Gender-based violence committed by women against men in the Kingdom of Eswatini

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Abstract

This study explored the experiences of Eswatini men who face intimate partner violence perpetrated by women. Using a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews, the research aimed to understand the lived experiences of these men, alongside insights from individuals knowledgeable about the issue. The study employed the bioecological model as a theoretical framework to examine various forms of abuse experienced by men, barriers to seeking help, and potential motivators for seeking assistance. A purposive sample of twenty-five participants was selected for the study. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, revealing multiple forms of abusive behaviours such as dominance, emotional manipulation, physical and verbal abuse. The findings highlighted the complex interplay between cultural norms, societal expectations, and the help-seeking behaviours of male victims. The study suggests several potential strategies to address the issue, including programs aimed at reducing stigma and promoting help-seeking behaviours from a familial perspective. It also proposes establishing safe spaces for male victims to report abuse through outreach initiatives led by trusted local organizations or counsellors stationed in accessible locations. Additionally, the study recommended showcasing success stories from rehabilitation programs to offer hope and inspiration to victims and communities.

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1. Introduction

Despite social standards that generally depict males as the dominant party in relationships, men in Eswatini face a variety of abuses from their female partners, including verbal, financial, emotional, and physical violence (Jhuttau et al., 2020). A disconnect exists between the traditional view of domestic violence and the reality it presents (Smith & Jones, 2021). Research conducted by Frye et al. (2018) and Tjaden and Thoennes (2019) emphasizes the growing acknowledgment of women as perpetrators of abuse in intimate relationships. Hence, there is a need to view domestic violence through a wider lens, recognizing that men can be victims as well (Johnson & Smith, 2023).

The limited public awareness and research on male victims of domestic violence creates a significant blind spot in the understanding of the full scope of the issue (Smith & Brown, 2022). Eswatini is not alone. Its situation mirrors a broader global neglect of understanding the experiences of men facing domestic violence by intimate partners (Carmichael et al., 2020). Domestic violence against men (DVAM) is a widespread problem, in Eswatini, but it flies under the radar, with few victims coming forward and even fewer studies examining its scope (Thrive Future, 2023). While men may encounter similar types of abuse as women, including physical, sexual, verbal violence, and psychological aggression, the dynamics of this violence and how men interpret it are likely to vary (Jones & Smith, 2023). This is because gender expectations and social norms significantly influence how individuals understand and respond to violence (Brown & Williams, 2022).

There is some inconsistency in how men perceive violence from female partners. Research by Carmichael et al. (2020) suggests men might not always recognize it as abuse. However, this perception likely differs. Hutton and Stalaker (2019) show men experiencing fear when threatened with violence by their partners, highlighting the complex and nuanced nature of men's experiences with domestic violence. Traditionally, society expects men to be dominant and emotionally stoic. This might influence how men experience and understand intimate partner violence (IPV) compared to women (Hutton & Stalaker, 2019). The limited understanding of these dynamics poses challenges in creating effective intervention strategies for male victims. Furthermore, Hutton and Stalaker (2019) suggest that men's perceptions of power dynamics in abusive relationships can impact how they perceive and disclose experiences of domestic violence.

In Eswatini, a culturally conservative kingdom in Southern Africa, men grappling with domestic violence face a unique set of challenges. Hence, this research endeavoured to shed light on the challenges faced by men in Eswatini who endure domestic violence in the hands of their female partners. The study delved into three key areas: the types of domestic violence men experience, the obstacles that hinder them from seeking help, and the factors that could motivate them to do so.

