

Why are male victims of domestic abuse considered hidden?



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**This dissertation is dedicated to all the victims that have not been believed or
received the support they are entitled to.**

**You are valued and are not hidden; it was not your fault, you have a voice and
we can together make a real change.**

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Abstract

Background

Domestic abuse affects approximately 712,000 males (Office for National Statistics, 2024a); however, existing research predominantly focuses on female victims. Due to significant underreporting, official statistics often fail to reflect the true extent of domestic abuse. This dissertation will specifically address male victims, without diminishing the experiences of female victims.

Objective

This systematic review aims to explore the factors that contribute to male victims of domestic abuse becoming and remaining hidden.

Methodology

In April 2025, the author conducted a systematic review by searching various databases for articles published in English between 2020 and 2025. The inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied. The author employed the qualitative checklist from the CASP tool (CASP, 2024) to assess the quality of the included studies. Data were synthesised using a thematic synthesis method with line-by-line coding.

Results

Four themes emerged from the analysis of the six included studies: 1. Difficulty in self-identifying as a victim, 2. Barriers to seeking help, 3. Interactions with professionals, and 4. Experiences of physical abuse. Data were gathered from England, Nigeria, Canada, and Jordan.

Discussion

The themes that have emerged as reflected in other systematic reviews in this area. The quality of the studies varied. The majority of the participants were males, apart from 4 female Helpline practitioners, the countries the studies originated from varied.

Conclusion

Despite the increasing body of research focusing on male victims of domestic abuse, much work remains to be done. Greater education and awareness are crucial for professionals, including law enforcement and healthcare workers, to better support male victims of domestic abuse.

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Chapter 1: Background and Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

Domestic abuse impacted 2.3 million people aged 16 years and above living in the United Kingdom (UK) between March 2023 and March 2024 (Office for National Statistics, 2024a). Domestic abuse is a primary global concern (Mysall et al., 2024; Kunasagran et al., 2023; Bland et al., 2022; Macy et al., 2021). Domestic abuse is a violation of the Human Rights Act (1998) alongside a public health and social problem (Machado et al., 2017; Huntley et al., 2019; Carrilo, 2021). According to Kurst-Swanger (2008), domestic abuse has a significant impact on the victims, perpetrators and people surrounding them. There is ever-growing research demonstrating the negative impact domestic abuse has on victims and their children's long-term health and well-being (Corbally, 2015; Ansra and Hindin, 2011; Vives-Cases et al., 2011; Ellsberg et al., 2008; Evans et al., 2008; Sharps et al., 2007).

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone (Monckton-Smith et al., 2014; Barrow-Grint et al., 2023). It can occur across all ethnicities, sexualities, ages, social classes, disabilities and communities (Cross-Sudworth, 2009; Lloyd, 2021). However, the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (2024) found that victims tend to be mostly aged between 25 and 54 years old. Although not statistically verified within published research, Capaldi et al., (2012) further suggest that being from a low-income household and minority group can be a predictor of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse is considered a hidden crime by professionals (Women's Aid, 2025a) because it is not always reported to the Police. Subsequently, crime statistics do not demonstrate an accurate picture of domestic abuse. With that in mind, the

Crime Survey for England and Wales between March 2023 and March 2024 estimated that 1.6 million females and 712,000 males aged 16 years and above have experienced domestic abuse (Office for National Statistics, 2024a). There are notably more females who report domestic abuse, with the Office for National Statistics (2024a) reporting that 72.5% of domestic-related crime victims were female.

For this dissertation, the focus will be on male victims and female perpetrators of domestic abuse. Previous research has focused on female victims and male perpetrators; this has resulted in a gap in research. Lack of information causes a poor understanding within the community, negatively impacting the support offered to male victims (Ambrozewicz et al., 2024; Hine et al., 2022c; Bates, 2020b; Lysova et al., 2020). The assumption of society that females are the only victims of domestic abuse (Dixon et al., 2023) has consequently given less awareness of males who have also been victims of abuse. Taylor et al., (2021) argue that female perpetration can often be viewed as protecting their children and themselves. Regardless of these views, statistics reported by the Police show 25% of domestic abuse crimes were against males (ManKind Initiative, 2025b). ManKind Initiative (2025b) reports that one in three reported domestic abuse victims is male. Actual figures are likely to be higher due to the potential barriers preventing males from reporting the abuse to local law enforcement.

Historically, females have been protected by the domestic law since the 1970s within the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act (1976). Therefore, males were not identified as victims within this Act. Domestic abuse is viewed as a gendered crime that is “deeply rooted in inequalities between women and men” (Women’s Aid, 2025b). Females are more likely to be victims of repeat victimisation

and be seriously hurt (Walby and Towers, 2018; Walby and Allen, 2004). This is reflected in the gender inequality within family roles (Monckton-Smith et al., 2014). Due to these biases, Machado et al., (2017) suggest that being a victim is seen as female-focused in Western society. Even though Steinmetz (1977) demonstrated that males are victims within the concept of Battered Husband Syndrome, it does not cover enough of males being victims.

Within domestic abuse, victims and perpetrators are often regarded as two diverse groups (Tanskanen, 2023). Yet, a person who is a perpetrator can be a victim of domestic abuse at the same time. This has been labelled as the victim-offender overlap, a term long established within criminology (Tanskanen, 2023; Berg and Schreck, 2022; Jennings et al., 2010; Lauritsen et al., 1991). There is limited research around the victim-offender overlap and domestic abuse (Tanskanen, 2023). This limits how healthcare, social care and Police professionals can support victims and perpetrators.

This dissertation will additionally explore the barriers males face when seeking support for domestic abuse and aim to determine why male victims are hidden, along with how healthcare, social care and Police professionals respond to male victims of domestic abuse. There is no intention to dismiss female victims or the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and Plus (LGBTQIA+) community. “Domestic abuse is not one dimensional (men on women) – it is four dimensional (men on women, women on men, men on men and women and women)” (ManKind Initiative , 2012, p1). However, this viewpoint does not fully consider all forms of gender and may need to be made more inclusive. This area was chosen as male victims can be overlooked and often only regarded as the perpetrator. The aim is to increase awareness of male victims. To explore this fully,

relevant literature will be reviewed to understand the core arguments that encompass this issue. These arguments include that male victims are under-researched and underrepresented within domestic abuse policies and support services, despite some recent growth in the amount of research being conducted in this area. Furthermore, the barriers which prevent male victims from seeking help will be explored.

1.2 Definitions

Domestic abuse is defined within the Domestic Abuse Act (DAA, 2021) as behaviour between two people aged over 16 years who are personally connected and whose behaviour is abusive. This behaviour can be abusive in several ways: physical, sexual, violent, threatening, controlling or coercive, economic, or psychological. The DAA (2021) defines “personally connected” as two people who are either married or in a civil partnership (even if this agreement has ceased), have a parental relationship with the same child, are relatives, or are currently or have been in an intimate relationship. Until the DAA (2021), there was no statutory definition of domestic abuse. Previously, there was a focus on only physical abuse within a relationship; this new definition widened the perspective on domestic abuse (Burton 2023). The DAA (2021) aims to raise awareness around the impact of domestic abuse on victims, their families, and communities. Domestic abuse can also be regarded as domestic violence, family violence, and intimate partner violence. Many definitions of a male or man can be explored from both a biological and a social viewpoint. However, for this dissertation, the definition of a male will be based on the legal definition of a male, a protected characteristic within the Equality Act (2010). The Equality Act (2010) defines a man as a male of any age. The UK

Supreme Court determined that a person's sex refers to their biological sex at birth (Chapman, 2025). As mentioned previously, there is no intention to dismiss the LGBTQIA+ community; it is recognised that there are people who identify as male and were not born male who can be victims as well. This community has not been represented in this dissertation's data.

For this dissertation, a victim refers to a person who is currently suffering or has suffered domestic abuse, and a perpetrator refers to a person who commits the abuse towards another person or people.

1.3 History of domestic abuse

Domestic abuse was first documented by UK legislation within the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act (1976), which stated that the Police had the right to arrest the person who was breaching the Act, and the female had the right to stay in the matrimonial home. Before the 1970s, domestic abuse was ignored, and the sanctity of family privacy was paramount, allowing abusive behaviour to go unreported and unseen. Dutton (2006, pp 16) describes this as the "age of denial". Male victims of domestic abuse were recognised in research in the 1970s (Steinmetz, 1977); however, this research has since then focused on female victims until recently, when there has been some growth in research focusing on male victims (Machado et al., 2021). Primary focus on female victims has caused policies and procedures to be female-centric. Domestic abuse was only viewed as a crime by the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004), which was a groundbreaking overhaul of the law around domestic abuse. Coercive behaviour and controlling behaviour within a family or intimate relationship were classified as an offence under section 76 of the Serious Crime Act (2015). This could lead to a prison

sentence of up to five years. In 2021, the DAA was published, which had a profound impact on the understanding of domestic abuse, and it recognised children as victims also. The DAA (2021) proposed the first legal definition of domestic abuse. Even though the DAA (2021) uses gender neutral terms, Barber (2023) argues that the framework is still female-oriented, causing males to feel ignored and stigmatised. Barber (2023) argues that existing assessment tools for domestic abuse tend to focus on female victims; therefore, professionals cannot effectively support and safeguard a male victim. There is a lack of research in this area. Barber (2023) touches on the matter but does not explain why. Hogan (2016) stated that some males have reported that some health, social care, and Police professionals lacked understanding and sensitivity. Lack of space at refuges for male victims also prevents them from leaving the relationship (Barber, 2023). Domestic abuse is often portrayed as a gendered crime, of males against females. Furthermore, if a male were to use an internet search engine to seek help when domestic abuse is searched, the first couple of results are female-focused support services. Since the support is not tailored to them, they may feel these services cannot provide adequate assistance.

1.4 Males as victims

Hine et al., (2022a) consider that males are often regarded as “hidden” and overlooked. Historically, domestic abuse has been associated with males as the perpetrators and females as the victims (Hine et al., 2022a; Dobash et al., 1992). This gendered model remains in current research and practice (Bates 2020b; Bates et al., 2017). Male victims are often neglected, and current understanding is limited (Hine et al., 2022a). Ambrozewicz et al., (2024) note there is still a lack of knowledge

and awareness around male victims of domestic abuse. In addition, male victims have received little focus within research (Lysova et al., 2020). Some research is slowly rising and has demonstrated the prevalence of male victims of domestic abuse (Archer 2000; Bates et al., 2014). Males are often blamed for their victimisation (Sorenson and Taylor, 2005). Males are less likely to tell anyone about the abuse when compared to female victims (Brooks, 2021). Brooks (2021) found that only 51% of male victims were able to disclose the abuse they were facing; the main barriers include the fear of not being believed, a challenge to their masculinity, and the fear of losing contact with their children. These confirm Ambrozewicz et al., (2024) findings that male victims tend to experience a higher level of stigma. A male victim's experience has a long-lasting impact on their future relationships. Their experiences caused them to face many consequences. These can include a distrust of their future partners, an inability to maintain healthy relationships, and a fear of the future (Hine et al., 2022a). Taylor et al., (2021) found that males are less likely to seek help when compared to females. It is argued that this is due to male gender stereotypes of being independent, stoic, and strong, which may prevent others from identifying males as victims (Ambrozewicz et al., 2024). One-third of males sustain severe injury from domestic abuse perpetrated by females (Hines and Douglas, 2010). Hine et al., (2022a) argue that the understanding of male domestic abuse has increased alongside the research. Males experience domestic abuse through physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. This results in both significant and minor injuries that can involve the use of household items and weapons (Ambrozewicz et al, 2024).

