



BEYOND THE “MEN NA SCUM” DISCOURSE: INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND WOMEN’S SOCIAL PERCEPTION OF MEN IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA



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Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a pervasive public health and social challenge in Nigeria, yet empirical attention to its association with women’s social perception of men remains limited. Guided by hegemonic masculinity theory and labelling theory, this study examined the link between exposure to IPV and women’s social perception of men in Kwara State, Nigeria. The study adopts a cross-sectional survey design, and data were collected from 1,075 women aged 15–49. IPV was measured using an adapted version of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale 2 (Cronbach’s $\alpha=798$), and social perception of men (Cronbach’s $\alpha=.853$) was assessed using an adapted version of Keyes’ Social Acceptance subscale. Both descriptive statistics and simple linear regression were employed for analysis. Findings indicated a substantial burden of IPV: 36.3% of respondents reported physical IPV, 34.9% psychological IPV, and 32.0% sexual IPV. Regression analysis showed that IPV experience was significantly associated with negative social perception of men ($B = -1.720$, $\beta = -.372$, $R^2 = .138$, $SE = 0.131$, $t = -13.123$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-1.977, -1.463]$). This finding revealed that IPV exposure was associated with a negative social perception of men as a social group. The findings of this study suggest that the “men na scum” discourse should not be understood solely as a social media phenomenon or an expression of online feminist activism. Rather, the significant association between intimate partner violence and women’s negative social perceptions of men indicates that the sentiments reflected in the discourse are grounded in lived experiences of IPV and unequal gender relations. Recommendations highlight the need for survivor-centred interventions, community-based prevention programmes, and multi-stakeholder collaboration to address the normalisation of violence and foster healthy gender relations.

Keywords: intimate partner violence, social perception, hegemonic masculinity, labelling theory, gender-based violence.

Introduction

Intimate relationships are traditionally understood as social spaces of companionship, emotional support, and mutual care foundational to family and community life. Yet this normative ideal coexists with the persistent reality of intimate partner violence (IPV). Globally, approximately 30% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lives (WHO, 2024), and the burden is disproportionately concentrated in low- and middle-income regions, where structural inequalities, weak legal

protection, and entrenched patriarchal norms reduce women's ability to resist or exit abusive relationships. In Sub-Saharan Africa, prevalence estimates range from 33% to 44% (Izugbara et al., 2020; Mossie et al., 2023), and Nigeria mirrors this pattern: approximately 31% of Nigerian women report having experienced physical violence by a partner since age 15 (Ntoimo et al., 2025), with some regional studies placing prevalence above 33% (Tesfaw, 2022). These figures are not merely statistical; they represent a pervasive social failure that shapes how women experience intimacy, trust, and safety in their everyday lives. The question that this study takes seriously, and that existing scholarship has not adequately addressed, is what happens to women's perceptions of men after this violence. Does surviving IPV produce rejection of men as a social group, as popular discourse assumes? Or do cultural and structural forces bend that response in a different direction?

This question has gained urgency amid a growing gendered counter-narrative. Since approximately 2017–2018, the expression “men na scum” amplified through social media hashtags such as #MenAreScum and #MenAreTrash has emerged across African digital spaces as a collective articulation of women's frustration with patriarchy, male infidelity, emotional manipulation, and intimate partner abuse (Solomon, 2020). Although frequently dismissed as social media hyperbole, this phenomenon deserves sociological scrutiny. Research suggests that such labels are not trivial: they constitute symbolic expressions of women's lived experiences and function as a public critique of harmful masculinities (Olorunnisola & Martin, 2021). In Nigeria specifically, the phrase became a rallying point for digital feminist communities following high-profile disclosures of partner violence and sexual abuse, functioning as a form of collective grievance, framing a discursive strategy through which women publicly name and resist interpersonal and structural violence. Yet the narrative is not without its own contradictions. Critics caution that sweeping generalisations about men risk reinforcing binary thinking, polarising gender relations, and obscuring the diversity of men's behaviours and experiences (Balogun, 2020). This imbalance between the narrative's legitimate expressive function and its potential to distort gendered perception sits at the heart of this study.

What the “men na scum” discourse implicitly predicts is that women who have personally experienced male-perpetrated violence will be among those most likely to reject men as a social group. However, the empirical picture is considerably more complex. Evidence from the literature shows that survivors' attitudes toward men are shaped not only by their personal experiences of abuse, but by the cultural frameworks, structural constraints, and social norms within which those experiences are interpreted. Some survivors do generalise their trauma, developing diminished trust and heightened suspicion of men as a category (Stark & Hester, 2019; Ese-Anaba, 2006; Saheed, 2025). Others, however, maintain social and emotional ties with male relatives, partners, and community members despite their victimisation (Stark & Hester, 2019), drawing careful distinctions between individual perpetrators and men more broadly. In the Nigerian context, this negotiation is particularly fraught: survivors must simultaneously navigate cultural expectations of heterosexual marriage, economic dependence on male partners, community pressures toward reconciliation, and the personal imperative of safety (Gage & Thomas, 2017). These competing pressures suggest that the relationship between IPV experience and social perception of men is not straightforwardly one of cause and effect, but is mediated by deeply embedded sociocultural structures, a possibility that the “men na scum” narrative, for all its rhetorical force, does not account for.

Despite growing scholarly attention to both IPV and digital feminist discourse in Nigeria, a critical empirical gap persists. Studies that have traced the origins and social functions of the “men na scum” narrative have focused primarily on its discursive and activist dimensions

(Lane, 2015; Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016; Matich et al., 2018), without examining its relationship to the actual attitudes of women who have experienced IPV. Conversely, research on the psychological and relationship consequences of IPV (Stark & Hester, 2019) has largely failed to connect those consequences to the gendered narratives circulating in women’s social environments. This gap is especially significant in Kwara State, where entrenched sociocultural norms around marriage, gender respectability, and community-mediated conflict resolution may shape how survivors interpret both their experiences of violence and public narratives about men. This study, therefore, moves beyond documenting IPV prevalence to interrogate a more nuanced question: Does exposure to intimate partner violence predict negative social perception of men among women of reproductive age in Kwara State, as the “men na scum” narrative would suggest or do cultural and structural dynamics produce a different outcome? In doing so, it offers a gender-sensitive and sociologically grounded analysis of the relationship between personal victimisation, popular discourse, and women’s perceptions of men in a context that has received insufficient empirical attention.

