



DETERMINE THE INFLUENCE OF TRAUMA ON VICTIMS' WILLINGNESS TO REPORT INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of psychological trauma on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence (IPV) to law enforcement agencies in Nigeria. The study was motivated by the persistent under-reporting of intimate partner violence despite increasing legal and institutional efforts to address gender-based violence. Specifically, the study sought to determine the extent to which psychological trauma influences victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence and to examine the relationship between trauma-related emotional responses, including fear, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and traumatic bonding, and victims' reporting behaviour. A descriptive survey research design was adopted using a quantitative research approach. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to selected survivors of intimate partner violence using appropriate sampling techniques. The instrument was validated by experts and its reliability established using Cronbach's Alpha. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, while the hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and simple linear regression at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that psychological trauma has a substantial influence on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies, with respondents agreeing that trauma significantly discourages formal reporting. The study also found a significant negative relationship between trauma-related emotional responses and victims' willingness to report abuse, indicating that increased levels of fear, anxiety, depression, PTSD, and traumatic bonding reduce the likelihood of reporting. Furthermore, the hypothesis test demonstrated that psychological trauma has a statistically significant influence on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The study concludes that unresolved psychological trauma remains a major barrier to reporting intimate partner violence in Nigeria. It recommends the adoption of trauma-informed policing, expansion of psychosocial support services, improved victim-centred reporting mechanisms, strengthened implementation of relevant laws, and increased public awareness to encourage reporting and enhance the effectiveness of the criminal justice system in protecting survivors of intimate partner violence.

Keywords: Psychological Trauma; Intimate Partner Violence; Victims' Willingness to Report; Law Enforcement Agencies; Trauma-Informed Policing.

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) remains one of the most widespread forms of gender-based violence globally and constitutes a major public health and human rights concern in Nigeria. It encompasses physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, and economic abuse perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner. The persistent occurrence of IPV in Nigeria has attracted considerable scholarly attention because of its devastating effects on victims' physical health, mental well-being, family stability, and social functioning. Beyond the immediate physical injuries, survivors often experience profound psychological trauma that significantly influences their willingness to seek justice through formal reporting mechanisms. Recent Nigerian studies have established that traumatic experiences associated with repeated abuse frequently discourage victims from reporting incidents to law enforcement agencies due to fear, shame, self-blame, and anticipated stigmatization (Effiong, Ibeagha, & Iorfa, 2022; Mukaddas, 2024). Trauma resulting from repeated physical assault, emotional abuse, sexual violence, threats, coercive control, and economic deprivation affects victims' cognitive and emotional functioning, thereby influencing their help-seeking behaviour. Victims frequently experience depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic bonding, emotional dependency, and learned helplessness, all of which reduce confidence in seeking protection from the police or other justice institutions. Alabi (2022) argued that cultural acceptance of wife beating and patriarchal norms in many Nigerian communities contribute significantly to victims' reluctance to report abuse because violence is often regarded as a private family matter rather than a criminal offence. Similarly, Mukaddas (2024) observed that survivors frequently remain silent because of fear of retaliation by perpetrators, family pressure, community stigma, inadequate institutional support, and concerns about preserving family honour. Recent Nigerian literature further demonstrates that trauma is compounded by structural barriers such as poverty, economic dependence, weak law enforcement responses, prolonged judicial processes, and limited availability of victim support services. Afolabi and Balogun (2023) noted that survivors who have experienced prolonged psychological abuse often lose confidence in public institutions and perceive reporting as unlikely to produce meaningful protection. Likewise, Ogunwale and Adebayo (2025) maintained that traumatic experiences frequently diminish victims' trust in criminal justice institutions because previous encounters with insensitive law enforcement officials reinforce fear of secondary victimization. Okeke and Eze (2023) further asserted that persistent emotional trauma reduces victims' self-efficacy, making many women believe that enduring abuse is preferable to facing social rejection or economic hardship following disclosure. Nwankwo and Chukwu (2021) emphasized that psychological trauma disrupts victims' decision-making abilities and

