

Assessment of the Forms of Domestic Violence against Men in Ondo and Osun States, Nigeria

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Abstract

Globally, domestic violence is a consistent social issue that is deeply ingrained in our system across geographical locations, cultural beliefs and norms, and among different genders. The foundation of domestic violence is always about women because they are disproportionately affected by the persistence of the violence. Scholars have argued that the issue surrounding gender-based violence is practically centred on women, where male victims are neglected and marginalised due to the social and gender norms that society places on them because of their patriarchal nature. However, scholarly evidence has shown that men also witness violence, with an increase in the volume of literature surrounding the phenomenon. These expose how society and the institutional structures deliberately exclude men due to their masculinity, silence, and social norms ingrained in the system. These show that men also witness violence from their partners. This is a qualitative study that used primary and secondary data from interviews, document analysis, and the extant literature. It unravelled the reality of domestic abuse against the male gender to argue that GBV goes beyond feminist victimhood. Experiences shared by participants indicated that male victims of GBV are usually coerced into silence because of societal perception and cultural assumptions of male dominance in domestic affairs. The study advocates an inclusive gender approach to violence, regardless of gender, ensuring adequate support services that are equitable and just to male victims.

Keywords: Male-dominance, domestic violence against men, patriarchy, feminism, male victimhood, sexual violence against men, sexual coercion, psychological trauma.

Introduction

Globally, the persistence and prevalence of domestic violence against men (VAM) is on the increase. The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (2024) reported that in the United States of America, one in four men witnessed violence with their intimate partners in their lifetime. In the United Kingdom, the Office for National Statistics (2020) recorded that over 700,000 men experienced persistent abuse annually. Countries like South Africa and Canada also have a similar trend of a high rate of violence against men, but greatly underreported (Tshoane *et al.*, 2024).

Domestic violence comes from different angles, such as physical, psychological, mental, emotional, and the manipulation of all forms. This unruly behaviour is used to exert power and control over the other partners, subjecting them to all forms of abuse. Ngobeni and Sekgobela (2025) have stated that male victims also witness various abuse from their partners, but the most

common type, aside from slapping, pushing, and biting, other manipulative behaviours are denial of sex, economic control, coercive sex, verbal abuse, and public humiliation. Other aggressive behaviours are poisoning of food, pouring of hot substances, and the use of dangerous objects like knives, broken bottles, pestles, and guns. Some women had killed their husbands. Despite these various abuses against men, they are still disproportionately low and biased towards acknowledging that they face violence from their female partners (Njoku, 2026).

This increase shows that cultural norms and beliefs on male masculinity, silences and deliberate non-support services for male victims culminate in the prevalence. However, the culture of silence, shame, and victimhood of male victims is not incidental; it has been entrenched in the institutional system (Njoku & Dery, 2023). These phrases discourage them from letting their fear and pain be known, as they have a wrong perception of their being in society. Jayaratne and Wijewardena (2025) stated that most men remain silent about their abuse because of the societal disbelief and mockery that comes with it.

Though research on violence against men is limited, it is gradually gaining momentum in academic discourse (Njoku, 2026). Ngobeni and Sekgobela (2025) have noted the need for a precise definition of VAM interventions that reflect on society. This strategy is important to create a stable society where all, irrespective of gender, will be free of all forms of violence and associated factors that aggravate it. This study interrogates the challenge of male silence and domestic abuse in society, relating to the forms and patterns, as well as institutional biases and responses. It also examines the cultural and global dimensions of male victimhood, drawing on select cases to gain insights into the prevalence of VAM.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of the study is to assess the forms of gender violence against men in Ondo and Osun States, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- i. ascertain the nature and forms of violence against men in the selected states.
- ii. understand the perceptions of victims and their reactions to violent attitudes from their spouses.
- iii. explore the factors that usually prompt violence against men in the selected states.

