechanisms (Aprilia & Masyhadi, 2022; Grace et al., 2020; Pratiwi, 2020).

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) refers to physical, sexual, psychological, or economic violence perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner and may occur in dating, cohabiting, or marital relationships (WHO, 2021). Beyond its high prevalence, IPV has profound consequences for survivors' well-being. Research consistently shows that IPV is associated with a range of adverse mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, dissociation, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Dworkin, 2020; Sardinha et al., 2024; Yakubovich et al., 2018). Furthermore, IPV carries broader social and economic implications, including reduced productivity, disrupted social relationships, and increased health system burdens (Baruwa et al., 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2022; Pratiwi & Halim, 2023). Theoretically, these consequences underscore the importance of understanding how survivors respond to violence and access support, as help-seeking is often a critical pathway to safety, recovery, and long-term well-being.

Although IPV can affect individuals across the lifespan, adolescents and young adults represent a particularly important population for understanding help-seeking behavior. This developmental period is characterized by significant transitions involving identity formation,

emotional regulation, and the development of intimate relationships (Branje et al., 2021; Malti et al., 2021). At the same time, adolescents and young adults remain vulnerable to IPV, with global estimates indicating substantial rates of victimization among girls aged 15–19 years (Sardinha et al., 2024). Dependence on romantic partners, fear of relationship dissolution, limited relationship experience, and exposure to controlling behaviors may increase vulnerability to victimization while simultaneously creating barriers to disclosure and help-seeking (Amanda & Mansoer, 2021; Saunders, 2022). These developmental characteristics may also make it more difficult for victims to recognize abusive experiences and access appropriate support (Saunders, 2022).

Aged 15 years and older represent a population at elevated risk of experiencing IPV. This period is characterized by important developmental transitions involving identity formation, interpersonal relationship development and the consolidation of moral reasoning (Branje et al., 2021; Malti et al., 2021). Despite the significance of this age group, previous literature reviews have primarily focused on specific populations, particularly children and young adults (Bacchus et al., 2024; García-Senlle et al., 2026). Consequently, the existing evidence remains limited. Resulting in a fragmented understanding of help-seeking behavior across the wider population vulnerable to IPV. To address this gap, the present review adopts individuals aged 15 years and older as the primary population of interest, in an attempt to provide more inclusive synthesis in the context of IPV.

As a result, leaving abusive relationships and breaking the cycle of interpersonal violence can be a challenging process, despite the well-documented adverse effects of IPV (Amanda & Mansoer, 2021; Di Babilio et al., 2022; Saunders, 2022). A multifaceted array of factors contributes to this phenomenon, including flawed thinking, inadequate social support, and manipulation by the perpetrator (Mabunda et al., 2025). As indicated by previous research findings, instances of revictimization by helpers when victims seek assistance can also serve to exacerbate the situation, particularly in contexts characterised by patriarchal values (Saunders, 2022). Moreover, cognisant of the crisis situation experienced by victims of violence, the effort to seek help for IPV victims becomes a significant issue that necessitates further exploration.

Despite its severe consequences, many survivors of IPV do not seek formal assistance (Spencer et al., 2025). Instead, they often remain silent (Pratiwi, 2017), rely on self-coping strategies (Pratiwi et al., 2022), or turn to informal sources of support such as family members and friends (Amanda & Mansoer, 2021; Nuqul & Rahayu, 2022). Help-seeking behaviors are influenced by a combination of personal barriers such as shame, fear, and feelings of helplessness. There are also structural obstacles, including social stigma, lack of trust in authorities, and the normalization of violence within intimate relationships. These barriers underscore the psychological and socio-cultural complexity of help-seeking among IPV survivors (Saunders, 2022).

Prior research has examined both the facilitators and barriers to help-seeking among IPV survivors, highlighting the role of individual, social, and structural factors (DeLoveh & Cattaneo, 2017). The broader literature

has predominantly focused on intervention strategies of IPV through social support and mental health outcome focus (Ogbe et al., 2020); prevention approach, (Bacchus et al., 2024), typologies (Ballesteros Cárdenas et al., 2023), possible risk factors and consequences (Dokkedahl et al., 2022; Gunarathne et al., 2023; White et al., 2024) as well as victimization (Laskey et al., 2019), and among specific population particularly young adult and children (Bacchus et al., 2024; García-Senlle et al., 2026).