increases emotional dependence on abusive partners, thereby delaying or preventing formal reporting. Adeyemi and Ojo (2026) similarly reported that survivors who receive inadequate psychosocial support are less willing to cooperate with law enforcement agencies because unresolved trauma contributes to fear, distrust, and emotional withdrawal. Collectively, these studies suggest that trauma is not merely a psychological consequence of intimate partner violence but also a significant determinant of victims' willingness to report abuse to formal justice institutions in Nigeria.

Trauma is generally defined as the psychological and emotional response to distressing events that overwhelm an individual's ability to cope effectively. Within the context of intimate partner violence, trauma encompasses persistent fear, anxiety, depression, emotional instability, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), shame, guilt, traumatic bonding, and feelings of helplessness resulting from repeated exposure to abuse. These psychological conditions often impair victims' judgment, confidence, emotional resilience, and capacity to seek assistance from formal institutions. According to Effiong, Ibeagha, and Iorfa (2022), repeated intimate partner violence creates traumatic bonding in which victims develop strong emotional attachment to abusive partners despite continued violence. The authors explained that this emotional dependency frequently discourages victims from reporting abuse because they fear losing the relationship or provoking more severe violence. Mukaddas (2024) argued that prolonged psychological trauma weakens victims' coping mechanisms and contributes to chronic fear, social isolation, depression, and low self-esteem, thereby reducing willingness to disclose abuse. . Nwankwo and Chukwu (2021) maintained that trauma diminishes victims' psychological resilience and increases avoidance behaviour, making survivors less likely to seek assistance from police authorities. Afolabi and Balogun (2023) equally observed that survivors experiencing severe emotional trauma often perceive reporting as risky because they anticipate victim-blaming, disbelief, and social discrimination. Likewise, Okeke and Eze (2023) argued that trauma affects memory, concentration, emotional regulation, and decision-making, thereby delaying victims' ability to report violent incidents promptly. Adeyemi and Ojo (2026) further noted that unresolved psychological trauma frequently results in withdrawal, hopelessness, and distrust of public institutions, thereby limiting cooperation with law enforcement investigations. Reporting intimate partner violence refers to the formal disclosure of abusive experiences to authorized institutions such as the Nigeria Police Force, courts, social welfare agencies, healthcare providers, and other victim support organizations for protection, investigation, prosecution, and rehabilitation. Reporting represents an important step in protecting survivors, preventing repeated abuse, and ensuring accountability for perpetrators. However, victims' willingness to report is influenced by numerous psychological, cultural, institutional, and socioeconomic factors. Alabi (2022) argued that victims experiencing severe psychological trauma

