



Exploring Men's Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence by Women in the Jozini Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

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Abstract: The study aimed to explore men's experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) by women in the Jozini Municipality, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The study was informed by three main research objectives: to explore men's experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) in the Jozini Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal; to identify the types of intimate partner violence (IPV) experienced by men in the Jozini Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal; and to develop strategies to reduce IPV experienced by men in the Jozini Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal. The model that underpinned the study was the Social Learning Model by Bandura. The study used an interpretivism research paradigm which enabled the participants of the study to narrate their daily lived experiences. Hence, the study used the qualitative research method during data collection. Twelve (12) men who had experienced IPV were interviewed by the researchers. The findings showed that IPV means an intimate partner who may use insulting words, deprive the other partner of sexual intercourse and not allow the other partner to see and be visited by his/her family members. The findings also demonstrated that men do not report cases of IPV to the relevant authorities but only to the in-laws and family members. Additionally, it was discovered that men do not report cases of IPV to authorities because they are not taken seriously and end up being ridiculed in the very centres from which they seek help. It was noted that in instances where men do report cases of IPV to the police station, men tend to receive gender-stereotyped treatment because IPV is widely viewed as an issue affecting only women. The study recommended the most crucial strategies for eliminating IPV against men would be to conduct research on IPV against men, and raise awareness campaigns on IPV against men, to mention a few.

Keywords: intimate partner, violence, men abuse, intimate partner violence, abuse

Introduction

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a global phenomenon that refers to ongoing or previous experiences of abuse or violence by an intimate partner who could be male or female (World Health Organization, 2020). It is also considered as any incident or threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial, or emotional) between adults who are, or have been, intimate partners or are family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. In an intimate partner, violence can be described as a subset of domestic violence because it means it is an act of violence perpetrated against intimate partners, spouses and dating partners, either in current or former relationships (Sinha, 2013). However, IPV differs from domestic violence in that domestic violence occurs as a result of harm from one family member to another, whereas IPV is more focused on acts of aggression between individuals who are in an intimate relationship (Patra et.al., 2018:494).

In an intimate relationship, IPV is usually sex-neutral as anybody can be a victim of, or a perpetrator, of violence in society (Ibrahim and Burczycka, 2016). However, to date, there has been a lot of focus on the prevalence of IPV against women, yet there is growing evidence that points to the increasing violence against men by females and males alike (Lien and Lorentzen, 2019:1). In exploring IPV on men, women committing IPV against their male counterparts have been largely ignored for several reasons. Firstly, cultural and societal beliefs are that males

are associated with being strong, in control, and being providers; secondly patriarchy has succeeded in portraying and allowing women to be submissive, weak and obedient (Thobejane and Luthada, 2019:13). This narrative drives the notion that only women can be recipients of IPV, which facilitates reasons for men consciously choosing to silently withstand the violence received from their intimate partners.

Despite the experiences of men and the acknowledgment that IPV occurs in almost all settings and among all socio-economic, religious and cultural groups in the world (Garcia-Moreno, et al., 2012), it is, however, disheartening that those men are viewed as the main perpetrators of such violence while women tend to be portrayed as victims (Dutton and White, 2013). According to Garcia-Moreno et al. (2012), women are also the cause of violence against men, knowing that they are protected by law. Men who are abused by their female partners find it very difficult to report cases of such and they live with the pain of being victimised by women (Dutton and White, 2013; Nagesh, 2016). According to Thobejani and Luthada (2019), South Africa is rated as one of the countries with the highest level of domestic violence against women and children. As a result, more studies are being done about domestic violence against women and children and there is little research done about domestic violence against men.

This study was therefore relevant as there is currently very few studies that explores male experiences of IPV worldwide. The study also speaks directly to three (gender equality, reduced inequalities and peace, justice and strong institutions) of the 17 'Sustainable Development Goals' which 193 countries of the United Nations subscribe to. It will therefore aid in shedding light on the prevalence and extent to which men become victims of violence in intimate relationships, thus ensuring that there are reduced inequalities and that gender equality is met. It will also be useful in informing policymakers on the need for peace, justice and strong institutions in dealing with the scourge of violence in intimate relationships. It is therefore important to highlight that IPV affects all genders and to shed light on men's experiences to provide a balance on issues of gender equality as it has been largely neglected.

Problem statement

The researchers observed with concern that men in the Jozini area are also victims of IPV yet the abuse against men is not acknowledged in society. Additionally, cases of IPV against men by women do not seem to be reported because men fear being mocked when reporting cases of this nature. As argued by Kubai (2014), abuse against men remains unreported because men are regarded as perpetrators of violence. According to Thobejane and Luthada (2019), men are generally unwilling to talk about being victimised, considering that this is irreconcilable with their masculinity, particularly in societies in which men are discouraged from talking about their emotions. For Thobejane and Luthada (2019), the justice system, African cultural norms, and patriarchal societal expectations are all compounding complex issues that cause men to be reluctant to report cases of being emotionally, psychologically and physically abused at the hands of their female partners. The scourge of IPV against men continues due to a lack of self-esteem and societal pressure. For example, a Kenyan study by Kubai (2014) showed that men have always been beaten by their wives in intimate relationships and the community tends to turn a blind eye.

The researchers as a teacher and academics by profession and counsellors to people who are experiencing violence, has dealt with cases of IPV against men. The cases reported have included emotional abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse, etc. It is argued that the causes of abuse or violence against men are not easily identifiable. In that regard, there is a mutual understanding that men's alcohol consumption and the resultant inability to provide for their families and fulfil their conjugal obligations are some of the main underlying factors that trigger women into abusing them (Kubai, 2014). The current study therefore sought to explore men's experiences of IPV. The media in South Africa has also reported cases of men who are abused by their intimate partners. A very shocking case reported in South Africa is the case of a stalwart, Ntobeko Patrick Maqubela, whose body was found in June 2009, decomposing in his bed. His wife, Thandi Maqubela, was convicted of murder and sentenced to an effective 18 years in prison (eNCA, 2015).

As the literature has demonstrated, there is evidence of cases of IPV against men in intimate relationships. It was the intention of the study to explore these experiences of IPV against men within the Jozini Municipality, to identify the types of IPV experienced, and ways in which it can be eliminated. The researcher believes that if the problem of IPV against men is not attended to, men will continue to suffer at the hands of women who know that they will not be punished. In that light, the study was important as by raising awareness among the public regarding IPV against men, it will play a vital role in teaching society that abuse, in general, is wrong and unacceptable in society. The researcher believes that the study would also assist those in authority in formulating policies that seek to protect men who are victims of IPV in heterosexual relationships.

