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Domestic Violence Against Men as a Public Health Concern: Public Perceptions and Implications for Legal Protection, Health Policy, and Support Services

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ABSTRACT: Domestic violence against men (DVAM) remains an underrecognized public health and psychosocial concern in the Philippines, where domestic violence has traditionally been framed primarily as an issue affecting women and children. This study examines public perceptions of DVAM and explores their implications for legal protection, health policy, and support services. Using a qualitative descriptive research design, the study involved eighty-seven participants from various sectors who responded to an online open-ended and semi-structured questionnaire. Responses were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Findings revealed three key dimensions shaping public perceptions of DVAM: rights and legal-based perceptions, sociocultural-based perceptions, and experiential and psychological-based perceptions. Participants identified gender stereotypes, machismo, and social stigma as significant barriers that may discourage male victims from disclosing abuse and seeking assistance. They also recognized the psychological and emotional harms associated with domestic violence and perceived limitations in existing legal and institutional support for male victims. These findings position DVAM not only as a legal and human rights concern but also as a public health issue requiring greater policy attention. Gender-responsive and inclusive health policies, accessible psychosocial and support services, improved referral mechanisms, and interventions addressing stigma and barriers to help-seeking may strengthen responses to domestic violence and promote appropriate support for victims regardless of gender.

1. INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, intimate partner abuse, also known as domestic violence, still continues to be one of the most prevalent human rights violations that affect persons regardless of sex, gender, civil status, or socioeconomic standing. In the Philippines, public discourse on family violence has predominantly focused on violence against women and their children. However, according to emerging studies, there has been a slowly growing recognition of men who encounter this traumatizing situation. In fact, a considerable number of cases of domestic male victimization remain largely underreported and underrecognized. Thus, this

social issue has evolved from a family and legal issue into a critical public health concern, with in-depth implications for victim health, family well-being, and community harmony.

Domestic violence must be understood not only in terms of the commission of an unlawful act but also in relation to its consequences to the physical, psychological, and social well-being of victims. Among male victims, intimate partner violence may involve physical, psychological, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse, with consequences that may extend beyond immediate physical injuries. A systematic review involving male victims reported experiences ranging from physical injuries and sexual abuse to humiliation and psychological distress and emphasized that intimate partner violence involving men should be considered a public health concern requiring gender-sensitive responses (Isangha et al., 2026). Similarly, studies have associated male victimization with adverse psychological and emotional consequences (Scott-Storey et al., 2023).

The health consequences of domestic violence, however, cannot be separated from the social environment in which male victimization occurs. Men are commonly expected to exhibit strength, self-reliance, emotional restraint, and control. Consequently, admitting victimization may contradict socially constructed ideas of masculinity and expose male victims to embarrassment, disbelief, ridicule, or emasculation. Huntley et al. (2020) identified fear of disclosure, challenges to masculinity, diminished confidence, and the invisibility or perceived unavailability of services as important barriers to seeking formal assistance. Hence, underreporting should not be viewed solely as a problem of criminal justice statistics. It may also signify unmet health and psychosocial needs, since victims who remain silent may fail to access medical care, psychological support, counseling, social services, and other appropriate interventions.

From a public health perspective, domestic violence is significant because its consequences are not confined to isolated incidents of abuse. Repeated exposure to violence may create continuing physical, psychological, emotional, and social burdens that require healthcare and psychosocial interventions. For male victims, these consequences may be compounded by delayed disclosure and reluctance to seek professional assistance. Thus, the public health significance of DVAM extends beyond treating injuries resulting from violence and includes early identification, mental health support, prevention, referral mechanisms, and access to appropriate health and social services. Recognizing male victimization as a public health concern therefore requires health systems to consider whether existing services are sufficiently accessible and responsive to victims regardless of sex or gender.

Moreover, public perceptions may influence the effectiveness of health policies and institutional responses to domestic violence. When domestic violence is predominantly understood as an experience affecting women and children, male victims may be less readily identified within healthcare, psychosocial, and community settings. Public health responses should therefore consider not only the prevalence and consequences of violence but also the social attitudes that affect recognition, disclosure, help-seeking, and access to services. Examining how the public perceives DVAM may consequently provide an important basis for developing inclusive health policies, strengthening screening and referral practices, improving professional awareness, and designing support services that respond to the health and psychosocial needs of male victims.