1.5 Females as perpetrators

A fair portion of research has demonstrated that female perpetrators can be victims themselves; their behaviour can be seen as self-defence and revenge for past abuse (Alsawalqa, 2023; Hines and Douglas, 2023). However, several studies have failed to support this idea (Hines and Douglas, 2023). Instead, the main reasons for a female to be abusive towards their male partner include expressing their feelings, gaining control, getting the person's attention, jealousy, or a reaction to his being verbally abusive (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012). Shark (2010) argues that females use domestic abuse to "create an environment in which they enjoy the same autonomy, liberty and dignity" and "feel entitled to punish male partners who fail" to be equal within a relationship (p 208). Females' reasons for domestic abuse have been insufficiently explored (Machado et al., 2017). Some participants in Machado et al., (2017) study reported that their female partners reported false allegations to the Police against them in response to them seeking support. Fear is also used to maintain control within domestic abusive relationships (Monckton-Smith et al., 2014). Literature reports many similarities between male and female perpetrator behaviour (Machado et al., 2017).

1.6 Children as victims

Domestic means home: hence, more individuals, not just adults, are involved. It is essential to consider the impact domestic abuse has on children. Even though this will not be fully explored within this dissertation, it is relevant to recognise that children are also victims of domestic abuse. It is now commonly accepted that domestic abuse can affect children (Millar et al., 2019). The DAA (2021) recognises

children as co-victims of domestic abuse. Between April 2022 and March 2023, 11 children's deaths were linked to domestic abuse (Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme, 2024). Domestic abuse can prevent a child's basic needs from being met, whilst also negatively impacting brain development, behaviour, and well-being (NSPCC Learning, 2024). Experiencing domestic abuse can affect a child's adulthood (Millar et al., 2019). Witnessing domestic abuse is a form of child abuse (Barnardo's, 2025; NSPCC Learning, 2024). Holt et al., (2008) state that children who witness domestic abuse have an increased risk of experiencing sexual, emotional, and physical abuse. They can also develop emotional and behavioural problems and increased life adversities. Children who witness domestic abuse have a higher chance of future perpetration and victimisation (Machado et al., 2017). Moreover, professional input, such as the Police, can put the children at a greater risk (Millar et al., 2019). The NSPCC Helpline reported that 7,825 contacts were made regarding children involved in domestic abuse, which is a 14% rise in contacts since 2023-2024. This is the highest rate since the NSPCC Helpline recorded domestic abuse contacts (NSPCC, 2025). The reason for this increase is not definite.

1.7 Barriers that prevent males from seeking help

Despite the growing research, awareness and development, male victims still face barriers to seeking help (Moore, 2021). Male victims can often feel isolated and that no one will understand their experience (Bates, 2020a). Research has shown that males are less likely to seek help from a health setting when compared to females (Bates et al., 2023). Bates et al., (2023) argue that a male seeking help could challenge their masculinity. The use of the word victim is seen as a barrier for males,

as it can be associated with weakness (Bates et al., 2023). Bates et al., (2023) maintain that most of society tends to convey that males should be in control, strong, dominant, and aggressive; this image is incompatible with being a victim. Some males view seeking help as a sign of weakness, a lesson learned from their peers; therefore, they fear being mocked for it (Lynch et al., 2018). Males could fear that if they leave the relationship, they may lose contact with their children (Bates et al., 2023). Hines and Douglas (2010) found this to be the top reason a male victim stays in an abusive relationship. Huntley et al., (2019) found that males were unaware of the help available. Therefore, they may think there is no way out of their abusive relationship. Some male victims do not see their experience as abuse (Tsang 2015; Lysova et al., 2020; Walker et al., 2020). Due to a lot of the organisations that support victims of domestic abuse being female-focused, males may feel that they cannot seek support from them (The ManKind Initiative, 2021). Ambrozewicz et al., (2024) found that some of these barriers include not being believed, stereotypes of a male and fear that reporting the abuse may worsen their situation.

1.8 Health, Social Care and Police Professionals' response to domestic abuse

Professionals and the public are still not viewing males as genuine victims, despite the ever-growing amount of research on male victims. Consequently, male victims are being mistreated compared to female victims (Bates and Taylor, 2022). Hope et al., (2021) state that some males feel ignored by the Police and other safeguarding services. Ambrozewicz et al., (2024) stated that there are scepticisms in healthcare professionals' ability to respond successfully to male victims.

There is some discussion in the literature about why some males prefer not to report abuse. According to Wallace et al., (2019), it is still not viewed as the norm; shame,

embarrassment, and fear of being ridiculed prevent males from reporting domestic abuse. Furthermore, Bates (2020a) reports that some males have stated that they were not believed, were being mocked, and services ridiculed their experiences or suggested that the abuse was their fault.

Police are often the first professionals to support victims of domestic abuse; they play a critical role in the multiagency response (Davies and Barlow, 2023). The Office for National Statistics (2024c) reports that the Police recorded 1,350,428 crimes related to domestic abuse in the year ending March 2024. However, Monckton-Smith (2014) argues that the Police are not equipped to deal with domestic abuse.

Research has also demonstrated that males are more likely to be arrested even when both parties are injured (Hope et al., 2021). Kravvariti and Browne (2023) state that Police officers regarded domestic abuse victims as primarily female and that domestic abuse was more severe when experienced by a female. There is limited research on how health, social care and Police professionals respond to male victims.

1.9 Domestic abuse and disability

It is imperative to consider disability when exploring domestic abuse, as one in five people within England is considered disabled (Dockerty et al., 2015). Disability can be defined within the Equality Act (2010) as a mental or physical impairment that impacts a person's daily life (Dockerty et al., 2015). Dockerty et al., (2015) also state that people with disabilities experience tremendously higher rates of domestic abuse when compared to people without disabilities; they also experience domestic abuse for a longer length of time, which is more severe and more frequent. Therefore, if males are considered vulnerable, a disabled male is at further risk.

Disability has an impact on victims of domestic abuse; males with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are seven times more likely to face domestic abuse (Dockerty et al., 2015). A person with a disability can be more vulnerable if their disability makes it harder for them to defend themselves (Ann Craft Trust, 2025). Ann Craft Trust (2025) also found that people with disabilities wait longer periods for support. Much of the information and research on disability and domestic abuse is female victim-focused; this could create a barrier for a disabled male victim. Domestic abuse is a traumatic experience; as a result, there is an increased risk of developing mental health conditions for both male and female victims (Hines and Douglas, 2009). Males have been found to experience long-term physical and psychological health issues (Coker et al., 2002; Coker et al., 2000). Domestic abuse can have a profound impact on the person's mental and physical health (NHS, 2025a). Knowledge of males' mental health is ever evolving despite this males are more likely to consume alcohol alone and misuse recreational substances (Mind, 2019) .

1.10 Male victims in the limelight

There have been several male victims who have come forward and spoken up about the abuse they are experiencing. In recent years, there have been several high-profile domestic abuse cases involving male victims.

In 2019, English television presenter Caroline Flack was arrested for allegedly assaulting her partner; the courts and media portrayed Caroline as a female perpetrator. This was later refuted by Caroline's mother, who claimed it was an accident (Sky News, 2024). BBC News (2024) contended that Caroline's mother

requested another review of this case, believing the charges were too harsh.

However, this information is based on the media's account and could be unreliable.

In 2022, a trial between the actors Amber Heard and Johnny Depp was live streamed worldwide. Heard initially accused Depp of being a perpetrator of domestic abuse, but Depp challenged this in court; this has been summarised in *Depp v. Heard* (2022). Heard was regarded as a perpetrator and victim of domestic abuse (Westmarland and Burrell, 2023).

There have been other reports as well. Alex Skeel, currently 30 years old, was featured in *Abused by My Girlfriend*. Skeel met Jordan Worth in 2012. Worth was training to be a teacher at the time of their relationship. It is unexplained whether Worth qualified as a teacher and what risk she may pose to children. She was the first female perpetrator to be imprisoned for coercive control. *My Wife My Abuser: Captured on Camera* highlighted the abuse Richard Spencer faced from his wife. Spencer had been a victim of domestic abuse for over twenty years. Spencer used cameras to document the abuse; the footage was later used to charge his wife. *My Wife My Abuser: Captured on Camera* highlighted the impact domestic abuse has on children, as they witnessed the abuse happening first-hand. The effect this had on the children and the current risk their mother poses to them is undetermined. *24 Hours in Police Custody* (Channel 4 Documentaries, 2023) also highlighted the death of Paul Jenner. Jenner made a statement about his abuse but then decided to withdraw it just before he died. Additionally, Laura McPherson, aged 35, was accused of financial abuse of her partner, Jon Leonard, over a period of five years by proclaiming she had terminal cancer. The court reported she spent the money on treatments on holidays, plastic surgery, and a weight loss programme (Duffin, 2025; Moore, 2025). The full extent of this case is unclear, as much of the information

comes from the media and could be considered unreliable. Nevertheless, these cases highlight the ever-growing attraction in the media of male victims of domestic abuse.

1.11 Post-separation abuse

It could be assumed that the abuse would stop once the relationship ended. The abuse, however, does not always end once the relationship breaks down; several victims report post-separation abuse (Bates, 2019). This can be the perpetrator's response to losing the power and control of the victim (Bates et al., 2023). Post-separation abuse is defined as any abuse which occurs after a physical separation; there are some difficulties defining when this happens (Bates and Taylor, 2021; Bates et al., 2023). Previously, academics' definition of post-separation abuse focused on female victims and male perpetrators. Bates and Taylor (2021) found that post-separation abuse was not a gendered phenomenon. Male victims' experiences of post-separation abuse have been neglected (Bates et al., 2023). This creates a minimal impact not only towards male victims but also those in same sex relationships (Bates et al., 2023). Hine et al., (2022a) highlight the impact a perpetrator has on the victim after separation; this harms their children, causing parental alienation. There is a lack of research on how post-separation abuse impacts male victims (Bates, 2019). Some victims reported that the abuse worsened when the relationship ended (Bates, 2020).

1.12 Conclusion

In conclusion, male victims of domestic abuse have been under-researched, and males are often regarded as perpetrators. Despite the growth of this research, there

is still significant progress to be made. Further development and education are needed for professionals to support victims more effectively.

Chapter 2 Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the methods used for the systematic review, as well as the justification and research methods employed.

According to Whiffin (2021), methodology is the underlying assumptions that direct decision making in a study, “as such methodology is the glue that holds everything together ” (p 10). Methodology is a framework that guides a research project.

Moreover, the fundamental aspects of research methodology provide a research project's rules, values, and ideologies (Roberts and Priest, 2010).