Aim of the study

The study aimed to explore men's experiences of intimate partner violence by women in Jozini Municipality, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Objectives of the study

- To explore men's experiences of intimate partner violence in the Jozini Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal.
- To identify the types of Intimate partner violence experienced by men in the Jozini Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal.
- To develop strategies to reduce intimate partner violence experienced by men in the Jozini Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal.

Theoretical framework

The model that this paper adopted is Social Learning Theory by Bandura (1963). This model combines behavioural and mental models of learning to produce an inclusive model that might take into account the wide diversity of learning experiences that occur in the actual world (Bandura, 1963:36). Social Learning Model is known for effectiveness in encouraging people to pay attention and listen carefully in order to learn. Hence, Bandura (1973) acknowledges that people learn behaviours through seeing and imitating the actions of others. In other words, children learn from their parents and from other people around them. According to Bandura (1963), another name for social learning is called observational learning. This occurs when an observer's behaviour changes as a result of watching a model behave. In this technique, an observer is impacted by the behaviour of a model in either a favourable or negative way known as vicarious reinforcement or vicarious punishment.

According to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, the environment where children reside is where observing takes place and is how people pick up new behaviours. The core idea of this theory is that early parental interactions, which are particularly prominent models, are where children learn a range of behaviours. In a similar vein, McLeod (2011) highlighted the fact that children are surrounded by a range of strong role models in society, such as their peers, parents, teachers, and characters on children's television. According to Bandura (1961), children imitate the actions of others around them after having observed them. Therefore, these models offer behaviour that may be seen and imitated. Through the family's (parents, siblings, relatives, and lovers) direct or indirect role models, violence is learned. It serves as a coping mechanism for stress or a means of dispute resolution throughout childhood and maturity (Bandura, 1973). Attention, retention, production, and motivation are the four distinct processes that go into social learning or observational learning, according to Bandura (1972). The four processes are thought to be the foundation of the social learning theory.

According to Bandura (1972), observational learning takes place by observing, remembering, and imitating behaviour acquired through socialisation. Replicas, according to Bandura (1972), are the people who perform the replicated performance. Although it is asserted that this kind of learning can occur at any age, it is believed to be especially crucial during the formative years when respect for authority is high. It is thought that learning can occur through observational learning without a direct change in behaviour. In other words, learning cannot occur unless behaviour occurs. It is acknowledged that new experiences can fundamentally alter and transform past behaviours. Learning thus promotes earlier improper behaviour. Sometimes it can have an impact on behaviours that are similar to those being displayed but cannot be distinguished from them. For example, witnessing a child memorize math facts may encourage another child to do the same. It can be claimed that the observational theory of learning indicates that behaviour is influenced more by considering the repercussions of an action than by immediate consequences (Bandura, 1972).

Therefore, it can be claimed that families are to blame for promoting and teaching violence (Gelles, 1972). As a result of often witnessing violence between family members, young children come to believe that it is a way of life. Fierceness may also result in immediate strengthening, such as a decrease in the unpleasant, contentious environment and an increase in sentiments of self-efficacy (Mihalic and Elliott, 1997). In a nutshell, the sentiments shared above are indications that being exposed to and experiencing fierceness can make one violent.

The lessons learned about the functional character of violence that is, how it may be used to express oneself, solve issues, control, and dominate others put a person at future risk of interpersonal violence (Jacobson et al., 1994). According to Wekerle and Wolfe (1995), using violence in intimate relationships may result in immediate benefits such as a reduction in conflict-related aversion (such as tension-related sensations and perceptions of demandingness) and an increase in sentiments of personal agency. Although the cycle of violence idea has empirical support (Widom, 1989), a scientific evaluation of its viability is constrained by methodological issues. Because the roots of relationship violence are laid in childhood but become active in adolescence when dating begins, maltreated children are more likely to experience relationship violence (Earls, Cairns, and Mercy, 1993). Particularly during the adolescent dating stage, one may notice the cumulative impact of exposure to experiences

of violence (Carlson, 1990). Adolescence is a stage when parental abuse increases and is also closer in time to their earlier maltreatment experiences than maturity (Sedlack and Broadhurst, 1996).

According to Barongan and Hall (1995), young people are exposed to powerful instances of coercive and sexist relationship models through the entertainment industry. Youth who have experienced abuse are more susceptible to these messages, probably because they have a difficult time understanding how to express their compassion and care for others, as well as because they are desperate for acceptance (Wekerle and Wolfe, 1998a; Wolfe et al., 1997). Through appealing depictions of sex and violence in television programs and advertisements, media portrayals of relationships aid in this process of disorientation. Unhappy family circumstances encourage a young person's emotional urge to choose and watch music videos that encourage escape and fantasy. The film might appear more intimate and passionate to you than it would to someone who comes from a happier home setting (Strouse, Buerkel-Rothfuss and Long, 1995). As a result, they start to see romance, sexual activity, and intimate relationships as depicted in the video.

The four elements of learning from others

Attention

Some claim that observers cannot learn unless they are aware of their surroundings. This process is influenced by both the observer's expectations and emotional arousal level as well as the model's qualities, such as how much the observer likes or identifies with the model. To put it another way, attention processes decide which characteristics of the modelled behaviour the observer will pay attention to. People cannot learn much via observation unless they pay attention to and precisely perceive the key characteristics of the model behaviour (Bandura, 1977: 6). It is asserted that in order to learn from observed behaviours, the observer must pay close attention to them (Bethards, 2014). In other words, followers emulate or learn from their master's on a daily basis. It is evident that observers carefully and thoroughly observe the model in order to replicate behaviour. According to Bandura (1977), witnesses must pay attention to their surroundings in addition to learning about what is happening. According to Bandura (1977), this process is influenced by both the observer's preferences for or identification with the model as well as their behaviour's. Additionally, it is asserted that the model's actions influence the audience, particularly the audience's level of emotional arousal.

