

## Episode 2

# "Understanding Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence: Myths vs. Reality"

### Transcript

#### Featuring this episode:

- The **narrator** (voice of Dylan Power)
- The **protagonist** Anna (voice of Aine Hanrahan)
- **Nicole van Gelder**(Victim Support Netherlands)
- **Cristina Soeiro**, (APAV- Victim Support Portugal)
- **Maria Nassar**, (Victim Support France)
- **Ramunė Jakstiene**, (Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania)
- **Daniel Cotrim**, (APAV- Victim Support Portugal)

### Transcript Episode 2

(Music)

#### Protagonist

Does the Train Only Pass Once?

(Music)

#### Narrator

Welcome to the 2gether4victims podcast

[Soundscapes: train, stations, announcements]

#### Protagonist

A journey through abundance, plunge and shadow to new understandings, heights and depths, unexpected discoveries or recoveries.

#### Narrator

A journey by train around Europe through the complexities of coordinating and harmonizing support services for victims of gender-based violence.

This podcast is focused on the latest developments in the field of gender-based violence services in the European Union.

This journey, shaped by Victim Support Europe, the leading European organization advocating for the rights and services of all crime victims, explores how eleven partner organizations in the 2gether4victims project are working together with one goal: improving services for victims of gender-based and domestic violence.

Along the way, we'll examine their current efforts and how these actions are paving the way for harmonized, gendered support services for victims across Europe.

Our 2gether4victims podcast takes listeners on a rail journey through seven countries: Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Portugal. And the journey doesn't end there—it will cross even more borders...

### **Protagonist**

If you work with victims of crime, have been a victim yourself, or know someone who has, please, find your seat. You'll learn about the latest advancements in victims' rights across Europe.

### **Narrator**

Our podcast train is funded by the CERV program of the European Commission. Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

(Music: exit)

### **Welcome to our episode, "Understanding Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence: Myths vs. Reality."**

In this episode, we'll explore common misunderstandings surrounding gender-based violence and domestic abuse, featuring insights from experts in the field.

We will tackle prevalent myths, such as the belief that if it were that bad, a woman would simply leave her abusive partner. The reality is far more complex; many women stay in abusive relationships for a multitude of reasons, including love, fear for their safety or their children's, financial dependence, and emotional manipulation.

We'll also discuss the misconception that domestic abuse always involves physical violence. In truth, domestic abuse can manifest in various forms, including emotional, financial, and sexual abuse, highlighting that it's not limited to just physical harm.

Another myth we'll examine is the dangerous notion that victims provoke their abusers. This misconception shifts blame away from the perpetrator and reinforces harmful stereotypes about gender roles.

We'll delve into the idea that domestic abuse is merely a private family issue rather than a significant social concern. The reality is that domestic violence has far-reaching impacts on society, including healthcare costs and long-term psychological effects on victims and their families.

In addition, we'll explore myths surrounding the prevalence of domestic abuse, such as the belief that it isn't common or that women are more likely to be attacked by strangers than by partners. Research shows that one in three women in the EU has experienced physical and/or sexual violence, and victims are far more likely to be harmed by someone they know. We will clarify the concept of "emprise", emprise in French law, exploring its significance in understanding the dynamics of control and coercion in abusive relationships. Additionally, we'll examine the often-overlooked issue of stalking and how it intersects with domestic violence, revealing the complexities that contribute to these forms of abuse. By sharing these vital truths, we aim to empower our listeners to understand the realities of domestic violence and support survivors more effectively.

(Music)

Our main character is Anna. As you already know, an independent podcaster, sound artist, and a survivor of domestic abuse.

[Soundscape: train]

She is travelling by train across Europe to investigate best practices and initiatives that support vulnerable populations, all with the aim of making the world a better place.

[Soundscape: typing]

### Protagonist

3, 2, 1... started

As my train pulls into the charming city of Nevers, often called the "Burgundian city of dukes," I can't help but feel excited.

(Music: cinematic)

While it may not be as famous as Dijon or Beaune, Nevers has plenty to offer, from its rich historical heritage to captivating museums, stunning natural landscapes, delectable food, and of course, some of the finest wines around.