More recently, scholars have also explored digital interventions as a potential means of providing accessible and anonymous support to IPV survivors (Bacchus et al., 2018). A significant proportion of articles concentrate on the legal aspects of the issue (Cattaneo et al., 2007; Stiller et al., 2025). Existing studies have examined IPV interventions and psychosocial outcomes, preventive frameworks, and the multifaceted impacts across diverse contexts. However, despite the growing body of evidence, the literature remains fragmented with limited attempts to comprehensively map conceptual and thematic development of IPV. Therefore, this study employs a scoping review approach to systematically explore and synthesize the existing evidence, with the aim of identifying underexplored themes, research gaps, and emerging directions.

A comparable study was conducted by (Lelaurain et al., 2017) with a focus on the psychosocial framework concept. Another research has documented substantial cross-national variation in the prevalence of intimate partner violence mental health outcomes (White et al., 2024). Furthermore, recent evidence has comprehensively mapped global trends in the acceptance of IPV across diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts (Bergenfeld et al., 2025). Despite the robust body of evidence demonstrating the intervention program to prevent IPV (Stöckl & Sorenson, 2024) the literature remains primarily focused on the prevalence, the intervention program and the outcome of IPV. Consequently, the current evidence base lacks a comprehensive synthesis of the factors associated with help-seeking behavior among individuals affected by intimate partner violence. Existing research remains context-bound, methodologically diverse, and conceptually fragmented, leaving gaps in our understanding of the psychological determinants of help-seeking. This study seeks to address that gap through a scoping review of international literature on help-seeking among IPV survivors, with a particular focus on heterosexual relationships. Specifically, the objectives are to (1) map studies published in the last five years, (2) identify key psychological factors influencing survivors' help-seeking decisions, and (3) understanding and combining qualitative evidence about people's experiences of seeking help. The novelty of this work lies in its effort to integrate diverse and scattered findings into a comprehensive psychological framework. The results are expected to enrich psychological science and contribute practical insights for designing more empathetic and responsive support systems for IPV survivors.

METHOD

A scoping review is deployed to summarize the existing literature and identify gaps in the current research base within a period of time (Nyanchoka et al., 2019). Researchers applied five stages in the scoping

review process (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005): (a) developing research questions; (b) identifying studies based on inclusion criteria; (c) selecting literature; (d) data extraction and recording data; and (e) summarizing results.

Developing Research Questions

In formulating research questions, we decided to use the population, concept and context (PPC) framework, first developed by the Joanna Briggs Institute (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Bour et al., 2021). These questions can be traced back to a diverse population as representative to population aspect, help-seeking to emphasize the concept and cross cultural to the context. Research question for this review: What is known from research published in the last five years about the psychological factors influencing help-seeking among survivors of intimate partner violence, and how can this evidence inform a conceptual understanding of the phenomenon and future intervention development?

Eligibility Criteria

We defined our inclusion criteria using the Population/Concept/Context (PCC) framework. The following table summarises the inclusion and exclusion criteria and their scientific justification:

Table 1
Summarises the Research Criteria

Inclusion Criteria		Scientific Justification
Population	Individuals aged minimal 15 years old	People aged 15 and over were included in this study because most people start having intimate relationships during their mid-adolescence. By including this age group, this review can cover experiences of seeking help among both adolescents and adults, whilst remaining relevant to the context of IPV (Bundock et al., 2020).
Concept	Help seeking for IPV in heterosexual relationship context	This study focuses specifically on help-seeking behaviour in relation to intimate partner violence (IPV) within heterosexual relationships. The restriction of this concept to heterosexual couples is justified by the documented diversity in social stigma, service accessibility, minority pressures, and help-seeking pathways observed in the LGBTQ+ population compared to heterosexual relationships (Himawan et al., 2024; Santoniccolo et al., 2023).
Context	Global perspectives	We did not limit the study to any specific locations. This meant we could capture a wide range of experiences. These were about seeking help, barriers and what makes it easier or harder to get help. We looked at different social and cultural contexts and healthcare settings. This approach is in line with the exploratory nature of a scoping review and helps identify knowledge gaps across different regions (Satyen et al., 2019).
Article type	peer - reviewed primary research articles	Studies that have been checked by other experts were included because they provide new evidence that directly looks at how people behave when they ask for help. We did not include conference reports, studies on