Theoretical Understanding

Hegemonic Masculinity Theory

R.W. Connell (1995) pioneered the concept of hegemonic masculinity to describe the culturally exalted ideal of manhood that legitimises men’s dominance in gender relations. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explain, hegemonic masculinity is not merely a personal trait but a pattern of practice, the currently most honoured way of being a man in a given society that ensures men’s power over women. It requires that other men position themselves in relation to this ideal, occupying subordinate or complicit masculinities, and ideologically legitimates the global subordination of women (Saheed & Edun, 2024). Crucially, Connell notes that hegemonic masculinity need not be enacted by the majority of men; only a minority may actually embody its ideals, yet it remains normative and consequential for all. Hegemony operates not primarily through force but through culture and institutions: through persuasion, consent, and the everyday reproduction of gendered norms.

Later theorists have expanded and refined this model by emphasising that multiple masculinities coexist. Alongside hegemonic masculinity are complicit, subordinate, and marginalised forms that relate to it in distinct ways. For example, men who benefit from patriarchal dividends without overtly dominant behaviour enact what Murphy (2009) terms “complicit” masculinity. Subsequent scholarship further insists that analyses of masculinities must account for women’s agency and the possibility of cultural change. Therefore, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has become central to gender studies precisely because it illuminates how men’s cultural power and identity are actively maintained, rather than naturally given (Jewkes et al., 2015).

In strongly patriarchal societies, hegemonic masculinity helps explain both the prevalence and the dynamics of intimate partner violence. The culturally valorised ideal of the “strong, dominant man” may function to normalise violence as an instrument of male authority. Empirical studies from African settings consistently confirm this link. Malesa (2022) reports that in contemporary South Africa, hegemonic masculinity has been deployed to explain men’s power over women via submission and the use of violence. Similarly, Jewkes et al. (2015) show that by legitimating men’s authority through tacit consent rather than overt coercion, hegemonic masculinity normalises behaviours including violence that reinforce male dominance.

In Nigeria, these dynamics operate within deeply entrenched patriarchal structures. Social institutions overwhelmingly position men as household heads with authority over women's behaviour and bodies. In African societies broadly, men are expected to be dominant and assertive while women are expected to be submissive (Agboola & Dare, 2025), and this expectation is reproduced in Nigerian normative arrangements. In Kwara State specifically, Olushola and Akinsemoyin (2025) find that entrenched patriarchal norms and cultural practices significantly contribute to the prevalence of gender-based violence, with patriarchal values dictating gender roles that systematically subordinate women. Under hegemonic masculinity, a partner's use of violence may therefore be perceived by perpetrators and communities alike as upholding the social order rather than transgressing it. Patriarchal beliefs emphasising male assertiveness shape constructions of masculinity in ways that reinforce domestic violence as a mechanism of control (Mshweshwe, 2020). In the Nigerian context, this means that IPV may become normalised as a culturally sanctioned means of enforcing obedience, loyalty, or honour if wrongly accepted.

Hegemonic masculinity not only produces violence; it also produces the conditions for a gendered counter-discourse in response to that violence. The expression "men na scum" circulating across Nigerian and African social media in hashtags such as #MenAreScum and #MenAreTrash can be theorised precisely as such a counter-discourse: a collective articulation of frustration with the very masculine norms and behaviours that hegemonic masculinity produces and protects. Women who experience repeated abuse under patriarchal conditions may generalise their anger, attributing to men as a social category the qualities of the hegemonic ideal that made their abuse possible.

Hegemonic masculinity contributes to this dynamic in two interconnected ways. First, by valorising traits such as emotional stoicism, dominance, and toughness, it creates cultural conditions in which abusive behaviour is rendered intelligible, and in some situations, permissible (Malesa, 2022). This systemic quality means that some survivors come to view men collectively through the lens of these structural conditions, rather than as individuals acting outside the norm. Second, hegemonic masculinity defines masculinity partly in opposition to femininity, such that women's public critique of men can provoke defensive reassertions of male identity. In theoretical terms, backlash theory predicts that challenges to hegemonic norms may prompt some men to double down on dominant behaviours to reassert their gendered position (Faludi, 1991). However, responses vary considerably depending on individual and structural contexts.

Women's perceptions are themselves varied. Some survivors may embrace the "men na scum" sentiment as an accurate representation of their structural reality, seeing their abuser not as an exception but as a product of a system that enables men to behave as they do. Others may distinguish between individual behaviour and systemic conditions, acknowledging their abuser as one man, while recognising that hegemonic norms shaped his conduct. Crucially, hegemonic gender norms may be internalised by women. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) observe, hegemonic ideals are sustained in part through the consent and internalisation of patriarchal logic among heterosexual women. This means that some survivors may accept or justify the violence they have experienced, framing it as the partner "enforcing authority" rather than attributing it to gendered structures. Others, drawing on feminist counter-narratives, may embrace the "men na scum" framing as a hyperbolic but politically necessary demand for accountability.