Literature Review

Violence against men (VAM) is less reported phenomenon across the globe. Generally, gender imbalance in reporting cases of VAM is often skewed against men (Tshoane *et al*, 2024). Recent studies have challenged the myths surrounding social and gender norms that dominate the cultural narrative of male victimhood (Mburuki, 2026; Akinseye, 2025; Auchter, 2025; Njoku & Dery, 2023). These exposures have created broader perspectives on VAM, leading to inclusive, rather than selective, reforms. Domestic violence against men, as a variant of gender-based violence (GBV), is characterised by domestic abuse or violence from intimate partners. In other words, VAM takes place within the context of marriage, involving interpersonal relationships in a family setting (Gateri *et al*, 2021). VAM encompasses attitudinal dispositions or actions that constitute harm or injuries to men within the context of marital relationships that could be physical, psychological/emotional, sexual, legal or financial. In some cases, abuse could be in the form of physical aggression, sexual denial or coercion, and mostly behaviours that ported spousal financial

controlling power over the man (Scott-Storey *et al*, 2023). In most cases, the man is coerced into submission to the control of the spouse because of financial incapability, especially when the husband is unemployed or underemployed with grossly inadequate income that could cater to the needs of the family.

Tshoane *et al* (2024) have identified four forms of VAM, including physical, sexual and verbal abuse, emotional and financial abuse. Physical abuse entails physical assaults in the forms of battery, biting and beating, nagging, choking and shaking, and, at times, burning with fire or strangling. An Indian man, Jitendra Kumar Yadav, was a victim of this criminal action by his wife with the connivance of her family (Singh, 2026). Similar cases have been reported as the phenomenon gains ground worldwide.

Sexual abuse is mostly characterised by spousal denial of intimacy or coercion, depending on the situation. It becomes abusive in a society where cultural practice precludes extramarital sexual affairs (Tshoane *et al*, 2024; Scott-Storey *et al*, 2023; Gateri *et al*, 2021). In this way, the husband is subjected to the harrowing emotional trauma capable of aggravating tensions and violence. In terms of spousal verbal abuse, hurling insults and nagging aggravate tension and often lead to physical assaults. Societal patriarchal mentality and beliefs often undermine the capacity to report such abuse, thereby constituting a silent war that has claimed the lives of hapless men.

Emotional or psychological abuse entails any form of non-physical attitudes or behavioural tendencies that portend control, intimidation, subjugation, silence and isolation of another person as a weapon of punishment (Tshoane *et al*, 2024; Scott-Storey *et al*, 2023; Gateri *et al*, 2021). Emotional abuse is usually non-verbal, but lethal spousal attitudinal separation or distancing from the man. It is often characterised by silence and confusion, especially when the man cannot discern the reasons for the mood change.

Financial abuse on its part is common in a society dominated by men's dependency on their wives for economic needs. Reports have shown that marital relationships in which women outearn their spouses are usually characterised by marital strain and conflict (Elsesser, 2025).

In the U.S., it is estimated that 31% to 37% of women are now the primary breadwinners in their romantic relationships. Similarly, 26% of Canadian women and 31% of women in the UK outearn their partners (Fisher *et al*, 2025).

The report noted that this phenomenon was undesirable, leading to feelings of gender threat with poor outcomes of spousal relationships. It added,

These findings offer novel insight into heterosexual scripts and the punishing social consequences for people who violate those scripts and suggest that social stigma...may pose a barrier to gender equality in close relationships and in society.

Historically, the framing of domestic violence against women comes from the foundation of an entrenched patriarchal system where men are seen and viewed as domineering, and women as weaker vessels and victims. Porter (2020) discovers how intimate partner violence needs to be considered as a gendered, structural and social issue in the society. Similarly, Rose, Mertens, and Balint (2023/2024) acknowledge that family violence and domestic abuse are deeply ingrained in the structural inequality of society, and call for radical interventions from the structural, cultural,

intersectional, and feminist aspects of society, where patriarchal traditional practices need to be dismantled.

Emerging Studies on Male Victimhood

Many studies have examined male victimhood due to its persistent prevalence in society (Mburuki, 2026; Akinseye, 2025; Auchter, 2025; Njoku & Dery, 2023). Njoku and Dery (2023) states that domestic violence against men is increasing because of the cultural normalisation, culture of silence, and gender and social norms that are deeply entrenched in society. Adebayo and Iweala (2022) found that any man who loses his masculinity and gender role will be vulnerable to violence and fear reporting because of the societal castigation. Njoku and Dery (2023) have noted that secrecy and discretion are coercive weapons that silence male victims.