Dawson (2009) proposes five aspects to explore when starting a research project: what, why, who, where, and when. Once these have been established, the researcher can move on to how the data will be collected. The researcher needs to discover what research is being explored. Then the researcher needs to establish why the research needs to take place. Who establishes the participants, where explores where your research will take place, and when determines when the researcher intends to complete the study. In this case, the what are male victims of domestic abuse, the why is due to the area being under-researched, the who are males aged over 16 years old, the where is within Birmingham City University and the when is between January 2025 and November 2025.

2.2 Systematic Review

A systematic review is a category of literature review that uses scientific procedures to methodically locate, assess and synthesise the existing evidence (CASP, 2025a).

A systematic review aims to assemble all observed evidence that fits a specific

criterion to answer a question (Cochrane, 2024; Boland, 2017; Ham-Baloyi and Jordan, 2016). Systematic reviews are the most productive method to provide a thorough and evidence-based answer to a specific research question (Hart, 2018; Coughlan and Cronin, 2017; Bettany-Saltikov and McSherry, 2016).

However, systematic reviews can become biased due to the review being heavily based on the author's knowledge (Jackson and Kuriyama, 2017; Aromataris and Pearson, 2014). In contrast, Smith and Noble (2025) state that this can be advantageous. In this dissertation, the author was interested in the subject. This means that the author had prior knowledge of the issues within domestic abuse and male victims. The author also had previous experience in supporting male victims of domestic abuse through working for a national safeguarding Helpline. Therefore, there could still be bias there; however, it is impossible to be free of bias (Smith and Noble, 2025). Conversely, measures were implemented to avoid bias, and the literature search was broad to ensure no research was left out. Nonetheless, Jackson and Kuryama (2017) point out that research could be considered biased because it only used English-language articles, as time constraints made translation impossible. There was also communication with researchers within this area and access to unpublished work. This was the right approach to this study, as this area is ever-developing (Hine et al., 2022a), and it is essential for the author to stay up to date with advances in the research area. A systematic review can highlight gaps within research.

Systematic reviews inform education, research, policies, and practice (CASP, 2025a; Uttley et al., 2023; Ham-Baloyi and Jordan, 2016). Systematic reviews are used for many professions, including health professionals (Bettany-Saltikov, 2012). Bird et al., (2023) state that systematic reviews are essential evidence of domestic abuse and

contribute to knowledge and practice. There are many advantages to a systematic review, including having control over the learning objectives and the project, the ability to focus on the area of interest, and the fact that ethical approval is not required, which can help with time constraints. It also explores a wide range of research, gaining multiple perspectives of the area, in this case, male victims of domestic abuse, thus gaining a robust viewpoint. On the contrary, there are disadvantages to a systematic review: without ethical approval, you miss writing and defending the application, work alone, which can be isolating, and it can be time-consuming (Boland et al., 2017).

Three types of systematic reviews exist: quantitative, qualitative, integrative, and mixed methods. Quantitative systematic reviews use primary research that obtains numerical data (Whiffin, 2021; Guest and Namey, 2015). Upon researching, there is a lack of quantitative and mixed methods research in this area. Qualitative research tends to collect participants' feelings, views, and experiences, which is what this systematic review aimed to achieve. Research within this area tends to be qualitative, making it an appropriate approach.

Mallett et al., (2012) state that systematic reviews reduce researchers' bias and are interpreted as a more thorough and systematic approach to reviewing research studies. When designing a research project, it is essential to consider bias. Kovera (2010) defines bias as a systematic error within data collected to investigate a research question. Bias can occur throughout the research process (CASP, 2025a; Smith and Noble, 2025; Pannucci and Wilkins, 2011). It can impact the research's validity, quality, and reliability (Smith and Noble, 2025; Olsson and Sundell, 2023; Boland et al., 2017) and exists in all research designs (Smith and Noble, 2025).

Qualitative research has been criticised for producing biased results (Mackieson et al., 2018).

A systematic review was decided due to the ethical issues of interviewing male victims of domestic abuse; the author also did not have access to many victims of domestic abuse; therefore, a systematic review seemed appropriate. There also appears to be a lack of existing systematic reviews of the area of male victims of domestic abuse.

2.3 Review question

A research question proposes the “formal statement of the intent of a piece of research” (Boland et al., 2017, p 260). Lipowski (2008) argues that a research question is the most crucial step within the research process. Without a research question, a project can become unfocused. Developing a suitable review question is essential in a systematic review (Boland et al., 2017). Having a research question from the beginning is vital, as it creates a foundation and direction for the review process (Betthany-Saltikov, 2012; Stern et al., 2014; Lipowski, 2008). A research question clarifies what information is relevant and what is not (Lipowski, 2008). A strong research question contests current understanding of the area and proposes a new way of thinking (Lipowski, 2008). The review question was formulated to define the systematic review. A relevant research question is vital for a systematic review (Higgins et al., 2019). A strong research question leads to a conclusion; without it, evaluating the success of the research is difficult.

2.3.1 Systematic review question

This systematic review has addressed the following question:

Why are male victims of domestic abuse considered hidden?

2.3.2 Initial searches and PICO

The author's course is Safeguarding Master's, taught within the university's health department. Boland et al. (2017) advised using various bibliographic databases, including MEDLINE, CINAHL Ultimate, Gale Academic OneFile, Unpaywell, and Sage Journals. This was conducted through using Birmingham City University's online library search. This search was performed using terms such as male, victims, domestic abuse, domestic violence, and interpersonal violence. These words were developed after researching the topic and were found to be used within academic research. This generated a substantial amount of evidence for the systematic review to be conducted on male victims of domestic abuse. As recommended by Boland et al., (2017), the questions were developed using the Population, Interest and Context framework (PICO) (JBI, 2024) (see Table 1) to examine the affected population.

Other frameworks were available; however, PICO appeared to be the most suitable as it addressed all aspects of the research question. PICO was recommended for a systematic review by Boland et al., (2017) as this prevented the exclusion of relevant research articles and provided adequate information regarding the systematic review's scope to the reader. The primary objective of PICO is extensively applied in health research. PICO explores population, interest, and context; it provides structure to a research project and transforms extensive research ideas into more specific questions, thus making it easier to design the research.

Table 1: PICO Framework with Research Question

Population	People who are classified as a male under the Equality Act (2010) and are
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	aged 16 years old and above
Interest	Victim of domestic abuse
Context	Experiences of domestic abuse

2.3.3 Aim and objectives

A study's objectives define its precise aims; they must be stated in the introduction of the research project (Farrugia et al., 2010). Aims and objectives are vital in the research process; they define what the researcher intends to achieve and how it will be completed. They provide clarification and direction to the overall research process. Much like a research question, a research project can become unfocused without aims and objectives. A research project aims to explore its primary purpose. An objective breaks down the aim into achievable steps, providing structure for the overall research project. It also provides structure to the research project and enables the researcher to evaluate its success. Lastly, it offers valuable communication with organisations that fund the research and the supervisor of the research project.

Aim

This systematic review aims to understand the factors that cause male victims of domestic abuse to become and remain hidden.

Objectives

A systematic review of qualitative studies regarding male victims of domestic abuse was undertaken to:

1. To explore what barriers are present when male victims of domestic abuse are seeking support.
2. To analyse why females are not considered perpetrators.
3. To identify how professionals can further support male victims of domestic abuse.

2.4 Research Design

Research designs can be categorised into qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Qualitative research gathers non-numerical data and investigates context, culture, and experience (Guest and Namey, 2015; Namey and Trotter, 2015; Whiffin, 2021). It is argued that qualitative research offers validity, but not generalisability, as it tends to emphasise an in-depth understanding of specific areas (Pyo et al., 2023). Validity refers to the accuracy and appropriateness of measuring phenomena (Pyo et al., 2023). Generalisability applies the observed phenomena to other instances (Pyo et al., 2023). Therefore, this could limit the application of the results of a systematic review to the broader public. In this case male victims of domestic abuse, the findings could only be applied to a percentage of the population. This is important to consider when using the findings for a broader population.

Quantitative research collects data that can be described or measured numerically and is analysed statistically (Whiffin, 2021; Guest and Namey, 2015). In contrast, quantitative research is characterised by reliability and generalisability (Pyo et al., 2023). Reliability relates to the consistency of a study and its replicability. However, due to its objective nature, quantitative research lacks the in-depth analysis that numbers cannot convey. Using mixed methods can benefit from both qualitative and

quantitative; nevertheless, reviewing said research could lead researchers to either a qualitative or quantitative methodology (Whiffin, 2021).

Pyo et al., (2023) describe qualitative research as appropriate when an “exploratory approach is required on a topic that is not well known,”. When something cannot be explained quantitatively, presenting a new aspect to the research area is essential.

This dissertation was conducted to explore more about male victims of domestic abuse. This required in-depth data around the experiences of male victims of domestic abuse. Therefore, a qualitative design was chosen. Furthermore, the existing research is primarily qualitative.

2.5 Identification of Research

The search approach for this systematic review was developed by the author, a student undertaking a Master of Science (MSc) in Safeguarding using the advice and guidance of Librarians at Birmingham City University, see Table 2.

The searches were conducted and refined to focus on research published between 2020 and 2025 for suitable qualitative studies. This obtained the most recent research and considered the impact of COVID-19 on domestic abuse victims.

Table 2: Key terms based on the PICO framework

Population	Male
Interest	Domestic abuse
Context	Experiences

Upon researching the area, it was apparent that different terms were used within this

research area; therefore, different terms were used in different orders, see Table 3. These search terms were run five times for each arrangement, and each combination was run on every database mentioned. To help refine the search, Boolean limiters were applied; see Table 3 for more information. The abstract of each study was identified and read in full, and then the irrelevant research was filtered out. Some studies were excluded based on their title as they did not fit the criteria.

Table 3 Search Strategy

Column terms combined with	Population		Interest		Context
OR	Male	AND	Domestic abuse	AND	Experiences
	Males		Domestic violence		Support
	Man		Intimate partner abuse		Professionals
	Adults		Family violence		
	Female perpetrators		Victim		
			Survivor		

Based upon recommendations from Birmingham City University (2025), NHS (2025b), and Boland et al. (2017), a multidisciplinary approach was used due to the health nature of the university course. The databases and search engines used are stated in Table 4.

Table 4: Databases and Internet Search Engines Used

Databases	Search Engines (First 100 hits)
MEDLINE	Google
CINAHL Ultimate	Google Scholar
Gale Academic OneFile	ResearchGate
Unpaywell	
Sage Journals	
Nexis	
ScienceDirect	

Wiley Online Library	
JSTOR	
ERIC	

Additionally, related websites were used to obtain further information on the subject area, as presented in Table 5. The mentioned websites were obtained after researching what charities and organisations support male victims of domestic abuse and relevant areas such as children's charities. Furthermore, Grey literature was used in the searches, including those detailed in Table 5. Grey literature refers to research and reports published outside of the traditional means (Lefebvre et al., 2025).