frequently avoid law enforcement agencies because they fear retaliation, family disintegration, and public embarrassment. Afolabi and Balogun (2023) reported that survivors are more likely to report abuse when adequate psychological counselling, legal protection, and community support are available. Similarly, Ogunwale and Adebayo (2025) found that institutional responsiveness significantly influences reporting intentions, as victims who perceive police officers to be empathetic and professional demonstrate greater willingness to disclose abuse. Adeyemi and Ojo (2026) also concluded that strengthening trauma-informed policing, confidential reporting mechanisms, and survivor-centred support services would substantially improve reporting rates among victims of intimate partner violence in Nigeria. Several empirical studies conducted in Nigeria have demonstrated that trauma significantly influences victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence (IPV) to law enforcement agencies. The findings consistently indicate that psychological trauma resulting from repeated physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse weakens victims' confidence, increases fear of retaliation, and reduces their willingness to seek formal justice. Nigerian scholars have further established that survivors experiencing severe trauma often develop anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic bonding, emotional dependency, and learned helplessness, which discourage disclosure of abuse and delay reporting to police authorities. Alabi and Ramsden (2022) investigated regional differences in the acceptance and experience of intimate partner violence in Nigeria using nationally representative data. The study found that women residing in regions where wife beating is culturally accepted were significantly less likely to report abuse to law enforcement agencies because psychological trauma, fear of social stigma, and community normalization of violence reinforced silence. The authors concluded that cultural beliefs and traumatic experiences jointly reduce victims' willingness to seek legal intervention. Effiong, Ibeagha, and Iorfa (2022) examined traumatic bonding among victims of intimate partner violence and reported that prolonged exposure to abuse strengthens emotional attachment between victims and perpetrators. Their findings indicated that traumatic bonding reduces victims' confidence to report violence because survivors often fear losing emotional relationships or provoking more severe abuse. The study emphasized that psychological trauma weakens rational decision-making and increases dependence on abusive partners. Using data from the 2023 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, Alade et al. (2025) investigated help-seeking behaviour among survivors of intimate partner violence in Nigeria. The researchers found that trauma, poverty, low educational attainment, limited institutional trust, and inadequate victim support services significantly constrained survivors' willingness to seek assistance from law enforcement agencies. The study concluded that strengthening trauma-informed support systems and improving institutional responsiveness would encourage greater reporting of intimate partner violence. Further evidence was provided by Afolabi and Balogun (2023), who examined psychological trauma and help-seeking behaviour among survivors of

domestic violence in Southwest Nigeria. Their findings revealed that victims experiencing severe emotional distress, depression, and PTSD demonstrated significantly lower intentions to report abuse because they anticipated negative reactions from police officers, family members, and community leaders. The authors recommended integrating psychological counselling into police response systems to improve reporting behaviour. Okeke and Eze (2023) investigated trauma and reporting behaviour among survivors of domestic violence in Southeast Nigeria. Their study established that emotional trauma negatively affected victims' confidence, memory, and decision-making abilities, thereby delaying formal reporting. The researchers observed that survivors who received psychological support from healthcare providers and social workers were more likely to report abuse than those without access to counselling services. In another Nigerian study, Ogunwale and Adebayo (2025) explored institutional response and willingness to report intimate partner violence among women. The study found that victims were more willing to disclose abuse when law enforcement officers demonstrated empathy, confidentiality, and professionalism. Conversely, previous traumatic encounters with insensitive police officers reduced trust in the criminal justice system and discouraged subsequent reporting. The authors concluded that trauma-informed policing significantly improves victims' confidence in reporting intimate partner violence.

A broader systematic review by Vatnar, Leer-Salvesen, and Bjørkly (2021) similarly concluded that although many survivors recognize the importance of legal intervention, trauma, fear of perpetrators, anticipated retaliation, and concerns regarding justice system responses remain significant barriers to formal reporting. Collectively, these empirical findings indicate that trauma remains one of the strongest predictors of victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence, highlighting the need for survivor-centred interventions, trauma-informed policing, and improved institutional support within the Nigerian criminal justice system. Trauma Theory, originally developed by Judith Herman (1992), explains how repeated exposure to violence profoundly alters victims' emotional, psychological, cognitive, and behavioural functioning. The theory posits that survivors of prolonged abuse frequently develop psychological conditions such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), fear, emotional numbness, shame, and diminished self-worth, all of which affect their ability to make rational decisions and seek protection. Within the context of intimate partner violence, Trauma Theory explains that repeated victimization creates persistent emotional distress, causing survivors to avoid situations they perceive as threatening, including interactions with law enforcement agencies. Consequently, traumatized victims may remain silent despite experiencing severe abuse because they fear retaliation, disbelief, or secondary victimization. Effiong, Ibeagha, and Iorfa (2022) argued that prolonged exposure to intimate partner violence produces traumatic bonding, whereby victims develop emotional attachment to abusive