Today, I'm on my way to the office of France Victimes, where I'll be meeting **Maria Nassar**, a Criminal Jurist with the organization.

### **Narrator**

France Victimes is a network that brings together 130 victim support associations and employs around 1,450 staff and volunteers. They operate 850 victim welcome offices across various locations, including courts, legal advice centers, police stations, and hospitals, providing support to around 320,000 victims each year.

Let's join Anna as she arrives at the France Victimes office. She's greeted warmly by Maria, and they head to a quiet room to dive into their conversation.

### **Protagonist**

Maria, I'm thrilled to have you here today because the concept of *emprise*—this idea of psychological hold in domestic abuse—is still so misunderstood. People often confuse it with other forms of control, and I'm hoping you can help us untangle the myths. To start, could you walk us through how *emprise* is defined in French law and what makes it distinct from other forms of abuse?

### **Maria Nassar**

00:06:29

Psychological hold is a concept that's increasingly recognized, though it's often mistranslated into English and confused with coercive control. There's still some confusion between the legal concept of psychological hold and the strategies used by abusers, highlighting the importance of clarifying these terms to better understand and support victims. This clarity plays a significant role in assessing the violence experienced by victims.

### **Protagonist**

It's fascinating how you highlighted the growing recognition of psychological hold but also the ongoing confusion with coercive control. Given how intertwined these concepts can seem, could you walk us through the key difference between psychological hold and coercive control?

### **Maria Nassar**

00:07:15

Well, when we talk about domestic violence, we often think of physical abuse. But psychological hold focuses on the victim's state, referring to their psychological condition marked by a loss of autonomy and emotional dependency on the abuser, fueled by emotional manipulation. It's about being deeply influenced or controlled by another person. However, coercive control refers to the abusers' actions - a mix of threats, psychological, and sometimes physical violence, aiming to dominate the victim's everyday life.

So, the hold focuses on the victim's state, and coercive control concerns the abuser's actions. These acts reinforce gender inequality and, most importantly, violate individual freedom.

Now let's imagine a situation where a doctor or other healthcare professional encounters a victim of domestic violence. The doctor's role is not to judge or impose anything, but in France, thanks to Article 226-14 of the Criminal Code, doctors and professionals can report the situation to the public prosecutor if the victim's life is in immediate danger and they are under hold, even if the victims can't ask for help themselves. What's important here is that the doctor must get the victim's consent. If that's not possible, they still need to inform the victim that they've made this report. This approach aims to better protect victims, even when they're unable to ask for help themselves due to what we call psychological hold, or being under influence, a form of psychological control that paralyzes the victim in a toxic relationship. It's what allows the abuser to maintain control. That's why the law is interested in this phenomenon, which isn't limited to domestic violence. It's also found, for example, in workplace harassment, when someone is "under the hold" of their harasser.

### Protagonist

I get it

### Maria Nassar

00:09:21

This change in the French Criminal Law gives healthcare professionals more tools to act, even when the victim can't do so themselves, which is a big step forward in protecting vulnerable people.

### Protagonist

So, that distinction between the victim's internal state and the abuser's external actions is so compelling. I imagine proving such a nuanced concept in court must be incredibly challenging. What types of evidence are typically used to demonstrate that someone is under psychological hold, and what hurdles do professionals face when presenting this evidence?

### Maria Nassar

00:09:58

Today, forensic doctors are asked to assess the state of psychological hold on the victim. This includes, for example, noting signs of isolation, as we all see as professionals — when the victims tell us that they are no longer in contact with their friends, family, or colleagues. These are elements often observed during the Victim Vulnerability Assessment, the EVVI. When victims don't undergo a forensic examination within medical-legal units, it's during

the EVVI that we can detect psychological hold in victims and determine their needs, especially throughout the legal process, the criminal proceedings.

We also see that the victim often excuses the abuser, justifies their behavior, and believes that everything is their fault. They make decisions they wouldn't make if they weren't under psychological hold, like staying home and restricting their movements.

