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Perceptions about Female-Perpetrated Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Uganda

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Abstract

Violence and coercion, including physical and verbal threats in intimate relationships, is a serious global problem. Although statistics reveal that women are the predominant victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), they are by no means the only affected gender. IPV research trends indicate growth in male victimisation by their female intimate partners. Yet, despite the growth, widespread disbelief of actual occurrence of female-perpetrated IPV against men still exists. The current status quo presents a contrast between what emerging research shows as a growing problem and the way ordinary societal members perceive the issue. This paper, thus, explores prevailing perceptions about violence perpetration by women against their male intimate partners in a variety of contexts. It further examines the implications of such perceptions about male victimisation on society's general understanding and recognition of IPV against men. Narratives on perceptions around female perpetrated IPV and male victimisation are presented and illustrated with direct quotes drawn from the interview transcripts. While men share their individual experiences of victimisation, they reveal how gendered notions, histories, structural, cultural and other social factors have negatively influenced societal perceptions about male victimisation in intimate relationships. These perceptions have consequently resulted in the under-recognition of men as legitimate IPV victims; thus, the limited provision of male-specific victim support services and resources.

Keywords: female perpetrators, male victimisation, intimate partner violence, common perceptions

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Introduction

Violence among intimate partners is a pertinent, complex, multifaceted, culturally, and historically shifting social phenomenon, especially with respect to the perpetrator – victim positions. It mainly occurs among partners in intimate relationships in a domestic setting (Allen-Collinson, 2008), although some violent actions between partners may take place in the public domain. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) cuts across various spheres which include: gender, culture/ethnicity, education, income, and religion (Gillum et al., 2018). IPV is perpetrated by both men and women against their intimate partners, through forms, such as: physical violence involving pushing, throwing objects, kicking, hitting, and several other actions and psychological or emotional violence – verbal threats, false accusations, humiliation, witchcraft, the use of intimate knowledge for systematic degradation and sabotage of contact with children (Karakurt & Cumbie, 2012). IPV can also manifest through sexual violence, material violence – violence against inanimate objects, such as breaking or destroying objects and other things that matter to the victim, as well as economic violence involving control of the partner's financial resources and economy (Isdal, 2000). IPV has further been classified under four typologies including: *situational couple violence* which involves either partner in the role of abuser or victim/survivor; *intimate terrorism* where the perpetrator is violent and controlling while the partner is non-violent and non-controlling. The other typologies are v*iolent resistance,* in which the perpetrator, often the female partner, fights back in response to continuous abuse by a violent and controlling partner, and *mutual violent control* involving both partners who are violent and controlling to each other (Johnson, 2008).

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Against Men

IPV against men is a complex social issue, deeply rooted in the interaction of social, economic, political, cultural, and biological factors. As such, perceptions, manifestations, and prevalence of male IPV victimisation differ from one society to another, owing to the fact that they are influenced differently by socio-cultural and religious beliefs (Akinsulure-Smith et al., 2013; Thobejane & Luthada, 2019). Despite the reported consequences of IPV (psychological distress/disorders, impaired self-concept, suicidal ideation, etc.) on male victims, the phenomenon still remains significantly under-estimated, non-recognised, or unreported due to the culture of shame, societal misconceptions, social taboos, fear of not being believed, and the heavily clouded silence that surrounds it (Adebayo, 2014; Aragbuwa, 2020; Lutwama-Rukundo, 2010).

Traditionally, IPV has been perceived as a feminine issue that only affects women, and thus, a significantly

large section of the population does not acknowledge male victims of IPV (Thobejane et al., 2018). These gendered perceptions of victimhood are influenced by how masculinity is constructed in society, to the extent that, victimhood is feminised, while violence perpetration is masculinised, often rooted in the imbalanced power relations within intimate relationships in patriarchal settings (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019; Scarduzio et al., 2017). Being that patriarchy is so widespread across Uganda, it follows that, in patriarchal communities, men have been privileged with power over women in intimate relationships and yet this power is sometimes abused, resulting in many IPV cases against women (Black et al., 2019; Francisco et al., 2013; Karamagi et al., 2006).

Consequently, a large bulk of research has been dedicated to understanding this gender asymmetry, focusing largely on the historically and socially constructed influence of patriarchy in allowing men to control, dominate as well as be violent towards their female partners (Barker, 2005; Flavahan, 2015; Kwagala et al., 2013; Namy et al., 2017; Rujumba & Kwiringira, 2019; Tumwesigye et al., 2012). This status quo has inevitably resulted in IPV occurrence and theorisation becoming feminised, thereby leading to men's experiences of violence as victims/survivors receiving much less attention and recognition (Brooks et al., 2020; Thobejane et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, scholars, such as Ayodele (2017), Bates (2020), Dutton (2012), and Thobejane and Luthada (2019), among others, as well as government agencies in a number of countries worldwide, have engaged in research that explores men's experiences of IPV victimisation in heterosexual relationships; thus, bringing the phenomenon to the attention of the public. Their research demonstrates how real and growing the problem of male IPV victimisation is, based on the available statistics; hence, calling for its due recognition and attention. For instance, findings from a survey in Northern Nigeria conducted by Ameh et al., (2012) indicate that, just over half (55.4%) of the men had ever experienced violence at home, among whom 82.4% had been verbally and emotionally abused. In Kenya, Uganda's closest neighbour, a study by Obegi et al., (2017) indicates an increased occurrence of female-perpetrated IPV in various forms of partner violence ranging from physical, to sexual, and psychological.