Table 5: Websites Searched and Grey Literature Searches

Websites Searched	Grey Literature Searches
Ann Craft Trust	ManKind Initiative Research and Dissertations (https://mankind.org.uk/statistics/research-male-victims-of-domestic-abuse/)
BBC News	PASK DV Project (https://domesticviolenceresearch.org/)
Legislation.gov.uk	NSPCC Learning (https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources)
Gov.uk	Barnardo's (https://www.barnardos.org.uk/research)
ManKind Initiative	Women's Aid (https://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/research/research-and-reports/)
Office for National Statistics	

2.6 Selection of Studies

2.6.1 Exclusion and inclusion criteria

Using inclusion and exclusion criteria minimises bias and ensures all studies are screened uniformly (Roberts and Priest, 2010). The criteria were determined before

selection to prevent bias (Drucker et al., 2016). This is considered standard practice for a research project (Patino and Ferreria, 2018). See Table 6 for inclusion and exclusion criteria. Research in the English language was conducted solely to make the findings understandable to the researcher; there are also time limitations, as the author is a part-time student and lacks the finances to facilitate translation. However, this has limited the research the researcher has obtained and could be considered a bias (Bettany-Saltikov and McSherry, 2016). There is also publication bias, stating that English is predominant throughout health research and is often regarded as more critical than non-English language research. Furthermore, most positive findings are published only in English (Brassey et al., 2017). On the other hand, this could have been avoided by using translation tools to translate the research papers into English. However, most, if not all, research papers found were originally in English.

Table 6: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Included studies which:	Exclusion Excluded studies that:	Rationale
Related to adult males who have experienced domestic abuse as a victim. This included adult males of any ethnicity and age above 16.	Related to adult males who had experienced domestic abuse as perpetrators.	The systematic review was focused on male victims, not perpetrators. Used males above the age of sixteen, as this is the age that the DAA covers.
Adult male victims of domestic abuse	Adult female victims of domestic abuse	The focus was on male victims, not female victims.
Qualitative studies	Quantitative, systematic reviews and mixed methods studies	To gain an in-depth analysis of male victims.
They were in the English language.	They were not available in English.	Unable to provide the time and finances for translating research.
They were produced	Were produced before	To analyse the impact

between 2020 and 2025	2020	of COVID-19 on male victims. To gain an up-to-date understanding of male victims.
Could be retrieved fully by the reviewer	Could not be retrieved by the reviewer	To be able to read the entire article within the available databases.

2.6.2 Types of studies

The studies explored the experiences of male victims of domestic abuse. This will be explored further in the results chapter. Any quantitative and mixed methods studies were excluded, as mentioned in Table 6.

2.6.3 Types of population

This systematic review is directed towards male victims of domestic abuse aged 16 years and above; there was no upper age limit, as said studies tended not to have this.

2.6.4 Types of context

This systematic review included studies that explored the experiences of male victims and female perpetrators within a heterosexual relationship. This distinction was made within the published research, and this convention was mirrored within the systematic review; any other gender identifications are outside the scope of this dissertation. This also covered experiences of domestic abuse outside of the relationship, for example, post-separation abuse.

2.6.5 Types of outcome

This systematic review focused on males' experiences of being in a domestic abusive relationship with a female.

2.6.6 The time periods

As mentioned in Table 6, only studies published between 2020 and 2025 were included to account for any discrepancies that COVID-19 may have caused. Within the background of COVID-19, domestic abuse was explored and demonstrated to have an impact on the rate of victims and the effect it has on them. This also ensured that the data were up-to-date and relevant for this systematic review.

2.7 Data Extraction

Boland et al., (2017) describe data extraction as acquiring relevant information from the included studies. The data extraction used the PICO framework to draw out key findings. Alternative tools to critically appraise research include the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI, 2025) Tools and Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2018). These tools are used to assess the relevance, results, and trustworthiness of published research. However, CASP is regarded as the most frequently used tool within healthcare (Long et al., 2020). The included studies were critically appraised using the CASP (2018) tool. The CASP Checklists were chosen to ensure that the studies used are trustworthy and accurate (CASP, 2025c). It provides a structure to appraise studies critically. Preparing the data extraction tool in advance reduced reviewer bias. The collected data was displayed in a table to facilitate a more concise and precise analysis.

2.8 Critical and quality appraisal

It is essential to consider whether the research is trustworthy. It is also important to look at the research's dependability and credibility. Tod et al., (2021) describe critical appraisal as a sensible and "systematic assessment" of a study's methodological rigour or trustworthiness. Tod et al., (2021) also state that this can impact the reader's confidence in the presented evidence and that qualitative research must be held to "high and difficult standards". The appraisal tool used can be found in Appendix 1.

2.9 Data extraction

Boland et al., (2017) describe data extraction as retaining relevant information about the study's findings of the included studies. It is an essential aspect of the research process to produce evidence concerning the research question. The information obtained was recorded within a data extraction table, which can be found in the next chapter.

The following details were obtained from each study:

- Bibliographical details such as the author, year of publication, title, and source
- Country and language
- Aim
- Methodology
- Setting
- The number of participants and characteristics of the participants, such as age
- Outcome

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has justified the use of a qualitative systematic review as the most relevant approach for understanding more about male victims of domestic abuse. This chapter also explains the research question and the aims and objectives of this systematic review. It has also explored the process of planning and conducting searches using the inclusion criteria. It also explained how the quality assessment of research was conducted, how data was extracted, and how synthesis was explained.

Chapter 3: Results

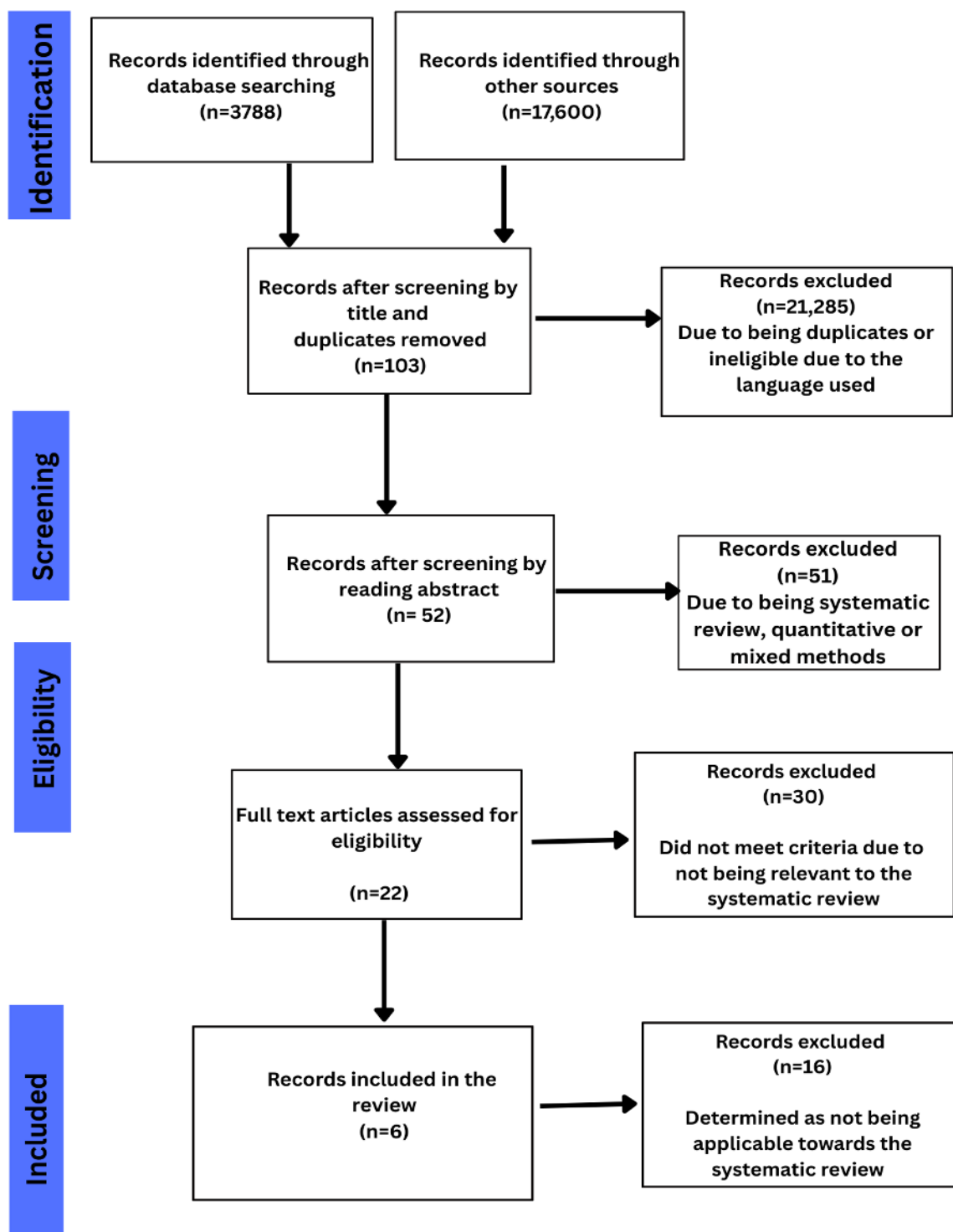
3.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the results obtained from the included studies. There are three parts of the results chapter: first, the section will determine the characteristics of the included studies and how these studies were included; second, the summary of methodologies will be examined; and third, the results of the included studies will be synthesised, and themes will be explored.

3.2 Summary of included papers

After preliminary searches, inclusion and exclusion filters were applied as stated in the methodology. Twenty-one thousand three hundred eighty-eight articles were obtained, 21,285 of which were excluded due to being either duplicates or ineligible, inappropriate research methods, or they were not being in English. Some were excluded due to focusing on female victims, or the entire article could not be obtained, and some focused on children, not adults. This left 103 articles, of which 51 were excluded due to being ineligible after reading the abstract; the excluded articles were either systematic reviews, quantitative, or mixed methods. This was then cut down to 22 after reading the articles and determining which were relevant towards the systematic review. In the end, six articles met the criteria and were the most relevant for this systematic review (Hines et al., 2022; Westmarland and Burrell, 2023; Aborisade, 2024; Dim, 2020; Taylor et al., 2021; Alsawalqa, 2023). This is also presented below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Flow chart of selection of studies, adapted from PRISMA group (Moher et al., 2009).



3.3 Characteristics of included studies

The characterisers of the included six studies are presented in Appendices 2 and 3. All of the included studies were published between 2020 and 2025. The studies took place in England (n=3), Nigeria (n=1), Canada (n=1), and Jordan (n=1). The sample sizes ranged from 4 to 344. Among all six studies, 596 participants were recruited; most were male (n=592), and only four were female, all of whom were Helpline practitioners (Hine et al., 2022c). Therefore, the information could be considered unreliable as it is not direct from the victim. Participants were aged between 19 and 85 years old; all of the included research studies aimed to analyse male victims of domestic abuse.