Psychological assessment in cases of domestic violence also allows for an evaluation of psychological hold. And during the EVVI, we must describe these factors in the questionnaire to determine if this hold is present or not. We notice that the victim loses their critical thinking, lacks personal opinions, and continues to give the relationship a chance.

Fortunately, progress is being made. Judges are becoming more educated on the issue of psychological hold. That said, everything still relies on judges and prosecutor training on this topic. For example, also a statement written by a psychologist can even be a key element in proving psychological hold.

We also see that the withdrawal of a complaint by the victim is often a clear indicator of psychological hold. It's becoming more recognized in procedures: today, even if the victim withdraws their complaint, prosecutions may continue if there's evidence that they're under psychological hold. And sometimes, the victim may minimize or even refuse to speak about the violence. This is a real challenge for professionals and underscores the importance of new practices and training to better understand and support these situations.

### **Protagonist**

It's heartbreaking to hear how deeply the hold can erode a person's autonomy and sense of worth. The way victims become paralyzed by fear and self-blame shows just how insidious this control is. How does this psychological and social impact shape their daily lives, and what challenges do they face in trying to break free from it?

### **Maria Nassar**

00:12:47

Psychologically, the hold is a form of domination by one person over another and can occur in different types of relationships: within a couple, but also in friendly, family or professional relationships. The dynamics of control are based on a balance of power between dominant and dominated, often so subtle that the victim does not even realize that he or she is under control. But recognizing this reality is the first step out of it – a long, painful and complex process.

For the victim, psychological hold means deep devaluation. They find themselves paralyzed by fear, pressure, and tension to the point where they can no longer think of themselves. Gradually, they fade away, to the point of believing they have no worth and that no one cares about them. And this isolation is no accident; it's orchestrated by the abuser, who

manages to make them feel ashamed and guilty for what they've become. Over time, the victims imagine they're responsible for everything that happens, even when they're the ones being assaulted.

There are moments when the abuser shows some tenderness. These moments, though rare, often represent a glimmer of hope for the victim—the belief that they might change. But this alternation between violence and tenderness is just another trap.

### **Protagonist**

Given how widespread and subtle this influence can be, I wonder, are there any typical profiles of victims and perpetrators? Or is the dynamic more complex and varied?

### **Maria Nassar**

00:14:30

Um, no, there is no specific profile for the victim under hold. However, the methods of manipulation vary, but all aim to isolate, make dependent, and control. As for the perpetrator, several profiles may emerge sometimes, they are people who have experienced emotional neglect, sometimes «spoiled children» or that used to get everything. Sometimes mental disorders, such as perverse or paranoid tendencies, may be present. But what is constant, however, is that the abuser considers that the problem always comes from the other.

One of the frequent strategies of the perpetrator is to make the victim look “crazy”. He highlights his emotional reactions, which are nevertheless provoked by the violence suffered. This reversal of guilt is so powerful that the victims eventually doubt themselves, believing they are responsible for the violence they suffer. And over time, they come to believe that this is indeed all their fault.

Being under influence leads to a real “cancellation” of the victims, who end up losing their identity and no longer recognize themselves. This invisible process makes the hold difficult to identify for those outside, but it is essential to talk about it, understand it, and act against it.

### **Protagonist**

How has the French judicial system evolved to better understand and judge situations of power, especially in cases of domestic violence?

### **Maria Nassar**

00:16:02

Today, there is a major evolution in the French judicial system's understanding and judgment of coercive control. We finally go from "Why isn't she leaving?" to "What did he do to get her under control or under hold?". This change in perspective is very important

because judges begin to question the abuser’s behavior, analyzing the psychological power they exert, and the concept of psychosocial coercive control is finally integrated into judgments. When an abuser says, "I love you" and, the next minute, "I’m going to kill you", it’s a violent behavior that can unfortunately lead to femicide.

The judges repeat today that they want to judge better by understanding coercive control... better known to better judge. This approach aims to understand the underlying dynamics of domestic violence, making justice more attentive to victims.

It is important to refer victims of domestic violence to psychologists and sophrologists, especially as getting out of control is a long and complex process. Training of judicial staff is essential, as it is not necessary to judge the victim or advise them to leave their violent partner without understanding the issues. Instead of telling the victim to leave the abuser, it is necessary to adopt an empathic approach, without judgment, that considers the complexity of their situation.