Retention

According to Bandura (1977), observers are required to recall the seen behaviour in addition to recognising it when it is happening. This process relies on the observer's capacity to mentally or physically simulate the activities of the model or to code or organize the information in a way that is easily recalled. According to Bethards (2014), retention mechanisms aid the observer in imprinting the seen behaviour in memory in a symbolic manner. According to Bandura (1977), a hallmark of retention is that observers primarily employ verbal and imagined systems to recall the modelled behaviour. This means that observers picture themselves engaging in the modelled behaviour in the future or in a different circumstance. We can infer that the spectator mentally pictures certain features of the behaviour and consequently silently practices certain behavioural steps. In other words, the observer use his or her capacity to organise or code the data in a way that makes it simple to recall. According to Astray-Canada, Busbee, and Fanning (2011), memory is important because it allows the observer to use what they have seen again.

Production

According to Bandura (1977), observers must be both physically and mentally capable of doing the act. To learn how to ride a bike, for instance, would be motor reproduction. The observer frequently has the proper reactions on hand. However, there are situations when replicating the model's activities may require abilities the observer does not yet possess. Observing a juggler in a circus is one thing; performing same acts at home is quite another. According to authors like Allen and Santrock (1993), after an observer has seen how a model behaves, they will show what they have learnt.

Motivation

Typically, onlookers won't engage in the act unless they are motivated to do so. In this process, the existence of reinforcement or punishment, whether directed at the model or the observer directly, becomes crucial. It is argued that a person must have motivation to imitate what they have observed. It is further suggested that depending on what happened to the model, the observer's motivation to mimic the behaviour and whether or not he or she is motivated change. However, you would be less inclined to copy if you saw the model receiving punishment; this is known as vicarious punishment. Additionally, an observer is more likely to mimic the behaviour of a model if they respect or like it more. External reinforcement, such promises of prizes from an experimenter, can also serve as a source of motivation (Bandura, 1977).

The Relevance of Social Learning Theory to this Study

As mentioned earlier, this study adopted Social Learning Theory. For instance, the Social Learning Theory contends that people who exhibit violent behaviour do so by inheriting it from someone or something. They might have received it through friends or family (Siegel, 2005). Additionally, behaviour modelling is a component of social learning that demonstrates how people learn by watching what others do, particularly young children. Accordingly, family relationships, environmental experiences, and mass media are the three main perpetrators of violence. For example, during family interactions, Siegel (2005) reveals that studies of family life have shown that children who are aggressive often have parents who also behave aggressively. For instance, children of wife beaters are more prone than children in the general population to employ aggressive methods themselves, especially if the victims their mothers experience psychological anguish as a result of the abuse. Moreover, environmental experiences is another element that teaches people to be violent. For example, Siegel (2005) argues that people who reside in areas where violence occurs daily are more likely to act violently than those who dwell in low-crime areas whose norms stress conventional behaviour. Siegel's (2005) study maintains that mass media is another contributor to violence in a family films and television shows commonly depict violence graphically. Moreover, violence is often portrayed as acceptable, especially for the heroes who never have to face legal consequences for their actions.

It may be claimed that the Social Learning Theory (SLT) supports the premise that family violence is learnt from childhood on the basis of the aforementioned three points made by Siegel (2005), who supports the idea that violence is learned. As a result, it views the family as the institution and social unit where individuals learn to play the roles of husband and wife, parent, and kid. To put it another way, the house is where everyone in the family learns how to deal with a variety of tensions, crises, and disappointments (Gelles, 1995). Gelles (1995) warns that a person often learns how to justify being violent and experiences violence for the first time in the household. According to Social Learning Theory, violent offenders may have been buttered as kids. In other words, a greater likelihood of future violent behaviour is associated with childhood exposure to abuse in the household. Boys who were exposed to familial violence when they were young are thought to have a double the risk of becoming violent as adults (National Coalition against Domestic Violence, 2007). It is asserted that domestic violence-prone households frequently mistreat children. Additionally, Social Learning Theory demonstrated that spectators who end up becoming offenders also commit child abuse in areas where domestic abuse occurs between 30% and 60% of the time (National Coalition against Domestic Violence, 2007). The Social Learning Theory, which holds that people pick up social behaviours through watching and copying others, was used in this study. Children, for instance, watch their parents' actions and copy them. It is made clear that this process can be seen in a child's language, aggression, and moral judgment development. It might be claimed that the social learning model serves as a mirror, making it obvious how violent behaviour is ingrained from an early age through a process known as witnessing.

Methodology

Research methodology refers to the systematic and scientific approach used to investigate a research problem and achieve the stated aims of a study. It serves as a roadmap that guides the researcher in selecting appropriate methods for collecting and analysing data in order to address the research questions and objectives effectively (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). In line with this understanding, a qualitative research approach formed the foundation of this study. Qualitative methodology was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of experiences and social phenomena from the perspectives of those directly involved (Creswell, 2014). This approach was particularly suitable for the present study, as it sought to explore the lived experiences of men who are currently experiencing, or have previously experienced, abuse within marital relationships perpetrated by their wives. By prioritising participants' voices and subjective meanings, the qualitative approach allowed for a nuanced exploration of sensitive and often underreported experiences.

This study employed an exploratory, descriptive, and narrative research design to investigate the experiences of men who have been abused or assaulted by their female intimate partners. Although often overlooked, abuse against men by women remains a significant global concern. The study focused on identifying and understanding such incidents through in-depth interviews and qualitative data analysis. A sample of 12 men who were either currently experiencing abuse or had previously experienced abuse in intimate relationships was selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Participants were personally invited to take part in the study, and all those approached agreed to participate voluntarily. The use of a small, purposively selected sample enabled a rich, contextualised exploration of participants' lived experiences.

The sample size of 12 men was deliberately selected to align with the aims and methodological orientation of the study. As an exploratory qualitative study, the primary objective was not to achieve statistical generalisation, but to gain an in-depth and contextualised understanding of men's lived experiences of abuse by their female intimate partners. Qualitative research prioritises depth, meaning, and richness of data rather than large sample sizes, and

smaller samples are considered appropriate when the phenomenon under investigation is sensitive, underreported, and complex. The use of a focused sample of 12 participants enabled the researchers to conduct detailed, narrative-based interviews that allowed participants sufficient space to share personal and emotionally charged experiences. Furthermore, the sample size was considered adequate to reach data saturation, where no substantially new themes emerged from additional interviews. Given the stigma associated with male victimisation and the difficulty of accessing this population, purposive and snowball sampling were employed to identify information-rich cases. Thus, the sample size was justified as methodologically appropriate, ethically manageable, and sufficient to meet the study's objectives of understanding and describing men's experiences of intimate partner abuse.