Most participants were classified as White; however, not all studies recorded this information. Most studies did not record participants' educational levels. However, Alsawalqa (2021) reported that 48.5% of participants had a university degree. Aborisade (2024) reported that 42.3% of participants were educated in secondary school. The studies were conducted across a range of universities, showcasing the interdisciplinary nature of research on domestic abuse. The studies were predominantly produced from the Sociology department; this focuses on domestic abuse through a social and cultural outlook (Aborisade, 2024; Westmarland and Burrell, 2023; Alsawalqa, 2021). Studies were also produced by the Psychology department, which has a focus on domestic abuse through a behavioural and cognitive standpoint (Hine et al., 2022a; Taylor et al., 2021). It was unclear which department produced Dim (2021).

The studies that recorded sexuality found that participants were mainly heterosexual; however, the research was based on Helplines that mostly supported heterosexual relationships, and there are other Helplines that specifically support victims within LGBTQ+ relationships, which were not covered within these studies.

Data collection methods varied: two used semi-structured interviews, one used a structured interview without specifying the type, another was observational, one was a telephone interview, and lastly, one was an online questionnaire. Two different data analysis methods were used: four studies employed thematic analysis (Hine et al., 2022c; Westmarland et al., 2023; Dim, 2020; Taylor et al., 2021), while two studies utilised Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Aborisade, 2024; Alsawalqa, 2023). The study durations were unclear but suggested they were short-term. Outcomes of the studies highlighted the influence of stereotypes of males and the fear of seeking support for domestic abuse due to the anxiety of stigmatisation. It was emphasised that some males could not view themselves as victims. A range of types of abuse were experienced, including physical, sexual, psychological, and financial. Interestingly, one study reported that the abuse began when they got married (Aborisade, 2024). Participants reported feeling isolated from friends and family and unable to speak about their experiences (Hine et al., 2022a). Some participants reported that they found it easier to seek help via email compared to using the telephone and in person (Westmarland et al., 2023). One study highlighted the need for more education and training for professionals who interact with victims (Taylor et al., 2021). The perpetrator used tactics to keep the victim within the relationship, including contact with children, isolation, sex, and money (Alsawalqa, 2023).

3.4 Quality appraisal of included studies

As mentioned within the Methodology, the CASP tool (CASP, 2024) was used to appraise the included studies critically. When evaluating the six studies, it was clear that their quality varied, and limitations were identified in some of them. Four of the studies had clear statements of aims for the research (Hine et al., 2022c; Westmarland et al., 2023; Taylor et al., 2021) and two did not (Dim, 2020; Alsawalqa, 2023). All studies used qualitative methodology, which was appropriate for the design as they were exploring the experiences of male victims of domestic abuse. It was noted that although Hine et al. (2022) was a strong article, it was concluded that the recruitment strategy was not appropriate for the aims of the research, as they did not use male victims of domestic abuse. All studies were of a qualitative design, which was relevant to obtain an in-depth understanding of male victims of domestic abuse. The six studies used a wide range of methods to get the data. Two used semi-structured interviews (Hine et al., 2022c; Alsawalqa, 2023). One stated they used interviews (Aborisade, 2024). Another study employed an observational method to examine contact with a Helpline for males (Westmarland et al., 2023), and Telephone interviews were used within Dim (2020). Finally, Taylor et al., (2021) used an online questionnaire. These methods were suitable for the aims of the studies. Interviews can obtain in-depth information (Xu et al., 2025). All studies had male participants; this enabled the researchers to capture the viewpoint of a male victim. The six studies used the most appropriate data collection methods to obtain in-depth and extended data around male victims of domestic abuse. See Table 7 for the full critical appraisal of the included studies.

Table 7 CASP Tool (CASP, 2024)

Critical Appraisal of all Included Studies Critical Appraisal Programme (CASP, 2018)						
CASP tool criteria	Research Studies					
	Hine et al., (2022c)	Westmarland et al., (2023)	Aborisade (2024)	Dim (2020)	Taylor et al., (2021)	Alsawalqa (2023)
1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the research aims?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
6. Has the relationship between the researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Y	Y	C	C	Y	C
7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Y	Y	Y	Y	C	Y
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
10. How valuable is the research?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Note: “Y” Represents Yes, “N” Represents No “, C” Represents Cannot tell						

3.5 Findings of thematic synthesis

Through analysing the six studies, four themes are present:

1. Unable to identify themselves as a victim,
2. Barriers to seeking help,
3. Interaction with professionals
4. Types of abuse.

These themes were developed by reading the articles and determining the presented themes through reading the results section, data was synthesised using a thematic synthesis method with line-by-line coding.

Table 8: Theme 1 within the studies

Theme 1	Example Quotations	Article Citation
Unable to identify themselves as a victim	"I can't be a victim of domestic abuse. How would I be a victim? I am a police officer, I'm a judge, I'm a solicitor, I work in the field, I can't be a victim." (pNP5604)	Hine et al., (2022c)
	"I am a victim of abuse, my solicitor said. But I don't know what was happening- I am a red-blooded male and don't want to think of it like that. I'm a bit embarrassed about it...I am an alpha male" (p7)	Westmarland and Burrell (2023)
	"I didn't realise men went through it; I thought only women were victims" (pNP18427)	Taylor et al., (2021)

3.5.1 Unable to identify themselves as a victim

Within three of the articles (Westmarland and Burrell, 2023; Hine et al., 2022c; Taylor et al., 2021), it was apparent that male victims could not identify themselves as victims. There were assorted reasons for this, including stereotypes about males and professions (Huntley et al., 2019; Hine et al., 2022c). One participant felt they could not be a victim of domestic abuse due to their profession, “How would I be a victim? I am a police officer” (Hine et al., 2022c, pNP5604), suggesting their profession was regarded as strong, independent, and masculine. Another participant commented that it took another person to highlight that they were a victim, “I am a victim of abuse, my solicitor said” (Westmarland and Burrell, 2023, p7). Lastly, one participant commented that males cannot be victims, as only females are victims of domestic abuse: “I didn’t realise men went through it” (Taylor et al., 2021, pNP18427). This supports the idea that domestic abuse is a gendered crime (Women’s Aid, 2025b); however, there is a lack of research in this area. Difficulty in recognising themselves as victims creates a barrier for males to seek help and support (Vail et al., 2025).

Table 9: Theme 2 within studies

Theme 1	Example Quotations	Article Citation
Barriers to seeking help	“Even the services that help men don’t always advertise that they help men, so they are quite surprised when I say to them, if I signpost them to local service, they go ‘oh, I saw them but they only support women, aren’t they” (pNP5610)	Hine et al., (2022c)

	<p>“It’s almost a postcode lottery to where you live in the county, cos different authorities and also individuals, but other authorities deal with things in a different way, you know” (pNP5611)</p>	<p>Hine et al., (2022c)</p>
	<p>“Things change, when we first started, we get half a dozen calls a week now you get that in one morning and even that when you’re constantly being told that your helpline is engaged. (pNP5612)</p>	<p>Hine et al., (2022c)</p>
	<p>“They found it to be a highly challenging experience, and often didn’t feel their experiences were taken seriously, or worried that this might be the case” (p7)</p>	<p>Westmarland and Burrell (2023)</p>
	<p>“I do want to call, but I think I will just break down and cry, and I need to be strong” (p8)</p>	<p>Westmarland and Burrell (2023)</p>
	<p>“I’ve been in the midst of associates where we mocked and ridiculed a man beaten up by his wife” (p21)</p>	<p>Aborisade (2024)</p>
	<p>“I didn’t involve social services or the police as I was told they would support the women, not the man.....It is very lonely as a man who is being tortured at home” (pNP18428)</p>	<p>Taylor et al., (2021)</p>
	<p>“You know our society’s view on divorce” (p5510)</p>	<p>Alsawalqa (2023)</p>

3.5.2 Barriers to seeking help

Throughout the six studies, many barriers were presented. One thought that domestic abuse services were for women, “oh I saw them but they only support women, aren’t they” (Hine et al., 2022c, pNP5610). This would create a strong barrier for a male seeking help for domestic abuse. Another commented that it depends on where the person lives and whether they receive support, “it’s almost a postcode lottery” (Hine et al., 2022c, pNP5611). Without support, the victim may not leave the relationship. Even when there is support, this support is limited due to resources and finances; one reported that they lack the capacity to answer calls, “Things change, when we first started, we get half a dozen calls a week now you get that in one morning” (Hine et al., 2022c, pNP5612). Another barrier is that the victim does not feel they will be taken seriously, fearing they will be mocked or ridiculed, “didn’t feel their experiences were taken seriously” (Westmarland and Burrell, 2023, p7) . One participant wanted to appear manly, and if he were to seek support, it would make him look weak, “I do want to call, but I think I will just break down and cry, and I need to be strong” (Westmarland and Burrell, 2023, p8). One participant had previously mocked victims of domestic abuse and therefore did not want to disclose the abuse, “I’ve been in the midst of associates where we mocked and ridiculed a man beaten up by his wife” (Aborisade, 2024, p21) . Another felt that social services would favour the female over the male, “I didn’t involve social services or the police as I was told they would support the women” (Taylor et al., 2021, pNP18428). Lastly, one study highlighted the cultural views of divorce, which therefore prevent the victim from leaving the relationship, “You know our society’s view on divorce” (Alsawalqa, 2023, p5510).

Table 10: Theme 3 within studies

Theme 3	Example Quotation	Citation
Interaction with professionals	“The police don’t see him as the victim; they see him as a perpetrator, so it’s a continual cycle of the fact that they can’t be victims because they’re men, so they must be the perpetrators.” (pNP5608)	Hine et al., (2022c)
	“I have been trying to raise this with the police for a while; however, I feel that being a male, they are just laughing at me.” (p7)	Westmarland and Burrell (2023)
	“When I told the officer that my wife had been abusing me and she inflicted a serious injury, He asked me to repeat myself a couple of times, visibly laughing.” (p21)	Aborisade (2024)
	“I first called a women’s help line, they listened to me and then rapidly the tone changed and she told me I only thought I was being abused and that I was the abuser and that I needed help dealing with all of the anger and violence abuse I was causing....and that I needed to turn myself in. I hung up, terrified!” (pNP18426)	Taylor et al., (2021)
	“On one occasion, while being held in a cell in	Taylor et al.,

	anticipation of questioning, I was told by one higher-ranking officer that I was filthy scum and that I would definitely be going to prison for several years (I was the one who had been physically and emotionally abused)” (pNP18427)	(2021)
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3.5.3 Interaction with professionals

Participants reported a varied response from professionals. Participants argued that they were seen as perpetrators, not a victim, “The police don’t see him as the victim; they see him as a perpetrator” (Hine et al., 2022c, pNP5608). The Police were the professional participants with whom they interacted the most. Some felt ridiculed by professionals, particularly the Police; some participants were mistaken for the perpetrator. This suggests that being male is further associated with being a perpetrator of domestic abuse. One participant commented that they had been trying to interact and seek support from the Police for a while and felt that they were being mistreated due to being a male, “I have been trying to raise this with the police for a while” (Westmarland and Burrell, 2023, p7). Another commented that the Police laughed at them when they disclosed that they were being abused, “He asked me to repeat myself a couple of times, visibly laughing” (Aborisade, 2024, p21). This must have been very off-putting for the victim, as they may have taken a while to disclose the abuse, and when they did, they were ridiculed. Huntley et al., (2019) proposes that the barriers that prevent males seeking help are complex. It was also found that victims feared on being discredited when they identify themselves as a victim (Taylor et al., 2021). Taylor et al., (2021) also state that males are less likely to disclose abuse when compared to female victims. Taylor et al., (2021) reported that one participant contacted a female-based Helpline and was gaslighted into thinking they were

the perpetrator, not the victim “she told me I only thought I was being abused and that I was the abuser” (pNP18426). Another participant stated they were threatened with prison; “I was told by one higher-ranking officer that I was filthy scum and that I would definitely be going to prison for several years” (Taylor et al., 2021, pNP18427). It was unclear if these comments were due to the person being male