History instructs that policies and laws on domestic violence are primarily gender-specific. This shows the general assumption that domestic violence is mainly committed by men against women (Kusuma et al., 2024), and, of course, against children. Although this framing responds to the historically documented vulnerability of women and children, it may also produce legal and service gaps that disadvantage victims whose experiences fall outside the conventional victim-perpetrator model. Domestic violence laws across several countries reveal significant differences in how they define, criminalize, and respond to violence against partners, with some adopting gender-neutral frameworks while others maintain explicitly gendered provisions (Aggarwal, 2025).

In the Philippines, Congress enacted Republic Act No. 9262, also known as the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act, in 2004, recognizing the harsh realities women and children face in abusive domestic relationships. This historic law criminalizes acts of violence against women and their children committed by their husband, former husband, or any person who has or had a sexual or dating relationship, or with whom the woman has a common child. Under R.A. 9262, the State prohibits physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence against women and their children and provides remedies such as temporary and permanent protection orders.

Justifiably, the Philippine government provides high regard to these vulnerable sectors, a constitutional guarantee under the 1987 Philippine Constitution. However, the question remains: What legal and health protection does the State provide male victims when the offender is a woman with whom they have, or had, a dating, romantic, or sexual relationship?

Domestic violence in the Philippines is often perceived as violence against women and children. This prevailing narrative, while grounded in well-documented patterns of gender-based violence, may inadvertently obscure the experiences of male victims who also suffer abuse within intimate relationships. Scholars have noted that violence against men in domestic settings often remains underreported because of social stigma, cultural expectations surrounding masculinity, and the perception that men are unlikely to become victims of abuse (Lupri & Grandin, 2004). More recent studies similarly demonstrate that male victims may encounter gender stereotyping, disbelief, and stigma that further discourage disclosure and formal help-seeking (Ambrozewicz et al., 2024; Scott-Storey et al., 2023).

In the Philippines, the lack of official statistics on male domestic abuse seems to contribute to the limited attention given to this form of violence. There was a substantial disparity in available data on violence against men and women obtained from the Philippine National Police Crime Information Reporting and Analysis System (PNP CIRAS). In May 2021, more than 8,900 women were recorded as having suffered forms of domestic violence under R.A. 9262, while only 21 incidents involving male victim-survivors abused by family relatives or intimate partners were recorded by the PNP during the same year (VERA Files, 2022). Such disparity must be interpreted cautiously because low recorded incidence does not necessarily establish the absence of victimization, particularly where stigma and barriers to reporting are present.

The present study is anchored on Social Role Theory, which provides an all-inclusive lens through which the cultural, legal, and perceptual dimensions of violence against men can be examined and understood. The theory posits that societal expectations dictate behaviors considered appropriate for men and women and shape the way individuals perceive themselves and others in social contexts (Eagly, 1987). In patriarchal societies such as the Philippines, men are socialized to embody strength, emotional restraint, and dominance. Such gendered expectations may lead to the stigmatization of male victimhood, as the admission of abuse contradicts the traditional masculine ideal.

In the context of domestic violence, this theory explains why male victims may hesitate to disclose abuse or seek help, fearing ridicule, disbelief, or emasculation. Public perceptions of violence against men are therefore shaped by deeply ingrained gender scripts that associate vulnerability with weakness. When male victimization is trivialized or rendered socially invisible, victims may be less likely to recognize abuse, disclose their experiences, seek healthcare or psychosocial assistance, report violence to authorities, or obtain appropriate support.

Accordingly, DVAM warrants examination through an integrated legal and public health perspective. Legal protection may provide recognition, accountability, and remedies, but legislation alone may not address the physical, psychological, and social consequences of victimization. Conversely, health and psychosocial interventions may remain inaccessible when victims are unwilling to disclose abuse or when service systems fail to recognize men as possible victims. Effective responses therefore require coordination among legal institutions, healthcare professionals, mental health practitioners, social workers, and other support services.

Hence, the present study examines public perceptions of DVAM in the Philippines and considers how these perceptions may inform legal protection, health policy, and support services. In doing so, the study recognizes that DVAM is a multi-aspect concern and that an adequate institutional response must address not only accountability for violence but also the health, psychosocial, and support needs of victims.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design

With the goal of exploring public perceptions regarding DVAM in the Philippines, the present study utilized a qualitative descriptive research design. This design was deemed appropriate as it enabled the researcher to obtain rich, descriptive data that reflect participants' perceptions, experiences, beliefs, and opinions on a specific phenomenon. Through the use of a qualitative approach, the present research delved into determining how people make sense of DVAM within various social and cultural contexts and backgrounds. Further, the research sought to unveil recurring patterns, meanings, and themes in participants' narratives and their implications for legal protection, health policy, and support services.