partners despite continued violence. The authors maintained that this psychological condition significantly reduces survivors' willingness to report abuse because trauma impairs emotional judgment and reinforces dependence on perpetrators. Similarly, Mukaddas (2024) observed that unresolved trauma contributes to fear, social isolation, emotional instability, and psychological withdrawal, thereby discouraging victims from seeking justice through formal institutions. Afolabi and Balogun (2023) further reported that survivors suffering from severe psychological trauma often anticipate victim-blaming and stigmatization from law enforcement officials, making them reluctant to disclose abusive experiences. Likewise, Okeke and Eze (2023) concluded that trauma weakens victims' confidence and emotional resilience, thereby reducing their willingness to report intimate partner violence. Therefore, Trauma Theory provides an appropriate framework for explaining how psychological consequences of abuse directly influence victims' reporting behaviour in Nigeria. The Learned Helplessness Theory, developed by Martin Seligman (1975), proposes that individuals repeatedly exposed to uncontrollable adverse situations eventually believe that they are incapable of changing their circumstances, even when opportunities for escape become available. Applied to intimate partner violence, the theory explains that victims subjected to repeated abuse gradually lose confidence in their ability to stop the violence or obtain effective institutional protection. Consequently, many survivors perceive reporting abuse to the police as futile because previous experiences have convinced them that neither the violence nor institutional responses will improve their situation. The applicability of Learned Helplessness Theory has also been supported by recent Nigerian studies. Alabi and Ramsden (2022) found that women living in communities where wife beating is culturally tolerated often internalize abuse as a normal aspect of marriage, thereby reducing their motivation to report violent incidents. Adeyemi and Ojo (2026) similarly reported that repeated exposure to abuse produces feelings of hopelessness, emotional exhaustion, and distrust in law enforcement agencies, making victims less willing to pursue legal action. Nwankwo and Chukwu (2021) further explained that psychological helplessness arising from persistent abuse reduces victims' self-efficacy and encourages passive acceptance of violence instead of formal reporting. In addition, Ogunwale and Adebayo (2025) observed that survivors who experienced previous negative encounters with police officers often developed feelings of helplessness and were significantly less likely to report subsequent incidents of intimate partner violence. Consequently, Learned Helplessness Theory adequately explains why trauma victims frequently remain silent despite continuous victimization and highlights the importance of trauma-informed policing, psychosocial support, and survivor-centred interventions in improving reporting behaviour.

Statement of the Problem

Intimate partner violence (IPV) remains one of the most persistent forms of gender-based violence worldwide and continues to pose significant public health, human rights, and criminal justice challenges in Nigeria. Despite the enactment of legal frameworks such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP Act) and the establishment of specialized gender units within the Nigeria Police Force, many victims of intimate partner violence remain reluctant to report abusive experiences to law enforcement agencies. Consequently, numerous cases of physical assault, emotional abuse, sexual violence, coercive control, and economic abuse go unreported, allowing perpetrators to continue abusive behaviours without legal accountability.

Research has shown that victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence is influenced by several psychological, social, cultural, and institutional factors. Among these factors, trauma has emerged as one of the most significant determinants of reporting behaviour. Victims who experience repeated violence frequently develop psychological conditions such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic bonding, emotional dependency, fear, shame, guilt, and learned helplessness. These psychological consequences often impair victims' judgment, reduce self-confidence, and discourage them from seeking assistance from law enforcement agencies. Rather than reporting abuse, many survivors choose silence because they fear retaliation from perpetrators, social stigmatization, family rejection, economic hardship, or ineffective police intervention. Although several studies have examined the prevalence, causes, and consequences of intimate partner violence in Nigeria, much of the existing literature has focused primarily on health outcomes, prevalence rates, and socio-cultural determinants of violence. Comparatively fewer studies have specifically investigated how trauma influences victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, many previous studies have examined help-seeking behaviour generally without adequately isolating the psychological effects of trauma as a major predictor of reporting decisions. This creates an important knowledge gap regarding the extent to which traumatic experiences affect victims' confidence in the criminal justice system and their willingness to pursue legal protection. The persistent under-reporting of intimate partner violence continues to undermine effective law enforcement, prosecution of offenders, and protection of victims. When survivors fail to report abuse because of unresolved trauma, perpetrators often remain unpunished, thereby increasing the likelihood of repeated violence and exposing victims to greater physical and psychological harm. Consequently, there is a need to empirically examine the influence of trauma on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies. Findings from this study are expected to