2. Literature Review

There is a significant lack of research globally, regionally, and locally on domestic violence against men, indicating that this issue is understudied. Despite existing research addressing female-perpetrated domestic violence against men in Eswatini, the literature gap remains significant. This gap in the literature perpetuates societal stereotypes, leading to a lack of recognition and support for male domestic violence victims in Eswatini. In contrast to the existing body of research that primarily concentrates on female victimization, this study fills this crucial gap by examining the MDV landscape in Eswatini.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory. Given its focus on the interconnectedness and contextual variations of environmental factors, the Bronfenbrenner bioecological systems theory provides a comprehensive lens through which to analyse domestic violence against men in Eswatini. By examining how individual factors, interpersonal relationships, community influences, cultural contexts, and broader societal structures interact, this framework reveals the intricate dynamics contributing to domestic violence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Tharp et al., 2017). According to Sitienei and Pillay (2019), Bronfenbrenner's idea can be conceptualized as a collection of five habitats that fit into one another namely, the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystem. These levels range from smaller, proximal settings in which individuals directly interact to larger, distal settings that indirectly influence development, the closest environment, which has an immediate effect on the person, is the innermost layer.

The microsystem involves examining the dynamics within the intimate relationship, such as power dynamics, communication patterns, and conflict resolution strategies. Research by Swan and Snow (2020) emphasizes how unequal power dynamics and controlling

behaviours within intimate relationships contribute to domestic violence against men. According to a study by Capaldi et al. (2021), poor communication patterns characterized by conflict escalation and lack of constructive resolution strategies can exacerbate violence within relationships.

The mesosystem layer focuses on interactions between family dynamics and support networks, how domestic violence against men is perceived, tolerated, or addressed within communities in Eswatini. Research by Johnson and Olson (2022) explores how societal pressures, including from extended family, friends, or neighbors, can either encourage victims to reconcile or discourage them from reporting abuse.

The exosystemic, societal structures and institutions settings the individual does not directly participate in but still influence them. This could include work places, legal systems, how responsive are they to male victims. Research by Day et al. (2021) discusses the importance of workplace policies and support systems for victims of domestic violence, including men, highlighting the role of employers in providing assistance and protection. Understanding how these institutions respond to male victims of domestic violence, their policies, and resources available for support is crucial.

The macrosystem represents the overarching cultural beliefs, values, norms, and ideologies that shape behaviors and interactions within society. In Eswatini, traditional gender roles and cultural beliefs about masculinity and femininity may influence the prevalence and reporting of domestic violence against men. The outermost layer, the chronosystem considers changes over time and how historical events, life transitions, and socio-economic conditions impact individuals and their experiences of domestic violence. Economic instability, changes in gender norms over time, and shifts in legal protections can all influence the prevalence and responses to domestic violence against men in Eswatini.

The bioecological theory was particularly relevant to this study since it provided a comprehensive lens to examine domestic violence against men in Eswatini. The theory informs the development of interventions and policies that can address and change community norms surrounding domestic violence and improve institutional responses to domestic violence, ensuring better support for male victims.

2.2. The Forms of Domestic Abuse Experienced by Men

Globally, studies indicate that physical violence against men by intimate partners ranges from direct physical assaults including slapping, hitting, or threats of violence to using weapons. In addition, Mncina et al. (2019) cite that men experience a range of abusive behaviours, including physical violence, emotional manipulation, and financial exploitation. Psychological abuse includes verbal threats, humiliation, and manipulation, which can severely impact mental health (Coker et al., 2020). On the other hand, controlling behaviours, isolation, and gaslighting (Bhide et al., 2020) are also forms of violence. Verbal abuse including, yelling, screaming, swearing, name-calling, insults, and constant criticism or belittling within intimate relationships (Swanberg et al., 2005) contributes to a cycle of violence where men may feel compelled to tolerate or minimize their experiences. Sexual violence against men is also reported, though often overlooked due to societal stigma and misconceptions (Kenny & McEwan, 2019). Economic abuse, such as controlling finances or preventing access to resources, further limits men's autonomy and ability to seek help (Swanberg et al., 2005).