2.2 Participants and Sampling

A total of eighty-seven (n=87) participants, chosen through snowball sampling, took part in the study. They belonged to various sectors of society, including students, professionals, educators, parents, and members of civic organizations. The selection guaranteed heterogeneity in terms of gender, age, socioeconomic status, and educational background. This allowed for a broader representation of public insights. Moreover, the participants were all of legal age. No minors were involved in the conduct of the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

2.3 Data Collection

Using Google Forms, data were collected through an open-ended and semi-structured online questionnaire intended to evoke meaningful and substantial answers from participants. The instrument consisted of questions focusing on public perceptions of DVAM, including its recognition as a social concern, the experiences and circumstances surrounding male victimization, barriers to recognition and reporting, and participants' views on the need for legal protection and institutional responses. These responses also provided the basis for examining the implications of public perceptions for health policy and support services.

The instrument was duly validated by a legal expert, a psychologist, and a policy researcher. The multidisciplinary validation was considered relevant given the legal, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions of DVAM examined in the study. Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter, the online questionnaire provided participants with an accessible means of responding while maintaining anonymity. The responses were collected over a period of four weeks and were subsequently collated for analysis.

2.4 Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was employed in analyzing the responses of the participants so that the qualitative data could be systematically interpreted. This analytical approach was chosen because it allows for the identification, organization, and interpretation of patterns of meaning across participants' narratives, making it well-suited for studies exploring social perceptions and cultural phenomena such as DVAM. The analysis followed the phases of data familiarization, code generation, theme search and review, theme naming and definition, and report production. The identified themes were then examined in relation to their implications for legal protection, health policy, and support services. Participant statements were used to substantiate and illustrate the themes generated from the qualitative data.

2.5 Data Saturation and Triangulation

Data saturation was considered in determining the adequacy of the qualitative data gathered from the participants. Although a total of 87 participants completed the online open-ended semi-structured questionnaire, data collection and analysis focused not merely on the number of responses but on the richness, relevance, and recurrence of information provided. During the thematic analysis, responses were continuously examined for emerging codes, patterns, and themes. Saturation was considered to have been reached when succeeding responses substantially reiterated previously identified ideas and no new meaningful codes or themes relevant to the research questions emerged. The diversity of participants from various sectors further allowed the study to capture a broad range of perspectives while identifying recurring patterns across the dataset.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, researcher triangulation was employed during the qualitative data analysis. The researchers independently reviewed the participants' responses and examined the initial codes, categories, and emerging themes. Their interpretations were subsequently compared and discussed to identify areas of convergence and divergence. Differences in coding or interpretation were resolved through deliberation and reference to the participants' original responses. This process helped minimize reliance on a single researcher's interpretation and strengthened the consistency and credibility of the themes generated from the data.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitivity of the topic, the study strictly adhered to ethical research principles to protect participants' rights, privacy, and welfare. Participation in the study was voluntary, and each participant provided informed consent before answering the questionnaire. They were informed of the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and the assurance that no personal identifiers would be collected or disclosed.

At the time the study was conducted, the Centro Escolar University Institutional Ethics Review Board (CEU IERB) was still in its early stages of institutional implementation. Thus, institutional administrative approval for the conduct of the study was sought and obtained from the Office of the Dean of the CEU School of Law and Jurisprudence. Additionally, confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process by anonymizing all responses and securely storing data in password-protected digital files accessible only to the researcher.

3. RESULTS

The thematic analysis of participants' responses revealed three major dimensions shaping public perceptions of domestic violence against men (DVAM): (1) Rights and Legal-Based Perceptions, (2) Sociocultural-Based Perceptions, and (3) Experiential and Psychological-Based Perceptions. These major themes and their corresponding subthemes reflect how participants understood male victimization, the social and cultural conditions surrounding it, and the need for recognition and protection.

1. Rights and Legal-Based Perceptions

Domestic violence can affect individuals regardless of gender and may occur in various intimate and family relationships. As it involves abusive behavior intended to exercise power and control over another person, an adequate legal framework is essential to protect all victims from abuse. In this study, rights and legal-based insights emerged as an important theme. This is a reflection of the participants' views on the adequacy and inclusivity of existing legal protections against domestic violence. Specifically, participants stressed three interrelated subthemes: (1) the absence of protective measures for male victims, (2) the need for gender-inclusive laws, and (3) the framing of domestic violence against men (DVAM) as a human rights issue.