In order to mitigate internal biases in verbal, textual, and visual information, we approached it systematically and reflexively. For example, during the process of interviews, we ensured that clarity was done during participants' verbal responses through follow-up and probing questions which was helpful in reducing misunderstandings, exaggerations, or socially desirable answers. By rephrasing questions and checking for consistency across responses, the interviewer can identify contradictions and better understand participants' intended meanings. Once interviews are transcribed verbatim, the resulting textual data provides an accurate and transparent record of participants' statements, limiting researcher reinterpretation and selective emphasis. The use of consistent coding frameworks further reduces subjective bias during analysis, while participant validation can correct inaccuracies or misrepresentations. In addition, interviews generate visual data such as body language, facial expressions, and contextual cues, which help contextualize verbal responses and reveal hesitation, discomfort, or emphasis that may not be evident in text alone. Comparing visual cues with spoken statements allows researchers to identify inconsistencies and better interpret meaning. The integration of verbal, textual, and visual data enables triangulation, reducing reliance on a single data source and strengthening the credibility of findings. Through careful interview design, neutral questioning, and reflexive analysis, interviews provide a robust method for mitigating internal biases within qualitative data. The following is a presentation of the participants' demographics:

Table 1.1: Demographic Characteristics of participants

Variables	Frequency (n=12)
Gender	
Female	0
Male	12
Total	12
Age(years)	
18 – 29	0
30 – 40	4
41 – 50	6
51 and above	2
Total	12
Highest Level of Education	
Grade 7 and less	1
Grade 8 – 11	2
Senior Certificate / Matric	6
Bachelors' Degree	3
Postgraduate	0
Total	12
Number of years experiencing IPV	
Less than 12 months	0
2 years - 3 years	1
4 years - 6 years	3
7 years - 10 years	5
11 years and above	3
Total	12

“Source: Authors' owns work.”

Ethical considerations

To increase reliability even further, ethical considerations were made sure of both before and throughout the investigation. The project was given approval by the University of Zululand's Research Ethics Committee (UZREC 171110-030 PGD 2021/126), after they were contacted. All 12 participants (men) voluntarily signed consent forms. Key informants were not permitted to participate in the interviews by the researchers until they had received an explanation of the study's methodology and had completed an informed consent form. They were also informed that they would not get payment for their participation, that they could leave the study at any time without facing consequences, and that all data gathered would be kept confidential with the exception of the researchers. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study, which was to look into the abuse experienced by men in the hands of their wives in an intimate relationship.

Data analysis

Creswell (2014) likes to employ the qualitative thematic analysis approach to "identify, analyse, and report patterns" (themes) in the gathered data (p. 56). The researchers were able to arrange and describe the data set in (rich) detail using the method explained by Creswell (2014). Issues that are presented with care regarding how women mistreat males in close relationships. Thematic analysis was used to examine the gathered data. After the qualitative data was analysed, several themes surfaced. The study managed to gather data from males who have experienced and continue to experience abuse at the hands of their wives who are intimate partners. The following is a discussion of the results:

Findings

Theme 1: Understanding of intimate partner violence against men

The participants were asked about their level of knowledge of IPV against men. This question was asked to unveil whether men know what it means to be abused by their women intimate partners. The study established that IPV against men is when female partners intentionally use insulting words and objects with the intention to cause harm. These findings were consistent with those of the World Health Organization (WHO) (2014) that violence is the intentional use of bodily force or authority against another person or against a group or community with the intent to harm. Some participants articulated their understanding of IPV against men as follows:

"Some female partners use strong words against their intimate partners with an intention to ensure that they afflict them emotionally and psychologically". (Participant #4)

"It is the use objects like knife, boiling water, gun and stones by a female intimate partner with an intention to harm the male". (Participant#7).

Correspondingly, scholars such as Ali et al., (2016) also considered violence in an intimate partner relationship as the use of very sensitive words, physical force, or power to injure the other person, which includes neglect and all forms of physical, sexual and psychological abuse. Policastro and Finn (2017) were of the view that violence in an intimate partner relationship is always directed at either a male or female partner, and is sometimes intended to cause injury, pain, fear and panic. According to Bandura (1973), the social learning model shows that violence happens is common in livelihood in all age groups.

Sub-Theme 1: Awareness of IPV against men in the area

The participants were asked about their level of awareness of abuse against men in intimate partner relations. Interestingly, the study established that all male participants revealed that they were fully aware of abuse against men by their intimate partners in their areas and it was a common thing, even though it was unknown in many cases. The study findings corroborated Bandura's (1973) model which also showed that it is possible for everyone to experience abuse in life because if a person grew up in a family that was violent, that person is possible to be violent too. The findings of the study concurred with Kubai (2014), Kolbe and Buttner (2020) in that abuse or violence against men is a well-documented and very old subject, but it has been largely ignored due to its nature. The Pandora Project (2009) also stated that the prevalence of women abusing their intimate partners or husbands began to emerge as early as the mid-1970s. Two participants articulated that:

"There are many cases of abuse against men in an intimate partner relationship, especially among men who are married and most of them turn to alcohol in order to cope with the situation". (Participant #1)

"Even though abuse against men is not known, men are experiencing very dangerous abuse from their female partners. The critical thing is that abuse against women is preached all over our country, yet the abuse against men is something that the public hardly talk about". (Participant #10)

The findings above concurred with Safariolyaei and Amiri (2017) who also found that men have been abused by their intimate partners, but such cases are not widely publicised. This means that men's experiences of IPV are

often hidden or unknown in the community because they are hidden from the public and many believe that it is only women who are abused by men (Safariolyaei and Amiri, 2017).