		how measurement tools are developed, literature reviews or data sets that were already collected. This is because they did not provide key findings that match the aims of this review, or they might repeat information that has already been reported in other places.
Language	English	English is the main language of scientific publications, so it has been included.
Exclusion Criteria		Scientific Justification
Included homosexual relationships or LGBTQ		This was done to make sure the review's focus on help-seeking in cases of IPV among heterosexual couples was kept in line with the review's other themes. The available evidence suggests that when people from the LGBTQ+ community seek help, it is affected by unique things, like the challenges of being a minority, discrimination, and barriers related to sexual orientation. These may be different from the challenges faced by the heterosexual population (Santoniccolo et al., 2023).
Abstract only, and no full-text is available, or the paper is not retrievable		This was not included because there were limitations in the information and results, which made it difficult to do a full assessment and collect data.

Search Strategy

Based on the subject coverage, relevance to the research topic and access the following databases and platforms were searched to find relevant articles: Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar. Scopus was selected because it is one of the largest multidisciplinary bibliography databases with coverage of peer-reviewed journals across psychology and social sciences. Pubmed was included due to its comprehensive coverage of biomedical and health-related literature. Google Scholar was selected due to its extensive multidisciplinary scope, encompassing peer-reviewed journal articles and regional publications that are not typically covered in subscription-based databases.

We conducted a literature review between 24 May 2025 and 30 July 2025. The search strategy employed a combination of terms related to help-seeking behavior and intimate partner violence, utilising Boolean operators to refine the search. The search string utilised for each database was as follows:

Table 2
The Search String Utilised for Each Database

No.	Databases	Date of Access	Search Terms	Initial Results
1	Scopus	24 Mei 2025	TITLE ("help-seeking" AND ("dating abuse" OR "intimate partner violence"))	124
2	Pubmed	24 Mei 2025	("help-seeking"[Title]) AND (("dating abuse"[Title]) OR ("intimate partner violence"[Title]))	255
3	Google Scholar	24 Mei 2025	allintitle: "help-seeking" ("dating abuse" OR "intimate partner violence")	81

Screening and Extraction

The research team comprised experts in the field of interpersonal relationships and related issues (DIP, LIF, and CHL), as well as help-seeking behaviour in a psychological context (WIT and FIH). A systematic review expert (MIF and ANN) assisted in designing this study. In addition, a research assistant supported the screening process through close collaboration with the team (ADY).

Following the previous step, the articles were screened by two different researchers independently (namely: WIT and FIH). The step-by-step process can be seen in Figure 1. The researchers independently reviewed the title, abstract, and full-text based on inclusion or exclusion criteria through MS Excel. Discussion among them will be conducted after researchers finish the review. This process reinforces the shared standard values underlying researchers' choices. Any discrepancies between

reviewers during the screening stage were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached. However, if there were major disagreements during screening and full-text review for inclusion, a third reviewer (DIP) resolved the conflict.