1.1 Perceptions toward the Absence of Legal Protection for Male Victims

The participants expressed concern over the perceived lack of specific legal protection for male victims of domestic violence in the Philippines. One respondent stated, *"It is sad that there's no law for this but if it is violence then it is a crime and it should be punished."* Some participants believed that domestic violence *"can happen to anyone regardless of gender"* and that *"men should have the same protection as women have."* Hence, they called for the enactment of a law addressing DVAM *"because they have their right also,"* and expressed that this should be *"implemented immediately."*

The lack of such legal safeguards, as participants noted, discourages men from seeking justice or assistance, as *"without a specific law, most male victims don't know where to go or who to ask for help."* Moreover, some highlighted the moral and human rights dimension of the issue, arguing that *"no man deserves to suffer in silence just because the law doesn't recognize him as a victim."*

Several participants expressed the belief that *"violence has no gender"* and that *"protection from domestic violence should be universal, not selective."* Their responses generally favored legal recognition of male victims and mechanisms that would provide protection regardless of the victim's sex or gender. In fact, *"Without a specific law, most male victims don't know where to go or who to ask for help,"* a teacher remarked. Additionally, a student stated, *"the fact na walang batas eh matatakot talaga silang magsalita"* (The absence of legal protection makes men afraid to speak up).

1.2 Perceptions Supporting Gender-Inclusive Laws

The participants also expressed support for fairness and gender neutrality in addressing domestic violence. One remarked that *"the law should be fair to both men and women,"* rejecting *"double standards"* in defining and prosecuting acts of abuse. Another respondent viewed violence against men and women as *"an equally serious problem and therefore shall be treated equally."*

A journalist stated that *"I think it's unfair if only men can get punished for domestic violence; women should be punished too."* They consistently articulated the need for *"one law for all victims, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation"* and *"a fair justice system recognizing the pain of every victim."* These responses show participants' inclination for accountability based on the act of violence rather than solely on the gender of the victim or perpetrator.

According to them, such a constricted legal view discounts the fact that violence can be inflicted by and against persons regardless who they are. As one respondent pointed out, *"Hindi dapat pumapabor sa iisang gender ang domestic violence law. Abuse is abuse, hello?!!"* (Domestic violence should not favor any gender—abuse is abuse no matter who commits it.) This statement shows a desire for balance and fairness, where accountability is determined by the act of violence rather than by gender. Moreover, they constantly articulated that there must be *"one law for all victims, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation,"* and

"a fair justice system recognizing the pain of every victim." "Anomang karahasan ay dapat panagutin. Hindi dapat tinitingnan kung sino ang biktima. Unfair yun." (Violence should be punished equally; justice should not depend on who the victim is), two respondents similarly explained.

1.3 Perceptions Recognizing DVAM as a Human Rights Issue

The participants further viewed DVAM as a matter of human rights. They emphasized that *"every human being should be treated fairly despite gender"* and that *"men and women are human beings that should have equal rights in being safe and not harmed."*

Others described the lack of recognition and protection for male victims as *"denial of justice"* and expressed that male victims are often *"ignored."* According to some participants, DVAM should not be treated merely as a *"reversal"* of gender roles or *"only a gender issue,"* but rather as *"a human rights concern."* These responses reveal a perception that safety, dignity, and protection from violence should extend to all victims.

Participants viewed domestic violence as a human rights issue that should "*encompass all forms of abuse, regardless of whether the victim is male or female.*" They emphasized that *"respect, safety, and equality are fundamental rights that every person should enjoy both at home and in society."* From this perspective, the failure to recognize and acknowledge male victims of domestic violence may constitute a "*denial of their right to live free from violence and abuse."*

2. Sociocultural-Based Perceptions

2.1 Perceptions Shaped by Masculinity and Machismo

The qualitative data reveal that participants associated the limited recognition of male victimization with the machismo construct. Several participants recurrently referred to men as *"macho," "dominant," "protector," "tough," "matibay ang loob"* (strong or emotionally resilient) and *"masculine,"* explaining that "men are expected to be strong both physically and emotionally."

Participants also expressed that male victims are sometimes treated as *"parang biro-biro lang"* (just a joke) and *"madalas pang tawanan"* (often laughed at). These responses indicate that expectations surrounding masculine strength and emotional toughness influence how the public perceives men who experience domestic violence.