In Uganda, where the current research was conducted, the 2018 Uganda Police Annual Crime Report recorded 2,873 males who were victimised in intimate relationships (Uganda Police Force, 2019). Yet, in 2019, 2,908 males out of a total of 14,232 people were recorded as victims of domestic violence (Uganda Police Force, 2020). More national statistics on domestic violence provided by the 2016 Uganda

Demographic Health Survey (UDHS) indicated that, of the 4,011 men aged 15 to 54 in the sampled households, 36% and 21% of them reportedly experienced spousal emotional and physical violence, respectively. On the same subject, national statistics by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) indicated that, in 2016, men who experienced spousal physical, sexual or emotional violence by their current or most recent wife/partner was at 44%, up from 42% in 2011 (UBOS & ICF, 2018).

However, despite the above statistics detailed by emerging reports and academic investigations about the gender symmetry of IPV, negative gender role stereotypes and perceptions relating to IPV against men continue to pervade society, casting doubt over the capabilities of women as perpetrators of the vice and the vulnerability of men as victims. Furthermore, women's violence is prone to be judged as contextually and situationally dependent (e.g., self-defence, escaping abuse, reclaiming a sense of self), with individuals searching for wider, external explanations for such behaviour (Bair-Merritt et al., 2010; Bates et al., 2019). Researchers–especially feminist researchers, who hold this point of view, argue that, findings that report women being as violent as men do not take context (e.g., self-defence) into account when they ask participants to report perpetration of IPV (Bates et al., 2019).

Such controversies that have for long dominated the IPV discourse may have hampered a more nuanced approach to recognising the problem of male IPV victimisation, by creating harmful stereotypical perceptions that lower societal concerns surrounding the abuse of men by their female intimate partners (Bates et al., 2019; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019). This paper thus interrogates common perceptions surrounding male IPV victimisation by the female intimate partners, particularly Baganda[1] men, of Masaka District, in the central region of Uganda, and how such stereotypical gendered perceptions may affect the recognition of male IPV victims in a contemporary masculinised and politicised society that views IPV as a problem affecting only women.

Social Construction of Masculinity and IPV

The Social Construction Theory, which suggests that identities–gender identities are formed and re-defined through a social process (Lorber, 1994), is the theoretical lens adopted by this paper. This social process establishes beliefs and perceptions regarding each gender in a given society through social norms and expectations, indicating

[1] The Baganda people belong to the Bantu family, and constitute the largest ethnic group in Uganda. The Baganda inhabit the Buganda region in south-central Uganda, which is constituted of more than 20 districts, and Masaka is one of the districts in Buganda. Masaka District – study area, is predominantly occupied by the Baganda (77%) followed by Banyankore (9%), Banyarwanda (8%) and smaller ethnicities (6%).

that all individuals are socialised to perform their gender in socially acceptable ways (Corbally, 2015; Riemann & Schutze, 2005). Since the social construction of masculinity is complex (Courtenay, 2000), men are influenced by public perceptions of what it means to be a man (Corbally, 2015). Within traditionally patriarchal societies, hegemonic masculinity is the socially constructed view of what it means to be a man (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), with characteristics, such as independence, strength and control (Kiyimba, 2010; Ratele, 2014). This societal view about ideal masculinity greatly influences men's expression of their abuse experiences and vulnerability, as well as the framing of perceptions about male victimhood by the general public as something incomprehensible (Aragbuwa, 2020; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019). Therefore, men strive to fit within the day-to-day social stereotypes (e.g., control, stoicism, self-reliance) associated with a hegemonic masculinity.

Since hegemonic masculinity in Uganda's patriarchal settings represents power and agency, this is the image that men and societal members perceive as masculinity. In Uganda's patriarchal societies, a challenge to a man's superior position quickly prompts doubts about his gender identity, by both himself and those he interacts with (Kiyimba, 2010; Namukwaya et al., 2021). Therefore, becoming a victim of IPV, coming to terms with being a victim of IPV, and responding to being a victim of IPV is quite problematic for many men and inconceivable by other societal members in the majority of patriarchal societies (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019; Thobejane & Luthada, 2019). How can such a man publicly pronounce himself as an IPV survivor, or how can society recognise him as a legitimate IPV victim when the cultural or social construction of his manliness, superiority, dominance and authority in society ought not to be questioned? By delving into the negation of the 'new' status of men's experience of IPV, the current paper explores common reactions and perceptions surrounding male victimisation and the implications of such stereotypical perceptions on the masculinity of male IPV victims in Uganda, particularly in Masaka District[2].

Methods and Materials

This qualitative study utilised the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), an approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences (Smith et al., 2009). This permitted a rich analysis of the victimised men's perceptions of their own abuse experiences, as well as the perceptions held by societal members about female violence perpetration against their male intimate partners. Snowball sampling was used to recruit 11 men over the age of

[2] The study site - Masaka District, was purposively selected through reconnaissance and statistical ranking of IPV prevalence by the Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Reports.

18, who had experienced female-perpetrated IPV either in the current or previous intimate relationships. The recruitment process and data collection lasted for two years and five months. In line with the recommendations of Smith et al., (2009), the researchers reviewed the data quality during data collection and the final sample size produced rich, experientially diverse data which met the analytic requirements of IPA.