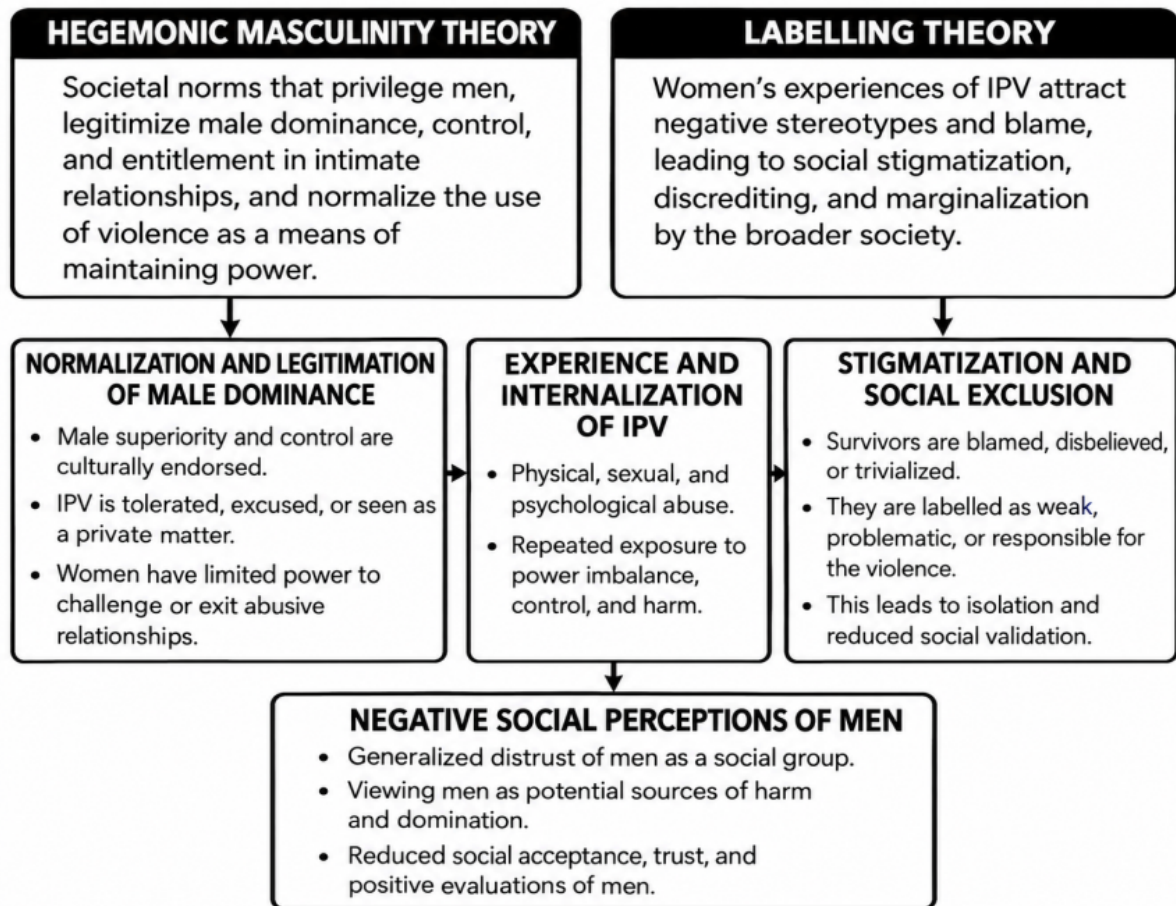
Labelling Theory

While hegemonic masculinity illuminates the structural conditions that produce IPV and the gendered responses it generates, it does not fully account for the social and symbolic processes through which collective labels such as “men na scum” come to shape how entire groups are perceived. Labelling theory, rooted in symbolic interactionism, provides this complementary analytical lens. Labelling theory, as developed by Becker (1963) and Lemert (1951), holds that deviance is not inherent in any act but is a social construction: a consequence of the rules that social groups create and the reactions they mobilise when those rules are breached. As Becker (1963) famously argued, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits but rather a consequence of others’ application of rules and sanctions. The act becomes deviant only when others react to it as such, and the person becomes deviant only when others apply the label. Once labelled, individuals may internalise that identity, engaging in what Lemert termed secondary deviance, a response to the stigma and exclusion produced by the label. Labelling theory thus reveals deviance as a dynamic social process, created and maintained through interaction, language, and power. Central to this process is stigma. As Bernburg (2009) notes, deviant labels are fundamentally stigmatising: they reduce those to whom they are applied to a single tainted quality in others’ eyes, attaching powerful negative stereotypes to an identity. This stigmatisation has consequences not only for those labelled but also for those who do the labelling, and it continues to shape how they perceive and interact with the labelled group in subsequent encounters.

Labelling processes, as the above principles make clear, extend well beyond their traditional application to crime and illness. They apply with equal force to social categories and collective stereotypes, and it is in this domain that the “men na scum” expression becomes analytically significant. The phrase functions as a sweeping gendered label: it attributes to all men as a category the qualities of immorality, danger, and untrustworthiness that labelling theory associates with deviant identities.

The most directly relevant empirical analysis of this phenomenon is Nurik’s (2019) study of women involved in the “Men na scum” social media movement. Nurik found that many participants did not intend the label as a literal statement about all men’s character, but rather as a deliberate act of “punching up” in protest against male-dominated power structures rather than against individual men. In this reading, the label is performative and political, not taxonomic. However, labelling theory cautions that the social consequences of a label are not fully under the control of those who deploy it. Even when wielded as a protest, a label that circulates widely and attaches to an entire social group carries stigmatising power. As Becker (1963) argued, once a label is successfully applied, the deviant is the one to whom it has been applied, and deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label. If the “men na scum” label gains sufficient cultural traction, it may contribute to how men are perceived and treated, regardless of the feminist intent behind it. The implications of this for IPV prevalence are substantial. When the “scum” label enters public discourse in a society where approximately 30% of women have experienced physical partner violence (Mbachu et al., 2025), it crystallises real, legitimate anger into a fixed social meaning. Labelling theory and stigma theory (Link & Phelan, 2001) together suggest that such a label creates in-group/out-group divisions between women (especially survivors) and men, which can widen interpersonal distance. Women who repeatedly encounter the label may begin to perceive potential partners not as individuals but as representatives of a stigmatised category. Meanwhile, Cooley’s (1902) looking-glass self concept, which holds that people’s self-concept is shaped by how they are perceived and labelled by others, implies that men exposed to this label may internalise it in ways that affect their own behaviour and self-perception, compounding the interpersonal fallout.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework on Intimate Partner Violence and Women's Social Perception of Men



Source: Authors'

Perception of Men

The conceptual framework illustrates how hegemonic masculinity theory and labelling theory jointly explain the association between intimate partner violence and women's social perceptions of men. Hegemonic masculinity theory explains how cultural norms that privilege male authority, dominance, control and entitlement may legitimise unequal power relations within intimate relationships. Where such norms are widely accepted, IPV may be tolerated, excused or treated as a private family matter, thereby increasing women's exposure to different forms of physical, psychological and sexual abuse.