Table

11: Theme 4 with in studies

Theme 4	Example Quotation	Citation
Types of abuse	“From my experience of working front line with men its [sexual abuse] particularly within this service it’s more common than I ever imagined. (pNP5606)	Hine et al., (2022c)
	“I really felt the hard beating on my back and neck area” (p8)	Westmarland and Burrell (2023)
	“I’ve been physically hit by her in my home and in public and had things thrown at me” (p12)	Westmarland and Burrell

		(2023)
	“I have a terminal disease which makes me lack the strength....my wife takes advantage of this to [physically] molest and hit me almost all the time” (p21)	Aborisade (2024)
	“On this single occasion, she hit me with a pestle while she was pounding yam for lunch”(p21)	Aborisade (2024)
	“She beat me up really badly, so badly that there was nothing left of my skin tone from my next” (p1036)	Dim (2021)
	“The assault started simply with her taking a slap at me, you know, it started with open hands slinging at me, and then it graduated to increase in becoming a hammerhead” (p1036)	Dim (2021)
	“The violence first began during sex. The first time was when I could not satisfy her, so she slapped me hard across the face” (p1037)	Dim (2021)
	“When it came to physical, it would be kind of slapping me around and spitting on me, that kind of stuff” (p1037)	Dim (2021)
	“Her violence was verbal. She screamed at me and cursed me.” (p1039)	Dim (2021)
	“There were verbal assaults anytime she would get angry about anything,” (p1039)	Dim (2021)
	“She beat me with a hairbrush. It is painful...Left a redness on my shoulder ...As hard as a sting”	Alsawalqa (2023)

	(p5510)	
	“Verbally attacks my personality” (p5510)	Alsawalqa (2023)

3.5.4 Types of abuse

Domestic abuse can take many forms. Physical abuse was apparent, the seriousness ranged, sometimes it happened at home and in public, “I’ve been physically hit by her in my home and in public” (Westmarland and Burrell, 2023, p12). Furthermore, existing illnesses were used, “I have a terminal disease which makes me lack the strength....my wife takes advantage of this to [physically] molest and hit me almost all the time”

(Aborisade, 2024, p21). Sometimes the physical abuse left injuries, “Left a redness on my shoulder” (Alsawalqa, 2023, p5510). Some participants commented that the abuse was verbal, “There were verbal assaults” (Dim, 2021, p1039), “Her violence was verbal” (Dim, 2021, p1039), “Verbally attacks my personality” (Alsawalqa, 2023, p5510). It’s important to consider all aspects of domestic abuse.

Conclusion

Throughout the results, it is clear that males face numerous barriers when seeking help; some males could not view themselves as a victim. Others reported adverse interactions with professionals, particularly the Police. It is important to consider that domestic abuse takes many forms, some can be obvious such as physical abuse and can leave injuries, whereas other types of abuse can be unobvious. Overall, it is incredibly challenging for male victims to seek support, and once they get that support, it is often harmful and not helpful. These aspects are essential to consider when supporting male victims of domestic abuse. Without making changes, males will continue to remain hidden and unheard, especially by professionals such as the Police and healthcare professionals.

Chapter 4: Discussion of findings

4.1 Introduction

The objective of this qualitative systematic review was to explore the experiences of male victims of domestic abuse. According to the thematic synthesis, there were four themes: unable to identify themselves as a victim, barrier in seeking help, interaction with professionals and types of abuse. The following chapter will discuss each theme, along with links to previously published articles and current policies and guidelines.

4.2 Previous systematic reviews

Upon researching systematic reviews of male victims of domestic abuse, it was concluded that there was a limited amount of research available to the author. Huntley et al., (2019) conducted a systematic review and the results were aligned with this systematic review. However, Huntley et al., (2019) obtained a greater number of themes, this could be due to the number of authors working on the systematic review or that the data is more detailed across the themes. This systematic review was outside the date range used for this dissertation therefore data obtained could be considered outdated, however the findings yielded similar information. Huntley et al., (2019) found that interest in male victims of domestic abuse is increasing and that there are barriers presented to help seeking male victims. It also proposed an alternate term domestic violence and abuse (DVA) which covers all types of abuse. Kim et al., (2023) conducted a mixed methods systematic review, the results were similar to this systematic review. It highlighted the need for specialised education, training and assessment for male victims. However they had a narrower scope, which produced more detailed findings about help seeking male victims. It was produced within the date range of this systematic review, meaning the results are relevant and up to date. Upon further investigation Kim et al., (2023) included some of the

papers included in this systematic review. Machado et al., (2022) also conducted a systematic review which came to similar conclusions regarding training for professionals such as healthcare professionals and the Police.

4.3 Characteristics of studies

All six studies explored the experiences of male victims of domestic abuse; however, one (Hine et al., 2022c) did this through information obtained by female Helpline practitioners. According to the CASP tool's reflection (CASP, 2024), only one of the included studies was considered of high quality. The studies were produced from four countries (England, Nigeria, Canada, and Jordan), thus increasing the generalisability of the findings. However, it is important to consider the cultural differences between the countries. Furthermore, two studies also focused on different ethnicities other than White British (Aborisade, 2024; Alsawalqa, 2023). Additionally, the studies took place in both developed and underdeveloped countries, which prevents bias and does not limit generalisability.

4.4 Quality of the studies

According to the CASP tool (CASP, 2024), only one study was reported to be of high quality. Two studies did not clearly state their aims (Dim, 2020; Alsawalqa, 2023). One study (Hine et al., 2022c) did not recruit participants appropriately, using a female Helpline practitioner instead of male victims; it might have obtained richer data if it had gathered information directly from the male victims. Furthermore, male victims may have been more comfortable with male practitioners, however this could be on a case by case basis. Hunt et al., (2018) explored the influence of gender in relation to support for callers with suicidal thoughts. It was found that gender may influence the caller's input. However, there is limited research on the impact of the gender of the helpline practitioners, further investigation would be required which this dissertation's word count and time limit does not

allow for. Within three studies, it was unclear if a relationship was considered between the participants and the researcher (Aborisade, 2024; Dim, 2020; Alsawalqa, 2023). One study did not consider the ethical issues (Taylor et al., 2021). Ethics is fundamental to consider when conducting research (Correia, 2023), especially when the topic is sensitive. Pinto et al., (2022) states that research on sensitive topics is important as it highlights those that are under-represented in research. Ellsberg and Heise (2002) state the main ethical issue is to prevent distress or harm. However, a large proportion of the research in this area are focused on female victims. Nonetheless, studies of this nature give the victim a voice (Marco and Rowlands, 2025). All studies used a qualitative methodology; this collected rich and in-depth data regarding domestic abuse. Testa et al., (2011) argue that mixed methods provide the most appropriate approach to research domestic abuse.

4.4.1 Sampling

The sample size ranged from 4 to 344; qualitative studies typically use smaller sample sizes to obtain rich data and an in-depth understanding of the area (Hennink and Kaiser, 2022). There is no set sample size for qualitative studies (Malterud et al., 2015). However, Guest et al., (2006) suggest that saturation usually occurs between 12 and 20 participants. Saturation occurs in qualitative research when the data produces no new theme (Saunders et al., 2017). Qualitative research typically uses purposeful sampling, whereas quantitative research tends to be random (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling obtains rich and relevant data (Palinkas et al., 2015). It is where the researcher selects participants based on specific characteristics (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The ages of participants varied; there was a lack of participants under the age of 40, which could limit the generalisability. Sexuality was only reported within one study (Westmarland

and Burrell, 2023) where the majority were heterosexual. However, if the sexualities were recorded in the other studies were varied, this would add to the generalisability.

4.4.2 Data collection

The majority of the studies used interviews to obtain the data, which can provide in-depth and rich data. However, they can be time-consuming, limit the sample size and costly (Schultze and Avital, 2011). Some interviews did not take place in person; therefore, the researcher could not obtain data on non-verbal cues such as body language (Abedi, 2023). Two studies used semi-structured interviews (Hine et al., 2022c; Alsawalqa, 2023), which allow for both structure and flexibility. Furthermore, the questions are partly consistent throughout each participant, whilst also providing space to delve deeper into the conversation (Rushin et al., 2022). However, they can be time-consuming, the flexibility allows the interviewer's bias to influence the results, and the conversation may lead to irrelevant information (Kallio et al., 2016). One study used an observational method (Westmarland and Burrell, 2023). Observational research allows the researcher to observe people and their behaviours, obtaining raw data directly. It is helpful when participants cannot articulate their experiences, as this is truly relevant to the sensitive topic the researcher was exploring. However, it can be time-consuming, there is a risk of bias from the research or observer, and it causes ethical issues such as lack of consent (Cohen et al., 2017). Another study used interviews (Aborisade, 2024) but did not specify what type; interviews are a standard method of obtaining qualitative data. In general, interviews gain in-depth data and provide an understanding of complex subjects such as domestic abuse. However, they can be time-consuming, and responses can be influenced by the researcher, which causes a bias (Cohen et al., 2017). Taylor et al., (2021) used an online questionnaire, which can be used to obtain a large sample size. It is also convenient for participants as they can access the questionnaire in their own time (Wright, 2017). They

also allow for anonymity, which could positively influence the participants' responses. However, this limits the participants as they require internet access to participate. They can attract a low response rate because a questionnaire can easily be ignored (Braun et al., 2021). Additionally, they may lack depth, and the researcher could misunderstand the writing because there is no method to clarify the participants' answers (Evans and Anil, 2005).

4.4.3 Data analysis

Four studies used thematic analysis (Hine et al., 2022c; Westmarland and Burrell, 2023; Dim, 2020; Taylor et al., 2021). Thematic analysis is standard within qualitative research; it highlights themes within research results (Vaismoradi and Snelgrove, 2019). This analysis method can be used across different subjects, making the results accessible and easy to read. However, it relies on the researcher's interpretation, which can introduce subjectivity and may also be time-consuming (Nowell et al., 2017). The other two studies employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Aborisade, 2024; Alsawalqa, 2023), which is used to understand lived experiences further. It allows for in-depth qualitative data to be collected and analysed (Smith and Osborn, 2015).

