

## Even a Scorpion Sting Hurts Just as Much: A Sobering Look at Men as Victims of Intimate Partner Abuse and Violence

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*“Because we focused on the snake, we missed the scorpion.”<sup>10</sup>”*

### Abstract

*The subject of intimate violence and abuse has piqued the interest of different groups of people, including psychologists, scholars, and human rights activists over the past 45 years. Even though the epidemiological literature has consistently shown that at least one out of every three people who experience intimate partner violence is a male partner, current initiatives have chosen to ignore this fact. Instead, the phenomenon has been described by most of its advocates as a gender-cockeyed social issue, with a man penned in an “offender” position and a woman in that of a “helpless victim”. Consequently, the exploited man and the abusing woman have been overly overlooked in the therapeutic processes, academic research, and legislative domain. This analytical paper, therefore, is an attempt to counter this position by showing how abuse and violence to intimate male partners happen and the milieu that gave rise to the misconceptions which have led to this unfortunate standpoint. Findings demonstrate that intimate male partners from all walks of life and backgrounds experience abuse and violence of some sort, particularly those relating to non-physical, unlike most women. The paper recommends abnegating the current unilateral narrative and rhetoric of domestic abuse and violence.*

**Keywords:** *Intimate Partner, Abuse, Violence, Perpetrator*

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<sup>10</sup>This is an Egyptian proverb. It warns individuals and social organizations not to be so focused on the most obvious obstacle that you miss out on an obscure but equally dangerous threat. Do not underestimate any danger, however small it may seem. The smallest threat can lead to a great defeat.

## **Introduction**

Apart from being one of the emotionally charged subjects, “domestic violence and abuse<sup>11</sup>” are also trendy issues that have been overly and mostly recited by human rights and gender activists at different national and international developmental fora and in numerous governments’ policy documents in Asia, Africa, and South America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (ICDSV, 2017; Thokozani, 2016). Development auditors and analysts in their outstanding scholarly faculties in the global North and South have equally joined hands in according them the eminence they enjoy today. Of course, one can argue that perhaps this was somewhat expected considering their widely recognised significance in affecting development initiatives in either direction in society. To their credit, indeed, the subject befits an agenda worth supporting by all good wishers of development on the one hand but also ought to be condemned when the efforts turn asymmetrical.

Whether deliberate or for lack of a better understanding of the subject, most of the discourses on the same have long committed numerous misconstructions, but only two merit the attention of this paper. First is the failure to distinctly provide the basis for the unilateral gendered argument they so advocate and perpetuate as far as intimate partner abuse and violence are concerned. This has made it harder to map out the problem on the ground and design appropriate mechanisms to avert it. The second and most significant point is that although accounts of intimate female partners assaulting their husbands had emerged since the early to mid-1970s, when the study of domestic violence first began (Vivian et al., 2019), frequently, whenever such issues are talked about, a woman is mainly referred to as vulnerable, victim or survivor, while her male counterpart as the perpetrator. This unfair viewpoint has had debilitating effects on the former in all forms, including physically, emotionally, socially, psychologically, and even economically.

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<sup>11</sup> The words 'violence' and 'abuse' are either mixed or used in isolation of each other due to the thin line that exists between the two terminologies and the ways and meaning within which either or both come to surface. While the terms 'abuse and violence' are widely used in research in the United States, 'abuse or violence' is more often used in the United Kingdom. This paper adopts the US approach for the purpose of broadening the horizon of discussion as far as men's intimate partner abuse and violence are concerned.

It is against this background; therefore, this paper responds to this wide-ranging injudicious position. It does this by generally, and in some instances, specifically demonstrating that male intimate partners suffer abuse and violence just as much, unlike what the current classical school of thought attests (Jefferson, 2015; Joyce et al., 2019). Some quantitative and qualitative shreds of evidence shall be pulled into this discussion to substantiate the claims and persuade the reader that intimate partner abuse is not a one-sided gendered phenomenon, but happens to both sexes.

### **Domestic Violence and Abuse: Addressing the Misconceptions**

Since the issues of domestic violence and abuse were first brought to the public's attention more than 40 years ago (John, 2021), a recurrent point of contention has been whether or not men can be exploited by their intimate partners. Unfortunately, science and lived experiences have often failed to prevail in most discussions about understanding the subject. The verity that there is even a possibility for that phenomenon to surface has been disturbing many proponents. This sentiment is reflected in Levy-Richardson's and Longley's (2020) as well as the U.K.'s Department of Health and Social Care's (2020) affirmations amongst many whose recounts convey their disbelief:

*... "This is a great taboo that brings out two forbidden dogmas in society: first, that the husband can, in effect, be beaten by the wife, which is an anathema, particularly to men, and second, an excruciating reality that women can be violent and aggressive, which contravenes with societal expectations and their training which I do not wish to acknowledge" ... (Levy-Richardson & Longley, 2020: 11).*