Sub-Theme 2: Personal experiences of intimate partner violence

The study wanted participants to uncover their personal experience of IPV by women who were their intimate partners in a relationship. This question was significant because it was intended to determine how IPV against men takes place and for what reason. The study discovered that males have different experiences of IPV in their relationships. In supporting the statement above, two participants said:

“As for me, the kind of abuse I suffer is verbal abuse which transcended to emotional abuse because a person speaks to you in a bad manner, it is bound to affect you emotionally. Since I am working far from home and at times I call my wife wanting to talk to my children, my wife would lie to me that they are playing outside. When I call my mother in-law, she would tell me that my wife is not at home but in town and that is the reason she was unable to give her phone to children to talk to them. That is when I realise that she was lying and when I confront her about her dishonest, she will then verbally abuse me. One time she came to my place of work, and I was not aware about that, and she embarrassed and insulted me in front of my colleagues. She comes to the complex where I stay and able to gain access because she befriended a security guard. She comes there to abuse, and she does not appreciate anything I do for her. As a result, I decided to commit my life to alcohol and I knew that when I am drug, my mind shuts off and I go to sleep without thinking of her evil behaviour. Alcohol never used to be my friend but because of the abuse I was receiving from my partner, I committed myself to it. And when I broke up with her, the drinking of alcohol also came to an end. I left everything behind”. (Participant #1)

“My wife threw boiling water on me because she was suspecting that I was cheating with her friend. Her friend was very close to both of us, and it is her who introduced me to her and after sometime she started arguing with me that I am in love with her friend. Her friend would call her through my phone if she was unable to find her in her phone and she suspected that we were cheating. My whole body was burned because she poured boiling water on me. My wife become an animal once we are in the house with her and any argument that starts between us, she is the first to insult me and even beat me. I am living with beast, and she even says if I separate with her, she will make sure that I get killed. My life is miserable even now.” (Participant #5)

The findings of the study agreed with Bandura's (1973) model which demonstrated that it is possible that children learn how to be violent from their parents and the environment where they are. Bandura (1973) also indicated that when a child that witnessed violence at a tender age become an adult, there are high chances for him/her to become abusive in life especially when he/she is in a relationship with. The findings of the study were corroborated by Mngomezulu (2019), who also found that women now employ different methods of IPV that are not strength dependent because they have realised that men are strong and have stamina in the event of a physical fight and are skilful enough to defend themselves. Drijber, Reijnders and Ceelen (2013) evidenced that some women have gone to the extent that they have high tempers where they apply physical objects such as daggers, chairs, weapons, boiling water, boiling oil and cutlery in attacks against male partners.

Theme 2: Types of abuse experienced by men in an intimate partner relationship

This section of the study describes the types of abuse imposed on males by their women intimate partners who are violent. The study felt it was critical to uncover this kind of information to make an informed decision on this subject. Having said that, the following sub-themes were discussed.

Sub-Theme 3: Depriving men of sexual intercourse

According to the findings of the study, some men complained that they are deprived of sexual intercourse by their wives. According to Bandura (1973), men can experience any form of abuse depending on the type of partner they are married to and what form abuse they feel like imposing on their partners. Two participants lamented:

“We as men, we suffer many things. In my cases for instance, my wife used to deprive me sexual intercourse for months and at times she would tell me to pay her R1000 for sexual intercourse. This thing became a thorn in my flesh, and I was really hurt. I used to pay the money because I really wanted sex.” (Participant #7)

“My partner used to be very strategic when it came to having sexual intercourse. She will complain for the first three weeks of the month but come month end, she will pretend as if all is well and would allow me to have an intimacy with her just maybe 2 days because she knew I had a salary. I saw myself as someone buying her to have sexual intercourse with me.” (Participant #9)

These findings were corroborated by the Indiana University (2020) which found that some partners deprive one another sexual intercourse due to financial issues. According to the Indiana University (2020), it is a common thing among married couples to find that one partner intentionally deprives the other the opportunity to be intimate as a form of punishment, which - is a form of IPV.

Sub-Theme 4: Men are not allowed to have contact with their immediate family members

The findings of the study demonstrated that some males are not allowed by their female intimate partners to have contact with their immediate families. This was voiced by some participants who said:

“One of the things that we as men suffer too much is that our wives do not allow us to have a relationship with our immediate families. My wife never allows me to visit my family members, yet her sister and younger brother are staying with us. I am not allowed to even buy my mother something to eat as a breadwinner of my family. My wife tells me in the eyes that my mother has got her own husband who should be responsible for her not me.” (Participants #2, 5, 6, 7,9 &10)

The findings above concurred with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) and Mngomezulu (2019) in that when couples abuse one another, the partner who has an upper hand ensures that his/her partner is isolated from friends and family members, denying him/her access to money or other basic resources.

Sub-Theme 5: Use of dangerous weapons and pulling men’s private parts

It was discovered from the study findings that a number of men complained that women use dangerous weapons to hurt men when an argument erupts. The findings of the study suggested that women use different dangerous weapons to hurt their male partners. Some participants emphasised:

“I got hurt and injured by my partner who took a brick smote me on the chest. I was hospitalised because I was unable to breath. She left me struggling to breath and I got help from my neighbours because I was drunk and the reason for my drinking was caused by her abusive behaviour.” (Participant #5)

“I will never forget the day my wife took my pistol and shot in the air telling me that my bank card belongs to her as a wife. She demanded that all the salary should come to her, and she is the one to decide what to do with the salary not me. I was under constant attack by my wife and the only thing that saved me was to leave her. She overpowered me because she had a huge body, and I was to her like a little boy. I do not think that will ever get married because you marry a woman, you become in trouble as she will boss you for the rest of your life. Never in my life will I ever involve myself with a woman.” (Participant #3)

“We had my wife’s friend when an argument started, my wife spoke as if I was nothing in the house and in front her friend. I commanded her to slow down her voice she slaps me on the face with a fist and her friend came me and pulled me backwards. My wife jumps and took off my trouser and pulled me with my private parts while her friend was holding me on the floor. I was half dead and when I woke-up I was in the hospital.” (Participant #7)

“My ex-wife used our house knife to stab me in the stomach. Even though our argument was a bit serious, I never thought she had a capability to use that to stab me. I was hospitalised for six months, and I never used any weapon to fight back. It was then when I decided that it is time for me to leave her.” (Participant #10)

“I will never forget the day my wife took my pistol and shot in the air telling me that my bank card belongs to her as a wife. She demanded that all the salary should come to her, and she is the one to decide what to do with the salary not me. I was under constant attack by my wife and the only thing that saved me was to leave her. She overpowered me because she had a huge body, and I was to her like a little boy. Living with an abusive wife is a curse and I will never in my life be involved with any woman.” (Participant #3)

The study findings aligned with those of Safariolyaei and Amiri’s (2017) who stated that when IPV is happening in a couple, very dangerous weapons and choking, or an attempt to strangle, is used as a form of violence. The two authors added that the use of weapons is to injure, cause disability or even death. According to Kolbe and Buttner, (2020), women are very aggressive against men as some use very sharp objects like knives to finish off with their partners. The findings above are in-line with those of Hines and Douglas (2010) who reported that because men are more likely to be physically larger and stronger than their female partners, women use extremely powerful objects like pistols and knives to ensure that men are completely knocked down.