Labelling theory complements this explanation by showing how women's experiences of IPV may influence the meanings and labels they attach to men as a social group. Repeated experiences of control, violence, disbelief, blame or social exclusion may encourage survivors to associate men with domination, danger and untrustworthiness. Consequently, the negative evaluation may extend beyond the individual abusive partner to broader perceptions of men, resulting in poor or negative social perception, diminished trust and greater interpersonal vigilance. The framework, therefore, positions IPV exposure as the explanatory variable and women's negative social perceptions of men as the outcome variable. The framework proposes that exposure to IPV is associated with more negative perceptions of men.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between intimate partner violence (IPV) experience and women’s social perception of men in Kwara State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional design was appropriate given the study’s aim of establishing the association between IPV exposure and attitudinal outcomes at a defined point in time, rather than tracking change over time. Data were collected between February 2025 and December 2025. The target population comprised all women of reproductive age (15–49 years) residing in Kwara State, estimated at 858,953 based on National Population Commission (NPC, 2022) projections across the state’s 16 Local Government Areas (LGAs). Because it was neither feasible nor efficient to survey the entire population, a multi-stage cluster sampling technique was employed to draw a representative sample. In the first stage, the population was stratified into three clusters corresponding to Kwara State’s Senatorial Districts: Kwara Central, Kwara North, and Kwara South. Each district contained sub-clusters at the LGA level. In the second stage, using simple random sampling, two (2) LGAs were selected from each Senatorial District, yielding six LGAs in total: Ilorin South and Ilorin East (Kwara Central); Edu and Moro (Kwara North); and Ifelodun and Offa (Kwara South). Simple random sampling was employed at this stage to ensure fairness and inclusivity, representing both majority and minority ethnic groups across the state. The six selected LGAs contained an estimated combined female reproductive-age population of 370,760. In stage three (3), each selected LGA was divided into political wards. Using simple random sampling, two wards were selected per LGA, yielding 12 wards in total. In stage four (4), in each political ward, regular enumeration areas (EAs) were selected using probability proportional to size, drawing on the National Population Commission’s 2015 and 2022 enumeration area demarcation. A total of 72 EAs were selected. In the last stage, within each sampled EA, households with women of reproductive age were purposively selected until the required number of eligible participants was reached.

The required minimum sample size was calculated using a scientific sample size calculator (Mason, 2025) at a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of ± 3 , yielding a minimum of 1,064 respondents. To account for potential non-response, incomplete questionnaires, and attrition, the sample size was increased by 5% (yielding 1117.2) (See *Iliyasu et al.*, 2024) and proportionately distributed across the six selected LGAs according to their relative population sizes. Ultimately, 1,075 questionnaires were returned fully completed and usable, and these constituted the analytical sample for this study. Inclusion criteria required that participants be female, aged 15 to 49, currently or previously in an intimate relationship, and residing in Kwara State at the time of data collection. Women who did not meet these criteria were excluded from analysis.

The study administered the Intimate Partner Violence and Social Perception of Men Scale (IPVSPMS), a structured questionnaire developed by adapting items from two validated and widely used instruments: the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale 2 (CTS2; Straus et al., 1992) and Keyes’ Social Wellbeing Scale (Keyes, 1998). The questionnaire comprised three sections. Section One captured demographic characteristics including age, marital status, educational attainment, occupation, and income level. Section Two measured IPV experience using an adapted version of the CTS2. The CTS2 is one of the most widely validated instruments for measuring intimate partner violence, with demonstrated reliability across diverse populations (Lucente et al., 2001; Straus & Mickey, 2012). This study adapted three subscales: physical violence (5 items), psychological/emotional violence (4 items), and sexual violence (6 items), yielding a 15-item IPV measure. Participants were asked to indicate whether they had ever experienced each form of violence from an intimate partner using a five-point frequency scale.

For the regression analysis, scores across all 15 items were summed to produce a composite IPV experience score, with higher scores indicating greater cumulative exposure to intimate partner violence. All prevalence figures reported in this paper accordingly represent lifetime estimates.

Section Three measured women's social perception of men using nine items adapted from the Social Acceptance subscale of Keyes' (1998) Social Wellbeing Scale. The nine items included both positively and negatively worded statements. Items 6 and 7 are positively worded, such that agreement indicates favourable evaluations of men; the remaining items, including Items 1 and 8, are negatively worded, such that agreement indicates unfavourable evaluations. Prior to analysis, the negatively worded items were reverse-coded so that, across all nine items, higher scores consistently reflect more favourable evaluations of men as a social group. The total social perception score was computed by summing all nine items after reverse-coding, with higher total scores indicating greater social acceptance of men. The internal consistency of the composite was satisfactory.

To ensure the suitability of the adapted instruments for the Kwara State setting, a pilot study was conducted among 120 women of reproductive age in Irepodun LGA, a location distinct from all sampled areas. Forty women were selected from each of the four communities. Content validity was established through expert review: the adapted items were reviewed by specialists in gender studies, sociology, and public health, who assessed their relevance, clarity, and cultural appropriateness for the target population. Items flagged as ambiguous or culturally inappropriate were revised before final administration. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha in SPSS. All subscales demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of .699 for sexual violence, .798 for physical violence, .668 for psychological/emotional violence, and .853 for the Social perception subscale.

Data were collected face-to-face using Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI), with 18 trained research assistants administering the questionnaire electronically via Android mobile devices, three assistants per selected LGA. This method, though facilitated by digital devices, was interviewer-administered rather than self-administered online, which directly addressed potential barriers related to digital literacy and internet access in more rural areas of Kwara State and ensured inclusivity across respondents of varying literacy levels. Research assistants were selected for fluency in both English and the relevant local languages (Yoruba, Nupe, or Bariba) of their assigned areas, enabling them to read questions aloud and explain them in participants' preferred language.

Prior to entering the field, all research assistants underwent structured training covering two core areas: (a) ethical principles in research involving sensitive topics, including informed consent, confidentiality, and appropriate response to emotional disclosures; and (b) scientific research protocols, including objectivity, bias avoidance, and correct administration of the CAPI instrument. Access to communities was facilitated through a formal protocol involving the community head, youth leaders, and household heads, ensuring local trust and cooperation before data collection commenced.

The data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were computed to summarise the sample's demographic characteristics and the prevalence and distribution of IPV across its three forms. Simple linear regression analysis was used to examine the effect of IPV experience on social perception of men. For regression purposes, scores on the physical, psychological/emotional, and sexual violence subscales were summed into a single composite

variable “IPV experience” representing each respondent’s cumulative exposure across all three forms of violence. Similarly, the nine social perception items (after reverse-coding of positively worded items) were summed into a single composite “Social Perception of Men” score. The regression model was estimated with IPV experience as the predictor and women’s social perception of men as the outcome.