*... "This is inconceivable unless he allows it. Men are physically and emotionally stronger than women; how could this be so? In my view and lived experience, the abuse in most relationships is one-sided. And we would think...from men to women and children" ... (the Department of Health and Social Care in the U.K., 2020: 24).*

Numerous studies have voiced their discontent with the perception that men could be the victims of their female partners (John, 2021). A great responsibility has, however, been placed upon the male who was, in hypothetical scenarios, seen as the perpetrator and female perpetrators as victims or survivors (Cook & Harris, 2018). Any discussion implicating a woman as being violent against her man was generally considered taboo by the media and society (Sara & Lewis, 2019). Such obdurate views held and perpetuated by sometimes prominent figures in the community and the media have unarguably constrained the ability of the man to seek help without the fear of being stigmatised.

In an attempt to distance itself from prevalent asymmetrical and prejudicial conceptions of the subject, this paper adopts the somewhat collaborative definition from the *Global Association of Counselors*. This definition was presented, debated, modified, and adopted during the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual *Global Association of Counselors*' Meeting in Johannesburg (2013). Accordingly, domestic abuse and violence were defined as “a pattern of abusive and violent actions used by one intimate partner against another to acquire, retain, or regain power and influence in the relationship. This includes physical, verbal, sexual, moral, economic manipulation, psychological attacks, and stalking or cyber-stalking” (GAC, 2013, p. 12). All such forms of obnoxious and ferocious behaviours have primarily, if not entirely, been ascribed to men as both engineers and artists. Aside from being portrayed as an objective being with no or less consciousness and power to act, a woman is further characterised as a saint—incapable of committing any wrongdoing. This inconceivable narrative has consistently pervaded the gender and human rights discourses, thus, lobbying it from being anything useful but part of geopolitical rhetoric.

In light of the Commonwealth Human Rights Institute report of 2016, some of the various specific forms of violence and abusive behaviour which men are accused of being the only ones or most capable of committing as opposed to women fall on six distinct fronts, namely physical abuse, verbal and non-verbal abuse, sexual abuse, cyberstalking abuse, financial/economic abuse, and spiritual abuse. Surprisingly, even with such a voluminous amount of ingredients constituting “intimate abuse and violence” in theory and practice,

only a few women have been linked to such. Perhaps it is now imperative to interrogate how the woman has escaped such obvious blame.

From the early times of Western patriarchal civilisation, husbands were expected to control their wives and punish them when their acts were insubordination of the husbands, not vice versa (Daniels & Daniel, 2019). In the context of this societal expectation, some scholars claimed that previously, cultures that insulted or mocked husbands were assumed to be dominated by their spouses in England and France (Steinmetz, 2000). Such conception was inspired by the inability of husbands to live up to male dominance and patriarchal philosophy in the culture that dominated the twentieth century. It is argued that this patriarchal system is based on unequal power dynamics between women and men (Coltrane, 2016). Apparently, however, it is primarily the man who enjoys power and possession of wealth within this system. Gender ideologies, which profile the man as controlling and violent and the woman as submissive and passive, are theorised, reinforced, and retained in the light of domestic abuse (Seelau-Seelau, 2015). The prevailing accounts of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity are at the core of this categorisation.

Although logically valid and somewhat statistically sound, the patriarchy theory suffers from several setbacks, thus, making it an untenable basis for ascribing the phenomenon only to men and not otherwise. However, in the interest of this paper, only two limitations shall be deliberated. First, the theory fails to acknowledge the contemporary philosophical paradigmatic shift from conservatism to liberalism, which champions human rights and equality. The shift is envisaged to accord *more*<sup>12</sup> power to women, enabling them to enjoy the same economic outfit as men and further extending their socio-political and economic tentacles unprecedentedly. Secondly, since this idea is more premised on economic power and control, which in its fully-fledged cyst is assumed to multiply into other kinds of power, it also fails to acknowledge the various non-econometric forms of manipulation and control. Such forms of power have ordinarily been resorted to by the supposedly weak

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<sup>12</sup>This determiner has been used throughout the discussions from the feminists and gender activists which is an admission that, indeed, women have the power of some sort, and not necessarily from the production, consumption, services, and supply as feminists would have liked it.

party in its quest to share or gain control from the purportedly economically influential (Foucault, 1982). This feminist conception of power blindfolds us from observing the different forms of power, in this case, abuses and violence committed by the so-called less powerful—women. Contrary to this viewpoint, this analysis adopts the Foucauldian conception of power, which analogises power with the *fluid* flowing in either direction.

Foucauldian analysis of power is best explained when comparing it with the dominant paradigms of power—Kantian liberalism and structuralism. Both paradigms' conceptions view power as something predictable and finite. As a phenomenon that some individuals or groups of individuals can rightly and definitively own, whether it be power divined from abstract reasoning, as Kantianism put it or power held by a morally worthy class, as with the Marxian proletariat. Foucault describes the power in a much more empirical and anti-ideological way. The fundamental distinguishing characteristic of Foucauldian power is its utter fluidity. For him, power relations and not power itself (Foucault, 1988) are the subjects of analysis. Power is not an object, either theoretically conceptualised or ideologised. It can only be demonstrated by how one acts on others (Ibid). Power is ubiquitous not because it can fuse and influence everything under its absolute power but because it is produced in real-time. Not only because it advocates for all but rather because it comes from all corners.