Şimşek *et al* (2026) reported that in the past years, 5.4% of men in the United States of America have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV), with exposure to poor physical and mental health outcomes because of violence from their partner. Stein *et al* (2025), in their framework, noted that psychological, mental, sexual, and physical effects have a great consequence on men's health, thereby leading to depression, substance abuse, and anxiety. Mphatheni (2024) opines that male victimhood in South Africa is treated as less important and ignored. Tshoane *et al* (2024) documented in their study that men experience physical, sexual, economic, financial, verbal, and psychological abuse but attract no public attention, especially in policy and social support services. In a similar vein, Kolbe and Büttner (2020) agree that there is a high rate of violence against men, with exposure to risk factors such as unemployment, low education, and social isolation in society.

Landa-Blanco and Mejía Sánchez (2025) in their study revealed that in low-middle-income countries, the statistics of men who experience violence from their intimate partners include 20% of men who experience physical violence, 44% psychological violence, and 7% sexual violence from intimate partners. These statistics show increasing rates of male victimhood globally.

Psychological and Social Impacts

The psychological effects of violence against men are complex. Men who experienced violence from their partner are found to have suicidal thoughts, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Stein *et al* (2025) have noted that the health effects of IPV are experienced by both genders, but males are disproportionately disadvantaged when it comes to interventions and social supports. This negligence leads to a high rate of violence, which affects them psychologically and reinforces their silence. However, societal inequality worsens these issues. Adebayo and Iweala (2022) emphasise that men condone shame and fear of being ridiculed, which prevent them from speaking out about the abuse. Mphatheni (2024) opines that societal expectations surrounding masculinity discourage men from speaking out and encourage underreporting and male victims' isolation and support. Isangha (2024) avers that male victims in Nigeria lack professional and culturally sensitive support as well as disbelief in their reporting.

Institutional Blind Spot

The persistent presence of VAM remains a prevalent issue despite growing concerns. There are inadequate institutional responses; healthcare workers failed to understand VAM, its prevalence, and its causes, categorising it as stress or aggression rather than victimisation. According to Pisano, Widanaralage, and Willmott (2025), professional service support for male victims is hindered by

societal biases and a lack of good training. Most studies even found that most professionals documented that male clients were not taken seriously when they reported cases, and some may be suspected of their reporting. Isangha (2024) notes that male victims in Nigeria were subject to disbelief from law enforcement and professional healthcare providers. These challenges show the deeply ingrained patriarchal traditional practices in society.

Bridging the Gap

The growing literature has been exploring the marginalisation and normalisation of violence against men among their intimate partners. Thobejane, Mogorosi, and Luthanda (2018) describes male victimisation as a “muted reality that needs urgent institutional intervention and a wake-up call. Bridging the gap between public discourse and evidence needs a multifaceted approach. Van Laar et al. (2024) emphasises that men are not only affected by gender equity and equality but must also be ready to dismantle them. Incorporating men in gender equality will foster an inclusive fight against domestic violence (DV) and combat VAM in all forms.

Academics must engage in rigorous research on VAM and be inclusive, while professionals must accept all reported gender incidents, regardless of the reporter's gender. The media must show empathy toward all reported cases and avoid selectivity in reporting. Non-governmental organisations must create solid awareness for open dialogue and must be gender inclusive to dismantle mockery, shame, fear, and stigma. By acknowledging the silence and pain of men, society can achieve stability with permanent healing, equity, empathy, and dignity.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted gender role theory and stigma theory to explain how male victimisation is shaped, silenced, and sustained. The gender role theory, propounded by John Money (1994), provides a critical view of understanding societal expectations on masculine behaviour of men from the context of GBV. This theory is deeply rooted in social and gender norms and in societal enforcement. The boys are forced to obey roles that are placed on them, such as rigid strength, dominance, subjugation, toxic masculinity, and emotional repression. These traits are not only verbal sayings but compulsory demands that have been passed down from one generation to the next. This culture of silence is not an accidental case, but a normalisation of and deep-rooted gender roles in society. Keratiloe *et al* (2022) states that male students in higher education fail to report violence against them due to mockery and ridicule by their colleagues or the opposite gender. However, there is an internal conflict between the lived experience of males and the societal expectations, which leads to psychological violence against them.