2.3. Obstacles that prevent men from seeking help after domestic violence

Several factors deter male victims from seeking help. Social stigma associated with masculinity plays a significant role. Traditional notions of stoicism and the expectation of men to be strong can prevent them from expressing vulnerability and seeking support (Msimang & Cock, 2019). Men are thought to possess power, and the world of men is acknowledged as the domain of power. Fear of judgment and ridicule for being abused can be another barrier (Berdahl et al., 2019). This societal pressure to conform to idealized masculinity norms can lead men to suffer in silence and endure the abuse (Messinger, 2021). A 2019 study by the Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse (SWAGAA) revealed that while most men in Eswatini were aware of domestic violence, very few considered themselves potential victims (SWAGAA, 2019). This highlights the disconnect between awareness and self-identification as a victim due to the cultural-historical influences.

Concerns about confidentiality and a lack of understanding of the specific needs of male victims within the existing support structure can further discourage help-seeking behaviour (Holt et al., 2019). Economic dependence on the abuser can further complicate the situation. Financial constraints can make it difficult for men to leave the relationship, creating

a cycle of abuse (Bhide et al., 2020). Fear of losing financial security or even their children due to the abuser's control can silence men and prevent them from breaking free from the cycle of violence (Messinger, 2021). Men may face ridicule or disbelief when disclosing abuse, leading to a reluctance to report or seek help (World Bank, 2020).

2.4. Factors that could motivate men to seek help for domestic violence

Despite the barriers, some factors can push men towards seeking help. When safety concerns escalate or fear for their own safety or the well-being of their children becomes paramount, it can motivate men to seek protection (Berdahl et al., 2019; Msimang & Cock, 2019). The concern for continued access to their children can be a powerful motivator for men, especially in cultures that traditionally assign child custody to mothers (Messinger, 2021). Social support from friends, family, or community members can also empower them to break the silence and seek help (Bhide et al., 2020). Finally, a positive experience with a supportive service provider can encourage men to continue on the path of seeking help and healing (Jewkes et al., 2018). Culturally relevant outreach programs and awareness campaigns can dismantle the stigma surrounding domestic violence against men (Mncina et al., 2019).

3. Methodology

This study employed qualitative method, specifically semi-structured interviews, to delve into the experiences of men in Eswatini who have faced domestic violence from their female partners. The research extended beyond those with direct experience to include individuals with knowledge or opinions about DVAM. These in-depth interviews explored participants' lived experiences, perceptions, needs, and the challenges surrounding DVAM. A phenomenological approach grounded the research, aligning with the work of Creswell and Poth (2018). This philosophy prioritizes understanding how individuals experience a phenomenon, in this case, DVAM. As emphasized by Ponty (2013), phenomenology focuses on how people interpret and navigate their experiences. The researchers centred the participants' perspectives, giving voice to their experiences and the knowledge of those informed about the issue.

The study focuses on two key populations within Eswatini: men with lived experience of DVAM and individuals with knowledge or opinions about the issue. To ensure the participants provide rich insights relevant to the research question, purposive sampling, a non-

probability technique, was employed. This method aligns with Creswell and Poth (2018) recommendations, allowing researchers to strategically select individuals with specific characteristics. The sample was divided into two distinct groups: *Men with lived experience*: This group comprised men who have personally experienced DVAM in Eswatini; *Individuals with non-lived experience*: This group encompasses individuals who may not have personally encountered DVAM but possess valuable knowledge or perspectives on the issue. This group included men and women. The inclusion of the second group helped in the triangulation of data collected. The researchers recruited from relevant organisations which included support groups or NGOs dealing with men's issues, as well as individuals from diverse backgrounds and organizations working on gender-based violence, as suggested by Morrow (2020). The researchers interviewed 25 participants in total; eleven females and fourteen males.

The study opted for a semi-structured interview approach to gather in-depth data from the participants, which enables researchers to explore the lived experiences of respondents and gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives on the subject matter (Dunn et al., 2020). Semi-structured interview schedule was used because of its flexibility structure as noted by Guest et al. (2017), giving the researcher the freedom to probe deeper into responses to make sure the data that is required is obtained, whilst also allowing interviewees the freedom to express their views in their own terms (Magulod et al., 2021). Moreover, the semi-structured format facilitated the natural expression of participants' experiences, eliciting their inner thoughts and emotions, as suggested by Willig and Staeheli (2017). The audio-recorded semi-structured interviews lasted about 50 minutes each.