These words or phrases are part of social conditioning that may lead to emotional repression, as men process the idea that expressing pain or seeking help slowly weakens their masculinity. The outcome is a culture of silence. Hence, *"kahit na nasasaktan sila, mas pipiliing manahimik kaysa mapahiya"* ("Even when they are being hurt, they would rather remain silent than face humiliation"). Participant commented, *"Society tells men to be protectors, not victims…So they end up suffering in silence."* Another said, *"men are taught from a young age to hide their emotions because showing weakness is seen as being less of a man."*

2.2 Perceptions Formed by Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes likewise emerged prominently in participants' responses. Several participants stated that *"men are always regarded as the abuser or the dominant in the household."* Others similarly referred to the perception that *"men are expected to be strong both physically and emotionally"* and described men as *"macho," "dominant,"* and *"masculine."*

One participant explained, *"They thought that since men are more dominant, we haven't experienced such kind [of violence]."* Another participant related these perceptions to popular media: *"Sa mga pelikula at teleserye, laging lalaki ang masama. Kaya pag totoo na silang biktima, walang naniniwala."* (In movies and television dramas, the man is always the villain. So when they become real victims, no one believes them.)

The responses demonstrate the participants' awareness of existing stereotypes regarding who is conventionally perceived as the perpetrator and who is considered capable of becoming a victim of domestic violence.

2.3 Perceptions Shaped by Social Stigma

Social stigma also emerged as an important factor in how participants perceived male victimization. Participants observed that male victims who seek help may be laughed at, teased, ridiculed, or doubted because of prevailing expectations that men should be strong, dominant, and unemotional.

One participant stated that *"men who try to seek help often get laughed at instead of being helped,"* while another observed that *"society finds it easier to believe women as victims. Men, on the other hand, are doubted and mocked."*

Another respondent summarized the problem: *"Kahit gusto nilang magsalita, natatakot silang ma-judge or mapahiya. So they just keep quiet."* (Even if they want to speak up, they are afraid of being judged or embarrassed. So they just keep quiet.)

The responses show that participants perceived stigma, embarrassment, and fear of judgment as factors that may discourage male victims from disclosing their experiences.

3. Experiential and Psychological-based Perceptions

3.1 Perceptions about Emotional and Mental Abuse of Male Victims

Participants recognized that DVAM extends beyond physical injuries and may include emotional, mental, and psychological forms of abuse. One participant stated, "Domestic violence against men...can be physical, mental, and emotional. It can cause trauma."

Other responses emphasized the effects of humiliation, manipulation, and degradation. One participant explained: *"Even words can hurt. Yung pang-aalipusta at panlalait araw-araw, nakakasira ng loob at tiwala sa sarili 'yon."* (Even words can hurt. The insults and daily humiliation can break one's spirit and self-confidence.)

Another respondent stated, *"A man also needs respect at dapat magkaroon ng fair at equal treatment sa bawat isa"* (A man also needs respect and should receive fair and equal treatment from everyone).

Participants likewise identified emotional manipulation and gaslighting as forms of abuse. One participant described: *"Nararanasan din ng mga lalaki ang emotional manipulation. Ginagaslight din. Minsan ginagawang kasalanan lahat ng ginagawa mo."* (Men also experience emotional manipulation. They get gaslighted too. Sometimes everything you do is made to look like it's your fault.)

These responses demonstrate that participants recognized the psychological and emotional dimensions of DVAM and their possible effects on victims' self-worth and well-being.

3.2 Perceptions Reflecting Lack of Awareness of DVAM

A recurrent perception among participants was the low level of public awareness surrounding DVAM. One respondent stated, *"It exists but not everyone knows it does. It's rarely or never on the news."* Another shared, *"Lack of statistics or numbers is another reason why there is no law yet."*

Participants also associated underreporting with masculinity and embarrassment. Some stated that *"many are in denial about it"* and that *"men are embarrassed to admit to be victims because of this macho image."*

These responses indicate that participants perceived DVAM as an existing but insufficiently recognized phenomenon. They also identified the scarcity of public information, limited visibility, and reluctance to report as factors contributing to its continued invisibility.

3.3 Perceptions Derived from Personal Witness Accounts of Violence

Several participants shared personal witness accounts of domestic violence involving men. Their narratives demonstrate that some participants had encountered DVAM within their respective communities. One witness noted, *"I have witnessed such from my neighbors and was really feeling sorry for the guy."*

Another participant described: *"Na-shock talaga ako when I saw it firsthand. Ibang klase fear sa mata nung guy, hindi mo in-expect na from a woman mangyayari yun."* (I was really shocked when I saw it firsthand. The fear in the guy's eyes was different—you wouldn't expect that something like that could come from a woman.)

Some participants also expressed uncertainty about how witnesses should respond. One stated: *"As a witness, ano ba'ng right step na gawin? Minsan, natatakot din ako na baka ako pa ang ma-target pag umingay ako about the situation."* (As a witness, what is the right step to take? Sometimes I'm also afraid that I might become the target if I speak up about the situation.)

