Women's and men's status: Revisiting the relationship between gender equality and intimate partner violence against women in Europe.

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Keywords

Gender-based violence, Violence against women, Intimate partner violence, European Union, 'Nordic Paradox'; Male privilege.

Introduction
While initially several authors understood violence against women as an expression of gender inequality (Daly, 1978; Brownmiller, 1975 and Dobash & Dobash, 1979), Yllö's (1984) empirical findings suggested the opposite. These opposing findings fostered a heated ongoing discussion on the relationship between gender (in)equality and Intimate Partner Violence Against Women (IPVAW). The 'Nordic Paradox' constitutes a new phase in this debate for the European setting. While many scholars addressed this debate directly or indirectly (Sanz-Barbero et al., 2018; Ivert et al., 2019; Gracia et al., 2019; Permanyer and Gómez-Casillas, 2020; Humbert et al., 2021), other equally interesting debates were left aside. One of those important debates entailed the confrontation of Marxist feminist theoretical positions claiming that women's absolute status deems more important than gender gaps, stressing women's economic status as the key aspect leading to a reduction of victimization. In addition, and surprisingly, men's status has been virtually absent in this debate, despite the relevance it may have in shaping perpetrators behaviours which essentially triggers IPVAW. Most importantly, we posit here the *Male privilege* hypothesis which states that women are "allowed" to increase their status if men do not experience losses in their status.

This paper has a three-fold theoretical objective. First, to test the backlash versus ameliorative hypothesis regarding women's relative status (on the macro-level). Second, to test the Marxist Feminist hypothesis regarding women's absolute status (on both the macro- and micro-level). Third, to propose and test the *Male privilege* hypothesis as a theoretical mechanism combining insights of backlash and ameliorative perspectives. In addition, this paper has methodological contributions: First, we use an improved measure of IPVAW, introducing a repetition sensitive indicator of current partner IPVAW instead of a prevalence indicator that does not differentiate between chronic and episodic violence (see Permanyer & Gómez-Casillas, 2020). Second, we follow previous contributions (Gómez-Casillas, 2018; Permanyer & Gómez-Casillas, 2020) highlighting that it is conceptually relevant to differentiate IPVAW that occurred in the past, perpetrated by the *previous* partner, from IPVAW perpetrated by *current* partners (Permanyer & Gómez-Casillas, 2020)[1]. By using a repetition-sensitive indicator we account for violence chronicity and by taking into account IPVAW perpetrated by the *current* partner we accurately assess violent victimization occurring in the present. The third methodological contribution is that we decompose a mainstream gender gap indicator (the EIGE's Gender Equality Index) (see Permanyer, 2015) into a gender gap indicator *stricto sensu* versus a component of welfare/achievement. The frequently used EIGE indicator combined the gender gap with achievement levels, which is misleading. We expect that it would be only achievement that would matter for IPVAW levels and not the gender gap as such. We conduct multilevel analyses using data from the European Union's Violence Against Women survey (EU-VAW survey hereafter).

Hypotheses
1. A positive (be it misleading) impact of EIGE's GEI index on repetitive IPVAW.
2. No impact of the relative *stricto sensu* component of EIGE's GEI index on repetitive IPVAW.
3. A negative impact of women's achievement component of the EIGE's GEI index on IPVAW (mainly due to women's achievement in the work and money dimension of the GEI index).
4. A negative impact of men's achievement component of the EIGE's GEI index on IPVAW.

Data, Measures, and Method

We used data from the FRA's EU-VAW survey (FRA, 2015) of women who declared to have a heterosexual orientation. The initial sample of heterosexual women having a partner (whether

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[1] In contrast, higher IPVAW prevalence measured in the 'mainstream' way perpetrated by any current or former partner and suffered by women during their life, could mean that union formation and dissolution occur more often, that women's probabilities to escape a violent relationship are higher, or that men's probabilities to reoffend a new partner are higher

they are living together or not) is 30284. The total analytical sample exists of 27195 women (about 10% of all women are dropped because of missing values on one or more of the variables to be analysed).

Dependent variable
The dependent variable is the repetition-sensitive indicator measuring physical or/and sexual violence perpetrated by *current* partner (Permanyer & Gómez-Casillas, 2020). The survey asks women if they suffer specific forms of violence victimization using a modified version of the Conflict Tactic Scale and if they did, they are asked if they suffered it once, two to five times, or six or more times (see Table 1). The thus constructed repetition sensitive indicator ranges between 0 and 100; 0 indicates no violence victimization and 100 that the woman has suffered every form of violence in the highest frequency (see also Permanyer & Gómez-Casillas, 2020).
We have to focus on current partner victimization because in the EU-VAW survey we do not know the number of previous partners, and thus women with few previous partners have had a lower probability of experiencing IPV than those with more previous partners.