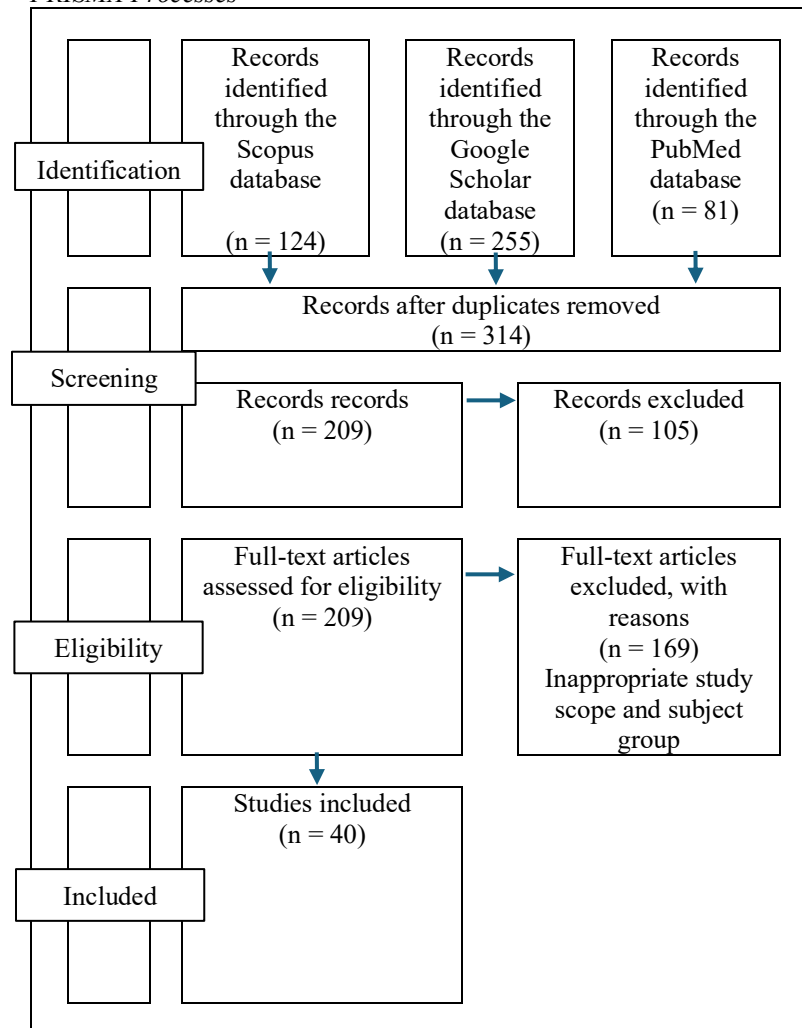
The following data items were extracted: [1] Database resource, study title, author(s), aim of the study, country where the study was conducted and year of publication; [2] the type of help-seeking, setting, and duration; [3] methodology, including study design, number of participants, research approaches, and research instruments. Duplicate studies were manually screened and removed based on matching information. This approach was undertaken prior to the title and abstract screening stage. This approach follows the frameworks proposed by Arksey & O'Malley (2005) which emphasize methodological rigor in extracting, analyzing, and reporting data in scoping reviews.

Data Analysis

The initial search yielded 460 articles, comprising 124 from Scopus, 255 from Google Scholar, and 81 from PubMed. We removed 146 articles due to duplication, and 314 were continued to the screening assessment of the abstract and full text.

During the screening process, 105 articles were not freely accessible and were excluded. A total of 209 full-text articles were assessed for relevance according to the defined eligibility criteria, resulting in the final inclusion of 40 articles for this scoping review. The research team excluded studies that did not fit within the scope of this research, for example, studies on homosexual relationships, secondary dataset research, measurement development studies, and publications in Spanish. In this process, two inter-rater (namely: LIF and DIP) conducted the coding and thematic analysis, resulting in four main themes.

Figure 1
PRISMA Processes



RESULTS

From an initial pool of 460 records identified through Scopus (n = 124), PubMed (n = 81), and Google Scholar (n = 255), 146 duplicate records were removed, leaving 314 unique records for screening. Following title and abstract screening, 105 records were excluded because the full-text articles were unavailable or inaccessible. Consequently, 209 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Of these, 169 articles were excluded due to reasons including inappropriate study populations, focus on non-heterosexual relationships, secondary data analyses, measurement development studies, and failure to address help-seeking in the context of intimate partner violence (IPV). Ultimately, 40 articles met all eligibility

criteria and were included in the qualitative synthesis. Literature searches were conducted between May and June 2025.

A qualitative synthesis of findings across 40 studies yielded four overarching themes that describe psychological, interpersonal, sociocultural, and systemic factors influencing help-seeking among IPV survivors. These themes collectively represent the key psychological, interpersonal, sociocultural, and systemic factors associated with help-seeking among IPV survivors and provide the basis for a conceptual understanding of the help-seeking process.

Main Theme 1: The Complexity of Violence Dynamics

This theme focuses on the perspective of individuals who have been subjected to violence, with a particular emphasis on their considerations regarding seeking assistance in the aftermath of their experiences. It is evident that as the risk and severity of violence escalate, there is a corresponding increase in its recurrence. Several studies found that the severity and frequency of violence influenced help-seeking decisions, with survivors experiencing severe physical injury, repeated victimization, or high-risk situations demonstrating greater engagement with formal support services (Park & Ko, 2021; Cuesta-García et al., 2024; An et al., 2024). Furthermore, the greater the risk of dehumanization and mental health issues for victims, the less probable is their propensity to seek assistance. Psychological consequences such as depression, emotional dysregulation, suicidality, feelings of entrapment, and trauma-related distress were identified as important barriers to help-seeking in several studies (Cho et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2022; Taylor, 2020; Taylor, 2023). Sexual violence is a significant contributing factor to the reluctance of victims to seek assistance. In addition, survivors frequently reported concerns regarding stigma, fear of disclosure, and anticipated negative reactions from others. The status of the relationship in which the violence occurs is also a consideration; cohabiting and married couples are more likely to seek help than those in dating relationships. Relationship commitment, emotional attachment, and concerns about preserving the relationship were also found to influence help-seeking decisions (Park & Ko, 2021).