Prior to the field data collection, the study protocol was approved by the Makerere University Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (MAKSS REC 10.17.94) and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST SS4541). In addition, the researchers sought permission from the Directorate of Research - Uganda Police Force, to be able to identify and recruit the male victims. Identifying men through the Police Child and Family Protection Unit (CFPU) was deemed viable since it is the police department in charge of domestic violence cases.

Despite the fact that most men find it demasculinising to self-identify as victims as well as report female-perpetrated IPV, the few men who choose to seek help after victimisation often approach either the law enforcement officers at police CFPU or the local council leaders. Therefore, identifying the male victims, with the assistance of the police CFPU (mainly those who had reported having been abused by their female partners) was envisaged as one of the viable options through which the researchers would identify the eligible study participants, which approach was successful. Through this approach, the researchers identified and recruited three male victims. Worth mentioning is that in order for these male victims to open up about their abuse experiences, the researchers engaged in an extensive conversation with them as a way of building rapport. After successfully conducting individual in-depth interviews with these male victims, the researchers requested them to lead them to other males who had experienced similar abuse situations from their female intimate partners. Through this snowball process, the other eight participants were successfully recruited to take part in the study.

The in-depth interviews were conducted in pre-arranged venues chosen by the study participants, since their choice of venue was deemed most suitable to facilitate privacy as well as foster confidentiality. The men were visited several times (2-3 times) following their first interview for purposes of data corroboration, and verification, particularly in instances where the researchers needed more details about the earlier provided data by the participants. Secondary participants who included: selected violent female partners to the abused men, purposively selected societal members (family, friends, peers, neighbours) who had either witnessed these violent occurrences or arbitrated

violent episodes amongst the intimate partners during the course of the couple's relationship, and some key informants (police officers, local leaders, religious leaders, GBV-NGO staff) were also interviewed. The interviews were conducted in the local language – Luganda, specifically for participants who did not understand English, and all the interviews were audio-recorded, after seeking consent from the participants. The audio-recorded interviews were later transcribed verbatim and translated from Luganda into English. Names of all participants were subsequently altered to protect their identity.

Data analysis included both thematic and narrative analysis, using the IPA, with a primary aim of gaining an insight into how each participant made sense of their own personal lived experiences or witnessed other persons' experiences of abuse (see Smith et al., 2009). The transcripts were read and re-read several times during which preliminary interpretations and notes of interest were identified, from which themes emerged.

The findings are discussed below, under the themes that emerged during and after data analysis.

Inconceivable for a Man to Be a Victim of IPV

Most societal members in Masaka perceived IPV as a masculine act against women, and that it was, and still is, a legitimate expression of power and authority by men upon their female intimate partners, especially in Buganda region (Kiyimba, 2010; Speizer, 2010) and 40% of married men report perpetration. Women and men who reported witnessing their fathers beating their mothers were more likely to report IPV victimisation (perpetration for men). When gender relations are constructed along such power relations, any consideration of alternative positions for men and women within intimate relationships become constrained. Aggression and control as well as subordination and submission, therefore, become gendered to the extent that they are viewed as consistent with the traditional male and female positions in relations and society. To this end, IPV is perceived as a feminised and hetero-normative experience, rendering the reverse occurrences of men being probable IPV victims hard to accept (Thobejane et al., 2018; McHugh et al., 2013). This explains the dominant view that the majority of society members in Masaka hold, of women as the only victims in intimate relationships and men as the perpetrators, as some of the key informants noted:

> … Violence by women never existed in our society. If I can recall, where violence existed, it was by men against women... (Catholic Priest & Notary to Masaka Diocesan Marriage Tribunal).

> When we hear about domestic violence, the first thing that comes to mind is a man hitting a woman. It is very rare and almost impossible that a wife

> can hit her husband! Here in Buganda??? Nooo… 'Ssemaka takubwa mukazi!' – [a household head who is a man cannot be beaten by a woman]. And indeed, where you find a woman has hit her man, there is either a very big issue in the background or she was just defending herself (Male - Village LC1 Chairperson).

The narrative above by the catholic priest points to the patriarchal undertones imbued in religious beliefs and perspectives, constructing men as the masters in the family, whose will, women are expected to submit to (Mann & Takyi, 2009; tests of competing theories on why the practice is common in the region are quite limited. This study evaluates the effects of resources and cultural factors on attitudes Africans hold about the acceptability of gendered violence, and specifically wife beating (battering Mansley, 2009). Therefore, with such perspectives, it becomes almost unfathomable for a 'master' to become victimised by his 'subordinate'. The narratives further reveal the deeply rooted perceptions among the societal members in Masaka, about the normative and gendered constructions of violence and victimhood. These constructions have hindered recognition of victimised men as well as abusive women within society, who have countered this perception. However, due recognition of the fact that IPV positioning is taking on a new twist where traditional victims are becoming perpetrators and vice versa ought to be considered.

The inconceivable nature of male victimhood is not only shared by societal members but also by some victim service support organisations. Some study participants expressed their disappointment about the stereotypical biases of the service support officers by failing or refusing to act, arrest or charge the female perpetrators when the victimised men reported the violence:

> After her attacks on me in the market yard, I decided to go straight to police with my torn clothes hoping that this time they would believe me. However, to my disappointment, the police officer refused to acknowledge me as a victim and her as an abuser. He instead told me that he would only believe my story after hearing from my abuser. I was, therefore, detained and she was summoned. To my surprise, when she appeared, she managed to use her antics and convinced the officers that I was actually the problem, that I was trying to abuse her and whatever she did to me was in self-defence. What hurt me most was, even though I took the decision to report my abusive wife, the officers could not believe my story, but believed her (Luswata - Male survivor).