Independent variables
Apart from important individual-level variables that have been proven to be related to IPVAW, we include the following contextual variables.

Gender Equality Index (GEI): the stricto sensu component
We first assess the impact of EIGE's Gender Equality index (EIGE, 2021a) in violence victimization using the indicator as proposed by EIGE slightly changing it to bound from 0 (full inequality) to 1 (full equality). Following, we decompose the index into two components of which the first one is the Gender Equality Index *stricto sensu*, based on the 31 input indicators used by EIGE (following Permanyer's (2015) methodology for 2012; see EIGE, 2017: Annex 1, not shown in this extended abstract due to lack of space). This newly created index ranges from 0 to 1, meaning 0 full inequality and 1 full equality.

The welfare component
In addition, we generate a welfare index focusing on the average welfare for both women and men. This index considers each average indicator score for women and men as provided by EIGE's Gender Database. The process of turning the Gender Equality Index into an overall welfare index is challenging because certain indicators are not relevant for overall welfare or impossible to assess achievement because they are measuring a gap between women and men (e.g. in the domain of 'power'). For the construction of this welfare index, we use the same aggregation as for the gender gap index *stricto sensu* and it thus ranges between 0 to 1, meaning 0 no achievement and 1 full achievement in women's status.

Women's and men's absolute status and the work and money composite indicator.
To accurately reflect the early Marxist feminist position, we created an Absolute Status index for women for the work and money domains. Similarly, we created the Absolute Status index for men, to test the *Male privilege* hypothesis. These indexes range from 0 to 1 and are interpreted as the previous indexes.

Analytical strategy
We perform multivariate analyses using stepwise multilevel linear regression models. Preliminary, we conducted an individual-level analysis in which we at least include age, the number of children, and women's employment status (although insignificant) to control for possible composition effects in these variables. Next, previous research has demonstrated that women's education, child abuse, marital status, residential area type, and subjective perception of the income situation of the household are impacting upon IPVAW (Ivert et al. 2019; Humbert et al. 2021). We also look at duration of the relationship as repetition would increase in longer relationships; relative earnings; and an indication of power with respect to consumption patterns in the couple which shows couple's egalitarian decision making. Finally, since the focus of this paper is mainly on the role of men, we take into account *his* educational level and employment status, as well as the extent to which her partner drinks alcohol (see also Humbert et al., 2021).

Our final analyses cover seven models: we test (1) the impact of EIGE's gender gap, (2) Gender Equality Index *stricto sensu*; (3) overall achievement; (4) women's absolute status (5) men's absolute status; (6) women's absolute employment and financial status and (7) men's absolute employment and financial status. We also test the robustness of these results to suggested methodological problems with the survey (e.g. the way in which the first contact with the respondent for the interview was done –face-to-face, by telephone, or by letter), as well as two potential confounding macro-level variables (available beds in shelters and homicide rates).

Results

Table 1 presents the models mentioned above. Results at the individual level (not shown here) are stable across the seven models. The results at individual level indicate that women are more likely to endure more repetitive violence from their current partner if they suffered (more often) violence during their childhood, they are lower educated, belong to a minority, or live in a household where they find it difficult to cope with the present income. Regarding the partner, women suffer more repetitive violence when their partner is lower educated, is out of the labour market (homemaker, unemployed, or disabled) and gets drunk frequently. Shorter relationships and not cohabiting (previously), as well as those relationships that are more egalitarian in terms of equal say in how to spend income tend to be protective for women.

On the contextual level, there is little variance to be explained: Only 0.9% of the total individual and macro-level variance takes place at the context-level. All our macro-indicators of interest explain a little bit of this contextual-level variation, of which men's absolute status explains the most (33% of the total variance at the macro-level as assessed by an empty model).

The first model (M1) shows a negative and significant relationship between EIGE's Gender Equality Index (merging gaps and overall achievement) and violence repetition; (p-value<0.01). Despite observing a small effect (b=-2.273)[2], this is in the opposite direction of the 'Nordic Paradox' prediction, which suggested that increased levels of equality would go together with more IPVAW (i.e. a backlash effect). The next model (M2), however, shows that our corrected gender inequality index has no significant impact on violence repetition (b=-2.153). In contrast, overall welfare (M3) has a negative and statistically significant impact (b=-1.662; p-value<0.001). These results indicate that the overall welfare component is leading EIGE's GEI in explaining violence victimization and not the gender gap *stricto sensu*. As we expected: men's absolute status (M5) shows a stronger effect (b=-2.352; p-value<0.001) than women's absolute status (M4; b=-1.481; p-value<0.01), implying the importance of the role of men's status in society for IPVAW. In contrast, when we assess Men and Women 'work' and 'money' composite indicator, we notice the opposite, M6 shows that the effect of women's effect (-2.138; p<0.01) is larger than men's (-1.918; p<0.01), as shown in M7.

