

# Intimate Partner Violence: Beliefs and Psychological Predictors of Intentions to Intervene Among the Swedish General Public

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Department of Psychology, 2016

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Avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i psykologi, som med vederbörligt tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs Universitet kommer att offentligen försvaras fredagen den 27 maj 2016 kl 10.00 i sal F1, Psykologiska institutionen, Haraldsgatan 1, Göteborg.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor Enrique Gracia, Department of Social Psychology, University of Valencia, Spain

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Föreliggande uppsats grundar sig på följande tre artiklar:

- I. Alfredsson, H., Ask, K., & von Borgstede, C. (2014). Beliefs about intimate partner violence: A survey of the Swedish general public. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 57, 57-64. doi: 10.1111/sjop.12254
- II. Alfredsson, H., Ask, K., & von Borgstede, C. (2014). Motivational and cognitive predictors of the propensity to intervene against intimate partner violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 29, 1877-1893. doi: 10.1177/0886260513511696
- III. Alfredsson, H., Ask, K., & von Borgstede, C. (2016). "If no one else, then why should I?" *The effect of social norms on the propensity to intervene against intimate partner violence*. Unpublished manuscript



**Abstract**

Alfredsson, H. (2016). *Intimate Partner Violence: Beliefs and Psychological Predictors of Intentions to Intervene Among the Swedish General Public*. Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is considered a global public health issue. Most people disapprove of partner-related abuse, yet are disinclined to personally intervene in order to stop the violence. Public interventions are important for the prevention of IPV, but little is known concerning psychological antecedents of public intentions to intervene. The aim of this thesis was to explore beliefs concerning IPV (Study I), to examine the psychological predictors of propensity to intervene against IPV (Study II), and to experimentally test the causal effect of descriptive social norms on intentions to intervene (Study III). Data for the three studies were collected through web-based surveys that were distributed to adults in the Swedish general population. In **Study I**, respondents estimated on average that IPV exists in 24% of all Swedish relationships and considered psychological violence to be the most frequent type of abuse. Approximately half of the respondents believed that IPV is equally distributed across demographic groups, while persons with low socio-economic status, non-European immigrants, inhabitants of suburban areas and people in the age range of 35-49 were regarded as particularly vulnerable to IPV. Respondents held IPV victims partially responsible for the violence, believing, for example, that victims contribute to the abuse by acting provocatively. Eight out of ten respondents described at least one intervention strategy they would consider using in a real-life scenario, although the reported strategies were mainly limited to talking to the victim and/or the perpetrator. Overall, female respondents displayed a greater awareness of the magnitude of IPV, victims' vulnerability, and available intervention options compared to male respondents. The findings suggest that the Swedish public needs to be better informed about IPV and specifically regarding available intervention options and victims' vulnerability to the violence. In **Study II**, motivational predictors were found to account for the largest proportion of variation in respondents' propensity to intervene. Thus, feeling morally obligated to intervene and experiencing negative emotions in relation to IPV may be particularly important for the formation of intentions to intervene. Cognitive predictors accounted for a smaller, yet significant, proportion of the explained variance in propensity to intervene. Considering IPV to be a prevalent problem in society and not attributing solution responsibility only to the offender were associated with stronger intentions to intervene. In **Study III**, participants first completed a web-based survey assessing the strength of their personal norms related to intervening and a pre-manipulation measure of their propensity to intervene. Two weeks later, participants were randomly assigned to watch one of three short film sequences portraying an outdoor male-to-female physical case of IPV. Descriptive social norms were manipulated so that the film either showed (a) a bystander intervening, (b) a bystander not intervening, or (c) no visible bystander. A second questionnaire assessed a post-manipulation measure of participants' propensity to intervene and dispositional self-monitoring (i.e., inclination to adjust their behavior to perceived social demands). As predicted, participants exposed to a non-intervention social norm reported a decreased propensity to intervene. Thus, intervention rates may be reduced by social norms signaling that people do not intervene against IPV. Moreover, personal norms and self-monitoring appeared to reliably promote intentions to intervene. The current thesis contributes to the existing IPV literature, which lacks a clear picture with regard to common beliefs concerning IPV and factors that may inhibit or promote people's intentions to intervene. Such knowledge is essential for the design of intervention programs aiming at improving public intervention rates.

*Keywords:* public perceptions, intimate partner violence, propensity to intervene, social and personal norms, negative affective response

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