

# Prevalence of Female-Perpetrated Abuse among Middle-Class Men in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria: Implications for the Culture of Peace

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## Abstract

This study examined the prevalence, forms, and socio-cultural dynamics of domestic violence against men in the Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria, with a focus on identifying the most common types of abuse and the attitudinal barriers that hinder disclosure and help-seeking. Using a mixed-methods approach, quantitative data were collected from 292 respondents through structured questionnaires, while qualitative insights were obtained from interviews with key informants, including social workers, community leaders, and representatives of non-governmental organisations. Quantitative findings revealed that emotional abuse (88.7%), intimidation and threats of violence (91.1%), and sexual coercion (90.4%) were among the most prevalent forms of abuse, alongside significant levels of physical violence. Qualitative narratives illuminated patterns of coercive control, marital entitlement, and emotional degradation, underscoring the complexity of male victimisation beyond physical harm. The study also found that cultural norms linking masculinity to dominance and emotional stoicism, coupled with the fear of ridicule and inadequate legal protection, serve as powerful deterrents to disclosure. The findings suggest that male victimisation is a critical yet under-acknowledged aspect of domestic violence, with significant implications for public health,

legal reform, and peacebuilding. The study recommends culturally grounded sensitisation campaigns, legal amendments to protect male victims, the establishment of confidential support services, and multi-sectoral partnerships to ensure inclusive intervention frameworks. By addressing the silencing of male survivors, the research contributes to a more balanced understanding of gender-based violence and calls for policies that protect all victims regardless of gender.

## Introduction

Domestic violence is increasingly recognised as a critical public health concern, a human rights violation, and a barrier to sustainable peace (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). While traditionally framed as a gendered issue predominantly affecting women, contemporary scholarship acknowledges that men can also be victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) (Douglas et al., 2023). The prevailing narrative in both global and African discourse has often marginalised male victimhood, relegating it to an anomaly or treating it as statistically insignificant. This invisibility has profound implications for legal protections, service provision, and societal attitudes. Globally, IPV against men manifests in various forms: physical assaults, emotional manipulation, sexual coercion, financial control, and social isolation. In high-income countries, surveys have begun to capture the prevalence of male victimisation, revealing that it can be comparable to or exceed female victimisation in certain forms of non-physical abuse (Morgan & Wells, 2023). However, data from low- and middle-income countries, including Nigeria, remain sparse, partly due to methodological limitations and partly because of entrenched socio-cultural norms that silence male victims (Hines & Douglas, 2020).

Domestic violence is shaped by the interplay of patriarchy, cultural traditions, and socio-economic dynamics (Ogunlana, 2022). Nigeria's patriarchal structures assign men the role of providers and protectors, equating masculinity with strength, stoicism, and authority (Udegbe, 2023). This cultural script leaves little room for the acknowledgment of male vulnerability. Consequently, men who experience abuse often fear stigma, ridicule, or loss of social status, leading to significant underreporting (Okafor, 2021). Official statistics reflect this silence. The 2018 *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS)*, the most comprehensive national dataset, primarily reports on violence against women but includes limited data on male experiences. Among surveyed households, 11% of ever-married men reported experiencing emotional violence from a spouse, 4% reported physical violence, and 1% reported sexual violence

within the past 12 months (National Population Commission [NPC] & ICF, 2019). While these figures appear low, they are likely underestimated due to cultural reluctance to disclose abuse, the absence of male-focused survey questions, and interviewer bias (Adebayo & Olatunji, 2022).

The neglect of male victims in Nigeria is further compounded by structural limitations. Existing domestic violence laws, such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015, are not consistently implemented nationwide and are often framed in ways that implicitly prioritise the protection of women and children. While this focus is justified by the scale of violence against women, it inadvertently leaves male victims with inadequate legal recognition or recourse. Additionally, support services—shelters, helplines, counselling, are predominantly designed for female victims, limiting men's access to assistance (Okafor, 2021). Middle-class men in urban centres such as Ibadan Metropolis present an especially important but overlooked demographic in this discussion. With relatively higher education, stable employment, and modern lifestyle expectations, one might assume reduced vulnerability to IPV. However, shifts in gender relations, economic pressures, and changing household power dynamics can also create contexts in which women perpetrate abuse (Myhill & Hohl, 2019). Emotional and economic abuse, in particular, can be pronounced in relationships where women have increasing economic independence or where financial stress challenges traditional provider roles.