Discussion

Previous research analysing the relationship between gender equality and violence victimization using FRA's EU-VAW survey data and the EIGE's Gender Equality Index (Ivert et al., 2019; Sanz-Barbero et al., 2018; Humbert et al., 2021) show either inconclusive findings or a positive relationship, thus supporting the backlash hypothesis (i.e. the 'Nordic Paradox'). In contrast to these previous results, we find a negative and statistically significant relationship between EIGE's Gender Equality Index and IPVAW. Therefore, our improved methodological approach (using a repetitive sensitive indicator of current partner IPVAW) shows support for the *ameliorative* hypothesis.

However, and more importantly, when we decompose EIGE's Gender Equality Index into two indexes, one that measures the gender gap *stricto sensu* and one that measures achievement, our results suggest different theoretical implications. On the one hand, we find no support for the ameliorative nor the backlash hypothesis when using the gender equality index *stricto sensu*. On the other hand, we find that a country's overall welfare indicates a stronger negative effect on violence repetition. In addition, male's absolute status has a larger and stronger impact than

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[2] A one standard deviation change in the original GEI index goes together with (.086*-2.273) = -.20 points difference on the repetitive partner violence scale (which ranges from 0 to 86 and has a standard deviation of 4.4). The maximum effect that the original GEI index can explain is (-.80-0.50)*-2.273) = -.68 points on the IPVAW index, which is still very little compared to the standard deviation.

women's absolute status. Men's overall achievement has the largest effect size, with a maximum change between countries to be observed of 0.94 on the repetitive IPVAW indicator (its standard deviation is 4.4).

These findings support Marxist feminist theories which indicate that women's status, and more specifically economic and employment-related status reduces IPVAW. Improved economic and employment status of women decreases women's dependence on abusive partners. Dugan et al. (2003) state that beyond women's specific status and circumstances, just envisioning the potential access to resources may prevent or encourage women from leaving threatening relationships. Mirroring contributions in the field of union dissolution (Van Damme and Kalmijn, 2014), it could be argued that both actual and expected economic costs of leaving a pernicious relationship seem to matter.

Finally, our study adds to previous research by providing evidence for the *male privilege* hypothesis that we develop in the paper, stating that women are allowed to conquest rights if males' welfare is not hampered.

Conclusions

Our results neither univocally support to the backlash nor the ameliorative hypotheses. They do indicate, however, two other important findings: first, women's status, and especially, women's financial and employment-related status are factors that may lower IPVAW, thus providing support to Marxist feminist theoretical positions; second, and most importantly, men's status turns out to be key to lessening victimization, a finding which supports our *Male privilege* hypothesis.

Table 1 *Experience of Repeated IPVAW for women who are currently partnered. Multilevel Linear Regression on continuous Repeated IPVAW experience variable (Minimum 0 No IPV, maximum 100 Many repeated IVP experiences)*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
EIGE's GEI	-2.273**						
GEI *stricto sensu* component		-2.153					
GEI Welfare component			-1.662***				
GEI Women's abs. status				-1.481**			
GEI Men's abs. status					-2.352***		
GEI Women's abs. status work and money domain						-2.138**	
GEI Men's abs. status work and money domain							-1.918**
sd country level	0.34	0.37	0.32	0.34	0.31	0.34	0.34
sd individual level	4.13	4.13	4.13	4.13	4.13	4.13	4.13
icc	0.007***	0.008***	0.006***	0.007***	0.006***	0.007***	0.007***
BIC	154831	154835	154827	154830	154826	154830	154830
N	27195	27195	27195	27195	27195	27195	27195

Notes:
* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$
Results are controlled for women's age, frequency of child abuse experience, women's and partner's educational level and employment status, degree of urbanization, number of children, belonging to a minority, earning inequality in the couple, difficulty to live on present income, relationship status (living together, romantic relationship, or separated), say in how to spend income, union duration, frequency partner is drunk)
Source: Authors' calculations based on the FRA's survey on Violence Against Women Survey dataset, 2012 and other sources.