These accounts reveal that participants not only recognized the occurrence of DVAM but also expressed uncertainty regarding the appropriate action, intervention, or assistance available when such violence is witnessed.

4. DISCUSSION

1. Rights and Legal-Based Perceptions

The findings reveal a strong perception among participants that domestic violence should be addressed according to the act committed rather than exclusively according to the victim's gender. Their expressions that "violence has no gender," that protection should be "universal, not selective," and that male victims should receive legal protection demonstrate an emerging preference for a more inclusive approach to domestic violence.

This finding assumes particular significance within the Philippine legal framework. Republic Act No. 9262 provides comprehensive protection and remedies for women and their children who experience physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse. Its gender-specific framework reflects the historical and structural realities of violence against women and children. However, participants' responses raise a separate question regarding how the legal system recognizes male victims experiencing comparable forms of abuse.

The scarcity of official data further complicates the issue. Jimenez (2022) noted the limited statistical reports concerning men as victims of domestic violence in the Philippines. Even the Supreme Court, in *Garcia v. Drilon*, a landmark decision that upheld the validity of the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children, acknowledged the difficulty of obtaining reliable estimates of domestic violence against men because reported incidents are relatively low and because male victims may be reluctant to report their experiences. Thus, low official reporting should be interpreted carefully and should not ipso facto be regarded as evidence that male victimization does not occur.

Participants' support for gender-neutral protection likewise corresponds with the broader principle of equality and inclusivity. Singh and Yadav (2025) explain that gender neutrality in law involves not merely changes in terminology but systemic and cultural transformations that ensure fair protection regardless of gender identity. In the Philippine setting, gender-fair approaches have increasingly been incorporated into government policies and institutional practices. The enactment of the Safe Spaces Act, for example, demonstrates that Philippine legislation can provide protection from particular forms of gender-based misconduct without limiting victimhood exclusively to women.

Nevertheless, gender-inclusive protection should not be interpreted as diminishing the historical and continuing vulnerability of women to domestic violence. Rather, the participants' perceptions suggest that recognition of male victims may complement existing protection by acknowledging that victimization can occur under different gender configurations. As Pathak (2020) argues, recognition of violence experienced by men and other groups need not deny the continuing reality of violence against women.

The findings also place DVAM within the broader discourse of human rights. Participants repeatedly referred to fairness, dignity, safety, and equal protection. Such perceptions support a victim-centered understanding of domestic violence in which protection from abuse is treated as a fundamental human concern. This is consistent with Philippine Supreme Court Associate Justice Marvic Leonen's observation in his Separate Concurring Opinion in *Garcia v.* Drilon that correcting historical and cultural injustices should not make invisible the possibility that men in some intimate relationships may likewise seek protection from abusive acts.

2. Sociocultural-Based Perceptions

The findings demonstrate that public perceptions of DVAM remain substantially influenced by masculinity, machismo, gender stereotypes, and social stigma. Participants repeatedly described men as "macho," "dominant," "protector," and emotionally strong. These descriptions reflect masculinity ideology, which pertains to beliefs and socially constructed norms concerning how men are expected to behave (Balane & Tirol, 2015; Poticano & Sasot, 2024).

Viewed through Social Role Theory, such perceptions demonstrate how socially assigned gender roles influence both the recognition of victimhood and expectations regarding appropriate behavior. Men are traditionally associated with strength, dominance, and emotional restraint, while vulnerability and victimhood are more commonly associated with women. Consequently, acknowledging abuse may create a conflict between a man's actual experience and society's expectations regarding masculinity.

The participants' responses concerning ridicule are particularly significant. Statements that male victimization is sometimes treated as "biro-biro lang" or that abused men are laughed at demonstrate how violence may be trivialized when the victim does not correspond with the socially expected image of a domestic violence victim. Gender stereotypes consequently function not merely as personal beliefs but as social scripts that may influence whether abuse is recognized as legitimate.

These findings are consistent with studies reporting that male victims may be less likely to disclose domestic abuse because of stigma, social expectations, stereotypes, and limited support services (Karystianis et al., 2024; Malik & Nadda, 2019; Ambrozewicz et al., 2024). The problem is therefore not simply whether male victims experience abuse, but whether the social environment permits them to identify themselves as victims and seek assistance without fear of humiliation.