The implications of female-perpetrated domestic violence extend beyond the individual to the wider society. At the micro level, IPV erodes trust, security, and mutual respect within households. At the macro level, it contributes to a culture of conflict, undermining the conditions necessary for a culture of peace (UNESCO, 2020). In communities like Ibadan, diverse, economically vibrant, yet socially stratified, domestic violence can disrupt social cohesion, weaken informal support networks, and, over time, normalise aggression as a conflict resolution strategy (Anderson, 2022). Despite these realities, academic and policy attention to male victims of female-perpetrated abuse in Nigeria remains limited. Few empirical studies have examined the prevalence, forms, and socio-cultural determinants of such abuse, especially within middle-class populations. This knowledge gap hinders the development of inclusive domestic violence policies, reinforces harmful stereotypes, and perpetuates cycles of silence.

This study seeks to address that gap by examining the prevalence of female-perpetrated abuse among middle-class men in Ibadan Metropolis and exploring its implications for the culture of peace. It aims to:

1. Identify the prevalent forms of abuse experienced by male victims.

2. Understand the socio-cultural and attitudinal barriers to disclosure and support-seeking.

By shedding light on an often-overlooked aspect of IPV, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of domestic violence in Nigeria and advocates for gender-inclusive approaches to prevention, intervention, and peace promotion.

### **Domestic Violence: Definitions and Forms**

Domestic violence is broadly defined as a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour within an intimate or family relationship, aimed at asserting power and dominance over another person (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). It is not restricted to a single incident but often occurs in recurring cycles of tension, abuse, reconciliation, and calm (Walker, 2019). While the term is often used interchangeably with intimate partner violence (IPV), the former is broader, encompassing abuse involving other family members or cohabitants, whereas IPV specifically refers to abuse between current or former romantic partners (Morgan & Wells, 2023). Domestic violence is multidimensional, encompassing physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, economic, and social isolation abuses (Hines & Douglas, 2020). These forms frequently co-occur, creating complex patterns of victimisation.

**Physical abuse** involves the intentional use of force capable of causing injury or harm. It includes acts such as hitting, slapping, kicking, choking, burning, or using weapons. In some instances, it extends to denying medical care or forcing substance use (WHO, 2021). Male victims often face difficulty in having such abuse recognised due to cultural assumptions about men's physical strength and capacity to defend themselves (Morgan & Wells, 2023).

**Emotional and psychological abuse** are designed to undermine a victim's self-worth, identity, and emotional well-being. This may involve verbal insults, intimidation, humiliation, gaslighting, threats of harm, or isolation from support networks. Such abuse can be as damaging as physical violence, with long-lasting effects including depression, anxiety, and diminished self-esteem (Okafor, 2021). Men may experience these behaviours intensely due to societal expectations that discourage emotional vulnerability.

**Sexual abuse** refers to any coerced or unwanted sexual activity, including rape, sexual assault, or non-physical coercion such as persistent pressure, manipulation, or threats. In male victimisation cases, social stigma and disbelief, particularly when the perpetrator is female, often result in underreporting and inadequate support (Myhill & Hohl, 2019; Ogunlana, 2022).

**Economic or financial abuse** occurs when a perpetrator exerts control over a victim's access to financial resources, thereby restricting autonomy and decision-making power. Examples include withholding money, preventing employment, sabotaging work opportunities, or incurring debts in the victim's name (Postmus et al., 2020). For men, particularly in households where women are economically empowered, such abuse can invert traditional power hierarchies and intensify conflict.

**Social or isolation abuse** involves controlling or limiting a victim's contact with friends, family, or community, thereby weakening support systems and increasing dependency. This may occur through monitoring communications, restricting movement, or spreading damaging falsehoods (Douglas et al., 2023).