The stigma theory, propounded by Erving Goffman (1994), focuses on the social discrediting of male victims of GBV. Building on gender role theory, this theory explains how society discredits someone who is not ready to comply with societal norms, beliefs, or expectations. In the case of male victims of GBV, stigma is seen at different levels. First, there is the stigma of victimhood itself. Raufu (2025) notes that being a victim through weakness or passivity is contradictory or negates the traditional way of masculinity. Male victims experience fear, shame, stigma, and are further prohibited from reporting and seeking help.

There is also a stigma of perceived failure to fulfill gender roles. As discussed by Edward (2025), how societal expectations of male dominance and the control of power conflict with each other, subjecting male victims to emasculation. A man who is being abused and fails to assert control

may be subjected to all forms of social judgments and isolation from friends and family. Stigma also affects institutional responses. Burke *et al* (2025) reveal how the failure of institutions to carry out proper action against violence against their male student subjects them to suffering and pain. Most of the support services are created for the female victims, leaving the male victims lacking access to support and the justice system. The cumulative effect of stigma is silence; men are not only dissuaded from speaking but are also isolated when caught speaking out. This silence perpetuates a circle of violence against men and continues male victimisation in research, policy, and reforms.

Interconnectedness and Implications

These two theories are interwoven, revealing the structural and cultural factors that motivate male victimisation. Gender role theory explains the societal expectations placed on men, while stigma theory shows the effects when deviating from such expectations, and the adapted power and control wheel emphasises how the two theories are used to exert control and abuse on the victims. The man's role expectation at home is to provide leadership in managing the home. Thus, the man is expected to exert control in organising and managing the affairs through the provision of necessary needs. The woman, working with the man, supports and manages the resources provided to ensure comfort. The fatherhood context places men above the wife with greater responsibilities of ensuring peace. Thus, the theory did not contemplate situations in which a woman would assume the domestic role of a man to the point of control and abuse hence the lack of societal recognition of men's complaints of physical abuse against women. The implication of this is that VAM is a manifestation of loss of power and subjugation of roles, either forcefully, based on the abrasive tendencies of the woman, or by circumstances that weaken the man's financial capacity and capability.

The consequence of role failure is the stigma associated with man's incapacity. A man will consider a woman's assumption of his role as a stigma that must be covered. Thus, when a man becomes a woman by virtue of role, he becomes a weakling, a shameful development that must be covered from society. This stigmatised perception perpetuates VAM domestically. This depicts the fact that stigma perpetuates VAM and subjects the man to all forms of abuse in silence.

Together, these theories explain why men remain silent in the face of abuse. Integrating these theories moves beyond a simplistic narrative toward a more inclusive dialogue about domestic VAM. This should not only be perceived as an anomaly but should be seen together with other forms of violence that transcend genders. Understanding this interconnectedness will bring justice, healing and total prevention.

Methodology

The study used primary and secondary data from interviews, public documents and extant literature. These sources provide credible data for the study, exploring trends, patterns, perceptions, and government responses related to the subject matter. Fifteen male participants were purposively selected from Ondo State and Osun States, Nigeria, for interviews. The use of purposive sampling was appropriate for the study because it requires participants lived experiences to yield rich and in-depth data. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, which were grouped into themes and discussed accordingly.

Result of the Findings

Participants expressed diverse views of their lived experiences, which were categorised into the following themes.

Forms and patterns of abuse beyond bruises: The spectrum of abuses against men

Globally, gender-based violence is understudied and underexplored across all regions because of societal expectations and cultural silence. Studies have shown that physical abuse is the most common form of abuse experienced by men; other forms include emotional, psychological, sexual, financial, and legal aspects of abuse.

Psychological and Emotional Trauma

Most of the participants said that they lived in psychological trauma daily because of the nature of the domestic torture their spouses inflicted on them. This arises from the nagging attitude of their spouses over minor issues: “as a company driver, I always wished I were assigned a duty tour to our branches outside the city for a long time because this would relieve me of my daily agony of living with my wife”, Participant 2 noted. This, according to the participant is because he is tired of the nagging of his wife. Other participants expressed a similar sentiment. While some managed to cope, others decided to be separated from the wife until family members appealed for settlements.