[Soundscape: pen writing on paper]

Requests for psychological evaluations specifically to assess the hold may be important.

### **Protagonist**

And what happens when children are involved?

### **Maria Nassar**

00:17:40

Well, the judicial system must stop thinking that a father who is violent toward the mother is necessarily a good father.

The judicial system must recognize that maintaining good relations with a violent father revictimizes the mother and prevents her from grieving, forcing her to remain under the hold of her abuser, especially when children are involved. This perpetuates a power of imbalance, where the abuser still exerts his power, thereby endangering the child’s safety.

Once the violence is recognized, it’s essential to no longer impose co-parenting.

So, all in all, this concept of control, although invisible, is now at the heart of changes in protection and justice for victims of violence. We are moving towards better understanding, fairer support and concrete actions to free the victims.

I hope that this invisible violence of the hold is now clearer to you.

(Music: Introspective)

[Soundscape: train and typing ]

### **Protagonist**

3, 2, 1... started (pause, take a breath).

Reflecting on my conversation with Maria, I'm struck by how crucial it is to understand the concept of "emprise" and its far-reaching implications. It's clear that coercive control often goes unnoticed, yet it can deeply affect a victim's psyche and life choices. This discussion has reinforced my belief that raising awareness about these complexities is essential in supporting survivors and dismantling the myths surrounding domestic violence.

(Music: Southern European)

Another day, and here I am in beautiful Portugal, drawn in by the sweet aroma of praline and vanilla—a Pastel de Nata calling my name. As I make my way to Victim Support Portugal (APAV). I'm thrilled to meet Daniel Cotrim, a psychologist who has served as a technical advisor to APAV's board since 2001. Daniel leads the organization's work on domestic and gender-based violence, as well as equality. Since 2005, he has also been the technical supervisor for the national network of shelters for women and children fleeing domestic violence. With extensive experience supporting victims of crime, particularly women and children affected by domestic abuse, Daniel provides training on victim support, personal development, and domestic violence. Today, he's here to challenge more myths surrounding gender-based violence and domestic abuse.

### **Narrator**

A note to our listeners: APAV is a pioneering non-governmental organization established in 1990, dedicated to providing comprehensive support to victims of crime, as well as their families and friends. They've been at the forefront of promoting victims' rights and offering specialized services tailored to the unique needs of those affected by violence.

With a national network of 83 community-based services, APAV is staffed by trained professionals and volunteers who are committed to delivering confidential and free victim support. Their services range from emotional and psychological support to legal information and practical guidance, ensuring that victims receive holistic care.

### **Protagonist**

Thank you so much for having me today, Daniel. Let's dive right in—can you share with us the underlying roots of domestic and gender-based violence?

### **Daniel Cotrim**

00:21:26

It's a pleasure to be here talking about the myths, talking about domestic violence and gender-based violence. Firstly, let me tell you about the roots of domestic and gender violence against people and mostly against women, because we are talking about the

problem that affects mainly women in all the world. United Nations talk about 80% of women are victims of domestic violence, intimate partnership violence or gender-based violence, and it has many forms and many types of violence.

The first is a clear violation of human rights, domestic violence and gender-based violence because your dignity, your freedom, your democracy is put at risk when you are a victim of this type of crime. Then you have also the way that people look at domestic violence or gender abuse, and they tend to normalize this kind of violence and to put it in the frames as sensing that it's cultural that it's part of the society. For us, for me, that's wrong, okay. Because if you continue to analyze this reality with the cultural eyes, you are going not to see everything that it's around gender-based violence. And the other aspect is that gender based violence and domestic violence are transversal to all people. It affects women, men, children, elderly people, migrant people, LGBTQ plus people. It affects people of all ethnicities, of all religions. Okay, so it's not an irony what I am going to say. That it's the most democratic of all the crimes that we know, okay, because it affects everybody.