These forms of abuse are rarely discrete. Physical abuse may be accompanied by emotional humiliation, and economic control is often reinforced through intimidation. In the Nigerian context, patriarchal gender norms shape the perception and recognition of abuse. Men are socially constructed as protectors rather than potential victims, leading to denial, ridicule, or dismissal of male victimhood (Adebayo & Olatunji, 2022). Such cultural attitudes perpetuate silence, hinder reporting, and prevent the development of gender-inclusive support services.

Recognising domestic violence as a multifaceted problem that can affect anyone, regardless of gender, is crucial for developing effective interventions and fostering a culture of peace.

### **Female-Perpetrated Abuse and Gender Norms**

Female-perpetrated abuse refers to acts of physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, or economic harm inflicted by women on their intimate partners. While domestic violence discourse has traditionally positioned women as victims and men as perpetrators, there is increasing recognition in both scholarly and policy circles that women can and do engage in abusive behaviours (Hines & Douglas, 2020; Morgan & Wells, 2023). This recognition has emerged from longitudinal research, national crime surveys, and qualitative accounts that document men's experiences of victimisation at the hands of female partners. The forms of abuse perpetrated by women are similar to those committed by men. Physical abuse may involve hitting, slapping, scratching, throwing objects, or using weapons. Emotional and psychological abuse often manifest through insults, humiliation, threats, manipulation, and coercive control, including tactics designed to isolate the victim from friends and family (Myhill & Hohl, 2019). Economic abuse can occur when a woman restricts her partner's access to finances, sabotages employment opportunities, or deliberately accumulates debt in the partner's name. Sexual abuse, though less frequently acknowledged in male victimisation, includes coercion, pressure, or manipulation into unwanted sexual activity.

One of the key issues surrounding female-perpetrated abuse is the intersection with prevailing gender norms. In many societies, including Nigeria, patriarchal structures frame masculinity in terms of physical strength, emotional resilience, and dominance within the household (Udegbe, 2023). This cultural script positions men as protectors and providers, and by implication, as immune to victimisation. Consequently, when men experience abuse from female partners, it is often perceived as a contradiction to societal expectations, leading to disbelief or ridicule when disclosures are made (Ogunlana, 2022).

These gender norms have several implications. Firstly, they contribute to the underreporting of female-perpetrated abuse. Men may refrain from seeking help for fear of damaging their social reputation or being labelled as weak. In the Nigerian context, such stigma can be exacerbated by community attitudes that discourage “washing dirty linen in public” (Okafor, 2021). Secondly, gender norms shape institutional responses. Law enforcement officers, healthcare providers, and social workers may minimise or dismiss reports from male victims, assuming that women are incapable of causing serious harm. This bias results in a lack of tailored services, legal protections, and public awareness campaigns targeting male victims.

The invisibility of female-perpetrated abuse in public discourse also has policy implications. Legislative frameworks often reflect gendered assumptions about victimhood, focusing on protecting women and children while overlooking men as potential victims. For example, shelter systems, hotlines, and support programmes in Nigeria predominantly cater to women, leaving male victims with few avenues for assistance (Adebayo & Olatunji, 2022). This absence of support infrastructure further entrenches silence and inaction.

Research also suggests that female-perpetrated abuse can occur in relationships where traditional gender roles are being renegotiated, particularly in urban, middle-class contexts where women have greater access to education and economic opportunities (Morgan & Wells, 2023). Shifts in household power dynamics may create tension, especially when societal norms lag behind evolving realities. In such cases, abuse can become a maladaptive strategy for exerting control or expressing frustration, mirroring patterns observed in male-perpetrated violence. Ultimately, the persistence of female-perpetrated abuse, coupled with entrenched gender norms, undermines efforts to build a culture of peace. A truly inclusive approach to domestic violence prevention must acknowledge that abuse is not determined solely by gender but by dynamics of power, control, and socio-cultural context. Challenging harmful gender norms, raising public awareness, and reforming institutional responses are essential steps toward ensuring that all victims, regardless of gender, receive recognition, protection, and support.