Main Theme 2: Social and Cultural Identity and Systemic Inequality in Experiences of and Responses to Violence

This theme is a finding with a comprehensive socio-cultural perspective. A substantial corpus of scientific studies has highlighted the existence of inequality in responses to violence, both in terms of social responses, cultural differences, and systemic handling. Several studies reported that stigma, victim-blaming attitudes, gender norms, immigration status, racial identity, and socioeconomic disadvantage shaped both survivors' experiences of violence and their access to support services (Shuman et al., 2022; Cuesta-García et al., 2024; An et al., 2024). Regarding patriarchal culture, it is important to note that gender inequality is a consequence of patriarchal values that demean women's experiences of violence. Studies conducted in collectivist cultural settings further demonstrated that concerns regarding family reputation, social harmony, and conformity to cultural expectations often discouraged disclosure and formal help-seeking (Park & Ko, 2021; Xu et al., 2022). The pursuit of information, the process of normalization, and the potential for revictimization are all impeded by collective cultural beliefs. These beliefs are characterized by a strong inclination to protect the family's reputation and maintain harmony within the community. Several qualitative studies also reported that survivors frequently encountered institutional distrust, inadequate legal protection, and previous negative experiences with support systems, which further contributed to reluctance in seeking assistance (Taylor, 2020; Taylor, 2023; Juarros-Basterretxea et al., 2024).

Main Theme 3: The Landscape of an Individual's Mental State in Seeking Psychological Help

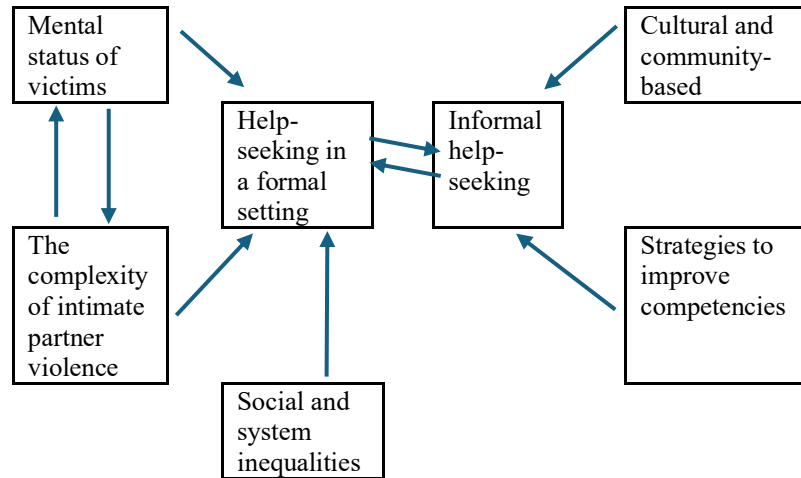
This theme provides a comprehensive representation of the complex situations, systems, or phenomena within individuals who experience violence and seek help. The decision to seek help is greatly influenced by various internal conditions that describe an individual's mental status. The victim is subject to a complex cycle of awareness, various forms of knowledge regarding how to seek help, distrust, cognitive and emotional conditions, and feelings of being trapped. Mental health literacy, awareness of available services, risk perception, and recognition of abuse emerged as important facilitators of help-seeking behavior (Nurazizah & Zulkaida, 2024; Badenes-Sastre et al., 2025; Juarros-Basterretxea et al., 2024). The presence of internal stigma and misguided beliefs has the potential to act as impediments. Conversely, religiosity has been observed to encourage women to seek assistance through both formal and informal support pathways, although some participants also reported harmful experiences within religious support systems (Chaudhry & Cattaneo, 2025). In several collectivist cultural contexts, social expectations regarding marriage, family reputation, and relationship maintenance influenced women's willingness to disclose violence and seek support (Park & Ko, 2021; Xu et al., 2022). A notable insight derived from this analysis is the predominant emphasis on the mechanisms through which victims seek assistance. However, a comprehensive exploration of the internal factors that impede their continued access to support remains conspicuously absent.