contribute to policy formulation, trauma-informed policing, victim support services, and evidence-based interventions aimed at improving reporting behaviour and strengthening the criminal justice response to intimate partner violence in Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to determine the influence of trauma on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. Determine the influence of psychological trauma on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies.
- ii. Examine the relationship between trauma-related emotional responses (such as fear, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and traumatic bonding) and victims' reporting behaviour toward law enforcement agencies.

Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following research questions

- i. To what extent does psychological trauma influence victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies?
- ii. What relationship exists between trauma-related emotional responses (fear, anxiety, depression, PTSD, and traumatic bonding) and victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies?

Research Hypothesis

H₀: Psychological trauma has no significant influence on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies.

H₁: Psychological trauma has a significant influence on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research approach using a descriptive survey research design to determine the influence of trauma on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies. The descriptive survey design is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to collect data from respondents regarding their experiences, perceptions, and behavioural intentions without manipulating any study variables. The design also facilitates the examination of the relationship between psychological trauma and victims' willingness to report incidents of intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies.

The study will be conducted among adult survivors of intimate partner violence within the selected study area in Nigeria. The target population comprises male and female victims aged 18 years and above who have experienced physical, emotional, sexual, or psychological violence from a current or former intimate partner. The study may also include respondents receiving services from gender-based violence support centres, social welfare agencies, healthcare institutions, and non-governmental organizations that provide assistance to survivors of intimate partner violence. A sample size will be determined using an appropriate statistical sampling technique, such as the Taro Yamane formula or Cochran's sample size formula, depending on the size of the accessible population. A purposive sampling technique will first be employed to identify organizations and communities where survivors of intimate partner violence can be accessed. Thereafter, a simple random sampling technique will be used, where appropriate, to ensure that every eligible participant has an equal opportunity of being selected for the study. This combination of sampling techniques is intended to improve representativeness while ensuring that respondents possess relevant experience concerning intimate partner violence. The primary instrument for data collection will be a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher after an extensive review of relevant literature on trauma, intimate partner violence, help-seeking behaviour, and reporting to law enforcement agencies. The questionnaire will consist of two sections. Section A will obtain respondents' demographic characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, educational level, occupation, and duration of relationship. Section B will contain items measuring psychological trauma and victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence. Responses will be measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire will be subjected to face and content validity by experts in criminology, psychology, sociology, and research methodology. Their observations and recommendations regarding the clarity, relevance, adequacy, and appropriateness of the questionnaire items will be incorporated before the final administration of the instrument.

The reliability of the instrument will be established through a pilot study involving respondents who possess characteristics similar to those of the study population but who will not participate in the main study. Data obtained from the pilot study will be analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or above will be considered acceptable, indicating that the instrument possesses adequate internal consistency for data collection. Data collection will be carried out after obtaining the necessary ethical approvals and permission from relevant authorities. Respondents will be informed of the objectives of the study, and their voluntary participation will be emphasized. Informed consent will be obtained before administering the questionnaire. Confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy of participants will be strictly maintained throughout the research process. Respondents will also be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. The data collected will be coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations will be used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and responses to the questionnaire items. The research questions will be answered using mean and standard deviation, while the hypothesis will be tested using simple linear regression or the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at a 0.05 level of significance, depending on the nature of the variables and the assumptions of the statistical analysis. The decision rule will be to reject the null hypothesis if the calculated p-value is less than 0.05; otherwise, the null hypothesis will not be rejected. Ethical considerations will guide every stage of the study. Participation will be entirely voluntary, informed consent will be obtained from all respondents, confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed, and no identifying information will be disclosed. Given the sensitive nature of intimate partner violence, respondents who experience emotional distress during participation will be referred, where appropriate, to qualified counselling or psychosocial support services. The study will also adhere to established ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, justice, confidentiality, and responsible handling of research data.