### **Socio-Cultural Barriers to Recognition**

The recognition of female-perpetrated domestic abuse against men in Nigeria is significantly constrained by deep-seated socio-cultural norms and values. These norms are entrenched within the patriarchal structure that governs gender relations in much of Nigerian society. Patriarchy positions men as figures of strength, authority, and resilience within the household and the community. As a result, the concept of a man as a victim of domestic abuse is often considered incongruous with prevailing ideals of masculinity (Udegbe, 2023). This cultural expectation creates an environment in which men may feel compelled to maintain silence rather than risk appearing weak or incapable of managing their personal affairs. In many communities, cultural scripts dictate that domestic issues should remain private matters, to be resolved within the family rather than involving external parties such as the police, social workers, or the legal system (Ogunlana, 2022). This tradition of keeping domestic affairs hidden is rooted in the belief that public disclosure of marital conflict or abuse is shameful and could bring dishonour to the family. For male victims, this means that even when abuse is severe, there is considerable social pressure to endure it quietly rather than seek help. Stigma is another powerful barrier. Male victims who attempt to speak out often face ridicule and disbelief. They may be told that they are exaggerating their experiences or that they should be able to physically defend themselves from a female partner (Okafor, 2021). This reaction is not only dismissive but also reinforces harmful gender stereotypes that equate physical strength with emotional invulnerability. Consequently, many male victims choose to suppress their experiences to avoid social humiliation or the perception that they have failed to meet societal expectations of manhood. Institutional responses to male victimisation are also shaped by these socio-cultural biases. In many instances, service providers and law enforcement officers may trivialise or overlook reports from male victims, assuming that women cannot cause serious harm to men (Adebayo & Olatunji, 2022). This perception results in a lack of tailored support services for men, such as shelters, legal aid, and counselling programmes. The scarcity of these resources further discourages victims from reporting abuse, as they perceive little chance of receiving effective assistance. Religious and traditional leaders, who hold significant influence in many Nigerian communities, can also inadvertently reinforce these barriers. While some advocate for the protection of all victims of domestic violence, others perpetuate gendered interpretations of abuse that prioritise the safeguarding of women. In some cases, religious teachings emphasise male leadership and authority in the household, indirectly discouraging the recognition of situations where men are victimised. This selective focus contributes to a gendered imbalance in the domestic violence discourse, which in turn sustains the invisibility of male victims.



Media portrayal of domestic violence adds another layer to this challenge. Mainstream narratives often present women as victims and men as perpetrators, rarely acknowledging the reverse. This narrow framing influences public perception, leading to the dismissal of male victimhood as either an anomaly or a sign of weakness. Without balanced representation, the societal understanding of domestic violence remains incomplete, and policies are less likely to be inclusive. Overall, socio-cultural barriers to recognising female-perpetrated abuse against men in Nigeria are complex and multifaceted. They stem from patriarchal gender norms, cultural traditions that value privacy over disclosure, societal stigma, institutional bias, and selective public discourse. Addressing these barriers requires deliberate efforts to reshape societal attitudes, expand inclusive legal definitions, and create services that acknowledge and respond to the needs of all victims, irrespective of gender.

### **Prevalence and Impact of Female-Perpetrated Abuse**

The prevalence of female-perpetrated abuse has been a subject of growing academic interest in recent years, although it continues to receive less attention than male-perpetrated violence. Research from high-income countries indicates that women can and do engage in abusive behaviours towards their male partners, although such cases are often underreported. In the United Kingdom, the Office for National Statistics (2022) recorded that approximately 1.4 million women and 798,000 men experienced domestic abuse in the preceding year. Of the men surveyed, a proportion reported female perpetrators, highlighting that this is not a marginal phenomenon. Comparable data from the United States have also shown that women are responsible for a significant share of physical aggression in heterosexual relationships, particularly in contexts involving mutual violence (Hines & Douglas, 2020). Comprehensive national statistics on female-perpetrated abuse are scarce, largely due to cultural norms that discourage male victims from reporting such experiences. Studies focusing on urban areas such as Lagos and Abuja have found that male victims exist across socio-economic classes, with middle-class men often experiencing unique challenges linked to their social position (Ogunlana, 2022). This group may be particularly reluctant to disclose abuse because of concerns about public image, professional reputation, and societal expectations of male authority. The lack of gender-inclusive survey instruments and reporting mechanisms in Nigeria also contributes to the invisibility of this issue.