Main Theme 4: Preferences and the Role of Informal and Formal Networks that are Sensitive to Culture and Community Context

This theme provides insight into the victims' preferences for seeking informal rather than formal assistance. Across multiple studies, survivors consistently reported greater reliance on informal support networks, including friends, family members, peers, and community contacts, than on formal support services (Shuman et al., 2022; Seon et al., 2022; An et al., 2024). The underlying rationale for this phenomenon may be attributed to the presence of disparities in formal policies and systems. Barriers to formal help-seeking included stigma, lack of trust in institutions, limited awareness of services, fear of negative consequences, and previous unsatisfactory interactions with formal systems (Taylor, 2023; Park & Ko, 2021; Cuesta-García et al., 2024). It is imperative to recognise the necessity of responsive informal networks for victims. The provision of empathetic and secure services has also been identified as a key area for improvement. Several studies highlighted the importance of trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and community-based approaches that foster safety, validation, and trust among survivors (Taylor, 2020; Taylor, 2023; Goddard-Eckrich et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2025).

Taken together, these findings suggest that help-seeking among IPV survivors is not a linear process but rather a dynamic process shaped by the interaction of violence characteristics, individual psychological factors, sociocultural influences, and the availability of formal and informal support systems. Survivors' decisions to seek assistance are influenced not only by the severity of violence but also by their interpretations of the experience, emotional responses, cultural expectations, and perceived accessibility of support. The conceptual relationship among these four themes is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Explanation of Findings



DISCUSSION

The present study identified distinctive patterns in the psychological dynamics experienced by victims of intimate partner violence when seeking help. The nature of violence, its severity (Cho et al., 2020), the context of the relationship, and the frequency of violent experiences have been demonstrated to be closely linked to the psychological impact experienced by victims (Wessells & Kostelny, 2022). Repetition of violence has been shown to have a detrimental effect on victims, causing them to lose their sense of self and experience a process of dehumanisation. As with victims of sexual violence (Cho et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2021), those who experience repeated violence are usually powerless to report the violence they have suffered. The presence of an imbalance in terms of control and power between the victim and the perpetrator can give rise to pathological dependence in the victim. This condition has the effect of complicating the way in which victims assess their situation.

The psychological distress experienced by victims of violence is frequently the result of misconceptions and negative feelings. This psychological distress then acts as an internal motivator or barrier for victims when seeking help. The failure to address psychological distress can result in the emergence of fear, distrust of others, and maladaptive behavioural responses. This, in turn, can lead victims to either delay or forgo seeking help. In certain cases involving victims of intimate partner violence, the act of seeking assistance is often perceived as a complicating factor that exacerbates the problem. Conversely, for victims who possess personal qualities such as hope, spirituality, and a sense of agency to improve their situation, this psychological distress becomes a motivator to seek or accept a wider range of support.

The challenges faced by victims of IPV in seeking help stem not only from internal factors but also from a socio-cultural system that reinforces

inequality. This phenomenon can lead to a reluctance among victims to seek assistance. The challenges faced by victims of violence when seeking formal help can be categorised into several domains. These include stigma against women, the normalisation of violence, unequal access to services, social consequences, racial inequality, and biased perceptions of support organisations. This phenomenon may occur in conjunction with the internal conflicts experienced by the victim. When victims hold erroneous beliefs about themselves, leading to psychological distress, compounded by the normalisation of violence within their social environment (for example, the expectation that women must maintain family harmony despite experiencing violence from their partners, victimisation or being blamed by their social environment as the cause of the violence, or the victim's lack of knowledge regarding procedures or access to formal support), this reduces the victim's willingness to seek or accept formal assistance.