Sub-Theme 6: Emotional abuse

The findings of the study uncovered that some participants were abused emotionally by their intimate female partners. Participants expressed that they had been subjected to emotional abuse for long periods of time. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) and Mngomezulu (2019) also found that psychological/emotional abuse is one of the types of abuse experienced in an intimate partner relationship. Mngomezulu (2019), in particular, mentioned that emotional abuse is about humiliating the victim, controlling what the victim can and cannot do, withholding information from the victim, purposefully doing something to make the victim feel diminished or embarrassed, isolating the victim from friends and family, and denying the victim access to money or other basic resources. Bandura (1973) also mentioned that people who grew up in a family that used to be violent, their children normally become emotional and would use anything at his/her disposal to abuse the other person. This was evident when two participants from the semi-structured interviews lamented as follows:

“In the beginning, I thought my wife was just a talkative woman but as time went by, I realised that talking too much was her lifestyle. She would use insulting words and would say I sleep with my mum. Meaning that I have sexual intercourse with my mother. In actual fact, my wife used to be a monster and if I never quitted, I was going to die and I was repeatedly battered and psychologically tortured.” (Participant #14)

“I have been emotionally and physically abused, as well as subjected to discrimination. I was really hurt emotionally because I was nothing to my wife. I respect women and I will never associate myself with them. Never.” (Participant#10)

These findings agreed with the literature that the most dangerous aspect of this type of abuse is that it can be classified as an interpersonal trauma, as well as symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which affect both men and women equally. It exposes men and women in intimate partner relationships to comorbid symptoms like depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, substance abuse, and sleep disturbances (Schou-Bredal et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2019; Gilmore and Flanagan, 2018; Carey et al., 2018; Rosellini et al., 2017; Kirkner et al., 2017; Walby and Towers, 2018).

Theme 3: The way the victims responded to their experiences of IPV

The study required participants to discuss how they responded to the IPV they had experienced, as it demonstrated that there was a common way in which men responded to the abuse they were experiencing. For example, the findings showed that talking to friends and parents as well as abusing alcohol and practicing polygamy were some of the ways to release stress. These findings were corroborated by Douglas and Hines (2011) who also reported when men are seeking help for domestic violence, they normally inform their parents and the in-laws. Some victims voiced the following:

“I dealt with my abuse by talking to friends mostly when I was drunk. This led to advice of going to see a psychologist. Speaking to a psychologist really helped me a lot. But before seeing the psychologist I used alcohol as my escape and a way to deal with the abuse. I also broke up with my partner even though I still loved her.” (Participant #1)

“I called wife’s parents and my parents to intervene, but it was like pouring water on a duck’s back. My wife will pretend as if she hears me and the advice of the parents very well but the minute our parents left us, she will begin where we ended. My wife was a beast.” (Participant #3)

Sub-Theme 7: Boozing alcohol

The study demonstrated that when men are abused by their wives, committing their lives to alcohol is the only way to release stress. This was also demonstrated when one of the participants in the semi-structured interviews expressed his dissatisfaction with the following comment:

“Boozing alcohol was the only way I thought about because telling friends, relatives and reporting to the police-station is another way of making yourself a laughing stock. I decided to commit my-life in alcohol and come home extremely drunk.” (Participant #2)

The findings of the study attested to the findings of Abramsky’s et al. (2011) that alcohol bingeing is one of the means used by the victims of IPV to console themselves when experiencing no peace in the house. Other reasons for this association include alcohol use as a way of coping with the violence as well as other adverse living conditions (Kaysen et al., 2007).

Sub-Theme 8: Practising polygamy

The study established that some men preferred to practise polygamy when they experienced IPV in their current marriage. This became evident as some participants lamented:

“I was abused by my wife to an extent that taking another wife was a solution to me. My life became better, and I took a third (3rd) wife and now am planning to have a fourth one. I never thought of polygamy but today I say to men who are abused by their wives, please take more wives if you want peace in your life and marriage.” (Participant #8, 10, 11 & 12)

These findings were corroborated by Naseer, Farooq and Malik’s (2021) findings that men practise polygamy as a way of having peace in their lives and marriage. Moreover, men allow themselves to marry as many wives as possible in order to maintain equality and justice in all the possession a man holds in material.

Theme 4: Contributory factors that lead to the perpetuation of IPV against men in heterosexual relationships

The participants in this study were asked to state the causes of IPV against men. This question ignited a great deal of debate among the participants, who responded with a multiplicity of diverse explanations for their situations. It is important to note that this section of the study had several themes emanating from the findings. They are discussed in the following ways:

Sub-Theme 8: Insufficiency of money in the family

The study findings established that when the husbands in an intimate partner relationship have no extra income, it sparks trouble in the house. This was demonstrated by the participants who stated that when money was insufficient in the house, their wives became violent and wild. This was evident when one participant said:

“The cause of the abuse was usually because my wife would ask for some money from me and when I say I do not have money; she will burst at me. The amazing part of this is that she expects me to always have money, yet I am paying school fees for the kids, I pay the bond and I buy food. To her, this is not enough, I should have money all the time, yet I am also employed like her. She does not want to use her money but mine all the time. Life is very hard when you have married a woman who always wants to be satisfied by having money in her pocket.” (Participant #10)

“It is a mark of shame when your wife has a salary that is more than yours as a husband. She rules you and is in charge all the time. You do not have any word and all the time she has a final word.” (Participant #5)

The findings above are supported by the Pandora Project (2009) which reported that men are denied by their intimate partners to have control over their own salaries because women want to know how the money is used and spent. Mngomezulu (2019) further lamented that women demand all the money from their husbands, and they go to the extent of taking their husbands’ bank cards and keeping them.

Sub-Theme 9: Stalking

The study discovered that stalking is one of the causes of IPV imposed by women on men. This became evident as one of the participants grieved:

“My wife always wants to know what I am doing, where I would be going and with who. She always wants to know what friend I am with, what time I am coming back home If she phones and by any mistake, I am unable to pick up her call when gets in touch with me, she would call me for several times to ensure that I feel guilt. When I come home, she will refuse to open the door for and will ensure that I sleep outside the house.” (Participant #9)

These findings concurred with Bandura (1961) who also revealed that children who grew-up in a relationship that was violent, they tend to imitate the actions they observed on their partners in future. The findings of the study are in conjunction with Thompson and O’Sullivan (2016) who discovered that wives become restless and ending up with suspicions of unfaithfulness in the lives of their husbands. According to Hart and Legerstee (2010), once women have developed suspicion of infidelity against their intimate partners, it causes them to have a complex set of thoughts, feelings, and actions because of a threat to self-esteem and/or a threat to the existence or quality of the relationship.