According to WHO (2017) estimates, about a third of all people who have ever been in a relationship have experienced harassment and aggression of some form from their partners. Despite the alarming number of men impacted by domestic abuse and violence, the current literature has largely systematically ignored men's harassment and violence issues. This disregard has, among other drawbacks, led to the endurance of existing misconceptions and myths regarding intimate partner abuse and violence in general, particularly those that relegate men (Alvarez & Philibert, 2017; Harrison, 2011).

The area of intimate partner violence and abuse is sometimes delicate and challenging (Coltrane, 2016; WHO, 2017). This complexity is brought about by the additional layers of challenges, an upsurge of disingenuous

information, and the damages such information creates in the process, given that various other experts in that field with sometimes firmly held false beliefs are often involved. Such individuals include police officers (Stephen & Goffman, 2017), social workers (Colman et al., 2017), and legal practitioners (Stephen & Goffman, 2017), making the situation much more challenging to address. Based on this fact, experts must be mindful of their attitudes and values regarding domestic violence and abuse and the effect the victim's experiences with other authorities can have on their entire experience with domestic violence and abuse.

### **Sources of “Only-Men” Misconceptions**

People's perspectives shifted towards what were deemed desirable and improper behaviours in marriage during the last half of the nineteenth century. Pioneers of family studies such as Erin (2007) revealed the latent secrets of domestic abuse for both women and men for the first time in the 1970s but with the former gaining much coverage. Nonetheless, it was the abused women's movement that gained popularity, supported by a passionate feminist chorus, whereas the abused men's campaign struggled in vain (George, 2007).

Most early academic studies on domestic abuse centred on women and the sociocultural causes that contributed to and sustained injury and violence against women (Joyce et al., 2019; Smith, 1989, cited in George, 2007). As a result, a large number of feminist-inspired works present intimate partner harassment and violence as sociocultural problems emerging from patriarchal structures (Daniels & Daniel, 2019). Such studies have sparked a global feminist outcry to change criminal law, its enforcement, and how social and law-enforcement agencies may address the needs of abused female partners in intimate relationships (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Daniels & Daniel, 2019).

Literature on intimate abuse and violence also confirms that the presumed personalities of a man as an abuse perpetrator and a woman as an abuse victim are problematic in three respects. First, historical orthodoxy and patriarchal governing practices were instituted to preserve social order. As a result, therefore, men's personalities as victims and women's characters as offenders are problematised. Second, such types of masculinity, such as resilience,

bravery, and physical strength, have become fetishised within the context of neoliberal socio-political ideology to depict the man as exalted and, in that capacity, favoured over feminineness attributes. Similarly, certain facets of femininity, such as the degree of emotion and caring, have been romanticised to depict the woman as respectful, albeit at the expense of male attributes.

This line of thinking makes the character of man as the “victim” difficult to identify and challenge, whereas his character as the perpetrator is most arguable. In the same way, the social construction of the woman as the offender is more disturbing to imagine and embrace (because aggression belongs to masculinity). In contrast, that which portrays her as the target is reinforced.

Finally, the effect of first-wave feminist emancipatory ideologies on scientific discourse has culminated in an all-pervasive paradigm of domestic violence and harassment driven by criticism of patriarchal domination and privilege. The man has become the potential culprit, highly unlikely to be a victim, thus deserving public criticism. In contrast, the woman has become the victim and unlikely perpetrator worthy of sympathy and public help. It is in light of the above that this paper, as well as Robinson’s and McNeely’s (2018) convictions, that “women for victims” and “men for perpetrators” is a misinterpretation of fact on both counts.

So then, why the deception? This is how Lawrence and Jeanne (2018) riposte to what I would term the highly aggravating question given the sentiments it brings.

*... “The short answer is money. The long answer is money and career advancement. The idea that females are victims garners millions of dollars in federal and foundations funding feminist-advocacy groups to launch special programs for women. The idea also helps well-educated women gain special preference in their battle for elite jobs at the top, and the real losers become the men who get shortchanged in such programs” ... (Lawrence & Jeanne, 2018: 19).*



Women's advocacy organisations have confiscated the civil-rights movement's moral capital to advance the special interests of well-connected women and the well-offs. They have terrified many families worried about their daughters' relationships when they should be concerned about their daughters and sons. A few qualitative studies using unorthodox yet methodical data collection methods, such as anecdotes, show that many self-reporting survivors are male (Archer, 2017). However, such researchers have remained a rarity up to this point, largely ignored in academic circles and strongly chastised by some (Sebastian et al. 2017) for documenting a substantial amount of female violence and abuse in society. Suffice it to contend that feminist-inspired research on domestic abuse and violence has had an exclusionary nature. However, such ethnocentric studies have been criticised because most concentrate on working-class women in the West (Sara & Lewis, 2019). Overall, the patriarch model remains the most acknowledged analytical framework across the legal, social, academic, and political spheres, even though attempts to test its practicability remain indecisive.