### Protagonist

Of the biggest myths I've encountered surrounding gender-based violence and domestic violence is if it was that bad, she'd leave. Then you'll love to hear your insights on this. Can you explain why victims of domestic abuse often find it so difficult to leave an abusive relationship?

### Daniel Cotrim

00:24:09

That's an important meet. We listen about that meets all the time and it is important to debunk, to destroy this idea, this is the idea that people that the communities, even the victims, have sometimes about massive violence and about gender-based violence. This is the sentence that we hear mostly in court. If it was bad, you believe. If he or she was bad for you, you would grow out of that. But we are talking about a kind of violence that happens in the middle, in the center of an intimate relationship. It's not a theft, it's not a robbery. It's not easy to present a complaint or to go to the palace, to the police, to the court and, and talk about it. Okay, you are going to talk about something that is happening between the walls of your house. Between the walls of your home. So it's it's a crime that has to do with your intimacy.

We have to talk about the cycle of violence and the cycle of violence is perpetuated by the victim and by the abuser all the time. Sometimes I try to compare those people that don't live, that don't have violence in our relationships. Okay, in our intimate relationships, but we are not different from the victims. In this cycle of violence, I talk about hope, love and hate. Hope for me and hope for you is something important because it gives us strength to continue, to, to want to live in our relationships, okay? It gives us air to breathe. It's the

same thing to victims, but they have violence, In there in this context. So, they want to move forward also, but when they refer the situation to organizations, when NGO's, to courts, to to the police. They are asking for them to help the abuser. That's the hope they are trying to reach. And then you have hope is connected to love. My way and your way of seeing love, of feeling, love. It's different. Nobody has the same kind and the same type of love.

So victims also they don't have the same kind of love that I have, or that you have, but they are judge by the kind of love that they live. And that's incorrect. And that's why it's difficult for them to break the cycle because they are going to hear a lot of times if he or she doesn't love. Why did you stay there? Bitch you is not a form of love. Okay, so it's difficult for them. But love exists in my experience, in my professional experience, I talk about love with victims, women or men. And they talk about the love that they feel or that they felt about their abuser, okay. And that love is connected to fear. In my life, in my intimate relationship, fear is connected to the fear of being betrayed, betrayal, of not being able to love more or any more. Or to be afraid that you have a person doesn't love me anymore. Okay, that she or he is going or he is going out of the relation.

Okay, It's the same with the victims. They feel the same, but they have more fears than I. They have the fear of being killed. They have the fear of staying alone. They have the fear of someone is going to take their children away from them, that the community, the society, their families, are going to look to them and say you are a failure. Okay, so these are the fears and then fears connect also to hope again.

So, you have three and the feelings and they are all connected. This time, this hope, in my case, is maybe it's my fault. Maybe I'm incapable now of doing things right, but I'm going to do it well. I'm going to stop and to look to my relationship and to my partner and see what she or he wants with victims. It's the same. But hope it's another thing. Hope is giving another chance. Hope is thinking all the time that the abusive things that are happening inside the relation are the victim's fault. So the victim is giving another chance to the abuser, but also the victims are hoping that the system- and the system are NGOs, courts, police, the neighbors, the family- the victim is hoping that someone is being capable of look to the to the abuser and help him or help her. Because the victim wants the same that I want or the same that you want, to have a good intimate relationship, to have a relation that is strong, to have a family, okay.

[Soundscape: Birds chirping]

### Protagonist

As we've explored these myths today, I'm encouraged by Daniel flipping the script from questioning the victims to questioning perpetrators. I've come to realize just how crucial it is to challenge misconceptions surrounding gender-based violence. Each myth not only

distorts our understanding but also impacts the lives of those affected. By sharing the truth, we can empower survivors and create a more compassionate society that supports those in need.

[Soundscape: train station. Bells and train departing]

**Narrator**

00:31:34

As Anna continues her journey, she's heading toward the vibrant city of Utrecht, where she'll be meeting Nicole from Victim Support Netherlands. She's eager to learn more as she's introduced to Ramunė an associate professor from Mykolas Romeris University. Together, they'll be tackling several myths about gender based domestic violence and stalking.

**Protagonist**

Victim Support Netherlands is one of Europe's largest Victim Support services, assisting hundreds of thousands of crime victims each year.