4.4.4 Positionality

In research, it is crucial to consider positionality, especially for qualitative studies. Positionality defines how a person's identity influences the relationship between the researchers and the participant. Positionality also refers to how a person's cultural and social identities influence their perspective and how they interact with others (Bourke, 2014). Research is a shared experience which is moulded by both the participants and the researcher (England, 1994). A key value of qualitative research is to consider the researcher's principles, morals, and biases (Bourke, 2014). Bourke (2014) also states that

instead of aiming to remove these influences, the researcher uses reflexivity to make their positionality clear. Unfortunately, none of the included studies wrote positionality statements, therefore it is unclear if there is any author bias present within the included studies this may decrease the credibility of the studies. However, all six studies declared there was no conflict of interest regarding research, authorship and/or publication of the articles (Hine et al., 2022c; Westmarland et al., 2023; Aborisade, 2024; Dim, 2020; Taylor et al., 2021; Alsawalqa, 2023). There was a fairly even split between female and male authors, thus reducing gender bias. The six studies also did not state whether any biases were present.

4.5 Theme 1: Unable to identify themselves as a victim

According to the data synthesis, there was a strong theme of the victim not being able to identify themselves as a victim, “I can’t be a victim of domestic abuse” (Hine et al., 2022c, pNP5604). In some cases, a professional will recognise the abuse first, “I am a victim of abuse, my solicitor said” (Westmarland and Burrell, 2023, p7). However, if professionals are not trained to identify male victims then they may be overlooked. Specialist training for legal professionals and frontline workers is available however, it may be outside of their remit, can come at a cost and be time consuming (ManKind Initiative, 2025c; Safe Lives, 2025a). If a male cannot identify himself as a victim, then he is less likely to access help (Hine et al., 2022c).

The participants used stereotypes of males to justify why they were not victims, “I am a red-blooded male...I’m a bit embarrassed about it...I am an alpha male” (Westmarland and Burrell, 2023, p7). Taylor et al. (2021) support this idea, stating that being labelled a “victim” challenges beliefs of being masculine. A male is often seen as in control, tough and strong, terms that are not associated with being a victim. Domestic abuse is often portrayed as a female-only issue; “I thought only women went through it” (Taylor et al.,

2021, pNP1827). This again can create another barrier for males to view themselves as a victim.

However, if a male is unable to identify himself as a victim, he is less likely to report it.

Therefore, the likely underrepresentation of male victims creates an inaccurate data within official statistics (Office for National Statistics, 2024b), which in turn impacts training and knowledge for healthcare professionals and Police. Additionally, the media, such as television shows, often portray the victim as female (ManKind Initiative, 2012). Domestic Abuse Education (2024) proposes ethical methods for the media to portray domestic abuse.

Due to this inability to identify themselves as victims, this limits our understanding of male victims compared to female victims (Scott-Storey et al., 2023). Furthermore, the lack of recognition of being a victim is a factor in why males do not disclose the abuse (Walker et al., 2020). This also impacts their ability to seek support for the abuse (Vail et al., 2025).

Males associate the word victim with the word “weak” and therefore do not want to be labelled a victim (Bates 2020a). Interestingly, a group of people were shown a male being victimised, and they felt less sympathy compared to a female being abused and thought that the male was in less need of physical and psychological support (Thomas and Hart, 2022). This idea is supported by a social experiment conducted by BBC Three, which recorded the public reaction to a female perpetrator and a male perpetrator. The public were more willing to intervene when the male was the perpetrator (BBC Three, 2016).

Despite this not being academic research, it demonstrates a simulated social experiment around male victims. Vail et al., (2025) state there is a lack of understanding and research on why males are unable to identify themselves as victims. Machado (2016) found that males were unlikely to self-identify as a victim as they felt shame and had a distrust in the support system.

Domestic abuse is not always obvious as it is not always physical abuse; it can begin with psychological abuse where the perpetrator controls the relationship and the victim however, it may then develop into physical abuse (Palmer et al., 2024; World Health Organization, 2012). Furthermore, the perpetrator can make the victim believe they are overreacting to their behaviour or making up the abuse; this is a form of gaslighting (King's College London, 2025). Additionally, domestic abuse is considered a hidden crime as it occurs at home, and most incidents are not reported to the Police (Women's Aid, 2025a).

4.6 Theme 2: Barriers in seeking help

There were apparent barriers when a males seek help for domestic abuse. The participants involved in the included studies emphasised that services were targeted for females and, therefore, were unable to engage in the services. "I first called a women's helpline, they listened to me and then rapidly the tone changed and she told me I only thought I was being abused and that I was the abuser" (Taylor et al., 2021, pNP18426). Furthermore, there were reports of gendered services, "I didn't involve social services or the police as I was told they would support the women, not the man" (Taylor et al., 2021, pNP18428). Therefore, this may suggest that males are less likely to seek support for domestic abuse (Taylor et al., 2021).

Women's Aid (2025b) argues that domestic abuse is a gendered crime, reporting that females are more likely to be seriously harmed. However, the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) does not state that domestic abuse only impacts females; it uses gender neutral language. Some participants noted that it depended on where they lived as to whether they received support or not. "It's almost a postcode lottery" (Hine et al., 2022c, pNP5611). This can be significantly limiting for a victim, as they may not have the support locally simply because of where they live.

Stereotypes of males can prevent them from seeking help. Society teaches males to be strong, stoic, and dominant; therefore, labelling themselves as a victim can go against these expectations (Ambrozewicz et al., 2024). Males may feel shame and embarrassment when seeking help; this may form a barrier (Macassa et al., 2025). They may feel as though they will not be believed, as females are typically smaller in stature than males and are seen as weaker (Quinn-Walker, 2024).

Hine et al., (2022a) highlighted that services for male victims are overstretched and under-resourced. “Things change, when we first started we got half a dozen calls a week now you get that in one morning” (Hine et al., 2022a, pNP5611).

Additionally, there is a limited space within refuges for male victims (ManKind Initiative, 2025a). Hines and Douglas (2010) suggest this is because, historically, females were predominantly the victims; therefore, more resources were allocated to support them. Furthermore, if males underreport domestic abuse, then services cannot obtain an accurate picture of how many males are impacted by domestic abuse and require support.

4.7 Theme 3: Interaction with professionals

The participants reported adverse interactions with professionals, particularly the Police, who are often the first to respond to domestic abuse incidents (Davies and Barlow, 2024). The Police have a duty of care towards male victims of domestic abuse (DAA, 2021); however, the data that was obtained from these studies suggest a different viewpoint ((Dim and Lysova, 2021). “The police don’t see him as the victim; they see him as a perpetrator” (Hine et al., 2022c, pNP5608). Some participants were mistaken for the perpetrator, “because they’re men, so they must be the perpetrators” (Hine et al., 2022c, pNP2608). Several participants felt they were being mocked by the professional when stating that a female was abusing them. “When I told the officer that my wife had been abusing me...he asked me to repeat myself a couple of times, visibly laughing”

(Aborisade, 2024, p21). This can be very intimidating to the victim. Males are less likely to seek support from a professional due to distrust in services, lack of services and stigmatisation (Vail et al., 2025). Males are also more likely to be frustrated with the Police's actions compared to female victims (Dim and Lysova, 2021). Felson (2008) found that males were more likely face arrest compared to females. Research has demonstrated that when males report their concerns to the Police, no report is made, or they do not receive a response (Dim and Lysova, 2021). Furthermore, there was a lack of empathy and inclination to listen to the male victim (McCarrick et al., 2016). "On one occasion, while being held in a cell in anticipation of questioning, I was told by one higher-ranking officer that I was filthy scum" (Taylor et al., 2021, pNP18427). The Police were reported in one study to be the least helpful service to male domestic abuse victims (Douglas and Hines, 2011). Research has demonstrated that male victims have not been treated fairly in the courtroom; some claim that, as a result they have lost custody of their children (Hine et al., 2007). The courtroom was also used to victimise the male further (Dim and Lysova, 2021). Male victims may feel more comfortable discussing and disclosing to services not linked to law enforcement, such as charities (Quinn-Walker, 2024).

Research demonstrates that healthcare professionals lack the education and resources to support male victims (Quinn-Walker, 2024), which can cause the victim to become trapped within a cycle of abuse. It can also lead to overlooked opportunities for innovation to support the male victim (House of Commons Library, 2021). It also makes the male victim less likely to seek support in the future. Furthermore, males do not seek help as this shows their vulnerabilities (Verdonk et al, 2010).

4.8 Theme 4: Types of abuse

The DAA (2021) states that domestic abuse can be physical, sexual, controlling, economic and psychological. Previously, domestic abuse was regarded as domestic violence

(Burton, 2023), however, domestic abuse covers more types of abuse. Understanding of male victims of domestic abuse is limited (Scott-Storey et al., 2022), therefore exploring types of abuse is difficult. Throughout the articles there was a presence of violence, “I’ve been physically hit by her in my home and in public and had things thrown at me” (Westmarland and Burrell, 2023, p12). Machado et al., (2017) found that male victims experience a development of physical aggression within domestic abusive relationships. Various levels of physical abuse were reported within the selected studies; however, it was identified that they abuse started with psychological abuse, this is also suggested within NHS (2025a) guidance for domestic abuse. Physical abuse is prevalent towards female victims (Caldwell et al., 2012); however, male victims are also impacted (Hines et al., 2007). Nonetheless, Macassa et al., (2025) reports that male victims reported more psychological abuse compared to physical abuse. However, Hine et al., (2022b) report that males are more likely to experience physical abuse compared to females who have been noted to report sexual abuse. These two researchers concluded with contradictory results, demonstrating the complexity of domestic abuse, further investigation would be required to determine the reasons behind this difference. The World Health Organisation (2024) reports that 1 in 3 females experience physical abuse from a partner; the statistics for males are not stated. Physical abuse is the most noticeable and reported type of abuse, as it can often leave unexplained injuries (Office for National Statistics, 2025). Participants reported that the perpetrator used a weapon to physically abuse their victim. “On this single occasion, she hit me with a pestle while she was pounding yam for lunch” (Aborisade, 2024, p21). However, other research demonstrates that it is more common for a male to use weapons against a female (Women’s Aid, 2025).

4.9 Conclusion

The information obtained from this systematic review is reflected and backed up by existing research, which highlights the need for further education and training for professionals who interact with male victims of domestic abuse. It also strengthens the idea that more research is required in this area. The results suggest that males may remain hidden due to the barriers faced by victims, and there is a lack of positive interaction with professionals. Greater awareness of male victims of domestic abuse is needed for professionals to support them effectively.

Chapter 5 Critique of this systematic review

5.1 Introduction

It is important to reflect on the systematic review as a part of the research process, reflection prevents inaccurate or biased conclusions (Shaheen et al., 2023). Systematic reviews have a great impact on decision making within the healthcare sector (Shaheen et al., 2023; Murthy et al., 2012).

5.2 Strengths of the systematic review

This systematic review was conducted to determine why male victims of domestic abuse are considered hidden. The use of the PICO framework ensured that this systematic review remained focused on answering the research question. Six primary studies were used after evaluating their suitability towards the inclusion criteria. Using a small number of high quality studies ensures that the systematic review's results are valid and reliable (CASP, 2025d). The search generated a variety of research using predefined search terms. The CASP tool (CASP, 2024) was useful to determine the quality of each study. At the moment, there is a lack of systematic reviews exploring male victims of domestic abuse when compared to research on female victims (Ambrozewicz et al., 2024; Hine et al., 2022c; Bates, 2020b; Lysova et al., 2020). This dissertation adds to the necessary and important research in this area, which in turn influences future policies, practice and funding. An important strength to consider was the author's prior knowledge, professional training and experience in this area.