The basis for criticising the model is anchored on the fact that it is unable to offer clarifications of the process within which men might convey their masculinity to dominate women (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; George, 2007; Lawrence & Jeanne, 2018), particularly, when men are enamoured by women, in which most of them are found to be passive (Dawson, 2018). Furthermore, in riposte to feminist accounts, it has been suggested that men's power and the agency that comes with it in a patriarchal social organisation may be diminishing or unavailable in the current capital social relations in which they find themselves (Archer, 2017). In reality, a growing body of evidence indicates that the alleged perpetrators are now contributing more to the cultural ethos that males can never be victims of domestic violence and abuse but can only be perpetrators.

To comprehensively understand the root cause of diverse manifestations of gender-based violence and abuse, it is imperative to situate the phenomenon within a particular social polity in which oppression, subordination, and exploitation are intrinsically entrenched. Given the exploitative and domineering nature of prevailing intimate partner abuse and violence, suffice

it to argue that such phenomena draw their structural makeup within the capital social relations. They are inextricably linked to class exploitation, production, reproduction, and private property ownership but are often patriarchalised and heterosexualised for the sustenance of the system. In this particular context, instances of abuse and violence are likely to originate from three capital-related spheres: possession of economic leverage and a desire to exert control over those who lack it; feelings of insecurity stemming from own economic vulnerability; and extortion and blackmail in an effort to acquire economic power from those who enjoy it. Owing to such circumstances, no particular sex category is excepted. This shows how the phenomenon has binarily existed but socio-politically confiscated and skewed to fit the liberal economic agenda of the day, where women get to play threefold strategic functions; reproducers, consumers, and labourers (Öztimur, 2007).

This analysis further elucidates why feminist movements have scarcely conferred advantages upon the *women of the world* at large but rather a select few of the upper echelon. It also explicates the rationale behind the emphasis of women's movements on domains that appear less advantageous for women from an economic standpoint rather than the equal distribution of responsibilities and opportunities as their discourse purports.

### **What Happens in the Men's Cage of Domestic Violence and Abuse?**

Generally, local and international reports on domestic violence and abuse indicate that cases of violence and abuse against women have been widely reported and documented. For example, according to WHO (2017), at least 2 out of four women worldwide have experienced sexual harassment/abuse at some point. Furthermore, nearly a third (30%) of those in romantic relationships claimed to have endured some kind of sexual and physical harassment or aggression from their intimate partners at a particular stage in their lives.

Such statistics notwithstanding, it cannot be strongly argued that such facts are sufficient to ascertain the case. Despite the voluminous nature of reported cases, fraud and errors in recording and reporting them have equally been observed. According to the Human Right Watch report of 2016 on "The State

of Human Rights Violation in Africa,” over twenty per cent of all reported cases of domestic abuse on women were never proven with evidence, be it tangible or circumstantial, at the police or the court of law, but mainly triggered by hatred.

... *“Often when we arrest the offender and find that he is the one either breeding or with bruises, unlike the woman, the women claim they were defending themselves. Normally they are the first ones to go to the police stations to report to protect themselves from getting bitten up later on” ...* (Police in charge at Jabulani Police Station, Soweto-South Africa).

... *“Women are good liars and actors when it comes to domestic violence...therefore, you certainly need to listen and inquire carefully when confronted with such cases at your desk. At the same time, we are scared of being accused of supporting the perpetrators...So it is, indeed, a challenging offence one would not wish to encounter” ...* (Police officer at Malava Police station-Kakamega-Kenya).

What is clear, however, and which most advocates of this subject fail to acknowledge for fear of controverting the current global rhythm or of becoming irrelevant, and thus, failing to secure financial support from the North, which is the true architect of the movement, is that domestic violence and abuse to men is alive and well. Moreover, although the exact incidence of intimate male partner violence is debatable, the paper contends that there are enough male victims worth the society’s attention. One important detail which is always left out of the discourses, consciously or otherwise, is that *patriarchy* which is claimed to be the basis for women’s subjugation and, thus, leading to their abuse, is the same system causing men not to report their intimate partners’ abuse cases.