Luswata previously had a bad record at police, since he had on several occasions been reported by his partner that he had badly hit her during a situational conflict that triggered physical violence

between the two. It was therefore hard for him to prove his victimisation in this particular incident, based on the previous record the police officers had about the couple. It is to note that while Luswata had previously abused his partner, this particular incident could have been one of violence in retaliation where he was the victim and not the perpetrator. From the above narratives, the reactions and perceptions of law enforcement officers during handling cases of IPV could possibly have been an outcome of the international and local legislation that has defined IPV to the extent that one gender (female) is seen as vulnerable to abuse, and the other gender (male) as the perpetrators. Given the legal and societal history of oppression and discrimination against women by men, this has resulted in the misrepresentation of IPV as a problem affecting only women. Consequently, such history has polarised appropriate conceptualisation of IPV by the "gate keepers of justice", thereby resulting in significant implications to male victims including making men's experiences invisible and hard to articulate. This has subsequently caused societal members' and police officers' disbelief and non-response to the plight of male IPV victims.

Worth noting is that the under-acknowledgment, non-recognition, mistreatment, and penalisation of victimised men puts them at additional risk to further victimisation by their already abusive female partners (Machado et al., 2020), since the female partners are aware that the police officers will not believe the men's stories even when they report their victimisation.

The abused men also narrated their experiences of encountering prejudice and discrimination when they decided to seek help from gender-based violence NGOs. Mukiibi, one of the male survivors said:

> … I decided to go to this domestic violence NGO (names withheld) because I had been told by a friend that it handles cases of domestic violence. However, when I went to their offices to seek help, the officer tasked me to prove that indeed I was a victim of spousal abuse … imagine, if your wife insults and vilifies you with rude remarks from time to time, how are you going to prove to an officer that you are a victim of emotional abuse? Do they want us to first run mad for them to believe our victimisation… or? (Mukiibi – Male survivor).

However, the NGO staff identified in the above quotation had this to say:

> While it might be true that the woman was violent towards him, we had to conduct investigations to prove his allegations and exactly what kind of violence he was subjected to. This required us to also go to the village where the couple stays and inquire from the neighbours as well as the LC1 chairperson to ascertain the occurrence of violence and what kind it was. Mind you, this is not a one-day investigation. It requires time. And asking him those questions

> was part of the process (Female NGO GBV staff).

Based on the survivor's narrative, the prejudice the NGO staff expressed could be attributed to the embedded ideologies, perceptions and beliefs that IPV is something that men do to women and that the reverse cannot be true (Bates, 2020; Machado et al., 2020; Thobejane et al., 2018); thus, exhibiting denial about the existence of female-perpetrated IPV against men. In this particular incident, Mukiibi's partner accessed information that Mukiibi had approached this NGO to seek help for his IPV victimisation. She, therefore, decided to also claim victimhood by approaching the same NGO to report that Mukiibi was abusing her and that she needed protection. Consequently, the NGO preferred to have Mukiibi incarcerated while the investigations into his reported victimisation were on-going. This resulted in Mukiibi's secondary psychological victimisation. This finding reinforces other findings (e.g., Hamel et al., 2007) that attribute denial of service support staff about male victimisation to their limited experience working within a narrow range of IPV victims (mainly women and children) as well as their greater allegiance to traditional views on gender and violence. Such ideological positioning and perceptions limit the service support staffs' understanding of how men can also be victimised within intimate relationships.

Another staff member of one GBV NGO insisted that although men have of recent come out to claim victimhood, IPV still has a significant gender dimension, mainly in cases of mutual violent control, in which the abusive women have as well been victims, at some point, during the course of their intimate relationship. He noted how studies have consistently indicated gendered patterns of perpetration where women are victimised much more than men, an issue of significant interest and concern to them as the front campaigners of violence against women. He said:

> … yes, it is possible that there may be some men who suffer violence from their female partners, but statistics continue to indicate that women are still more likely to be victims than men…we cannot ignore this fact in favour of male victims (Male NGO GBV officer).

This finding points to the gender biases and stereotypical gendered perceptions held by victim service providers including NGOs about female IPV perpetration against their male intimate partners. The NGO victim service support officers primarily analyse IPV occurrences within the context of female victimisation based on the limited statistics indicating incidents of male abuse. It should be noted, however, that the minimal available statistics may be attributed to the dearth of studies that have been conducted in this rather under-researched area as well as the fact that the majority of the men who are abused do

not report the occurrences as much as women do (Barkhuizen, 2015; Brooks et al., 2020). Indeed, considering Uganda's IPV victim service support system which is more oriented towards providing help and support for predominantly female IPV victims, men were bound to experience frustrations while trying to access support, as well as unpleasant experiences of being treated as perpetrators. Such similar experiences have been reported by male victims in other parts of the globe (Douglas & Hines, 2011; Huntley et al., 2019; Machado et al., 2016) in Portugal, the phenomenon of male victims of IPV remains hidden and is not a target of research, public policy, or social attention. This exploratory study analysed the prevalence of victimisation, help-seeking behaviors, and needs of 89 men who defined themselves as victims of IPV. Men reported that they had been the victims of at least 1 abusive behavior by their current or former female partner. Psychological violence, followed by physical and sexual violence, was the most frequently reported experience. The majority of the men did not seek help because of difficulty in self-identifying as victims, shame, and distrust of the support system. When they did seek help, informal sources, such as friends and family, were used more often than formal sources. In terms of formal support, victims used health professionals and social/victim support services more than any other type. The male victims evaluated the formal resources (e.g., social/victim support services, police, and the justice system. Worth noting is that if a man reports his experience to services, such as domestic violence organisations or the police and is neither believed nor his abuse taken seriously, the psychological impact he suffers can be significant. Research shows that, experiences such as these perpetrate re-victimisation; hence, leading to further trauma of abused men (Barkhuizen, 2015; McCarrick et al., 2016).