The forms of abuse perpetrated by women against male partners vary widely. Physical abuse may involve hitting, slapping, or using objects to inflict harm. Emotional and psychological abuse is frequently reported and can include constant criticism, humiliation, manipulation, and isolation from friends or family. Economic abuse is



another significant form, in which a female partner may restrict a man's access to money, control joint accounts, or undermine his ability to earn an income. Sexual coercion, though less frequently discussed in the Nigerian literature, is also reported by male victims in international studies and can have lasting psychological effects. The impact of such abuse on male victims is profound and multi-dimensional. Physical abuse can lead to injuries, some of which may require medical intervention. Emotional and psychological abuse can result in depression, anxiety disorders, diminished self-esteem, and post-traumatic stress disorder. These mental health outcomes may be compounded by the stigma of male victimhood, which can discourage victims from seeking professional help. Economic abuse can lead to financial instability and dependence, limiting a victim's ability to leave an abusive relationship and increasing vulnerability to further harm. Beyond the individual level, the consequences of female-perpetrated abuse extend to families and communities. In households with children, exposure to domestic violence can have detrimental effects on child development, including behavioural problems, emotional distress, and the potential perpetuation of violence in future relationships. At the societal level, the failure to address female-perpetrated abuse undermines broader efforts to promote gender equality and foster a culture of peace. It perpetuates a selective understanding of victimhood that excludes men, thereby leaving significant gaps in policy and service provision. These omissions not only disadvantage male victims but also hinder the creation of comprehensive strategies for violence prevention and conflict resolution.

In sum, while the prevalence of female-perpetrated abuse against men in Nigeria remains under-documented, existing evidence from both localised studies and international research indicates that it is a real and consequential issue. The impacts are serious, affecting victims' physical health, psychological well-being, financial stability, and social relationships. Recognising and addressing this form of abuse is essential for developing inclusive domestic violence interventions that promote the safety and dignity of all individuals, regardless of gender.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

This study adopts Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) as its primary analytical lens to explain the prevalence and dynamics of female-perpetrated domestic abuse against men in Ibadan Metropolis. Social Learning Theory posits that human behaviour, including violent conduct, is largely acquired through observation, imitation, and reinforcement rather than being solely the product of innate drives or biological predispositions. Within the context of domestic violence, this theory suggests that individuals—whether perpetrators or victims—learn behavioural patterns from their family environments, peer groups, and broader socio-cultural contexts. If a person

grows up witnessing violence between caregivers or experiences abusive interactions, these behaviours may become normalised and subsequently replicated in adulthood (Smith & Johnson, 2021).

Applied to this study, Social Learning Theory provides a framework for understanding how female-perpetrated abuse can emerge and persist in a society where certain aggressive behaviours are modelled, tolerated, or even rewarded. For instance, women who have observed or experienced coercive control may internalise such patterns as acceptable conflict resolution methods. Likewise, male victims who have grown up in environments where men are expected to tolerate hardship without complaint may be less likely to resist or report abuse. Reinforcement mechanisms, both positive and negative, also play a role. A perpetrator may continue abusive conduct if it achieves the desired outcome, such as compliance from the victim, while the absence of legal or social sanctions can further entrench the behaviour. On the victim's side, avoidance of social ridicule or family dishonour may reinforce silence, allowing the abuse to persist.

### Research Methodology

A descriptive survey design was employed to capture the experiences of middle-class men in Ibadan Metropolis. The target population comprised adult men aged 25 and above, possessing at least post-secondary education, employed in white-collar or skilled professional jobs, and residing in urban or semi-urban areas. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants who had experienced abuse from female partners within the last ten years. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were thematically coded to explore recurring patterns in experiences, coping mechanisms, and societal responses.