Financial Abuse

Beyond nagging, other participants revealed that they suffer in silence with minimised attention and ridicule because of their financial incapacity to meet the needs of the household. “My financial capacity is limited because of the nature of my employment. While I struggle to add other side hustles to augment my earnings, my wife nags and abuses me, with name-calling each time there are inadequate food items” (Participant 10). Five other participants expressed a similar experience, noting that as the head of the family, they were ashamed when their wives hurled insult on them because they could not provide enough. One participant revealed that his drinking habit, as a coping mechanism, infuriated his wife and she packed out with the children,

Physical and verbal abuse

Physical abuse against men is mostly insignificant or dismissed. But this is a reality in the case of some of the participants. The societal expectations make men defend themselves at all costs, making it hard for male victims to seek help. A participant said that he was tired of explaining his plights to his family members because they blamed him for maltreating his wife. “One day, when I told my uncle that my wife assaulted me, he dismissed me as a lazy man who was running away from responsibilities, using fabricated assault as an excuse to tarnish the image of my wife” (Participant 3). Mphatheni (2024) documents how male victims experienced abuse at the hands of female partners, thereby ignoring male calls against abuse, ridiculing them rather than showing empathy. Similarly, Mukwevho (2024) explores the lived experiences of men in Kwaai-Draai Village, South Africa, where male victims were repeatedly assaulted. In several cases, men have lost their lives to their violent spouses. Recent data has shown the increasing rate of women killing their spouses. Ketelo *et al* (2024) reported that 226 were killed by their spouse, with 85% occurred in their respective houses. This trend has expanded to Nigeria, Ghana, and mostly Southern African countries, where the records of intimate partner violence are rampant.

Stein *et al* (2025) examined the physical health consequences of GBV among men, showing that there is an increase in cardiovascular issues, mental health and chronic pain, yet no proper attention was given to male victims. This access to support services was channelled to female victims. “Each time my wife beats me, I would lose concentration because I could not retaliate” (Participant 5). However, the minimisation of male victims deepens the societal expectations and continuous perpetuation of violence against them, thereby discouraging reporting cases and help-seeking.

Emotional and psychological abuse: Gaslighting, humiliation, isolation

The emotional abuse against men does not show a physical effect, but has a psychological impact on them, damaging their self-esteem. The gaslighting, humiliation and isolation are common ways of abusing men and eroding their self-esteem. Ghosh and Kumar (2024) argue that the emotional abuse against men is a forgotten narrative, where victims are portrayed as weak and fools in their own pain. This misinterpretation silences men and continues to reinforce harmful patriarchal practices about masculinity: “I was only vindicated one day when a senior colleague paid me a sudden visit and met me reeling in pain while my wife and her friends were making a jest of me” Participant 7 noted.

Lausi *et al* (2024) delve into the psychological consequences of GBV, explaining how anxiety, depression, and cognitive impairment are sustained among male victims. These variants can lead to long-term psychological trauma affecting all areas of life, from relationships to memory and decision-making of one being. Tshoane *et al* (2024) further assert that emotional abuse is often persistent in intimate partner relationships, as male victims find it difficult to understand and resist manipulative behaviours. A participant revealed in this regard, thus:

I had to persuade my employer to transfer me out of town under the guise of a new establishment that needed an experienced manager. When I explained my situation to an understanding boss, who also discovered the mental pain I lived with at home, he facilitated the transfer that made me come to town once in three months (Participant 8).

Isolation is one of the important components of psychological abuse, because it is effective against men due to their inadequate social support network. These keep male victims from voicing out or having their voices heard on the abuse perpetrated on them, which leads to emotional withdrawal and dependence on their abusers. This isolation deepens and discourages men from seeking help, leading to the continuous reinforcement of abuser control.