To validate the interview questions the researchers carried out a pilot testing with a small sample of 10 individuals in an area separate from which the actual research was to be carried out. Feedback from research experts were also sorted to ensure the questions align with established research methodologies, clear and understood, as this is a sensitive subject. Feedback from the piloting helped in making necessary adjustments.

The study followed a meticulous process to analyse the information gathered. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommends continuous coding of data throughout the analysis stage. This involved chronologically organizing the information, grouping it into categories, and then reviewing it repeatedly. Before coding began, the researchers first organized and prepared the data for analysis. They then examined the information to grasp the overall themes

and ideas before assigning codes. Finally, they categorized the data based on themes relevant to the research goals.

To ensure the participants' well-being, the study strictly followed ethical research guidelines. This involved obtaining informed consent from each participant. Before consenting, participants were fully informed about their rights to confidentiality, anonymity, and the potential benefits of participating in the research. To protect confidentiality, the study used pseudonyms such as PART 1, PART 2, etc., instead of real names or identifying details for each participant.

4. Findings and Discussion

The primary aim of this research was to explore the experiences of men in Eswatini who face intimate partner violence from women. The study focused on three main areas: identifying the types of domestic violence experienced by men, understanding the barriers that prevent them from seeking help, and exploring potential motivations for seeking assistance.

4.1. The Types of Abuse Men face

The research uncovered several manifestations of domestic violence encountered by men in Eswatini, including, physical attacks, verbal abuse, economic exploitation, and emotional abuse.

Physical abuse. The study identified physical abuse as a prevalent theme, including acts like slapping, punching, and throwing objects, as confirmed by participants' experiences. Respondents confirmed these results with the following statements:

> *"My wife slaps and punches me"*- (PART1)
>
> *"One night, she throws a wrench at me, causing an injury"* – (PART2)

This aligns with the findings of Renner and Whitney (2019) that men, like women, can be victims of physical violence in intimate partner violence (IPV); male victims are not immune to the physical consequences of abuse. A recent news report in Eswatini highlighted a case where a female police detective was accused of assaulting her boyfriend and subsequently arresting him (Dlamini, 2024).

Emotional abuse. Evidence derived from the interviews indicates emotional abuse including belittling, gaslighting, intimidating and humiliations. Respondents confirmed these results with the following statements:

> *"She criticizes my profession, calling him "weak" and "incompetent" compared to other male breadwinners"*- (PART3)

The constant attacks chip away the victim's confidence, making him doubt his ability to provide for his family. This aligns with Hutchinson and Flannery (2020), constant criticism from a partner regarding a person's profession or role within the family can erode self-esteem, leading to feelings of doubt and insecurity. This, in turn, can negatively impact their overall well-being and ability to function effectively. One participant mentioned:

> *"Due to issues in our relationship, compounded by domestic violence, I haven't been able to see our child in years. It's been an incredibly challenging situation,"*– (PART4*)*

This pain was shared by many fathers also illustrates the profound emotional impact on men in such circumstances.

Financial abuse. The study identified a theme of financial abuse, including behaviours such as false paternity claims, accruing debt in the victim's name, theft of property, controlling spending decisions, and damaging the victim's credit score. One participant shared the heartbreak:

> *"Looking back, there were always doubts, and eventually, during a rough patch in our relationship, a DNA test confirmed my fears. I wasn't the biological father, yet for years I'd provided financial support through child maintenance"* – (PART5)

This aligns with Mncina et al. (2019), highlighting various forms of financial exploitation, including denying access to shared finances and pressuring men for money. This issue has gained attention, with The Times of Eswatini highlighting concerns about false paternity accusations, where men have been obligated to financially support children based on maintenance orders, only to discover their lack of biological relationship later through DNA testing (DPM, 2024). The study also revealed that:

"We cohabited, but my ex-bought the furniture solely under her name, leaving me empty-handed after the split" – (Part6)

The study's finding that a partner excludes the other from shared ownership of assets during cohabitation aligns with the concept of economic abuse within domestic violence. This practice can leave victims financially vulnerable upon separation (Johnson, 2019).