While it might sound like this is an argument with the intention of evening up the score and overly emphasising, incidents of abuse and violence often surface from both sides—men and women. Whereas men are purported to be economically, biologically, and culturally stronger than women (Geist

& Cohen, 2011; Michael et al., 2018; WHO, 2006), unfortunately, this locus does not necessarily cushion them from being abused by their intimate partners. Unlike the obvious, women are far less unlikely to be abusers. According to Kimberly Taylor, the President of *the Alliance for Family Wellness*, an agency mandated by the United States Government to provide intervention and prevention services for those affected by domestic abuse and violence, the agency receives thousands of women every year from all works of life who had been criminally charged with intimate partner abuse. Her revelation is further collaborated by the findings of the study conducted in 2017 by *The Centre for Social Welfare and Dignity (CSWD)* on *the Nature of Domestic Abuse and Aggression in the Modern Era*. According to the findings, despite a statistical increase in male intimate partner harassment and violence, the number of female intimate partner abusers is rising in Asia, the Caribbean, South America, and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the verity on this subject is somewhat difficult to establish in Africa and Tanzania in particular. Apart from thin and isolated statistics, news in the media, and insulated anecdotes, no wide-ranging and credible study has ever been conducted worthy of mentioning as exposing what is happening in the men's world of domestic abuse (Hoffman et al., 2018; John, 2021).

What is commonly shared in nearly all the studies and cases presented in developed and developing communities is perhaps the distinctive nature of violence and abuse most accomplished by women. Unlike physical abuse, which is ordinarily attributed to a male partner abuser, it was found that female partners mainly employed non-physical tactics to retaliate, assert, project, or gain control and dominance over their male partners (ibid).

### **Non-physical Abuse and Violence**

Mostly, these are manipulative acts intended to demonise, demean, and diminish the partners' power, mental well-being, and morale, intimidate or persuade a partner. The study by the International Centre for Domestic Sexual Violence (ICDSV) revealed that, often, it was control, manipulation, threatening to demonise the partner against the children, threatening to leave, withdrawing her parents' support, and threatening to take the children away.

Other forms of non-physical abuse and violence widely engaged in by abusive female partners to their male intimate partners, according to John (2021), include ridiculing or shaming the partner in front of relatives, co-workers, peers, or on social media; controlling where he goes and whom he hangs out with. Others are refusing conjugal rights, hiding life-sustaining drugs and car keys, denigrating his sexual competence, threatening to reveal him to the world, and making false allegations about the partner to the police or friends.

*... “Due to the explosion of social media, you need to be extra cautious of every single phone call or short message you send to her (wife, girlfriend, fiancé...). Any sense of begging or crying for her love must be excluded because she will surely use such weaknesses to blackmail you when the romance goes sour” ... (Informant’s comment quoted in John, 2021: 383).*

Jefferson (2015) and Thokozani (2016) concur with ICDSV findings and add that female abusers’ shared characteristics include being controlling and jealous, possessive, having unrealistic demands and expectations of the partner, anger and rage, having high impulsivity, and lacking sufficient outside support from their friends. These created a perfect recipe and breeding ground for and justification of abuse and violence.

Emotional abuse, an essential element of the non-physical form of abuse, is perceived by psychologists as one of the most critical abusive practices next to psychological abuse, particularly when conducted in the presence of children (Ellard et al., 2020). As a result, children suffer both psychologically and emotionally, situations that could permanently damage their physical and mental health, including being compelled to take the side of one of the parents. According to findings from Asia, North Africa, and South America, the most grievous form of violence cited by intimate male partners was emotional victimisation (WHO, 2017). This is usually cumulative, involving long-term trauma, which can lead to suicidal thoughts in severe cases. Victimisation of this kind may have dire consequences on a person’s ability to form potential sexual and social relationships with people of the opposite sex. It could also affect their ability to work, thus, leading to a loss of livelihood (Stets & Straus,

2010).

Such violence and abuses are as detrimental as any other. The tendency of researchers to concentrate their attention and resources on allegedly males' physical aggression has contributed significantly to the lack of research on intimate partner psychological assault. The more evident consequences of physical violence have recently prompted attempts to develop preventive strategies (Elias, 2019). Psychological violence, on the other hand, causes more harm to victims than physical abuse (Ellard et al., 2020). Even after correcting the violence, it significantly increased the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which has devastating and wide-ranging effects on those assaulted (Pape & Arias, 2020). This type of disorder could potentially harm physical and mental health, work, and relationships among many (Ibid). Even though men and women in abusive and violent situations experience psychological abuse as their prime source of desolation, men's effects have been more apparent than women's (Marshall et al., 2015; Stets & Straus, 2010; Malley & Hines, 2018). Similarly, a study by Sebastian et al. (2017) also discovered that men who were currently abused were less likely to suffer the effects than men who had previously been abused.

The preceding study's finding parallels Ingram and Simonelli's (2020), which examined depression and anxiety in university male students who had recently or currently experienced physical or emotional violence in their intimate relationships and found the same pattern of consequences. Although ninety per cent of respondents said they had been subjected to emotional abuse, forty per cent confessed to having been subjected to physical abuse, and twenty-nine per cent to serious assaults. Depression and psychological distress cases were higher in students who had been abused in their most recent relationships as opposed to students in their current relationships.