**Nicole van Gelder**

00:32:06

Hey, welcome to our office Anna.

**Protagonist**

thank you.

**Nicole van Gelder**

00:32:10

I'm Nicole Van Gelder, a researcher here at Victim Support Netherlands. It's great to have you and let's dive into the important work that we're doing podcasting.

**Protagonist**

Nicole, you've chosen 2 myths to debunk for our podcast. Let's start with the first one. How would you debunk the "If it was that bad, she'd leave"?

**Nicole van Gelder**

00:32:31

It's definitely a myth because first of all, it can take a while before you realize that you're in an abusive relationship. You know, at the start of it, there may not be any signs of abuse at all or certain behaviors that at first seemed romantic maybe later looking back might seem

abusive, but it can take a while. And, of course, you fall in love with someone, you you love them. You want to be with them, you build a future and you know when you get to that point that you really invested in the relationship and that you have feelings for someone, it can be really hard to acknowledge that actually things are not going well. And it can be hard to to leave that partner, maybe you still love them, or maybe you have children together and you are afraid that you might lose your children when you leave your partner or report the violence. Or you feel like your kids have a right to parents and you feel like if you report the violence, maybe your kids would lose one parent if you know if they have to go to jail for example, and then there are a ton of other reasons.

So for example, feelings of fear, what might happen if I report this? Violence this abuse will I be believed? Will I get help? Will my partner maybe retaliate when he or she finds out. And also shame feelings of guilt. And of course, I want to stress, these victims have nothing to be ashamed of, and they certainly should not feel guilty for what's happening. But these feelings often do come into play for victims. So they can make it very hard to live if you think it's your own fault or if you are really ashamed of what's happening, it can be really hard to reach out for help and try and leave that relationship.

Also, I hear sometimes from women that they want the violence. Install, but they don't necessarily want the relationship to stop, so that's a different perspective as well. And then it can also be the case that you might not realize that you're in an abusive relationship because your partner isn't physically violent, or you might not know where you can go for help. You might be financially dependent on your partner and you know don't know how to to arrange a new home in that sense. Or you might be dependent on your partner for with regard to your residency status. Also, victims can often get isolated from their family and their friends, for example, so they might also feel like they have no one else besides their partner, and then are afraid to, to, leave them because then they don't have anyone else and they don't know where to go either.

So there are many, many reasons why it can be really hard to leave an abusive relationship, even though it is very, very bad. Furthermore, I want to stress as well that sometimes people feel like "Well, but if you don't leave that abusive partner, if the relationship ends then that solves it. You know then, then the violence will end as well" And unfortunately, that is definitely not always the case, because when a relationship ends, then sometimes the, the, violence the abuse can get even worse. For example, if your partner feels like well you have no right to leave me and I won't accept that. And they, they, will harass their, their, partners, their ex-partners, in this in this sense and maybe stalk them and maybe sometimes or well definitely sometimes it even ends fatally for the victims. So, it is very important to you to realize that there are many, many reasons why it can be very hard to leave an abusive relationship. And victims really need our support and understanding, so listen to them without any victim blaming, no judgment. Try to be there for them, even if

you sometimes don't understand why they cannot take certain steps, just let them know that you are there for them. That's most important.

### **Protagonist**

Thank you. Now about the second myth, domestic abuse always involves physical violence. How do you debunk that one?

### **Nicole van Gelder**

00:36:56

This is definitely a myth, because in reality, intimate partner violence can be experienced in person and online, and it has many faces. So, there are various types of violence and abuse that encompass intimate partner violence. So, for example, it can be psychological and emotional abuse, also coercive control, stalking, financial and economic abuse, sexual abuse, and then you also have physical abuse. And there are absolutely intimate partner violence situation where there is no physical violence whatsoever, but that doesn't mean that these types of relationships are any less abusive. So it is important to understand that psychological abuse, for example, is not less severe or less serious than physical abuse. And oftentimes in society, we probably have the idea that intimate partner violence needs to be something physical to be violence, but actually that is not the case.