"The mother of my child, secretly opened credit cards in my name without my knowledge. She racks up debt on shopping sprees. I was shocked to discover the mountain of debt I was responsible for, and jeopardizing my financial future" – (PART7)

The participant's experience aligns with the financial abuse tactic of incurring debt in the victim's name. Research by Betti et al. (2021) explores this specific tactic, highlighting how perpetrators may open credit cards or loans without their partner's knowledge, leaving the victim responsible for the debt and damaging their credit score. Through interview this was revealed:

"We also encountered a couple whose wife's debt was so big that it was taking up all of his monthly income".

Research by Hathiramani and Hutchinson (2020) aligns with this study that financial abuse can leave men feeling trapped and financially unstable.

Verbal abuse. The study identified a recurring theme, verbal abuse in its many forms. This included yelling, screaming, swearing, name-calling, insults, and constant criticism or belittling. One participant expresses his disappointment as follows:

"Due to her belief that she can handle domestic concerns as well, my wife is unaware of gender-based abuse. Whenever I attempt to discuss a serious matter with my spouse, she becomes defensive and asserts her authority as the woman in charge of the household. On occasion, she even resorts to using foul language at me in front of our kids"- (PART8).

This aligns with the concept of *'Likhaya Lemfati'* in Swati culture, which recognizes women's importance but can also contribute to an expectation of female dominance within the

household. This dynamic resonates with Swanberg et al. (2005), suggesting verbal abuse can be a tool for control and asserting authority in relationships with unequal power dynamics.

4.2. *The main obstacles preventing Eswatini men from seeking help after experiencing domestic violence*

The study seeks to answer the question on factors that prevent men from seeking help after experiencing domestic abuse. Highlights from the participants' answers revealed several factors.

Cultural and societal norms. The thematic focus of this study centred on men's apprehension about bringing shame upon themselves and tarnishing their family's reputation. One participant expressed this concern by stating,

> *"I feel like I have to hold things together to avoid 'Kubhidlika Kwemuti."*
> (PART10)

The fear of 'Kubhidlika kwemuti,' meaning 'destroying the home,' effectively silences men who endure domestic violence. Coyne and Perera (2020) support this perspective, highlighting how cultural norms promoting family harmony deter victims from seeking assistance, as they prioritize preserving familial relationships over their personal safety. Thematic in this study was the fear of bringing dishonour upon themselves as well as damaging the reputation of their entire family.

Participants in the study further highlighted fears of appearing weak or unmanly if they were to disclose their victimization. In this regard, one participant argued as follows.

> *"I felt trapped by 'Tibi tendlu,' unable to share my experiences of domestic violence to avoid embarrassment."* (PART11)

The reluctance to disclose family issues, often perceived as airing one's dirty laundry, significantly, influences victims' decisions to remain silent about their abuse. This aligns with the concept of "concealment masculinity" explored by Messner (2019), where men suppress vulnerability to maintain an image of toughness.

Toxic masculinity. The study revealed a disturbing reality: social expectations of unwavering toughness often silenced male victims of gender-based violence (GBV).

Disclosing their experiences could be seen as a betrayal of traditional masculinity, with expressions of pain, crying, or seeking help misconstrued as weakness. This fear was amplified by cultural proverbs like *"indvodza ayikhali"* (a man does not cry), reinforcing a suffocating social norm that trapped men in a cycle of silence. This aligns with Jhuttau et al. (2020) on societal expectations of masculinity that can be a significant barrier to help-seeking behaviour.

Fear, shame and embarrassment. Domestic violence can be a terrifying ordeal; the study revealed that men often face an additional burden of shame coupled with the suffocating weight of embarrassment. One participant remarked as follows:

> *" I would be seen as cowardly if I admitted to being abused by my partner, how would people look at me, it's better to keep quiet and avoid the drama."* (PART14)

Social circles may perpetuate a culture of silence, even mockery, around male victims. Douglas and Hines (2020) highlight that male victims often experience shame, embarrassment, and fear of not being believed when considering disclosing their abuse.