Worth mentioning is also the fact that most programmes and interventions that have been put in place to prevent violence in relationships, families, and communities, are women-centred. Indeed, research shows that there are limited victim service support organisations available specifically for male IPV victims (Drijber et al., 2013; Machado et al., 2016; in Portugal, the phenomenon of male victims of IPV remains hidden and is not a target of research, public policy, or social attention. This exploratory study analysed the prevalence of victimisation, help-seeking behaviors, and needs of 89 men who defined themselves as victims of IPV. Men reported that they had been the victims of at least 1 abusive behavior by their current or former female partner. Psychological violence, followed by physical and sexual violence, was the most frequently reported experience. The majority of the men did not seek help because of difficulty in self-identifying as victims, shame, and distrust of the support system. When

they did seek help, informal sources, such as friends and family, were used more often than formal sources. In terms of formal support, victims used health professionals and social/victim support services more than any other type. The male victims evaluated the formal resources (e.g., social/victim support services, police, justice system Walker et al., 2019). In Uganda, the vast majority of domestic violence organisations are focused mainly on female victims, as opposed to only one NGO (Men's Forum Against Domestic Violence Uganda), formed to help male survivors of domestic abuse. This could be attributed to the traditional gender stereotypes deeply engrained in Uganda's patriarchal societies that consider women as the dominant victims of domestic violence. Since the majority of the domestic violence NGOs subscribe to the dominant social construction of IPV where the male is primarily considered the perpetrator and the female as the victim, the protection programmes and domestic violence shelters of many GBV organisations are set up to provide assistance to abused women as one male survivor alluded: "When I went to that NGO for assistance about my estranged wife, I was told that they only attend to female domestic violence victims and not men… (Kiwuwa – Male survivor).

The majority of victimised men seemed resigned to the fact that the victim support organisations are "female spaces", and that such a service system is not always able to serve them when victimised. When such a perception exists, it justifies Galdas et al. (2005) and Douglas and Hines' (2011) view that victimised men will less likely seek help compared to women. Kiwuwa, cited above, believes that since abused men's victimisation is deemed non-normative by the larger community, the abused men must overcome both internal and external obstacles, ranging from the family to the community level before their vulnerability is recognised and attended to.

When one of the staff members of a domestic violence NGO was consulted about the exclusion of male survivors of IPV in service delivery, he explained that almost all their activities are donor funded. He noted that funders have stipulated conditions under which the funds are to be utilised, and that it explains why, the organisation he represented prioritises women and children. Due to the huge operational costs and limited finances by many of these NGOs, they are left with limited options, other than adhering to the instructions set by their funders (Wallace et al., 2019) 20 semi-structured interviews were completed with managers and practitioners of domestic abuse services supporting men. Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Findings: Analysis identified six themes: against the tide of recognition, a need to recognise and accept domestic abuse, knowledge of provision, low

numbers of men, resources (time and funding. This thus explains why resources and services of IPV, such as the Domestic Violence Shelters, NGOs and other counselling and crisis centres are much more available for female victims, while there is an extreme shortage of such services and resources available to male IPV victims (Douglas & Hines, 2011).

Men to Blame

Women's violence within Masaka, in the majority of cases, was perceived to occur under contextually dependent circumstances of either situational couple violence or through violent resistance. This links female-perpetrated IPV to wider external explanations, such as retaliation and/or self-defence (Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza, 1999). The Baganda cultural traditions socially construct women as: weak, meek, and non-violent towards their male partners (Jjuuko & Kibalama, 2011). When the contrary happens, most Baganda, just like most other societies in Uganda, explain the occurrences of IPV against men as an act of self-defence by the female partner. Gerald, a friend to one male survivor, made reference to this assertion in his interview, "I will not lie to you. My friend is also a very provocative and abusive man. So, maybe, Phoebe was violent to him in retaliation" (Gerald – friend to male survivor).

Kasamba, another male survivor, narrated how he was blamed by the law enforcement officers for causing his victimisation by returning home with condoms in his trouser pockets. While he claimed that he had bought them as a family planning measure, considering that his wife had earlier noted how she was not ready yet to have their third child, he did not declare them to her. She only noticed them when she was laundering Kasamba's clothes; thus, becoming suspicious about Kasamba's actions. In view of the fact that his wife had previously suspected him of infidelity, when she found the condoms in his trouser pockets, she concluded that Kasamba had bought them for use when having intercourse with his other women. Kasamba's wife explained how her disappointment with her husband's actions forced her to engage in multiple-partnering in retaliation to Kasamba's previous philandering acts that had earlier psychologically affected her. She narrated:

> That man was controlling me by keeping me home. Yet, he had other women out there. Imagine, he has even never paid my bride price. So, my family does not recognise him as my 'official' husband but rather as the father of my children. Now, tell me, what stops me from having a romantic relationship with another man who is willing to pay my bride price? Why is he hurt when he was also doing the same things by getting involved with other women? What were those condoms for? (Agnes–Kasamba's female abusive partner).