Social stigma becomes particularly relevant in this respect. Goffman's (1963) concept of spoiled identity explains how individuals possessing socially discrediting characteristics may manage or conceal aspects of their experiences to avoid negative judgment. For male victims, disclosure of abuse may be perceived as inconsistent with masculine identity. The participants' observations that abused men fear being judged, embarrassed, doubted, or mocked demonstrate how stigma may create a culture of silence.

This silence has implications extending beyond reporting to law enforcement. When male victims are reluctant to disclose abuse, opportunities for accessing legal assistance, medical attention, psychological support, counseling, social services, and other forms of intervention may likewise be diminished. Thus, sociocultural barriers may operate as barriers to both justice and health-related help-seeking.

3. Experiential and Psychological-Based Perceptions

The findings further demonstrate that participants recognize DVAM as extending beyond physical injury. Their responses identify humiliation, verbal abuse, emotional manipulation, gaslighting, degradation, and loss of self-confidence as manifestations of domestic violence. These perceptions are consistent with the growing literature demonstrating that intimate partner violence against men may involve significant psychological and emotional consequences (Scott-Storey et al., 2023; Badua-Oquendo et al., 2023).

Emotional abuse can produce injuries that are not readily observable but may nevertheless affect victims' psychological well-being. Karakurt and Silver (2013) recognize emotional abuse as a significant form of intimate partner violence, while studies on psychological maltreatment demonstrate that verbal degradation, manipulation, and coercive behaviors may produce considerable emotional consequences. Gaslighting, specifically, involves manipulative behaviors that destabilize a victim's perception of his or her own experiences and reality (March et al., 2025).

The participants' recognition of trauma, damaged self-confidence, humiliation, and emotional manipulation consequently strengthens the framing of DVAM as a public health concern in addition to being a legal and human rights issue. Domestic violence does not end with the unlawful act itself. Its consequences may extend to psychological functioning, emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, and willingness to seek assistance.

At the same time, participants identified low public awareness and underreporting as important problems. The limited visibility of DVAM may create a circular problem: low reporting produces limited official data; limited data reinforce the perception that male victimization is uncommon; and such perceptions may further discourage victims from recognizing or reporting their experiences. This may partly explain the substantial disparity between official reports involving women and male victims in the Philippines.

Studies have consistently reported that male victims may underreport domestic abuse because of shame, stigma, fear of disbelief, and gender expectations (Ambrozewicz et al., 2024; Scott-Storey et al., 2023). These barriers are especially relevant from a health-policy perspective because failure to disclose victimization may also prevent the identification of physical injuries, psychological distress, trauma, and other health-related needs.

Finally, the personal witness accounts demonstrate that DVAM is not entirely abstract to the participants. Some had witnessed male victimization within their communities but expressed uncertainty about what they should do. This uncertainty suggests a possible gap not merely in awareness but in knowledge of available referral pathways and support mechanisms. While sympathy toward victims is important, effective community response requires accessible information regarding where victims and witnesses can seek legal, medical, psychological, and social assistance.

Implications of Public Perceptions of Domestic Violence Against Men

The findings have important implications for the recognition and institutional response to domestic violence against men. Participants' perceptions reveal that DVAM is not solely a legal concern but one that intersects with psychological well-being, help-seeking, social recognition, and access to appropriate services. The implications are discussed in terms of legal protection, health policy, and support services.

1. Legal Protection

The participants' call for fairness, equal protection, and gender-inclusive responses suggests the need to examine whether existing legal mechanisms adequately respond to male victims of domestic violence. While R.A. 9262 remains an essential social legislation addressing the historical and continuing vulnerability of women and their children, the findings raise questions regarding the remedies available to male victims who experience physical, psychological, sexual, or economic abuse within intimate relationships.

The findings therefore support further policy and legislative examination of gender-inclusive mechanisms for domestic violence (Nabe & Chavez, 2025). Such reform may take the form of complementary legislation or other legal mechanisms that recognize victims regardless of gender while preserving the specialized protection and services presently afforded to women and children under R.A. 9262. The purpose should not be to diminish existing protection but to address possible gaps encountered by victims who presently fall outside its protective scope.

Moreover, legal protection should extend beyond criminal penalties. Accessible reporting procedures, appropriate protective remedies, gender-sensitive investigation, reliable documentation, and clear referral mechanisms are necessary if legal recognition is to translate into meaningful protection. Law enforcement, prosecutors, courts, and other government institutions must likewise be equipped to recognize that victimization may occur under different gender configurations without automatically treating male complainants with disbelief or ridicule.