All participants were fully informed of the study’s purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, before providing written informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured throughout: no personally identifying information was recorded, and responses were accessible only to the research team. Given the sensitive nature of IPV disclosure, research assistants were trained to recognise and respond appropriately to signs of distress, and participants were not compelled to answer any question they felt uncomfortable responding to.

Community-level access was secured through formal engagement with community heads, youth leaders, and household heads, who were briefed on the study’s objectives and the importance of voluntary, confidential participation. Only women who met the inclusion criteria, provided informed consent, and willingly agreed to proceed were enrolled. All research procedures were conducted in accordance with established ethical principles for human subjects’ research.

Presentation of Results

Table 1: Prevalence and Frequency of Intimate Partner Violence

IPV Item	Never	Once	Twice	3–5	6–10	11–20	>20	n expos	M expos	SD samp le M	Full- samp le SD	Full-expos ed	Full-expos ed
Physical Violence													
Slapped or hit by a partner	697	65	74	82	79	54	24	378	3.15	1.49	1.11	1.74	
Pushed or shoved violently	728	78	76	71	62	41	19	347	2.91	1.50	0.94	1.61	
Violently grabbed or restrained	757	74	68	62	55	36	23	318	2.94	1.56	0.87	1.59	
Hit with an object that could hurt	816	73	60	52	38	22	14	259	2.68	1.50	0.65	1.36	
Arm twisted or hair pulled	840	71	58	46	33	18	9	235	2.56	1.44	0.56	1.25	
Psychological/Emotional Violence													
Insulted or belittled by the partner	705	59	68	76	74	58	35	370	3.29	1.56	1.13	1.81	
Appearance repeatedly criticized	729	67	71	70	65	46	27	346	3.10	1.55	1.00	1.69	
Treated as stupid or incompetent	773	72	66	61	51	34	18	302	2.88	1.52	0.81	1.53	
Told she cannot care for herself	817	74	62	52	38	21	11	258	2.62	1.45	0.63	1.33	
Sexual Violence													
Partner insensitive to her sexual needs													
Withheld sex when she desired it	773	58	62	67	58	38	19	302	3.04	1.50	0.85	1.58	
Used threats or pressure to obtain sex	781	63	64	62	54	35	16	294	2.94	1.49	0.80	1.53	
Sex without a condom despite	805	65	58	55	46	31	15	270	2.87	1.52	0.72	1.46	
	828	62	54	49	41	28	13	247	2.83	1.52	0.65	1.39	

IPV Item	Never	Once	Twice	3–5	6–10	11–20	>20	n expos	M expos ed	SD samp le	Full- samp le M	Full-expos ed SD
refusal												
Insisted on sex when she was tired or sick	842	64	54	46	36	22	11	233	2.70	1.49	0.59	1.31
Forced or threatened oral or anal sex	886	59	46	37	26	14	7	189	2.53	1.43	0.44	1.13

Source: Researcher’s Computation (2025).

Note. Conditional statistics (n , M , SD) are computed only among respondents who reported experiencing the specified act, using the original 6-point metric where 1 = Once and 6 = More than 20 times. While the full-sample columns are were recoded as 0 = Never, 1 = Once, 2 = Twice, 3 = 3–5 times, 4 = 6–10 times, 5 = 11–20 times, 6 = More than 20 times. Means and standard deviations are computed across all 1,075 respondents, with non-experiencers contributing a score of 0..

The findings presented in Table 1 reveal that intimate partner violence (IPV) was not merely occasional among respondents but occurred repeatedly across physical, psychological, and sexual dimensions. The concentration of responses within the repeated exposure categories suggests that many women experienced ongoing victimisation rather than isolated incidents. This pattern reflects abusive relationships in which violence becomes sustained and normalised over time.

Psychological and emotional violence emerged as the most pervasive form of abuse among respondents. Experiences such as insults, belittlement, and repeated criticism were highly recurrent, indicating that emotional degradation is commonly used as a mechanism of control within intimate relationships. In practical terms, nearly 1 out of every 10 women in the psychological violence subgroup reported experiencing insults or belittlement more than 20 times, demonstrating the chronic nature of emotional abuse. These findings are particularly important because psychological violence is often less visible than physical assault. Yet, its long-term effects on self-esteem, mental health, and social functioning can be equally damaging. The results suggest that emotional abuse may gradually weaken victims’ confidence and increase dependency, thereby making it more difficult to resist or leave abusive relationships.

Physical violence also showed a disturbing pattern of recurrence. Acts such as slapping, hitting, violent restraint, and aggressive shoving were repeatedly experienced by many respondents. Approximately 1 in every 6 women who experienced physical violence reported being slapped or hit between 11 and 20 times, while a notable proportion endured such abuse more than 20 times. This indicates that physical abuse within intimate relationships is often cyclical and entrenched rather than accidental. The persistence of these experiences may reflect structural and cultural factors such as economic dependence, fear of social stigma, concern for children, or limited access to protective services and legal support.

The findings on sexual violence further highlight the vulnerability of women within intimate relationships. Coercive sexual practices, including pressured intercourse, denial of sexual autonomy, and non-consensual sexual acts, occurred repeatedly among many respondents. For

example, close to 1 out of every 10 women who experienced sexual coercion through threats or pressure reported enduring it more than 20 times. Similarly, a substantial proportion experienced repeated sexual demands even when tired or ill. These findings underscore the persistence of unequal gender power relations in intimate unions, where women's consent and bodily autonomy may be disregarded. Such experiences have serious implications for reproductive health, emotional well-being, and women's sense of personal dignity and safety.