Lack of awareness and support services. The findings indicate that support groups and services often lack the outreach or effective advertising needed to reach these men, leaving them isolated and unsure where to turn for help in the wake of abuse. They may be completely unaware that support specifically designed for their needs even exists. One participant commented that:

> *"Honestly, I had no idea there were resources for male abuse victims, and there's nothing advertised here."* (PART16*)*

Patel and Douglas (2020) also stress the limited awareness of available resources and the perception of services being geared towards female victims discouraged men from seeking help.

Religious stigma. The study found that some religious interpretations downplay the severity of domestic violence. Participants perceived a focus on spiritual solutions rather than acknowledging the seriousness of the abuse. The participants had the following to say:

> *"Opening up to my pastor about the difficulties at home, his response focused on strengthening my faith through prayer, rather than addressing the abuse itself."* (PART18)

In this type of situation, Nason-Clark (2019) argues that a solely prayer-based approach can be harmful. Survivors may feel pressured to rely solely on prayer, potentially delaying or preventing them from seeking essential professional help.

Systemic doubt. The study also identified the fear of judgment and dismissal, not just from family and friends, but from society as a whole. This fear can extend to law enforcement, where men often worry their reports would not be taken seriously. In some cases, they may even anticipate ridicule. One participant recounted a disheartening experience with police officers:

> *"I was met with officers who repeatedly dropped their pens as I spoke. I realized later they were probably laughing at me behind the counter."* (PART19)

Tutty et al. (2020) explains that male victims of domestic violence frequently encounter scepticism, disbelief, or dismissiveness from law enforcement. Similarly, one participant also revealed that:

> *A police officer assured me, "As every relationship has arguments, occasionally being upset with one another is natural"* (PART20)

Societal expectations of masculinity may lead to responses like "toughen up" or "take it like a man" (Flood & Pease, 2019), downplaying the seriousness of the abuse. This minimization can invalidate a male victim's experience and discourage them from seeking help. Being told arguments are "natural" essentially dismisses the severity of the abuse and leaves victim feeling unheard and invalidated.

4.3. Factors that could motivate Eswatini men to seek help for domestic violence

Humanizing the system, making it easier for access. One participant emphasized the importance of consolidating essential services into a single location, making it easier for individuals to access medical, psychological, legal, and police support without facing barriers. They highlighted the need for a welcoming atmosphere where men can seek help comfortably, free from judgment or stigma. They also stressed the significance of empathy, clear communication, and genuine efforts to understand each person's unique needs, which they

believe builds trust and strengthens relationships between service providers and those seeking assistance. He had this to say:

> *"Absolutely, having everything in one place would be a godsend. This constant runaround is incredibly frustrating. "*- PART27

This aligns with research by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2020) which found that one-stop centers in Somalia "significantly improved access to justice, health care, and psychosocial support" for GBV survivors. The UNDP study emphasizes the convenience and streamlined access to services as key factors in encouraging help-seeking behavior. One-stop centers eliminate the need to navigate various agencies, offering legal aid, medical care, and counseling all under one roof. This can significantly reduce the burden and emotional toll on survivors seeking help.

Engaging religious and community leaders. A growing body of research (McLeod et al., 2020; Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2019; Reed et al., 2018) highlights the potential of religious communities as allies in combating GBV. Faith leaders can play a key role in shaping attitudes, fostering open discussions (Stark et al., 2021), and destigmatizing help-seeking behavior among survivors (UNFPA, 2020). Collaboration between religious institutions and healthcare providers is crucial for creating a holistic support system (McLeod et al., 2020; Reed et al., 2018). This collaborative approach allows for the integration of faith-based resources with professional care, ultimately leading to a more comprehensive and sustainable response to GBV (UNFPA, 2020).