And I've spoken to many women in, for example, the, the, research projects that I've conducted those women, actually more of them experience psychological abuse than that they experienced physical abuse. And they also said that, for example, when they had experienced psychological and physical abuse, some of them had, for example, said that, for example, if they had a broken nose, they they knew that he would leave eventually. But if someone really wrecked them as a person, you know their, their, personality, their, their spirit, their passion, their zest for life, that was severely negatively affected by the psychological abuse. They said that that took them way longer to heal and that they they still carry the scars. So, it is important to know that that actually, just because it isn't physical, that it is less severe for the victim. So, yeah, we might often think with the world's intimate partner violence, we might often associate that with injuries, wounds, bruises. But please do not forget about the other forms of violence and abuse that that are really relevant for victims to and that they want support for, but sometimes it's hard. It's hard for them to seek support or report the crime, because if they feel like, well, you know if I can show any physical signs, then who is going to believe me? What evidence do I have? Or for example, if they feel like "Well, then I must be experiencing something different than intimate partner violence because my partner doesn't hit me" Then it can be very hard for them to know what kind of situation they are in and to to understand that actually this is still intimate partner violence, even though your partner doesn't hit you. So it can also increase barriers to seek help if we do not adequately acknowledge that intimate partner

violence, is not always about physical violence. There are other types of violence that are not physical and that they also need adequate support and help for, and they deserve that. So just be careful. Be mindful that they are very different types of intimate partner violence. And be mindful that you don't accidentally, for example, minimize what a victim is experiencing. If they tell you that they are experiencing things in their relationships that in their relationships, that is, you know that they're not okay, but they are not physical abuse. Because like I said, the other types of abuse are not less severe or less serious, and people who experience intimate partner violence, whatever type it is, they need our support.

### Protagonist

Thank you so much Nicole. Now Ramunė, could you tell us a bit about yourself and explain why there are so many myths surrounding stalking?

### Ramunė Jakstiene

00:41:01

Hey, my name is **Ramunė Jakstiene**. I am an associate professor at Mykolas Romeris University in Lithuania. I will explain you the most prevalent myths related to stalking and will try to debunk them.

You may be wondering why are there so many myths related to stalking? Well, first stalking is a comparatively new phenomenon on the research agenda and in legislation. Therefore, it's still misunderstood and recognized and misinterpreted. Second, media often links stalking to bias beliefs about risks and victimization. And most importantly, social cultural beliefs regarding romantic pursuit, gender roles and intimacy will also help to perpetuate commonly held misconceptions about the nature of stalking. Evidence shows that stalking is still off, normalized, minimized and even romanticized through various cultural institutions.

### Protagonist

Thank you, Ramunė. It's lovely to meet you. Now let's explore the first stalking related myth. Stalking is just a problem for celebrities.

### Ramunė Jakstiene

00:42:13

Absolutely not true. This stereotype is supported by sensationalistic media coverage of true stories about superstars talking. For example, the case of Judith Foster when her stalker attempted to assassinate the president of USC to impress the famous actors. But research case, law, analysis and statistical data show that anyone can become a victim of stalking.

### Protagonist

Ramunė, I'm curious to hear your take on this. Stalkers are usually strangers. What can you tell us about that?

**Ramunė Jakstiene**

00:42:46

Oh yes, love with a stranger is often romanticized in popular culture. However, according to the data provided by law enforcement, in most cases women report stalking by their ex intimate partner. Therefore, stalking is a clearly gendered phenomenon. Breaking an intimate relationship is a strong risk factor to experience stalking.

**Protagonist**

Thank you, Ramunė. That's something I haven't thought about before. Can we tackle the next myth? Stalkers tend to be mentally disturbed and dangerous. What do you think of this one?

**Ramunė Jakstiene**

00:43:21

Not necessarily. Stalkers are frequently portrayed as slow or wired or deranged, obsessed, psychopathic, mentally ill, violent and cultural deviant individuals, reinforcing the idea that they are easy to identify and avoid. On the contrary, the demographic characteristics of stalkers are very diverse. And the behaviors are not always easy to detect and to prove, especially when they employ multiple disguise manipulative well thought out tactics that are very flexible and shift from one strategy to another.