Another important implication emerging from the table is that less severe forms of IPV appear to occur more frequently than overtly extreme acts. Emotional insults, criticism, and coercive sexual behaviours showed prevalence than highly violent acts such as forced oral or anal sex. This may indicate that certain abusive behaviours have become socially tolerated or insufficiently recognised as violence within intimate relationships. Consequently, many victims may fail to identify these experiences as abuse until the violence escalates into more severe forms.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Social Perception of Men

Item	SD f (%)	Df (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)	M	SD
1. I do not generally feel that men are kind (R)	111 (10.3)	162 (15.1)	216 (20.1)	264 (24.6)	322 (30.0)	3.49	1.33
2. I think that men are unreliable (R)	109 (10.1)	183 (17.0)	216 (20.1)	266 (24.7)	301 (28.0)	3.43	1.33
3. I believe that men are self-centred (R)	107 (10.0)	161 (15.0)	194 (18.0)	291 (27.1)	322 (30.0)	3.52	1.32
4. I feel that men are not trustworthy (R)	140 (13.0)	150 (14.0)	193 (18.0)	270 (25.1)	322 (30.0)	3.45	1.38
5. Men live only for themselves (R)	119 (11.1)	161 (15.0)	215 (20.0)	258 (24.0)	322 (30.0)	3.47	1.35
6. Men are more honest these days	321 (29.9)	329 (30.6)	161 (15.0)	156 (14.5)	108 (10.0)	2.44	1.32
7. Men care about people's problems	301 (28.0)	291 (27.1)	193 (18.0)	161 (15.0)	129 (12.0)	2.56	1.35
8. I am unable to be tolerant of men (R)	107 (10.0)	172 (16.0)	215 (20.0)	280 (26.0)	301 (28.0)	3.46	1.31
9. I accept men as they are	159 (14.8)	243 (22.6)	143 (13.3)	217 (20.2)	313 (29.1)	3.26	1.45

Source: Researcher's Computation (2025). Note. SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree. Responses were scored 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Item means and standard deviations are reported on the raw response metric, before reverse-coding. Items marked (R) were reverse-coded prior to computing the composite, so that higher composite scores indicate positive social perception of men. The composite, therefore, ranges from 9 to 45.

The findings presented in Table 2 indicate a generally poor social perception and trust toward men among women who experienced intimate partner violence (IPV). Across most items, respondents showed a stronger tendency to agree with negative perceptions of men than with positive ones. This pattern suggests that repeated exposure to abuse may substantially shape victims' interpersonal attitudes, emotional orientation, and social expectations regarding men.

The strongest patterns emerged around perceptions of selfishness, untrustworthiness, emotional insensitivity, and unreliability among men. These attitudes imply that IPV experiences extend beyond immediate physical or emotional harm and may fundamentally alter victims’ social cognition and relational confidence. Women who repeatedly encounter violence or coercive control within intimate relationships may begin to generalise those experiences to men more broadly, thereby reinforcing suspicion, emotional withdrawal, and defensive interpersonal behaviours.

A proportion of respondents rejected statements suggesting that men are caring or honest. This indicates that positive perceptions of men were comparatively weak among IPV victims, thereby reinforcing the interpretation that victimisation experiences contribute to diminished relationship trust and social optimism. Negative perceptions of men can influence future relationship formation, emotional attachment, family interactions, and willingness to seek social or institutional support from male figures. Such attitudes may also contribute to social isolation, reduced emotional security, and long-term interpersonal difficulties.

Although many respondents expressed negative attitudes toward men generally, a considerable proportion still reported some positive perceptions of men. This suggests the coexistence of emotional ambivalence among IPV victims. While many women were critical of men due to their experiences, social tolerance or emotional accommodation still exists, which can be linked to cultural expectations surrounding gender relations, marriage, family stability, or dependence on male partners.

Effect of IPV Experience on Social Perception of Men

To conduct the regression analysis, the key statistical assumptions were examined. Linearity was assessed by inspecting a scatterplot of standardised residuals against predicted values, which confirmed an approximately linear relationship between IPV experience and social perception scores. Normality of residuals was evaluated using a P-P plot of standardised residuals, which indicated no substantial departure from normality. Homoscedasticity was assessed through visual inspection of the residual plot, which showed no systematic fanning pattern. As the model contained a single predictor, multicollinearity was not an issue. These checks confirmed that the assumptions of simple linear regression were satisfactorily met.

Table 3: Regression Summary

Predictor	B	SE	β	T	P	95% CI
Constant	-0.229	0.249	—	-0.921	0.357	[-0.717, 0.259]
IPV Experience	-1.720	0.131	-.372	-13.123	.000	[-1.977, -1.463]

Source: Researcher’s Computation, 2025. (Model Fit: $R = -.372$, $R^2 = .138$, $F(1, 1073) = 172.217$, $p < .001$).

A simple linear regression was conducted to test the null hypothesis that experience of intimate partner violence has no significant effect on women’s negative perception of men. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(1, 1073) = 172.217$, $p < .001$, confirming that IPV experience is a reliable predictor of variation in social perception scores. The model accounted for 13.8% of the total variance in social perception ($R^2 = .138$), indicating a modest though meaningful effect. The model shows that for every one-unit increase in a woman’s IPV experience score, her social perception score increased by -1.720 units ($R^2 = .138$), $B = -1.720$, $SE = 0.131$, $\beta = -.372$, $t = -13.123$, $p < .001$, $F(1, 1073) = 172.217$, $p < .001$ 95% CI $[-1.977, -1.463]$. The result revealed that higher exposure to IPV was associated with poor or

negative social perception of men. Women who reported IPV expressed more critical, distrustful, and socially distancing appraisals of men as a category than women who reported no such exposure. This implies that IPV is one of the factors shaping how women socially perceived and evaluate men collectively.

Discussion of Findings

The study reveals a strikingly high burden of intimate partner violence (IPV) among women of reproductive age in Kwara State. Roughly 3-4 in 10 respondents reported having experienced physical (36%), psychological/emotional (35%), or sexual (32%) violence from a partner, figures that are comparable to the 35% global lifetime prevalence reported by the World Health Organisation. The prevalence estimates modestly exceed Nigeria's 2018 Demographic and Health Survey (25%), which suggests that IPV may be especially severe in this region. Notably, the violence was predominantly chronic rather than isolated. For example, among women reporting physical abuse, over one-third experienced slapping or hitting six or more times, indicating repeated "battering" rather than a one-off incident. This pattern of recurrent abuse aligns with theoretical and empirical descriptions of IPV. Decades of research have defined such repeated harm as "battering" (Odini et al., 2024; Krug et al., 2002) and shown that survivors often endure multiple incidents. Similar chronic patterns emerged for psychological and sexual abuse. A large minority of survivors reported insults, criticism, coerced unprotected sex, or forced sex repeatedly rather than once. These findings echo prior literature in demonstrating that IPV often involves ongoing aggression. The present results thus corroborate the view of IPV as a sustained process of coercion (rather than isolated "incidents"), consistent with global evidence that large majorities of abused women experience multiple episodes.