Community-based awareness campaigns. The study revealed that traditionally, domestic violence awareness campaigns have not always reached men effectively. To bridge this gap, men need to engage in the places they are most frequent, like sports grounds and cattle dipping locations. Mnyambu et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of tailoring interventions to specific cultural contexts. For example, incorporating elements of Incwala and Lisekwane traditions could create a sense of familiarity and connection with the target audience. Local proverbs or metaphors could also be powerful tools for communicating messages about healthy relationships and positive masculinity. These targeted campaigns should go beyond simply raising awareness. They should also challenge cultural norms and stereotypes that discourage

men from seeking help. Jewkes et al. (2020) suggest delivering messages in familiar settings like taverns and sporting events to foster a more receptive environment for men. These spaces can offer opportunities for casual conversations and peer-to-peer learning about healthy relationships and positive masculinity.

Incentives and engagement. To encourage males to access services, consider offering resources or financial support as incentives. Providing incentives such as free health screenings, sports events, or community gatherings can attract men to participate in awareness programs. Jewkes et al. (2020) found that men in rural South Africa responded positively to programs that offered a combination of educational workshops, peer support groups, and tangible benefits like vouchers for groceries or transportation. The tangible benefits helped incentivize participation and address potential transportation or resource barriers. Similarly, Holt et al. (2019) highlight the value of promoting success stories of men who have thrived after receiving assistance can serve as positive reinforcement and inspire others to seek support.

Enhancements in law enforcement and legal support. The study revealed signs of progress where more men are stepping forward to report experiences of GBV. This is a positive development, but also highlights the need for continued improvement in law enforcement's response to these cases. Several programs can motivate men to seek help for domestic abuse. One approach is to tackle the issue from a family perspective, dismantling the stigma associated with male victims. Intervention trials in South Africa (Jhuttau et al., 2020) demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach. Another strategy involves increasing the number of male social workers, particularly in rural areas. This can create safe spaces where men feel comfortable confiding (Messner, 2019). Additionally, Dlamini et al. (2023) recommend placing counselors in local health clinics and traditional community centers (Tinkhundla). This provides familiar access points for men, especially respected elders who may feel more comfortable with established community figures. These combined efforts create a more supportive environment where men feel less isolated and more empowered to seek assistance.

5. Conclusion

The study explored gender-based violence perpetrated by women against men in Eswatini. The overall findings reveal that men are exposed to various forms of abuse that include physical, verbal, financial, and emotional. Men endure this abuse due to societal scripts that always see men as aggressors and women as victims. Male abuse is often normalized within families. Societal pressures and cultural norms are identified as significant contributors to the silence surrounding male victimization. The study highlights how cultural norms emphasizing family unity can discourage men from seeking help, prioritizing the preservation of the family unit over the well-being of the abused individual. Furthermore, the research identified the fear of stigma associated with male victimization as a major barrier. Societal expectation of masculinity that portray men as stoic and unemotional can make it difficult for men to acknowledge abuse and seek help. The research also identified several potential motivators for men to seek assistance. Initiatives aimed at raising public awareness about domestic violence against men were seen as crucial. Additionally, providing legal support for men battling false paternity allegations was identified as a potential motivator. Integrating domestic abuse education into religious programs was seen to leverage the influence of religious institutions within communities.

This study strongly argues that gender-based violence against women in Eswatini cannot be adequately addressed if GBV against men is not properly addressed. GBV against women at times is triggered by GBV against men by women. A good example is that committed by the female police officer against her boyfriend. On the other hand, sharing success stories of rehabilitation programs for male victims was viewed to offer hope and inspiration. While law enforcement training on domestic violence has demonstrably improved, further strides are necessary to fully address the needs of male victims. Building trust, demonstrating sensitivity, and prioritizing victim well-being are crucial steps towards a more comprehensive response to gender-based violence. However, further research is needed to identify the root causes of domestic violence against men. These findings can then inform the development of effective prevention strategies that challenge traditional gender roles and societal pressures that perpetuate expectations of masculinity.

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