**Protagonist**

What do you think about the myth that stalking is not that dangerous?

**Ramunė Jakstiene**

44:05

Unfortunately, it is due to several reasons. First, stalking is a pattern of repeated behaviors that are always intrusive, harassing, intimidating, usually causing fear, stress, anxiety and inconveniences. Second, stalking tends to escalate. The average duration of stalking behaviors is two years. Worse, stalking is associated with PTSD symptoms and victims and other long term adverse impacts on their mental health and social life, as well as physical harm and financial loss. Therefore, stalking is severe enough to reach the level of ultimate crime and criminalization of stalking is a clear trend.

**Protagonist**

For my last question, what do you think are the most effective measures to counter all these misconceptions about stalking?

**Ramunė Jakstiene**

00:45:03

Well, research shows that awareness raising, especially anti-stalking legislation and increased academic knowledge tend to decrease populations adherence to stalking myths thus stalking behaviors become more recognizable by victims themselves and law officials.

[Soundscape: Train station, typing]

**Protagonist**

3, 2, 1... started

(Music)

Okay. I just need a moment to reflect on everything I've learned during these days. I'm on the train leaving the Netherlands, and my mind is spinning. My conversations with Daniel in Portugal, and then with Nicole and Ramunė here in the Netherlands... they've left me with so much to think about.

When Daniel was talking about why victims don't just leave, it really struck me. The "If it was that bad, she'd leave" myth — it's so much more complicated than that. It's not just about the victim not wanting to leave; it's about fear, control, emotional manipulation. It's about being trapped, not just physically but mentally. I've heard that myth before but hearing him talk about it so directly made me realize how dangerous and simplistic that kind of thinking really is.

Maria brought up so many points that I hadn't heard of. The "emprise" was really important for me to learn about.

And then, Nicole... she said something that really stuck with me: abuse doesn't always look like what we expect.

Finally, Ramunė's thoughts on stalking really opened my eyes. It's unsettling to think how often stalking goes unnoticed or is underestimated, dismissed as harmless when, in fact, it can be terrifying and dangerous.

I'm realizing how vital it is to shed light on this issue, to help people understand it better and, most importantly, to protect those who are vulnerable.

It's a lot to process. I think I've learned so much, but I also feel like I'm just scratching the surface. These myths, these misconceptions—they're not harmless. They shape the way we view victims, the way we support them, or fail to.

But I also feel hopeful. By sharing the truth, by breaking these myths down, we can, we can change things. I don't know exactly how, but this journey feels important. I want to keep learning, keep challenging the things I thought I knew. I know these conversations will stay with me. Maybe, just maybe, sharing them will help someone, someone else see the truth, too.

[Soundscape: train]

### **Narrator**

As Anna continues her journey through Europe on the train, she's filled with anticipation for the new countries and experiences that await her.

Thank you so much for tuning in! We hope you'll join us again next time as we continue our journey with the 2gether4victims podcast.

Our next episode, "Finding Hope: Life After Gender-Based Violence," features Nina Fuchs, who bravely shares her harrowing experience as a survivor of rape. She opens up about the challenges she faced in accessing support services and seeking justice, emphasizing the urgent need for gender-specific assistance in the aftermath of gender-based violence (GBV). Joined by psychologist Ivana Prović, they delve into the psychological impact of GBV on survivors and discuss strategies for healing and empowerment. Nina's inspiring journey from victim to advocate highlights the critical demand for improved support services and legal frameworks tailored to the needs of GBV survivors.

Tune in as our expert guests engage in a candid discussion, reflecting on the path toward recovery and advocacy.

(Music)

[Soundscape: train]

Does the Train Only Pass Once?

### **Narrator**

You're listening to the 2gether4victims podcast, focusing on gender-based violence services. This podcast was produced by the 2gether4victims project, led by Victim Support Europe in collaboration with ten partner organizations and funded by the CERV program of the European Commission.

Thank you very much for listening.

(Music: exit)

**Narrator**

Thank you very much for listening.

**Disclaimer**

This podcast is co-funded by the European Union.

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission.

Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.