### Results

Objective 1: Prevalent Forms of Abuse Experienced by Male Victims

**Table 1:** Prevalent Forms of Domestic Violence against Men in Ibadan Metropolis (N = 292)

Form of Abuse	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean
<b>Physical violence with dangerous object</b>	79 (27.1)	156 (53.4)	48 (16.4)	9 (3.1)	3.04
<b>Physical abuse (slapping, hitting)</b>	97 (33.2)	158 (54.1)	34 (11.6)	3 (1.0)	3.20
<b>Emotional abuse (threats, insults)</b>	129 (44.2)	130 (44.5)	32 (11.0)	1 (0.3)	3.33
<b>Restriction of movement / isolation</b>	112 (38.4)	152 (52.1)	25 (8.6)	3 (1.0)	3.28
<b>Intimidation / threats of violence</b>	148 (50.7)	118 (40.4)	15 (5.1)	11 (3.8)	3.38
<b>Financial abuse</b>	56 (19.2)	147 (50.3)	60 (20.5)	29 (9.9)	2.79
<b>Destruction of personal property</b>	97 (33.2)	108 (37.0)	28 (9.6)	59 (20.2)	2.83
<b>Constant nagging</b>	106 (36.3)	127 (43.5)	26 (8.9)	33 (11.3)	3.05
<b>Sexual coercion or pressure</b>	141 (48.3)	123 (42.1)	16 (5.5)	12 (4.1)	3.35
Aggregate Mean					<b>3.13</b>

Findings reveal that emotional abuse (mean = 3.33), intimidation/threats (mean = 3.38), and sexual coercion (mean = 3.35) are the most prominent forms of abuse experienced by men in the Ibadan Metropolis. While physical abuse remains significant, over 87% reported being slapped, hit, or attacked with dangerous objects, psychological control and sexual coercion appear equally or more damaging.

### **Objective 2: Socio-Cultural and Attitudinal Barriers to Disclosure and Support-Seeking**

Table 2: Socio-Cultural and Attitudinal Barriers to Disclosure among Male Victims (N = 292)

Barrier	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean
<b>Male victims often ridiculed</b>	145 (49.7)	129 (44.2)	15 (5.1)	3 (1.0)	3.42
<b>Men seen as dominant; hard to believe they're abused</b>	164 (56.6)	112 (38.6)	11 (3.8)	3 (1.0)	3.84
<b>Speaking out seen as weakness</b>	165 (56.5)	121 (41.4)	6 (2.1)	—	3.54
<b>Gender stereotypes hinder recognition</b>	161 (55.1)	125 (42.8)	6 (2.1)	—	3.53
<b>Culture/religion prioritises female protection</b>	167 (57.2)	113 (38.7)	12 (4.1)	—	3.53
<b>Male victims internalise pain</b>	191 (65.9)	90 (31.0)	9 (3.1)	—	3.63
<b>Law inadequate for male victims</b>	141 (48.3)	123 (42.1)	16 (5.5)	12 (4.1)	3.35
<b>Include men in national sensitisation</b>	152 (52.1)	125 (42.8)	6 (2.1)	9 (3.1)	3.44
<b>Aggregate Mean</b>					<b>3.53</b>

The highest-rated barrier was the belief that men are naturally dominant (mean = 3.84), followed by internalisation of pain due to masculinity norms (mean = 3.63). Ridicule, fear of appearing weak, and gender stereotypes were also strongly endorsed, confirming deep-rooted patriarchal norms that silence male survivors.

### **Discussion**

The findings from this study reveal a complex and multifaceted pattern of abuse experienced by male victims in the Ibadan Metropolis, cutting across physical, emotional, sexual, and economic domains. While physical abuse remains prominent, with more than 87% of respondents reporting experiences such as slapping, hitting, or

attacks with dangerous objects, the data indicate that psychological and sexual forms of coercion are equally, if not more, prevalent. Emotional abuse, including threats, insults, and humiliation, was reported by 88.7% of respondents, while intimidation and threats of violence were experienced by over 91%. Sexual coercion or pressure was reported by 90.4% of respondents, a particularly striking finding given the persistent societal tendency to overlook male sexual victimisation. These patterns underscore the reality that domestic violence against men often manifests through coercive control, sustained psychological pressure, and sexual dominance rather than solely through physical injury.