2. Health Policy

The participants' recognition of trauma, humiliation, emotional manipulation, gaslighting, damaged self-confidence, and other psychological consequences establishes an important health dimension of DVAM. These findings suggest that domestic violence involving male victims should be considered within broader health policies addressing violence, mental health, trauma, and psychosocial well-being.

Health policy should therefore recognize the possibility that men presenting with physical injuries, psychological distress, anxiety, trauma-related symptoms, or other consequences may be experiencing abuse within an intimate relationship. Healthcare and mental health professionals may benefit from appropriate training in recognizing possible indicators of domestic violence among patients regardless of gender, while remaining sensitive to the different patterns and contexts in which victimization occurs.

The findings likewise highlight the importance of reducing barriers to health-related help-seeking. Machismo, shame, embarrassment, and fear of disbelief may discourage male victims not only from reporting abuse to law enforcement but also from seeking medical, psychological, or psychosocial assistance. Health policies and institutional protocols should therefore promote a nonjudgmental and trauma-informed environment in which victims can disclose abuse without being subjected to gender stereotyping.

3. Support Services

The findings further imply the need for accessible and inclusive support mechanisms for victims of domestic violence. Participants repeatedly identified stigma, embarrassment, fear of judgment, limited awareness, and uncertainty regarding appropriate responses. These conditions may discourage disclosure and prevent victims from knowing where or how to obtain assistance.

Support services should therefore provide clear and accessible pathways for legal assistance, psychological counseling, medical referral, crisis intervention, social welfare assistance, and other appropriate services. Existing government and community-based institutions may consider whether their referral systems can accommodate victims whose experiences do not correspond with the conventional perception of domestic violence as exclusively involving female victims.

Public information campaigns are equally important. Awareness initiatives should communicate that seeking help is not inconsistent with masculinity and that experiencing abuse does not diminish a person's dignity or identity. Such programs may help challenge the machismo construct and gender stereotypes identified by participants while encouraging victims to disclose abuse and seek appropriate assistance.

The participants' witness accounts also demonstrate the importance of community-level information. Some witnesses recognized abuse but remained uncertain about the appropriate action to take. Support systems should therefore provide not only victim-centered services but also accessible information for family members, friends, colleagues, and community members regarding safe reporting, referral, and assistance.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Violence in all forms is unacceptable and should not be a norm in society. Violence knows no gender, race, age, bounds, and limits. While domestic violence in the Philippines is traditionally viewed as a women's and children's issue, there is a documented, albeit underexplored, issue of domestic violence against men (DVAM). The findings show that public perceptions of DVAM have important implications for legal protection, health policy, and support services.

The findings illustrate a perceived gap in protective measures for male victims and an emerging recognition of DVAM as a human rights and public health concern. At the same time, deeply rooted cultural nuances, particularly machismo, gender stereotypes, and social stigma, may hinder disclosure and help-seeking among male victims for fear of isolation, disbelief, embarrassment, and mockery. Moreover, participants recognized that DVAM extends beyond physical violence and may involve trauma, emotional manipulation, humiliation, and other psychological harms. Thus, legal reform must be attended by health and social interventions that recognize the physical, psychological, and psychosocial needs of victims.

Although legislative reform is encouraged, legal balance must be taken into consideration. Any response to DVAM should recognize male victimization without diminishing the specialized legal protection and support structures presently afforded to women and their children under R.A. 9262. Thus:

1. The Philippine legislature should consider a comprehensive and gender-inclusive domestic violence framework that recognizes physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, and economic abuse and provides accessible protective remedies to victims regardless of gender, without diminishing the protections afforded to women and children under R.A. 9262.
2. Government agencies involved in law enforcement, prosecution, the judiciary, health, and social welfare should strengthen gender-sensitive and trauma-informed responses to domestic violence. Data collection should likewise be improved and, where appropriate, disaggregated by sex or gender to provide a stronger basis for legal, health, and social policies.
3. Health and support services should recognize the possible physical, psychological, and psychosocial consequences of DVAM, and that DVAM should be a public health concern. Thus, accessible referral mechanisms should connect victims with appropriate medical care, psychological counseling, legal assistance, social welfare services, and other necessary interventions.
4. The government, together with healthcare and educational institutions, civil society organizations, and NGOs, should strengthen public awareness and education to challenge machismo, gender stereotypes, and stigma surrounding male victimization and to encourage appropriate reporting and help-seeking.
5. Further research should examine the health and service dimensions of DVAM in the Philippine context, particularly its physical and mental health consequences, barriers to help-seeking, healthcare utilization, and the experiences of male victim-survivors in accessing legal, health, and social support services.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are available upon request.

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