Although most current clinical researches concentrate much on the effects of depression, anxiety, and stress, the results of which claim that a woman is impacted twice as much as a man (Levy-Richardson & Longley, 2020), the same neglect to put the same effort into similar-nature illnesses such as alcoholism or PTSD, which most epidemiological studies have proven to be substantially higher in men and linked to the experience of intimate partner violence and abuses (Malley & Hines, 2018). Assaultive attitudes, self-

destructive, psychotic, and self-mutilating behaviours, as well as self-destructive and suicidal thoughts, have all been ignored in such research (Mills et al., 2018). They also neglected to note that the rate of suicide incidences has consistently been higher in men than women (Office of National Statistics, 2011). Men have also recorded feelings of shame or fear, desire to pursue revenge and insecurity (Moore, 2016), in addition to immediate effects such as depression, frustration, and emotional distress (Sebastian et al., 2017).

*... “Researches show that we, men die earlier than women. What do you think is (are) the reason? While the same researchers conclude that most of us die earlier for biological reasons, I refute this conclusion. I think the absence of love and affection is the number one killer. Instead of being inspired to work harder, you get mistreated by your wife and those who depend on you. This leads to despair and, ultimately, death. This phenomenon mostly occurs in men than women. Because, for us, losing the family is losing the purpose of living” ... (Informant’s comment quoted in Malley and Hines, 2018: 14).*

### **Physical Abuse**

The use of non-physical forms of abuse and violence from an intimate female partner did not relieve or help men escape from the physical forms of abuse, which most studies have affixed to a male abuser. Though in moderation, evidence-based studies from the North, Asia, and a few parts of Africa, such as that of the Commonwealth Human Rights Institute (2016), have demonstrated that an abusive intimate female partner may destroy her partner’s possessions, spit, kick, punch, and throw things at her partner—light or heavy. To compensate for any difference in physical strength, she might catch the partner by surprise or otherwise attack the partner while asleep. She could also use liquids such as acids, hot water, or oil and could as well use weapons such as a gun or knife.

*... “I do not care. When I am pissed, I do not want to be told to calm down or that everything will be okay because I do not want it to be just okay. Jose (my husband) knows this*

*because he got beat or thrown at anything I found around me on almost every occasion he had tried this. This is how we lost our first television” ... (a female informant’s comment quoted in CHRI, 2016: 18).*

For instance, in an experimental study by WHO in the Pacific Island, Philippines, Brazil, the Caribbean, Mexico, and Cameroon in 2011, physical violence and abusive acts such as piercing and hitting were regularly listed and reported to have also severely affected intimate male partners. For example, women’s use or throwing of weaponry objects during a fracas as a strategy to even up the score with physically stronger male partners was reported in these studies to have severely affected men relative to women (Malley & Hines, 2018). While women are highly improbable not to be the victims of men’s physical abuse, such as being thrown objects at or being hit (Stets & Straus, 2010), acts of violence of a similar nature perpetrated by women are more likely to cause some type of injuries (Moore, 2016).

In his surprising volte-face analysis of intimate partner abuse, Andrew Jerkins, a United States Democrat Senator from Iowa—a strong supporter of women’s rights and protection, summarises mostly unmentioned physical acts when speaking of domestic or intimate partner abuses while he was making his submission on the floor of the House on the re-authorisation of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 2019. He expressed what many considered aberrant of his belief:

*“I would sincerely wish to persuade my colleague on both sides of the aisle to debate this piece cautiously, keeping in mind that this is a nation of women, men, and many others. In my twenty years of practising family law, I have witnessed and read various excruciating acts exercised by women on their spouses. Such heinous acts also ought to be recognised and captured by this Act without favour. In an effort to compensate for the disparity in physical strength, they strike whilst men are asleep or when their cognitive ability is at its lowest, perhaps due to alcoholism or substance abuse. Some use weapons to cause damage to*



*men and their belongings, not to mention the incessant nagging of some women, leading to psychological torture. How could these deeds be construed differently? Abuse transcends gender. It is disturbing to anybody who encounters it, particularly men. Those who report the incidents get ridiculed by men and women for not being men enough... This phenomenon is not limited to the United States.... it is a worldwide phenomenon. In Africa, for example, barely a month passes without a woman abusing a man to the point of homicide! In this country, as per the 'National Coalition Against Domestic Violence', an intimate partner physically abuses nearly twenty individuals per minute. This represents more than ten million people annually”.*

It is this highly controversial viewpoint that led to the amendment of the VAWA in which, initially, the word “man” was barely mentioned but “woman”. Despite this cosmetic change, for the first time, at least men got into a nationwide conversation to their superficial advantage.

### **Institutional Neglect**

Throughout the discussion, the current mainstream literature demonstrates a deliberate apathy and shortage of incidence reports on intimate male victims compared to the opposite gender. Various reasons have been provided in support of this situation. But one that this paper is interested in, and which has, on different occasions, been contested by male victims, is a sense of *neglect* from the structures responsible for safeguarding the interest of the victims. Their interpretation and construction of *abuse* and *violence* and the respective *victim* and *perpetrator* have encouraged and propagated impunity to a greater extent (Barber, 2008).