Sexual Coercion: Underreported due to shame and disbelief

The sexual coercion against men is the most underreported form of GBV, due to societal shame and disbelief. Stein *et al* (2025) notes that male victims who experience sexual violence witness psychological and emotional distress, including post-traumatic stress disorder, yet their experiences are dismissed or ignored. Mukwevho (2024) reported a case of men who have been sexually assaulted by female partners. When they attempted to report, they were ridiculed in the face of abuse. Most of the participants narrated their experience with sexual coercion, which depicted routine activities which they could not describe to people outside their homes. These beliefs are rooted in the myth that men love sex and are willing to participate in it without forcing themselves into it. In a similar vein, Kaur and Kaushal (2025) noted that in India, laws of GBV fail to acknowledge men as potential victims of sexual violence.

The shame associated with male victimhood of sexual coercion comes from fear and mockery, as male victims may hide their pain, leading to prolonged mental health problems and resistance in seeking help. The culture of silence increases men's invisibility on sexual abuse against men, leading to hindrance in gender inclusive development. As Njoku (2026) has noted, “part of the reason male sexual abuse is overlooked is that men tend not to speak about it. The general assumption has been that silence is driven by fear of stigmatisation”.

Legal and Financial Abuse: Manipulation through the system

The legal and financial abuse is the institutional means to overpower the victims. Males are subjected to these manipulations through fighting for the custody of the children or financial control. Kaur and Kaushal (2025) emphasise how divorce proceedings and custody of the children in India are being weaponised against men, leading to financial bankruptcy or unjust legal outcomes. Some men may even commit suicide as the judgments do not favour them when all their labours have been taken away. A participant corroborates this, thus:

My wife was a drunkard and a cheat. When she filed for divorce and custody of the children, I fought to secure the children, but the judicial institution denied me the opportunity. I only got respite when my daughter ran away from her mum, complaining of abuse (Participant 10).

Ghosh and Kumar (2024) describe cases in which some men are coerced into relinquishing their property, income, or parental rights. These judgment proceedings are a form of abuse against men, reinforcing legal structures to legitimise full control over men, thereby damaging their existence. Tshoane *et al.* (2024) argue that society cannot accept that men experience financial control. Yet it plays an important role in maintaining dependency and limiting escape options.

Conclusion

Domestic violence remains underreported, misinterpreted, and structurally ignored among male victims across different regions of the world. Despite their growing concern, systemic inequality and societal frameworks persist in marginalising their lived experience. Ingrained gender and social norms, systemic inequality, and stigmatisation fuel a cycle of silence. The theories adopted for the study include the gender role theory and stigma theory which show how masculinity is preserved to discourage vulnerability and disclosure. Male victims face all forms of violence, from systemic inequality to fear, stigma, and shame. Addressing VAM requires more than empathy, but includes service support, social inclusion, well-trained professionals, legal reforms, special and reform courts to trial perpetrators of male victims to hasten judgment, public enlightenment, awareness, campaign and advocacy. Justice, equity, equality, and healing must cut across all victims regardless of their gender, without exclusion.

Recommendations

Addressing domestic violence against men needs combined efforts from various channels. It is, therefore, important to identify the various forms of VAM to ensure targeted remedies to deal with each. Male victims face unique challenges rooted in gender and social norms, institutional failure and social stigma. Effective interventions must span legal reforms, public awareness, professional training, and infrastructure development. Legal frameworks in many countries still define DV as

GBV, and still position women as disproportionately affected. This excluded males from seeking justice and speaking out. Social norms discourage men from reporting. The law is needed to redefine their concept of GBV and must be inclusive of all genders to foster protection, unity, and cooperation.

Public awareness and advocacy must challenge the myth that men cannot be victims of abuse. This will change the negative perception of society and render help to victims. The importance of speaking out on male vulnerability and promoting survivor narratives. Male victims can be helped through various campaigns and advocacy in schools, community outreach, and social media platforms to reduce stigma and combat the normalisation of male abuse.

Professionals, such as law enforcement agencies, healthcare providers, and social workers, need to be trained and retrained on their role in accepting male victimisation as a reality rather than a myth. Men from marginalised groups should have professional healthcare to attend to their trauma, as their case is more compounded in society.

Infrastructure facilities for male victims are inadequate. Governmental and non-governmental organisations must ensure that all genders are included in any reform approach. There is a need for inclusive support systems, including male-friendly shelters, hotlines, and therapy. However, the girl child must be trained to accommodate the boy child with respect, integrity, love, and empathy. By so doing, the circle of violence will keep reducing to the barest minimum.

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