The qualitative accounts provide depth to these statistics, revealing that many male victims endure sustained emotional degradation in the form of belittling comments about their economic capabilities or questioning of their masculinity. Sexual coercion was often normalised by perpetrators as a marital entitlement, leaving victims feeling trapped in an inescapable dynamic of compliance and resentment. One 42-year-old participant remarked that his partner would insist on sexual activity even when he was unwell, and that refusal was met with accusations of infidelity, making him feel there was “no way to win.” These narratives align with the observations of Morgan and Wells (2023), who note that male victims frequently encounter sustained control strategies designed to undermine autonomy and self-worth, and with Hines and Douglas (2020), who have shown that emotional abuse can be as psychologically damaging as physical violence. Viewed through the lens of coercive control theory (Stark, 2019), these findings demonstrate that the abuse experienced by men in this context is not incidental, but part of a systematic pattern of domination.

Beyond the forms of abuse, the study highlights deep-seated socio-cultural and attitudinal barriers that hinder disclosure and support-seeking. The most prominent of these is the widespread belief that men are naturally dominant, a view endorsed by 95.2% of respondents, which makes it difficult for society to accept the possibility of male victimisation. Closely related is the tendency for men to internalise their pain due to prevailing masculinity norms, a finding supported by 96.9% of participants. The stigma of being perceived as weak and the fear of ridicule were also powerful deterrents to disclosure. Interviews revealed that for many men, speaking out about abuse was considered a form of “social suicide,” with one NGO worker explaining that male clients “whisper” their experiences to avoid being mocked by neighbours. This aligns with hegemonic masculinity theory (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), which posits that dominant cultural scripts equate masculinity with strength and emotional invulnerability, thereby framing victimhood as incompatible with male identity.

The structural dimension of these barriers is further compounded by legal inadequacy. Almost 90% of respondents expressed the view that existing laws do not sufficiently

protect male victims, reflecting a broader policy gap in which gender-based violence frameworks are implicitly designed around female victimhood. As Chirwa and Anyango (2021) have argued, this legal invisibility effectively erases male victims from the scope of institutional protection, reinforcing the silence and isolation they experience.

When both quantitative and qualitative findings are considered together, it becomes clear that the prevalence of psychological and sexual coercion is closely linked to cultural silence. Men who fear ridicule, disbelief, or legal neglect are less likely to seek help, which in turn allows perpetrators to maintain patterns of abuse with minimal resistance. This creates a cyclical relationship between abuse and stigma, where each reinforces the other. From a public health and human rights perspective (World Health Organization, 2022), this underscores the need for domestic violence interventions that are inclusive of male experiences, both in their legal recognition and in their support structures. Ultimately, the findings challenge the narrow, gender-exclusive framing of domestic violence that dominates both policy and advocacy spaces in Nigeria. They highlight the urgency of sensitisation campaigns that dismantle harmful stereotypes, confidential reporting mechanisms that protect male survivors from stigma, and legislative reforms that explicitly recognise male victimhood. Without such measures, the cycle of abuse and silence will persist, perpetuating both individual suffering and broader societal inequities

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study's findings make it evident that domestic violence against men in the Ibadan Metropolis is both prevalent and multifaceted, encompassing physical, emotional, sexual, and economic forms of abuse. These experiences are deeply intertwined with socio-cultural beliefs, patriarchal norms, and systemic gaps in legal and institutional protection, all of which contribute to the silence and underreporting of male victimisation. The persistence of these dynamics not only perpetuates cycles of abuse but also undermines broader peacebuilding and gender equity efforts. Addressing this issue requires dismantling the cultural scripts that equate masculinity with invulnerability, reforming policy frameworks to include male survivors explicitly, and developing community-based interventions that provide safe and stigma-free channels for disclosure.

In light of these findings, several actions emerge as essential:

1. There is a need for national sensitisation campaigns that challenge stereotypes around male victimhood and normalise help-seeking behaviour, using culturally relevant messaging to reach diverse audiences.
2. Legal definitions of domestic violence must be broadened to explicitly include psychological and sexual abuse against men, ensuring that laws and enforcement mechanisms offer equal protection regardless of gender.

3. Confidential support systems, such as helplines, counselling services, and discreet referral pathways, should be developed to encourage male victims to seek assistance without fear of ridicule or retaliation.
4. Multi-sectoral partnerships involving government agencies, civil society, and traditional leaders should be fostered to integrate male-focused interventions into existing gender-based violence strategies, thereby promoting an inclusive approach that strengthens family stability, community harmony, and national peacebuilding.

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