According to a few studies conducted to investigate how male victims of intimate abuse have been treated in institutional policies and procedures and society as a whole, the situation is disheartening. Omissions and quiet-mentioning of male victims, which in principle, hinder male intimate partners from reporting and seeking justice, have been observed in various

institutional policies and procedures instituted to handle matters pertaining to abuse and violence. Shockingly, this discriminatory trend in the administration of justice is not circumscribed but global. Similar incidences have been reported even in countries globally known for championing human rights, such as the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (Human Right Watch Report, 2016).

For example, according to the ICDSV (2017) study, out of the 418 institutional strategies on abuse and violence, whereby; 112 belonged to the governments, 268 to private organisations, and 38 to international organisations; only twenty-eight per cent demonstrated consistency in gender inclusivity in their definitions and the steps ought to be taken should abusive and violent acts present themselves. While sixteen per cent had exclusively crafted their policies in generality—no mentioning of a man or woman, forty-eight per cent mentioned the man only mutedly, ranging from 2-6 (man) compared to 23-74 (woman) in one document. Unsurprisingly, eight per cent did not mention a *man*, only a woman, in their policies. However, fifty-four per cent of those ignored or neglected were uncommonly from public institutions, forty-one per cent from international organisations and agencies, and five per cent from private enterprises. This picture shows how deep and wide the problem is.

During the Durban Domestic Violence Forum of 2015 in Southern Africa, Ndongoloza Thato and Nhlanhla Kungawo, the victims of domestic abuse and violence from Soweto and Polokwane, respectively, provided a detailed account of how it felt and meant to be the male victims of domestic violence in an African country<sup>13</sup>. They offered their experience about how they were perceived by their communities and the agencies where they sought help thereafter. Thato recounted:

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<sup>13</sup> Focusing solely on Africa as a hazardous region for the well-being of men in the context of intimate partner abuse and violence may appear discriminatory. Nonetheless, their unfavourable stance towards the continent, which could potentially be perceived as unjust by critics, is substantiated by the stance adopted by African leaders during the 2nd AU Men's Conference held on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2022 in Dakar. In the course of the meeting, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Moussa Faki, confirmed that... "it is up to men, the main perpetrators of physical and psychological violence, to reverse the trend by fighting in themselves, the impulses which push them to violate women". See: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/42386-pr-2nd\\_MENS\\_CONFERENCE\\_PRESS\\_RELEASE.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/42386-pr-2nd_MENS_CONFERENCE_PRESS_RELEASE.pdf)

... “Well thought of and highly regarded agencies such as the Social Welfare Service, Human-Dignity, Domestic Prevention Initiative, and TEARS Foundation were, at best, regarding men’s claims of abuse with suspicion, and favouring women’s story in the end” ... (Thato, the survivor cited in Rotham, 2019: 74).

As part of his experience, Kangawo recalled being mocked by his uncle several times and his young brother, whom he first told, and later to some of the government officials (Social Welfare Service) and the police whom he had visited to report the matter in fear of being physically harmed by his wife. This expressed fear of social disapproval harmed a man’s ability to speak openly about his experiences outside and within the relationship, preventing him from getting any useful support.

... “You need to be a man and half...figuratively... to first admit that you need help, and that help should be obtained within the law. In the first and last place, no one, be it a woman or a man, will ever believe what you are saying if there is anything to say anyway. What you would call violent or abusive acts are mostly laughable, embarrassing, and considered feminine. Regrettably, I say, because I received most of these mockeries from senior government officials assumed knowledgeable enough to know what I was going through” ... (Kongawo, the survivor, cited in Rotham, 2019: 76).

Kongawo’s account collaborates with that of Mashilo Mnisi (2018), the Chief Executive of *Moshate*, —the men’s rights organisation in South Africa, whose principal objective is to fight against and address the imbalance of gender and ill-treatment of men by authorities. These include biasness and mockery by court officials, police, public health workers, and other public entities rendering services related to gender-based violence and abuse by females. This was after he realised that, because of the government’s exclusion within the domestic programs and policy framework, many men were clinging and fearing to come out to report the abuse and violence from their women. Mnisi relates:

... *“Moshate’s mission does not include downplaying women’s efforts and struggle, and therefore, suffocating women’s rights. But making sure that such a movement does not, in the event, infringe and impinge on the men who have severely been affected by such and the current systems fomenting them. I have firsthand received such mistreatment at the National Department of Social Development simply because I was a man”* ... (Mnisi, a gender activist, cited in Rotham, 2019: 89).