On the other hand, Makubuya, a male survivor, was blamed by community members for having given a lift to a village lady whom his controlling wife, Sarah, had long suspected of being a lover to her husband. Community members, thus, justified Sarah's physical violence of pelting stones at Makubuya and his presumed lover whom he had offered a lift on his motor bike as one of the couple's neighbours alluded:

> He already knew how jealous his woman is. Moreover, that village lady is the same woman Sarah had long suspected of dating her husband Makubuya. With all that prior knowledge, why then did he go ahead to give her a lift, if there was nothing at all between them? It was as if he was provoking Sarah – [*obwo bubeera bujoozi* – that is disrespect] …therefore, Sarah was also right to attack them (Rosette – couple's neighbour).

Notably, neither Sarah nor the community members were cognizant of the fact that Makubuya, being a Muslim, his religion allows him to have up to four wives, as long he has the financial ability to ably take care of them.

The above narratives explain the corresponding range of perceived levels of legitimacy of women's utilisation of violence against an intimate partner regardless of other factors, such as religion and culture which may have an influence on the dynamics of the relationship. In this case, the man's position in an intimate relationship where the woman is violent is troublesome since the man's subjection to abuse is often attributed to his actions (Ayodele, 2017; Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza, 1998; White & Dutton, 2013). Given these findings, it is not surprising that societal members did not express willingness to intervene when the abuser was a woman. Rather, the blame was placed on the male victim/survivor for provoking his abuser. This finding reinforces findings by Rhatigan et al., (2011) where participants attributed minimal blame to female IPV perpetrators, by shifting most of the blame to the abused men for causing their victimisation.

Negligible Acts of Violence on Men

Based on the traditional construction of femininity to meekness and being weak, as compared to masculinity being considered in terms of power, strength, and stoicism in most of Uganda's patriarchal societies, the majority of study participants perceived the impact of female violence on men as less risky compared to that caused by male violence on women. Indeed, one female perpetrator noted: "Shaaa[3]… I just pushed and kicked him out of the house, of course with a few words… Did they cause any injury to his body?" (Jamilah – female abusive partner).

[3] By using that expressive word above, it seemed that the female abuser was trying to dismiss the gravity of her abusive actions by considering them as rather minor and of no consequence.

While the female abuser reported that she accompanied her physical violence with "a few words", the couple's neighbours and Luswata's friends described Jamilah as a very quarrelsome and verbose woman, who had no fear of using obscene words. It is highly likely that in this instance, even though she underplayed the magnitude of her attack, she could have subjected her partner to insults and ridiculing terms, in addition to physically pushing and kicking him out of the house. As indicated by Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2019), women are adept at verbal abuse by being equipped with verbal prowess in relation to men. Thus, Jamilah's hypothetical few words may not only have been voluminous, but could also have been so demeaning and hurting to her partner. This explains why emotional and verbal abuse is taken less seriously than physical abuse. Yet, emotional and psychological abuse committed by women is as harmful to victimised men as any other form of IPV (Hines & Douglas, 2010; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005).

Furthermore, there were instances of trivialising the acts of violence that the women performed, citing the fragility of women as justification for the unlikely severity of the impact of their actions. A local council chairperson echoed this view when he said: "At least for the cases I have witnessed/handled, women, however violent they are, they do not inflict such significant physical injuries on men the way men injure their wives" (Male Village LC1 chairperson).

Community members perceived injury from IPV only in the physical form, and not in the psychological and emotional forms, which the majority of violence-prone men are usually exposed to (Bates, 2020; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019; Walker et al., 2019). Consequently, some of the male participants interviewed described how such community perceptions played an important role in intimidating them to disclose the violence they were subjected to. Makubuya, for instance, confessed how he became afraid of living in his home due to the witchcraft that his wife, Sarah, practised and yet, he believed that none or few would comprehend his psychological trauma. He narrated:

> … with time, I became scared of staying in my house, because of the endless sights of snakes wherever I would turn. I could find snakes on the veranda, in the sitting room; the scariest was the one I found under the pillow in our bed. I was afraid of sleeping in the house that night (Makubuya, male survivor).

Kiwuwa, a male survivor, also recounted his terrifying experience of finding knives in their bed whenever he retired to sleep. He explained:

> I was already aware that things were not going on well between me and my wife. So, with time, I started finding knives in our bedroom. Sometimes, she would put them on the table which was in our bedroom. At other times, I would find a sharp knife on top of her

> bed pillow… it became a daily sight… I just could not sleep. I didn't know what was going to happen next, whether she was going to use them to hurt me… those knives really traumatised me… indeed she finally used it to stab me, that night we had a brawl (Kiwuwa, male survivor).

Makubuya and Kiwuwa who were caught up in emotional violence began to see their homes as unsafe places. Such circumstances denied them the opportunity of peaceful rest, a right which is stipulated in Article 24 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948). And by extension, the victimised men's ability to enjoy meaningful family interactions was curtailed. Similar to what Powney and Graham-Kevan (2019) argue, the situation Makubuya and Kiwuwa endured disagrees with the previously discussed perception that IPV perpetuated by women is less grievous than violence perpetrated by men.