Sub-Theme 10: Cheating

The study also established that some men are victimised by their intimate partners' relationships because they are always caught cheating. Two participants voiced that:

"My wife caught me once committing adultery and now she insults me every-day. I accepted my mistake but now I am suffering for what I did she is not forgiving me." (Participant #2)

"To be honest madam, I cheated with my wife's closest friend and now I am paying for what I did." (Participant #11)

The study findings concurred with those of Fowler (2002:9) in that unfaithfulness is one of the root causes of IPV against men. For example, Fowler (2002: 9) added that some men are reportedly alleged to be cheating with the wives of their friends who are also close friends to their wives. According to Fowler (2002), some men have gone to the extent that they even cheat with women who are housekeepers, which furthermore perpetuates IPV cases.

Sub-Theme 11: Reporting experiences of IPV

The participants were asked if any of the cases of IPV they had experienced were reported to the relevant people or authorities. The aim behind this question was to uncover whether men reported cases of IPV by their women partners and indicate where the cases were reported. Based on the question above, the study discovered that men reported their experiences of IPV by their intimate partners only to their family members. Only two (2) men report cases of abuse by their partners:

"I did report to her parents, but they would choose to listen to their daughter. I also would speak to my mother and sisters and even though they felt my pain, I got very little advice from them. I did not report to other family members because I did not want people in my affairs and that men tend to be protective of their bedroom affairs which leads them not to talk." (Participant #1).

"Madam, cases of abuse against men cannot be reported to any authority because women according to the law of South Africa are always right and they can do anything to their husbands. I only reported my case to men who came to negotiate and pay dowry for me. But then, they were unable to help me because my wife pretended to be nice in front of them but once we are together, she becomes a lion. I was unable to stand that, and I had to quit." (Participant #4)

According to Safariolyne and Amiri (2017), the matter of IPV against men ends between family members where it is only reported and no action is taken because men are believed to be strong. Hines and Douglas (2010) articulated that when men complain about their experiences of IPV by women, no action is taken because men are perceived to be strong and capable of avoiding violence by their partners.

Sub-Theme 12: Steps taken after the incident of IPV is reported

A follow-up question was asked of the participants regarding the steps taken after the experience of IPV was exposed. The study found that steps taken by their family members but were all in vain. The participants highlighted these:

"I reported to her parents, but because she was good at talking and spinning things around I would turn into the bad guy. I also reported to my family, but no steps were taken because they believe I am a man that can solve all my problems."

"Oh, women are very smart and can terrorise you in front of people. My wife denied everything she was doing to me, and all the family members left the meeting blaming me in everything. After several attempts, I had to quit my marriage because she was an animal."

These findings agreed with Safariolyne and Amiri (2017) whose findings also found that men are always viewed as perpetrators of violence in intimate partner relationships, and when men are abused by their partners, little attention is paid. According to Sethuraman (2008), when men as victims of abuse report cases of IPV by their intimate partners, a large number of people do not believe them and as a result, men themselves as victims of the violence feel shy and end up assuming that nobody will believe them. In that regard, it is generally presumed that when men have a bruised eye or swollen chin, he was hurt while performing his duties or was involved in a brawl.

Sub-Theme 13: Hindrances of reporting or opening a case against the culprit

Again, participants were asked to state the reasons behind not reporting their experiences of IPV to the right authorities, meaning opening a case against the culprit. The study established that men had similar reasons for not reporting cases of IPV. For example, the study discovered that men fear being the laughing stock in society, as this would always be the case. Many men who never reported had this to say:

“What prevents men from reporting is that it is seen as shameful to be abused by your wife as a man and you lose your manhood. Furthermore, as for me, I was taught at home as a boy that you must not be found or heard airing your dirty laundry and having your personal affairs spoken about by other people. Even at the police station it is not safe because you will be reporting to local officers who know you or are members of the community and will ridicule your situation.” Participants #2, 3, 6 & 12)

“Listen my sister, reporting cases of abuse especially when your female partner abuses you is a mark of shame in the society. Once you report your story to the police station, they will laugh at you and talk about you all over the township or community. Hence keeping to yourself and few trusted family members is crucial.” (Participants #5, 7, 8, 9, 10 & 11)

According to Kolbe and Buttner (2020), there are few, to almost no cases, of men being abused by their intimate partners that are reported because men are afraid for their suffering to be known. Several studies Kubai (2014) and the Pandora Project (2009) argued that many cases of violence against men by their intimate partners do not receive public attention because men in general do not report their experiences of IPV due to the stigma and patriarchal views of society. The reason for this is that women are perceived to be more frequent victims of intimate partner violence, and the idea that a woman could be the instigator rather than a caregiver is counter-intuitive and contradicts social norms of femininity (Lien and Lorentzen, 2019).

Theme 5: Strategies to minimise men’s experiences of intimate partner violence

The study required participants to discuss and indicate contextual solutions that needed to be adapted in order to minimise men’s experiences of IPV in an intimate partner violence. The following is a summary of the findings derived from the participants:

Sub-Theme 14: Raising awareness of intimate partner violence against men

The study findings demonstrated that there is a need to raise awareness of the experiences of IPV inflicted on men because the community is not aware of such an act. This was demonstrated by some of the participants, who stated what they had observed:

“Awareness can be raised by using radio/ media campaigns which address issues of IPV against men and not only women as it is currently done, because women also murder men, but it is kept as a secret or isn’t shone in the same spotlight as that of women. There should also be months that raise awareness on men abuse and law enforcement agencies should also take men seriously when reporting cases.” (Participants #1, 5 & 12)

The study findings are supported by Green, Cooper and Wilke (2017) whose study revealed that it is critical for the awareness of the public about abuse against men by their intimate partners because many people believe it is only men who abuse women. Additionally, awareness of abuse against men, children and women can also be raised through media such as television, radio, the internet, newspapers, magazines, and other printed publications, for example, reach a larger audience and influence change in society (Green, Cooper and Wilke, 2017; Campbell and Manganello, 2006).