The descriptive analysis of women's perception of men uncovered pervasive negative perceptions. As evident in table 2 majority of respondents agreed that men exhibit undesirable traits (54-57% agreement). Conversely, most respondents rejected positive characterisations (e.g., only about 40% believed "men care about other people"). These findings suggest that roughly 1 in 2 women implicitly endorses negative stereotypes about men. To the researchers' knowledge, few empirical studies have quantified women's generalised attitudes toward men in this way. It is reminiscent of observations in feminist and trauma-recovery literature that survivors may develop strong misandric sentiments. For example, in a clinical case series, one sexual assault survivor explicitly reported the belief "all men na scum" following her trauma (Tilstra-Ferrell et al., 2024). It illustrates how personal victimisation can generalise into broad negative beliefs about men. This current survey suggests that such sentiments may be far from anecdotal. Large proportions of women (*See table 2*) endorse statements like "men are not trustworthy," which is a reflection of what the media colloquially terms "men na scum." These attitudes stand in stark contrast to expectations from patriarchal socialisation. In traditional patriarchal societies, women are often socialised to tolerate male dominance and avoid overt criticism of men. As such, belief in the normative tolerance of wife beating is a core patriarchal attitude linked to IPV prevalence (Sambisa et al., 2011). Such norms would predict that abused women might publicly downplay grievances about men to conform to gendered expectations. Instead, our participants expressed remarkably blunt criticisms of men. This discrepancy suggests a sociocultural shift or backlash: having experienced abuse, many women apparently feel freer to voice negative judgments about men, even though this runs counter to traditional expectations of female deference.

The regression analysis revealed a statistically significant association between women's experience of intimate partner violence (IPV) and their scores on the Social perception subscale ($B = -1.720$, $SE = 0.131$, $\beta = -.372$, $R^2 = .138$, $t = -13.123$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-1.977, -1.463]$). The negative coefficient indicates that exposure to IPV was associated with poor

social perception of men. Women who reported IPV expressed more critical, distrustful, and socially distancing appraisals of men as a category than women who reported no such exposure. The model accounted for approximately 13.8% of the variance in social perception scores, indicating that IPV exposure is a meaningful correlate among several factors that shape how women evaluate men collectively. The significant association between IPV and negative social perception of men, suggests that women who experience violence are more likely to develop distrustful and unfavourable evaluations of men as a social group.

These results speak directly to the “men na scum” narrative prominent in Nigerian digital spaces. This implies that the attitudes commonly expressed through the “men na scum” discourse may have experiential rather than purely rhetorical origins. The slogan “men na scum” emerged in Nigerian digital spaces as a feminist expression of frustration with male violence, abuse, and betrayal. Much of the existing commentary has treated it as an online or social media phenomenon driven by activism, hashtags, and digital feminism. However, the findings of this study suggest that the underlying sentiment may not be merely a product of online discourse. Rather, negative perceptions of men appear to be rooted in women’s lived experiences of intimate partner violence. Hence, the study provides evidence that the discourse is not simply a digital narrative but reflects broader social realities experienced by many women. The online slogan may therefore be understood as a public articulation of perceptions that are also present among women outside social media environments. Rather than creating these perceptions, digital platforms may amplify and make visible attitudes that have developed through repeated experiences of gendered violence.

Mendes et al., (2018) theorise digital feminist activism as a repertoire through which women publicly name, expose, and delegitimise perpetrators of gendered harm, drawing its force from the premise that women who experience male violence come to withhold legitimacy from male authority. It is frequently assumed that this sentiment is confined to a narrow constituency of younger, urban, and highly educated women with sustained access to social media. The present data suggest otherwise. In a sample drawn from across the social geography of Kwara State, higher IPV exposure was associated with more negative evaluations of men as a group, indicating that the attitudinal disposition expressed online has a broader demographic base than its digital visibility implies.

This result is consistent with the established trauma literature, in which victimisation is associated with reduced social trust, heightened interpersonal vigilance, and increased social distancing from the group associated with harm (Stark & Hester, 2019). Grigaitė et al. (2024) and Mengo et al. (2021) similarly report that IPV survivors exhibit elevated psychological distress and withdrawal from social engagement. Herman (1992) argues that the injury inflicted by interpersonal violence is fundamentally relational: what is damaged is not only the body but the capacity to extend trust safely, and that damage rarely remains confined to the individual perpetrator. Freyd’s (1996) formulation of betrayal trauma sharpens this point by locating the distinctive harm of IPV in the fact that the injury originates from a person on whom the victim depends. Where harm and dependence coincide, appraisals of safety are recalibrated broadly rather than narrowly, and the category to which the perpetrator belongs becomes a reasonable object of caution.

From a theoretical perspective, hegemonic masculinity theory helps explain how repeated exposure to male dominance and coercion shapes women’s perceptions of masculinity and male authority. Hegemonic masculinity theory holds that IPV is not the idiosyncratic conduct of deviant individuals but an enactment of a gender order that authorises male dominance and

legitimizes the coercive means through which it is maintained (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Labelling theory further suggests that repeated experiences of violence influence the meanings women attach to men as a social group, potentially reinforcing expectations of aggression and control. Becker's (1963) central claim is that deviance is conferred through social response rather than residing in the act itself, and the process is not the exclusive property of formal institutions. Survivors of IPV engage in labelling of their own: the experience of violence supplies the interpretive material through which men as a group are reclassified as a source of potential harm. This reclassification is reinforced when communities respond to disclosure with scepticism, mediation, or the attribution of blame to the woman, since each such response confirms that the label attaches to the survivor rather than to the man who harmed her. The finding of this study is therefore consistent with a process in which victimisation and the social reception of victimisation jointly reshape how men are evaluated as a category.