Unlike other social and legal agencies where one would visit for psychological, emotional, financial, social, and counselling help, the police agency occupies a unique position in the fight against domestic abuse and violence. It is mandated to justly provide domestic violence services and adjudicate all matters pertaining to criminal offences, including intimate partner violence and abuse (Vigurs et al., 2016). The agency is typically the first point of contact for victims seeking justice action. It should respond objectively to a report or allegation of harassment and violence by arresting, detaining, investigating, and, if necessary, charging a suspect. However, stories connecting this agency with impunity and impartiality while discharging their duties, especially those related to female abuse and violence against men, are prodigious. Scholars such as Johnson and Goodlin (2015) and Cho and Wilke (2010) deduce this current unfortunate attitude of the agency from the stance in which the arena of “domestic violence and abuse” was initially introduced, conceived, and institutionalised in the agency. A classic example of this theory is drawn from Tanzania, whereby the introduction of the Police Gender and Children Desk (P.G. and CD) to the agency was rather a reactionary and pre-emptive one other than objective and solicitous.

Since this supposedly impartial novel structure was mandated to handle all matters on women and children protection and promotion of gender parity within and without the institution (URT, 2019), officers to handle such cases were trained in numbers. However, an important point to note in such training was the disproportionate nature of the number of trainees. Since it was conceived from the beginning that domestic abuse and violence happen

to women and children, most trainees are women (URT, 2016; 2019). Since its inception, women have been heading such units and handling all matters regarding intimate abuse in the agency. This pattern has been replicated in almost all government institutions and agencies. This ill-representation is one of the significant weaknesses of such initiatives. In the event, this approach has significantly victimised men and impinged their rights to report (because of lack of trust and bias), get professional assistance, and enjoy their lives just as much.

Geffrey (2018) also claims that all of the male victims he interacted with in his studies expressed a struggle with their masculinity and awareness of social standards that demand them to be resilient, tough, and aggressive. However, this massive undertaking of social renovation is likely to affect male victims directly and jeopardise their identities. Any departure from male supremacy roles and identities is rejected and even ridiculed in this idealised vision of a man. As a result, there is no space for those who behave differently, making it impossible for so-called insecure men (in this case, abused men) to emerge. This status is also sufficient to create a patriarchy-inspired counter-construction of female privilege, in which it is appropriate to ridicule or slap a man who fails to fulfil the masculinity standards (Fontes, 2003). Furthermore, by framing the conversation of intimate partner abuse around totalising concepts about sexual identity, rather than normal states of mind and people's proclivity to use abuse and violence as an inter-relational tactic, women's victimisation is likely to continue, just as some men's hidden victimisation will.

According to Lawrence and Jeanne (2018), it has been observed that on multiple occasions, the judiciary tends to cling onto a persistent fallacy pertaining to domestic and intimate abuse cases, which suggests that women are more susceptible to violence and abuse due to their inherent fragility. This assertion is fallacious and lacks empirical backing, as research indicates that individuals of any educational background or social circle are susceptible to manipulation and harmful entanglements in relationships. The phenomenon of violence within intimate relationships is an indiscriminate occurrence, affecting both the perpetrator and the victim without bias. Consequently, it exerts an impact on individuals irrespective of their

cognitive abilities, scholastic attainments, professional pursuits, societal status, spiritual beliefs, ethnic background, sexual orientation, and other idiosyncratic dissimilarities. The attainment of a high academic qualification does not serve as a safeguard against the infliction of bodily harm by an assailant wielding a weapon, nor does it render individuals impervious to the deleterious effects of psychological manipulation and subjugation.

Undoubtedly, vulnerability constitutes an inherent aspect of the human experience, particularly evident within intimate relationships where emotions hold a pivotal position. Couples engage in intricate power dynamics subject to variation across diverse contexts and temporal dimensions. In the initial stages of a relationship characterised by control, a female individual may experience a sense of gratification from the heightened level of attention bestowed upon her by her partner or may perceive their partner's jealousy towards others as a sign of affection. This could be interpreted as an indication of affection. A male individual may experience feelings of empathy towards a woman in a state of despair, perceiving himself as being highly valued and desired. However, these patterns may also indicate a dynamic that has the potential to intensify gradually towards perceived blackmails, extramarital affairs, unfounded allegations, and aggression as the offender experiences a growing sense of powerlessness in managing their significant other. The perpetrator gradually exerts heightened authority and sway over their victim, resulting in a situation where the latter is reliant on substantial assistance to extricate themselves from the relationship.

## **Conclusion**

Contrary to the widely held single-gendered narrative of abuse and violence, research findings and narratives of various informants show that, like women, men also suffer intimate partner abuse, even at a substantial rate if one cares to investigate. Women's harm to their male partners can take different forms. Such abuses and violence range from minor to critical and non-physical to physical. Therefore, it is imperative for the structures mandated to take charge of all matters related to intimate partner abuse and violence to challenge their grasp of the phenomenon by interrogating what they know against the crux of the issue on the ground. This clarion call further extends to gender activists,

academia, and the political class, who have continuously made uninformed judgments on males based on an untenable patriarchal analytical framework.

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