Sub-Theme 15: Equal Treatment

According to the findings of the study, men who experience abuse by their wives strongly believe that they do not receive equal treatment as they are always thought to be perpetrators of abuse. As a result, they demanded that they be treated equally with women because they are also human beings, and they deserve to be heard and treated well. According to one participant:

“It is hard to say. The only thing needed is for everyone to restrain from inhuman thoughts and learn to treat us the way they want to be treated.” (Participants #7, 9 & 11)

Another participant suggested:

“Our government especially policy implementers must stop thinking that men are strong and cannot be abused by a woman because women are dangerous compared to men. We also need a constitution that protect men from abuse by their intimate partners. I do not understand the logic of thinking that men are

faking when men are murdered by women. Maybe it is because women complain too much compared to men who keep quiet.” (Participants #3&5)

These findings agreed with Kubai (2014), Kolbe and Buttner’s (2020) findings that the abuse or violence against men is a well-documented and very old subject, but it has been largely ignored due to its nature and there is no equal treatment between the two genders.

Sub-Theme 16: Imprisonment of Perpetrators

The study demonstrated that men who are abused by their intimate partners in a relationship believe it is critical for perpetrators to face life in prison if convicted of murdering their partners, just like men. The findings concurred with Ghosh (2020) who also recommended that once all genders are aware of the implications of abuse of each other, it should be easy to put the perpetrator in prison. To bolster the above suggestion, one participant demonstrated:

“Women who abuse their intimate partners by murdering them and are found guilty of abuse and killings of their husbands should get life imprisonment. This would end the perception that men are strong and can defend themselves.” (Participant #1, 4 &10)

Sub-Theme 17: Provision of psychological counselling

After experiencing abuse, men should also receive psychological counselling from a professional psychologist, according to the findings of the study. The study demonstrated that men need counselling, just like women, when they are abused by their intimate partners. The International Federation of Social Workers (2014) also revealed that social workers, together with psychologists, are considered as professionals whose responsibility is to provide counselling to ensure that they deal with the root cause of the problem. This was evidenced by some men who stated:

“Social workers and psychologist should be encouraged to intervene in such cases and to hear from both partners because dealing with one person cannot solve the problem.” (Participant #10)

Another participant said:

“Psychologist play a crucial role in counselling us as we are unable to cope emotionally and psychologically especially after we have been abused. We become traumatised emotionally and psychologically.” (Participant #3)

The findings of the study agreed with those of Hogan et al. (2012) who also found that men who are abused by their intimate partners require counselling just like women and children. The author also mentioned that once men have experienced abuse, they feel ashamed and embarrassed in the society, hence counselling is vital.

Implications and conclusion

In summary, the research yielded a variety of new findings. During the presentation and discussion of the data, a number of themes and sub-themes arose from the fully disclosed cases of abuse against males by their female counterparts. It is clear that, although abuse directed towards males is important, academics shouldn't ignore the underlying causes of abuse directed towards men or the ways in which the Social Learning model might be useful in these situations. The majority of men mistreated and suffer severe violence against their female partners. When they are assaulted by their partners, most men do not report the incident and do not receive assistance.

According to the study's findings, every participant understood what was meant to be understood as "intimate partner violence." The study's conclusions state that intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs when one spouse purposefully hurts the other by using derogatory language and items. The study also revealed that a large percentage of participants were aware of intimate partner violence (IPV) against men and that they had experienced personal abuse at some point in the past. The survey discovered that men were abused by their spouses in a variety of methods, such as verbal abuse, shooting, using boiling water, being knifed by their wives, denying them access to sexual relations, preventing them from receiving visits from and seeing family members, and emotional abuse, to name a few. Another startling observation was that some wives have even gone so far as to drag their husbands by their privates in an attempt to murder them.

The study came to the conclusion that men's experiences with IPV should not be dismissed by the public as a non-issue when it came to recommendations for removing the reason why men fail to report occurrences of IPV to the appropriate authorities. Rather, since males can become actual victims and certain experiences can be fatal, these cases should be carefully studied and handled. Furthermore, police stations that receive reports on men's experiences with intimate partner violence should not treat these situations casually or with indifference. Rather, these circumstances ought to be handled with respect, and those responsible for such crimes ought to receive

sentences that are equivalent to those meted out to males. This study recommends an urgent need to raise awareness on the existence of IPV against men and more research is required on this subject.

In this study, internal biases in the qualitative data were mitigated through a rigorous, reflexive, and ethically sensitive approach tailored to research with men who have experienced abuse. Given the stigma, silence, and socially constructed expectations surrounding masculinity, particular care was taken to minimise assumptions that could shape data collection or interpretation. The researchers ensured reflexivity was central throughout the research process; the researchers maintained a reflexive journal to document personal assumptions, emotional responses, and interpretive decisions, ensuring ongoing critical self-awareness. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide that allowed participants to narrate their experiences in their own terms, reducing the imposition of preconceived frameworks. To strengthen credibility, triangulation was applied by comparing patterns across participants and actively seeking divergent or contradictory accounts, rather than privileging dominant narratives. Peer debriefing was used to challenge emerging interpretations and guard against confirmation bias, while thick description and direct quotations were employed to ground conclusions firmly in participants' voices. Conclusions were derived through systematic, iterative analysis, moving from codes to themes using constant comparison, ensuring that findings reflected the complexity and diversity of men's lived experiences of abuse rather than simplified or biased interpretations.

Since this study employed an exploratory research design, the intention from the outset was not only to understand men's lived experiences of abuse, but also to inform the development of future, more focused research. The use of open-ended questions in the initial phase allowed participants to articulate their experiences, perceptions, and meanings in their own words, thereby revealing underlying issues, patterns, and gaps that are often overlooked in existing literature. Based on the themes and insights generated from this rich qualitative data, future research was anticipated to move towards more structured designs aimed at deepening and extending understanding of the identified issues.

Specifically, the findings from this exploratory phase provide a foundation for developing targeted research instruments, such as structured interview guides or questionnaires, that focus on key forms of abuse, coping strategies, barriers to disclosure, and help-seeking behaviours identified by participants. Future studies may also employ a mixed-methods or quantitative approach to examine the prevalence and correlates of these issues across larger and more diverse populations of men. Additionally, comparative studies involving different cultural or socio-economic contexts, or incorporating the perspectives of service providers, were anticipated to further validate and contextualise the initial findings. In this way, the exploratory design functioned as a crucial first step, guiding subsequent research that can inform policy, intervention programmes, and support services for men experiencing intimate partner abuse.

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