A substantial body of Nigerian scholarship documents the persistence of permissive norms surrounding IPV. Antai and Antai (2008) report that many rural Nigerian women regard IPV as an ordinary feature of marriage under a rigid patriarchal culture; Meinhart et al. (2020) find that Nigerian women, particularly young married women, frequently endorse patriarchal norms even after experiencing violence; Benebo et al. (2018) and Sunmola et al. (2020) attribute the persistence of IPV to permissive social norms under which marriage confers unconditional male dominance; and Kalunta-Crumpton (2017) shows that Nigerian women often interpret abuse through patriarchal ideological frames and seek remedies within a male-dominant paradigm. Endorsement of patriarchal norms, and the justification of wife-beating specifically, are normative beliefs concerning the legitimacy of particular behaviours under specified conditions. Social acceptance, as operationalised in Keyes' (1998) framework, is an evaluative appraisal of a social group and of the respondent's willingness to regard that group as trustworthy and worthy of belonging. These are analytically separate. A woman may accept that "a good woman endures" as a rule of conduct binding on her, while holding a diminished view of the men whose conduct she is required to endure. Akanle et al. (2016) document precisely this divergence in Yoruba-speaking communities, where women curate public presentations of marital harmony while privately enduring abuse, and Callaghan et al. (2015) describe the communal surveillance, religious teaching, and family expectation through which such performances are enforced.

This study further aligns with other findings. Itimi et al. (2014) and Mapayi et al. (2022) document how financial dependence and the stigma attached to marital failure keep Nigerian women in abusive relationships, where exit may entail poverty, social ostracisation, and loss of access to children. Intimate partnerships in Nigeria are further embedded within dense networks of kin and community obligation, such that severing the relationship forfeits the social resources and protections that accrue through recognised marital status. A woman may therefore remain, comply, and publicly perform contentment while privately withholding regard for men as a group. The present finding suggests that the internal evaluative register and the external behavioural register have come apart, and that the normalisation literature, which has largely measured the latter, may have understated the extent of the former. National data are consistent with such a shift: the proportion of Nigerian women justifying wife-beating declined from 62.4% to 37.1% across successive rounds of the Demographic and Health

Survey (NPC & ICF, 2019), indicating movement in the normative environment even where structural conditions remain relatively fixed.

The sociocultural specificity of Kwara State conditions these dynamics. The state blends northern Nigerian Islamic traditionalism with Yoruba communal values to produce an environment in which patriarchal authority is reinforced through overlapping channels of religious prescription, ethnic custom, community leadership, and family structure. Traditional institutions carry particular weight in the management of domestic conflict. In communities across Ilorin, the *Mogaji* serves as a primary arbiter of domestic disputes through community-led mechanisms that prioritise reconciliation over protection. These arrangements are conventionally understood as evidence of a responsive social system. However, where dispute resolution is conducted by male traditional authorities and reconciliation is systematically preferred to sanctions or protection, a survivor’s encounter with these mechanisms may confirm that institutions led by men will not act decisively on her behalf. Smith and Freyd (2014) describe this as institutional betrayal, in which harm is compounded when the body responsible for protection fails to provide it. Such a process would extend distrust outward from the individual partner to men occupying positions of authority more generally, and would plausibly deepen rather than moderate the negative appraisals recorded here.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the relationship between intimate partner violence (IPV) and women’s social perception of men in Kwara State. The findings showed that IPV experience was significantly associated with poor or negative social perceptions of men. It therefore concludes that experiences of IPV are one of the factors contributing to negative social perceptions of men by women. Thus, women who are exposed to IPV were more likely to conclude that “men na scum”. The findings of this study suggest that the “men na scum” discourse should not be understood solely as a social media phenomenon or an expression of online feminist activism. Rather, the significant association between intimate partner violence and women’s negative social perceptions of men indicates that the sentiments reflected in the discourse are grounded in lived experiences of violence and unequal gender relations. While the present cross-sectional design cannot establish that IPV causes these perceptions, it provides empirical evidence that women who experience high levels of IPV are more likely to evaluate men negatively as a social group. Consequently, the “men na scum” discourse may be interpreted less as a digitally manufactured narrative than as a visible expression of deeper social experiences that extend beyond online platforms into everyday realities. This shifts scholarly attention from viewing the discourse as merely rhetorical to recognising it as a reflection of broader structural and relational dynamics surrounding gender-based violence in contemporary Nigerian society. The findings are consistent with trauma-based explanations which suggest that repeated victimisation can weaken interpersonal trust and shape survivors’ perceptions of the social group associated with the source of harm. The study contributes to the body of literature by extending the understanding of IPV beyond its physical and psychological consequences to the domain of social perception.

From a policy perspective, the findings underscore the need for coordinated interventions that address both the prevention of IPV and its social consequences. Based on the findings that women who experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) exhibited negative social perception of men, reflecting the enduring impact of abuse on interpersonal trust and gender perceptions. Hence, a multi-sectoral response is recommended.

First, the Federal and State Ministries of Women Affairs, in collaboration with development partners and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), should strengthen women's economic empowerment programmes through vocational training, entrepreneurship support, access to microcredit, and livelihood initiatives. Enhancing women's economic independence would reduce financial dependence on abusive partners and increase their capacity to make safer relationship decisions.

Second, the Ministry of Justice, law enforcement agencies, and relevant human rights institutions should improve access to survivor-centred legal protection by ensuring the effective enforcement of existing laws against domestic violence, establishing confidential reporting channels, expanding access to legal aid, and increasing the availability of safe shelters for survivors. These measures would improve survivors' confidence in formal support systems and reduce barriers to seeking protection.

Third, traditional institutions, community leaders, religious leaders, and alternative dispute-resolution bodies should reform community-based conflict-resolution mechanisms to prioritise survivor safety, accountability, and justice over reconciliation at all costs. Women should be actively represented on community mediation and adjudication panels, and members of these structures should receive regular training in gender-sensitive approaches to handling IPV cases. Such reforms would foster more responsive and survivor-centred community interventions.

Finally, government agencies, civil society organisations, educational institutions, and faith-based organisations should implement sustained gender-transformative programmes that engage men and boys in promoting respectful, non-violent relationships. These interventions should focus on challenging harmful gender norms, promoting positive masculinity, and strengthening accountability for abusive behaviour. At the same time, psychosocial support services should assist survivors in rebuilding interpersonal trust through trauma-informed counselling and support groups, recognising that distrust of men following IPV is a rational response to lived experiences rather than a personal deficit. Collectively, these interventions would help prevent IPV, strengthen survivor well-being, and foster healthier gender relations within communities.

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