However, since female-perpetrated IPV is grossly overlooked and goes unrecognised in the majority of societies, men who are subjected to this kind of women's abuse are often left out of support services or law enforcement interventions (Barkhuizen, 2015; Hoskins & Kunkel, 2020) processing adverse emotions, developing better mental health, and garnering relationship success. Yet, social support may not always be accessible to those who need it the most. Through participant observation and in-depth interviews, this study examined how men who have perpetrated intimate partner violence. Important to note, however, is that, abused men, just like women, whether in terms of psychological, emotional, or physical abuse, inevitably experience traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation, depression, high blood pressure, and general psychological distress (Lien & Lorentzen, 2019; Walker et al., 2019). Therefore, it is clear that while some members of the Masaka community underrated the danger of female-to-male IPV, the problem poses a high risk to the mental and physical health of victimised men.

Strong Men, Weak Women

Men were reluctant to accept the label of "victim". Their narrative accounts of IPV experiences revealed an ideological positioning of self-worth that involved a complicated process of consent to being victimised by their female partners. Makubuya, a male survivor, expressed how Baganda men are socialised not to show weakness and to be the stronger sex both physically and emotionally. Thus, any man who declares the victim status upon himself, especially being victimised by the presumably 'weaker female' immediately threatens his masculine self-image, thereby defying the hegemonic masculine norms of control and power, as the victimised men alluded:

> How can I come out and report that I have been beaten by a woman? It is deemed unmanly! I would be

> referred to as *ekisajjassajja*[4] (Makubuya – male survivor).
>
> … I felt so ashamed and insignificant having experienced this violence in the presence of our children… my self-image was badly affected. To be honest, I now feel less of a man (Kiwuwa – male survivor).
>
> Having been unable to discuss my wife's abusive humiliating acts with our [mine and my wife's] families and then they later found out our issues while at the police, the shame and embarrassment I had to endure was unbearable! This has psychologically traumatised me. I now feel less of a man especially among my in-laws (Kasamba – male survivor).

Participants' accounts highlighted the importance of masculinity and stereotypical gendered perceptions surrounding the expectations of men to their experiences of IPV victimisation (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In patriarchal settings, such as among the Baganda, men's internal battles regarding their victimisation are repressed by their internalised gender stereotypes, social constructions of ideal masculinity, in addition to the limited recognition and availability of service interventions customised to their victimisation (Bjørnholt & Rosten, 2020; Machado et al., 2020). From their narratives, it is evident that some of the men experienced pressure to "perform" masculinity, and to adhere to societal expectations to avoid losing face as well as project a desirable self-image (Hogan et al., 2022). For instance, Makubuya's narrative was evidence of how stereotypical gender-based perceptions surrounding what constitutes IPV contributed to the obscurity of his experience of victimisation; thus, preventing him from labelling himself as a victim of female-perpetrated IPV for fear of public scorn and ridicule, although he recognised his female partner as abusive.

The men's narratives further demonstrate how male IPV victims grapple with tensions of pretending to be strong and in control of the relationship, at least to those outside of the relationship, vis-à-vis experiencing IPV within their homes and its effect on them emotionally and physically. Indeed, Corbally (2015) illuminates this reality when she argues that experiencing abuse is harder for many men to articulate than it is for women. Much of masculinity literature has expressed men's unwillingness to define themselves as victims even when they acknowledge the violence against them (Brooks et al., 2020; Machado et al., 2020; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019). This is premised on the fact that men's IPV victimisation is incongruent with the social construction of masculine gender identities of physical and emotional strength (Kiguli, 2001; Obarisiagbon, 2019; Omilusi, 2017). To this end, victimised men's individual experiences are inhibited by

[4] *Ekisajjasajja* among the Baganda literary means a man who does not exhibit masculine traits/behaviours and thus not fit to be called a man.

perceptions that disclosing violence meted on them would be quite emasculating, and would expose them to social stigma and public ridicule (Namukwaya et al., 2021; Odero et al., 2014)but the prevalence is much higher in East Africa. Though some formal and informal resources do exist for women experiencing IPV, data suggest that disclosure, help seeking, and subsequent utilisation of these resources are often hindered by sociocultural, economic, and institutional factors. This article explores actions taken by victims, available support services, and barriers to the utilisation of available IPV resources by pregnant women in rural Nyanza, Kenya. Qualitative data were collected through nine focus group discussions and 20 in-depth interviews with pregnant women, partners or male relatives of pregnant women, and service providers. Data were managed in NVivo 8 using a descriptive analytical approach that harnessed thematic content coding and in-depth grounded analysis. We found that while formal resources for IPV were scarce, women utilised many informal resources (family, pastors, and local leaders).

In addition, men's feelings of shame were related to their perceived failure to adhere to hegemonic masculinity, which privileges power, authority, and dominance (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Having become self-critical of their inability to maintain "control and authority" within their intimate relationships, the male victims' accounts indicated the difficulty they experienced in integrating a social narrative of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), with the paradoxical experiences of being victims of female-perpetrated IPV (Hine et al., 2022). Consequently, hegemonic masculinity made it quite difficult for some men to self-identify as victims of female-perpetrated IPV, and for the men who labelled themselves as victims, this heightened their feelings of shame.