5.3 Limitations of the systematic review

A substantial disadvantage is that there was only one reviewer for this systematic review. Since it was part of a master's dissertation, there was only one person to conduct the

review. This systematic review was the first one the author conducted; hence, the author lacked experience in this area. This could have contributed to selection bias, lack of a detailed search or errors within the data analysis.

The systematic review could be considered limited because it focused only on qualitative studies. The search yielded several mixed methods; therefore, it may have obtained more data if mixed methods were included. However, the mixed methods studies varied in quality.

Furthermore, the author was female and had not experienced domestic abuse first hand, therefore this could limit the author's understanding and knowledge. On the contrary, the author has supported domestic abuse victims both male and female. Domestic abuse is complex, it can be bi-directional, a victim can be a perpetrator and vice versa, due to time and word count limitations this could not be fully explored. It may be beneficial to explore this specifically in the future to additionally support victims and build upon professional's knowledge and experience. It is also vital to consider the LGBTQIA+ community as this is another under-researched area (Safe Lives, 2025b).

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Conclusion

The thematic synthesis supports that male victims of domestic abuse are hidden, through their inability to recognise they are a victim, barriers that they face seeking support and their lack of positive interaction with professionals. It also demonstrated the prevalence of physical abuse within a domestic abusive relationship. This suggests that further research needs to take place to understand male victims. Also, it demonstrates that professionals such as the Police and healthcare professionals need additional education and training in supporting and identifying male victims. It further suggests that, as a society, we need to recognise that males can be victims of domestic abuse as well as females and break down the stigma around males seeking help for domestic abuse. These factors could aid males in seeking help and support for domestic abuse and will make it a visible crime rather than a hidden one. The studies used for this systematic review varied in quality. It was helpful that mainly male participants were used; however, it would have been more dependable for Hine et al. (2022) to have used male participants rather than female participants. This would have meant they interviewed male victims directly; this may have obtained richer data. This systematic review has contributed to the ever-growing body of research in this area; however, further development is needed to make a real difference. The results demonstrated that domestic abuse is still viewed as a gendered crime; this needs to change, as evidence suggests that males are also victims of domestic abuse. If this does not change, males will continue to face barriers when seeking help for domestic abuse. It is positive that polices such as DAA (2021) recognise that domestic abuse impacts everyone, but this is not fully represented within research.

6.2 Implications for practice

Male victims of domestic abuse have been overlooked for a long time; this research highlights the need for improved training, policies and practice to support male victims of domestic abuse effectively. The Police were highlighted within the systematic review as creating a barrier for victims; this therefore suggests that further training is needed for this profession to enable them to support male victims of domestic abuse more effectively.

6.3 Implications for future research

Further research is required within this area to improve support for male victims of domestic abuse. The DAA (2021) protects everyone from domestic abuse, not just females. We all have a duty of care to safeguard everyone, especially professionals such as the Police and healthcare workers. Awareness of male victims of domestic abuse needs to improve; this can be done if more research is produced in this area.

6.4 Conflict of interest

The reviewer has no financial support or conflicts of interest to declare.

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Appendix 1 CASP qualitative checklist

CNSP

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

CASP Checklist: For Qualitative Research

Reviewer Name:	
Paper Title:	
Author:	
Web Link:	
Appraisal Date:	

During
critical
appraisal,
never
make

assumptions about what the researchers have done. If it is not possible to tell, use the “Can’t tell” response box. If you can’t tell, at best it means the researchers have not been explicit or transparent, but at worst it could mean the researchers have not undertaken a particular task or process. Once you’ve finished the critical appraisal, if there are a large number of “Can’t tell” responses, consider whether the findings of the study are trustworthy and interpret the results with caution.

Section A Are the results valid?	
1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Can't Tell

<p>CONSIDER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>what was the goal of the research?</i> • <i>why was it thought important?</i> • <i>its relevance</i> 	
2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Can't Tell
<p>CONSIDER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants</i> • <i>Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal?</i> 	
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Can't Tell
<p>CONSIDER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>if the researcher has justified the research design (e.g., have they discussed how they decided which method to use)</i> 	
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Can't Tell
<p>CONSIDER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected</i> • <i>If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study</i> • <i>If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)</i> 	
5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Can't Tell

<p>CONSIDER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If the setting for the data collection was justified</i> • <i>If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.)</i> • <i>If the researcher has justified the methods chosen</i> • <i>If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews are conducted, or did they use a topic guide)</i> • <i>If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why</i> • <i>If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.)</i> • <i>If the researcher has discussed saturation of data</i> 	
<p>6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Can't Tell</p>
<p>CONSIDER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location</i> • <i>How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design</i> 	
<p>Section B: What are the results?</p>	
<p>7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Can't Tell</p>
<p>CONSIDER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained</i> • <i>If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)</i> 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>If approval has been sought from the ethics committee</i> 	
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Can't Tell
<p>CONSIDER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process</i> <i>If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data</i> <i>Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process</i> <i>If sufficient data are presented to support the findings</i> <i>To what extent contradictory data are taken into account</i> <i>Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation</i> 	
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Can't Tell
<p>CONSIDER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>If the findings are explicit</i> <i>If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments</i> <i>If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)</i> <i>If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question</i> 	
<p>Section C: Will the results help locally?</p>	
10. How valuable is the research?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Can't Tell
<p>CONSIDER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g., do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research-based literature)</i> <i>If they identify new areas where research is necessary</i> <i>If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other</i> 	

populations or considered other ways the research may be used

APPRAISAL SUMMARY: *List key points from your critical appraisal that need to be considered when assessing the validity of the results and their usefulness in decision-making.*

Positive/Methodologically sound	Negative/Relatively poor methodology	Unknowns

Appendix 2 Key Characteristics of included studies

Citation	Country Language Location	Aims	Paradigm Study Design	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis	Sample Size	Participants Characteristics
1. Hine, B, Bates, E and Wallace, S (2022) I Have Guys Call Me and Say ‘I Can’t Be the Victim of Domestic Abuse’’: Exploring the Experiences of Telephone Support Providers for Male Victims of Domestic Violence and Abuse. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 37, (7-8).	England English University of West London	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make available more information about help-seeking male victims. 2. Explore the experiences of male victims 	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic Analysis	4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Female 2. Aged between 43-69 years old 3. Call handlers at a UK-based organisation 4. They have 21 months and 14 years of experience within the area and organisation.
2. Westmarland, N and Burrell, S (2023) ‘I’m a red-blooded male’: Understanding men’s experiences of domestic abuse through a feminist lens. Criminology and Criminal Justice, 1-17	England English Durham University	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explore the methods in which male victims of domestic abuse draw upon expectations about masculinity, using the "Man Box" as its analytical framework 	Qualitative	Observational	Thematic Analysis	344	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Male 2. Aged between 19 and 85 years old 3. Identified as White British, Asian/British, Asian, African/British 4. The majority were heterosexual 5. Used 'men's Advice Line run by Respect
Aborisade, R (2024)	Nigeria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explore the 	Qualitative	Interviews	Interpretati	52	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Male

Report and Risk Being Called a Weakling?: Perspectives of Male Victims on Sociocultural Barriers to Reporting Domestic Abuse in Nigeria. <i>Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma</i> , 33(1), pp 13–31	English Olabisi Onabanjo University	influences that interact with decisions of abused males, sociocultural barriers of reporting abuse, and the social reactions towards victims after reporting.			ve Phenomenological Analysis		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Most of those aged between 26 and 73 were below 40. 3. Living in mainland Nigeria and the Island of Lagos State. 4. Identified their ethnicity as Yoruba, Igbo, Urhobo and Itshekiri, Ijaw, Beno, Tiv, Igala and Erira. 5. Only six were separated from their partner.
4. Dim, E. E. (2020). Experiences of Physical and Psychological Violence Against Male Victims in Canada: A Qualitative Study. <i>International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology</i> , 65(9), pp 1029-1054.	Canada English University of Toronto	1. Seek understanding of the impact of male victims of IPV.	Qualitative	Telephone interviews	Thematic Analysis	16	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Male 2. Between 30 and 70 onwards, most were over 45 years old. 3. Lived in Canada, mainly Ontario 4. All were separated from their abusive partner 5. Participants' occupations varied from unemployment to being an aircraft technician.

5. Taylor, J, Bates, E, Colosi, A and Creer, A (2021) Barriers to Men's Help Seeking for Intimate Partner Violence. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 37 (19-20).	England English University of Cumbria	1. Explore the barriers to help-seeking for male victims of domestic abuse in a heterosexual relationship .	Qualitative	Online questionnaire	Thematic Analysis	147	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Male 2. Most aged between 27 and 74 were between 40 and 59. 3. The majority identified as British; some participants identified as European, US citizens, Australian, New Zealand, or Canadian. 4. The majority of participants had children. 5. Most participants were out of the abusive relationships.
6. Alsawalqa, R (2023) A qualitative study to investigate male victims' experiences of female-perpetrated domestic abuse in Jordan. Current Psychology, 42 (7).	Jordan English University of Jordan	1. Investigate male victims of female-perpetrated domestic abuse in Jordan.	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis	33	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Male 2. Aged between 29 and 60 years old 3. Married 4. From Anman, Jordan 5. The majority had children

Appendix 3 Outcomes of included studies

Citation	Outcomes
Hine et al., (2022c)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stereotypes of a male influenced the manner in which they responded. 2. Males who called the Helpline experienced different types of abuse, including coercive control, physical, sexual, psychological and financial. 3. Reluctance to see themselves as victims and seek help. 4. Victims have experienced issues with their physical and mental health and are unable to have access to their children. 5. Victims felt isolated from their families and friends and could not talk about their experiences.
Westmarland et al., (2023)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Victims did not feel like they were meeting the expectations of a “real man” (p6) and felt weak. 2. Males should be self-reliant and independent. 3. Some participants found it easier to email than call the Helpline. 4. There were rigid gender expectations; males should provide financially for their household, and females should oversee the housework and childcare.
Aborisade (2024)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Male victims did not want to report the abuse for fear of social stigmatisation, socio-religious status and loss of security. 2. Most of the participants reported that the abuse began after they were married. 3. The participants who faced severe abuse from their partner showed an unwillingness to report the abuse.
Dim (2020)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Most of the participants had experienced psychological and physical abuse from their female partners. 2. Female partners were unpredictable, which caused the victims to feel threatened. 3. Male participants had a distrust of females and intimate relationships.

Taylor et al., (2021)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Males are seen as a stigmatised gender. 2. Some barriers prevent a male from seeking help. 3. Males did not know that males could experience domestic abuse. 4. More education and training are required to change policies.
Alsawalqa (2023)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants experienced a range of abuse, from physical to emotional abuse. 2. Perpetrators used tactics to keep their partner in the relationship, such as children, isolation, sex and money. 3. The perpetrator's family often interferes with the couple's life.