In Eastern cultures, the absence of specific legislation pertaining to dating relationships can impede victims from seeking formal assistance due to the ambiguity surrounding the legal framework. However, it is important to note that perpetrators of dating violence can be prosecuted when there is evidence of physical harm to the victim (Pratiwi, 2020; Baindowi, 2022). This challenge is further complicated by various patriarchal views, which regard women as inherently culpable for having created opportunities for the opposite sex, thus facilitating the occurrence of violence. In Western cultures, Black women are less inclined to seek formal assistance or resort to legal action due to their perception that the legal system is not adequately supportive of their needs (Cheng, 2022; Wachter, 2021). A significant number of migrant women encounter challenges in accessing support due to economic vulnerability, privacy concerns and communication barriers.

When victims of violence encounter obstacles in seeking formal support, they often choose to turn to close friends or other sources of psychological support. This may be overlooked by both the victim and the person providing support, as the process commences with the victim recounting their experience of violence. In summary, the preliminary assistance obtained through non-official channels primarily entails a receptive stance on the part of the support provider. The emergence of a sense of safety and acceptance is concomitant with the experience of being heard. It is this sense of safety and acceptance that victims of violence often do not receive through formal support. Consequently, there is an increasing tendency among individuals who have experienced violence to seek informal support from trusted close friends or other informal community sources, whether in person or online, whilst maintaining anonymity.

A more in-depth discussion of the implications of seeking formal and informal support in the context of intimate partner violence is as follows. The quest for formal assistance is a multifaceted endeavour, characterised by systemic approaches that often overlook the nuances of cultural differences, social identity, and gender (Augustyn & Willyard, 2022; Hogan et al., 2021; Monterrosa, 2021; Valdovinos et al., 2021). It has frequently been observed that the perspective of women as victims is often

undervalued, and male victims are frequently expected to demonstrate a greater degree of fortitude (Hogan et al., 2021), which can dissuade them from seeking additional support from formal institutions. The conditions of these individuals are considered to be normalised, or they are even subjected to indirect forms of unpleasant treatment or revictimisation (Taylor, 2020). Within a collective cultural context, there is an expectation to maintain family harmony, resulting in issues of violence against women being subjects that tend to be taboo to disclose and follow up on (Sears, 2021). Meanwhile, individualistic cultures tend to emphasize personal autonomy, individual rights, and self determination which may endorse disclosure and help-seeking when experiencing violence (Guler et al., 2023). This phenomenon is also observed among immigrant populations, who often encounter challenges in accessing formal assistance and are underserved (Shuman et al., 2022).

It is evident that formal assistance has the capacity to provide services to victims of intimate partner violence. For help-seeking, specific groups such as students with disabilities (Son et al., 2020) and those who experienced violence in childhood (Seon et al., 2022) have been found to place a high level of trust in campus institutions to facilitate their recovery from the effects of violence. The implementation of targeted campus policy programmes has been identified as a key strategy for providing assistance to survivors of violence. The availability of formal services, in the form of a number of assistance providers that is proportional to the population (Augustyn & Willyard, 2022), and the dissemination of information on how to access assistance (Nurazizah & Zulkaida, 2024), will increase access to social services. The transformation of formal assistance in collaboration with various communities is a promising strategy (Chaudhry & Cattaneo, 2025; Murugan et al., 2023; Shuman et al., 2022).

The inequity observed in formal assistance systems often compels individuals who have experienced personal violence to seek recourse through informal channels provided by family and friends. The subjects in this study reported reliance on family members, colleagues, and friends to assist them in overcoming the challenges they were facing (An et al., 2024; Sears, 2021). This informal assistance also poses challenges for those providing it. It is expected that family members, colleagues, and friends will possess the capacity to listen, empathise, and establish a secure environment for victims (Taylor, 2020). In reality, however, not all individuals in close proximity to victims are able to provide assistance with such psychological readiness. The informal assistance approach is not only required for victims; it is also regarded as a safer strategy for providing behavioural change assistance to perpetrators of violence in the personal sphere (Hashimoto et al., 2021).

As posited by Lelaurain, Graziani, and Lo Monaco (2017) about help-seeking framework in intimate partner violence, the intention to seek help is influenced by a multitude of complex factors, including the characteristics of the violence experienced, internal factors, and social factors (Lelaurain et al., 2017). Consequently, a psychosocial approach is strongly recommended in order to facilitate a comprehensive

understanding of the phenomenon of help-seeking among victims of intimate partner violence.