IPV Against Men Not a Credible Academic Subject

A participant from one male domestic violence organisation noted that the neglect of IPV against men can also be traced in Uganda's scholarly research interests. Very little scholarship on the subject is available, and yet, widespread scholarship would enhance public visualisation and societal awareness or acknowledgement of male IPV victimisation, which would subsequently influence policy and intervention approaches on male abuse. He observed:

> You see, with research, government would maybe recognise and consider the plight of abused men. But the academic community does not appear to appreciate the problem. It appears that all their research efforts are only targeted towards research on violence against women by men… (NGO Staff – Men's Forum Against Domestic Violence).

The officer at the men's NGO pointed to insufficient recognition of female-perpetrated IPV in academic discourse. Academic scholars have concentrated more on researching female IPV victims, as witnessed by the volumes of studies and publications on violence against women. This could be attributed to the magnitude of the prevalence of wife abuse and battering as indicated by the global, regional, and national statistics (WHO, 2021). Thus, researchers have predominantly focused on conducting extended research and mapping out ways through which violence against women can be curbed, and in the process, giving less attention to violence against men.

What is more, donors perceive GBV in the patriarchal lens. Thus, their prioritisation is on funding research addressing gender-based violence against women and girls. Since conducting research requires availability of funds, the academic community is thereby influenced by donor priorities of conducting GBV studies in the lens of female victimisation and male perpetration (Donor Tracker Insights, 2020). For instance, the majority of studies on IPV in Uganda (e.g., Karamagi et al., 2006; Kaye et al., 2005; Francisco et al., 2013) typically focus on female victims of any male-perpetrated violence. This renders the study of male violence victimisation as a subject of less relevance in the academic discourse. It is to note, however, that when scholars do not interrogate the full panoramic view of IPV which includes female-to-male violence, it further hinders service providers from understanding and recognising the heterogeneity and severity of IPV against men as well as the development of gender-specific programmes for all violence victims.

With just a paltry of studies clearly articulating the nature and extent of male victimisation, the majority of which are conducted in Europe and the USA, and on the African continent; in Nigeria and South Africa, not only are male survivors limited by scarce male-sensitive service provision, men-centred victim service/rights organisations also face significant barriers while lobbying for policy intervention and funding for service provision to male survivors of IPV. For instance, while the Man Kind Initiative (a UK charity that supports male victims of IPV) solely relies on the kind generosity of the public to provide services for abused men, it is expected to lobby for the recognition of male survivors within government policy as was the case when the UK government was launching the 2016-2020 "Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (McCarrick, 2019). This is a clear indication that, where research focuses predominantly on women, male victimisation is cast into the shadows, missing out on benefiting from policy formulation and resource allocation (Bates et al., 2019). Thus, in addressing IPV in communities, governments and donor agencies ought to review their funding priorities by embracing an inclusive

approach of funding research studies that examine the nature, extent, and experiences of IPV against men (Joseph-Edwards & Wallace, 2020) as is the case for women. This will have a significant influence on enhancing awareness, recognition, and inclusion of male IPV survivors on the domestic violence policy agenda during development of strategies to end violence in communities as well as tailoring services to IPV victims.

Conclusion

The current research set out to explore common perceptions associated with male IPV victimisation and female perpetration in Masaka District, central Uganda, therein examining existing debates on how stereotypical gendered perceptions of IPV impact on the recognition of male survivors. The research findings indicate that IPV and victimhood are strongly associated with femininity; thus, causing an eclipse over the occurrences of IPV against men. Living in the shadow of research and intervention into IPV against women, IPV against men is obscured and the claims about its existence continue to be viewed by a wide section of society as almost illegitimate.

Furthermore, for the majority of victimised men, perceptions surrounding *ideal* masculinity as well as their subscription to traditional masculine gender norms seemed to be a paralysing factor, articulated as preventing them from disclosing abuse or seek help. The male participants' non-disclosure of abuse was due to fears of ridicule, emasculation, indifference, and secondary victimisation, an experience almost similar to that of victimised women, although perceptions are slowly changing. Worth noting is that, some participants who chose to disclose their violence experiences were ridiculed, humiliated, and felt emasculated, since the gendered stereotypes around IPV victimisation seemed to affect the society and families' attitudes towards the male victims. Thus, the marked difference of the structure and form of the abuse experiences of the male victims reiterates the fact that female-perpetrated IPV remains an "unbelievable" or "forbidden" discourse for male survivors and community members (Aboderin et al., 2021; (Aboderin et al., 2021 Allen-collinson, 2008; Ameh et al., 2012; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019).

Therefore, societal perceptions need to be addressed at a deeper level, before campaigns that raise awareness on male victimisation can be effective. This could be achieved through early awareness which aims at discouraging the traditional gender stereotypes that feminise violence as a women-only problem. Besides, the deeply ingrained stereotypical perceptions regarding male IPV victimisation can be tackled by encouraging men to share their stories and lived experiences of IPV without being judged, in order to reduce stigma associated with male victimisation. With recent scholarly research, consistent media and police reports indicating that women are as aggressive in intimate relationships,

their findings present a prompt need for further non-gendered qualitative investigations by the academic research community in this rather unacknowledged population in the IPV discourse.

It is believed that results from this and more evidence-based research will inform the policy makers, decision makers, the donor community, and professionals in the GBV field about the unique challenges that male victims face as a result of the misconceptions and perceptions around their IPV victimisation by their female intimate partners. It is envisaged that such research findings will guide the different concerned sectors in generating appropriate legislation and interventions that address the plight of male IPV victims rather than the existing one-size-fits-all interventions that currently exist in Uganda.

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