The present findings are consistent with the view advanced by Lelaurain et al. (2017) that the decision to seek help involves a range of complex factors, ranging from the victim's internal state to the availability of both formal and informal support. Furthermore, we identified the distinctive psychological mechanisms experienced internally by victims of domestic violence. These mechanisms include the experience of violence, which manifests as psychological distress, psychological dependence, and emotional attachment to the perpetrator. In addition, these mechanisms also include normalisation, perspectives of inequality, and stigma from the social environment. These factors can lead to delays or reluctance in seeking help.

The present study contributes to the extant literature by adopting a process-oriented approach. The study elucidates the manner in which victims become aware of situations of violence, the relevance of barriers, the desire to disclose, and the subsequent emergence of a desire to seek formal and informal support. Moreover, the psychosocial approach discussed by Lelaurain et al. does not yet specifically outline the skills that informal support providers actually need to master, namely the skills of active listening and empathy towards victims of intimate partner violence. These two skills are essential when validating the feelings and thoughts of victims of intimate partner violence. The provision of this informal support can also be delivered on an individual basis, thus ensuring a more private nature, or alternatively, it can be developed as part of a community-level strategy. This form of assistance is considered more relevant to the experiences of victims in accordance with their cultural background and utilises positive norms within a community to reduce the likelihood of violence occurring (Cuesta-García et al., 2024; Murugan et al., 2023).

Limitations of the Study

It is imperative to acknowledge the limitations inherent in the interpretation of the findings of this review. Firstly, the evidence base is largely drawn from studies involving women who are victims of intimate partner violence, reflecting the primary focus of existing research. While this emphasis is comprehensible in view of the disproportionate burden of intimate partner violence experienced by women, it may limit the extent to which the identified help-seeking patterns can represent the experiences of male victims and other under-represented population groups. Furthermore, the present review focuses specifically on heterosexual relationships, which limits the applicability of these findings to individuals in same-sex relationships or relationships involving gender diversity, whose help-seeking experiences may be influenced by different social, cultural, and structural factors.

Secondly, the present review is constrained to studies retrieved from Scopus, PubMed and Google Scholar, as well as publications from the last five years. Despite the comprehensive scope of these databases, which encompasses a vast array of social science literature, it is important to note that studies which have been indexed in other relevant databases or published outside the specified timeframe may not have been included.

Moreover, given that this is a scoping review, the primary objective is to map and synthesise the extant evidence, as opposed to conducting a comprehensive assessment of methodological quality or estimating the strength of relationships between studies. Consequently, these findings should be interpreted as a general overview of current knowledge and emerging themes regarding help-seeking among victims of IPV, rather than as definitive evidence regarding effectiveness or causal relationships. It is recommended that future reviews consider incorporating additional databases, broader populations, and formal quality assessment procedures with a view to strengthening the completeness and robustness of the evidence base.

Recommendations for Future Research

This scoping review underscores the intricacy and variability of the process of seeking assistance among victims of intimate partner violence. The pursuit of help is influenced by a multitude of individual, relational, sociocultural, and systemic factors. These findings emphasise the significance of culturally responsive support systems and the complementary roles of informal and formal networks in facilitating access to psychological and social support. While the identified themes provide a comprehensive overview of the current evidence, they essentially reflect the perspectives represented in the existing literature. As such, they should be interpreted within the context of the studies reviewed.

The decision to seek help from victims of intimate partner violence can be understood through a range of psychological dynamics. These include personal perceptions of self-worth, attachment to the perpetrator, and the presence or absence of normalisation and stigma within the social environment. These dynamics subsequently influence an individual's decision to seek help (whether formal or informal), or to delay or refrain from seeking help altogether. The present study offers insights into the necessity of enhancing the listening skills and empathy of informal helpers, who can serve as a robust alternative for assisting victims of domestic violence. This enhanced capacity can subsequently be developed into community-level strategies.

It is recommended that future research endeavours extend the existing evidence base by incorporating under-represented groups, notably male victims and individuals across a range of relationship contexts. Additionally, it is advised that the exploration of experiences in seeking help be expanded to encompass a more diverse array of cultural backgrounds. A systematic review incorporating formal quality assessments could also assist in clarifying the strength and consistency of the existing evidence, thereby enabling the development of policy narratives for formal support for those affected. From a pragmatic standpoint, initiatives designed to enhance the efforts to seek assistance should focus on fortifying culturally sensitive formal services while leveraging informal support networks. These networks frequently function as the primary point of contact for individuals grappling with intimate partner violence.

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