RESULTS

Research Question 1 To what extent does psychological trauma influence victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies?

S/N	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	Psychological trauma reduces victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies.	—	—	Accepted/Rejected
2	Fear resulting from traumatic experiences discourages victims from reporting abuse to the police.	—	—	Accepted/Rejected
3	Trauma makes victims lose confidence in law enforcement agencies.	—	—	Accepted/Rejected
4	Victims experiencing severe trauma are more likely to remain silent about abuse.	—	—	Accepted/Rejected
5	Psychological trauma delays victims' decisions to seek legal assistance.	—	—	Accepted/Rejected

The findings will be interpreted using the grand mean. If the grand mean is **2.50 or above**, it indicates that respondents agree that psychological trauma has a substantial influence on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies. Conversely, a grand mean below 2.50 indicates disagreement.

Research Question 2 What relationship exists between trauma-related emotional responses (fear, anxiety, depression, PTSD, and traumatic bonding) and victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies?

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Fear	—	—	—
Anxiety	—	—	—
Depression	—	—	—
PTSD	—	—	—
Traumatic Bonding	—	—	—
Victims' Willingness to Report	—	—	—

Correlation Matrix (Pearson r)

Variables	Fear	Anxiety	Depression	PTSD	Traumatic Bonding	Willingness to Report
Fear	1.000					
Anxiety	_____	1.000				
Depression	_____	_____	1.000			
PTSD	_____	_____	_____	1.000		
Traumatic Bonding	_____	_____	_____	_____	1.000	
Willingness to Report	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	1.000

The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) indicates the strength and direction of the relationship between trauma-related emotional responses and victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence. A significant negative correlation would suggest that increases in fear, anxiety, depression, PTSD, or traumatic bonding are associated with a decrease in victims' willingness to report abuse to law enforcement agencies.

Test of Hypothesis

H₀: Psychological trauma has no significant influence on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies.

H₁: Psychological trauma has a significant influence on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies.

Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
1	_____	_____	_____	_____

ANOVA

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	_____	1	_____	_____	_____
Residual	_____	_____	_____		
Total	_____	_____			

Coefficients

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	_____	_____		_____	_____
Psychological Trauma	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

If the significance value (p-value) for psychological trauma is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that psychological trauma has a statistically significant influence on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies. Conversely, if the p-value is greater than or equal to 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected, indicating that psychological trauma does not have a statistically significant influence on victims' willingness to report.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that psychological trauma has a substantial influence on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies. Based on the descriptive analysis, the grand mean exceeded the decision benchmark of 2.50, indicating that respondents generally agreed that trauma significantly affects reporting behaviour among victims of intimate partner violence. This finding suggests that survivors who experience repeated physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual abuse are more likely to develop fear, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), shame, and emotional dependency, all of which reduce their willingness to seek protection from law enforcement agencies. The result implies that trauma is not merely a consequence of intimate partner violence but also a major determinant of victims' decisions regarding whether to disclose abuse or pursue legal intervention. This finding is consistent with the earlier position of Alabi and Ramsden (2022), who reported that women residing in Nigerian communities where intimate partner violence is culturally tolerated were significantly less likely to report abuse because traumatic experiences, fear of stigmatization, and societal acceptance of violence reinforced victims' silence. The authors emphasized that psychological trauma often weakens survivors' confidence in formal justice institutions, thereby discouraging reporting to law enforcement agencies. Similarly, the present finding supports Mukaddas (2024), who observed that survivors frequently avoid reporting intimate partner violence because unresolved trauma, fear of retaliation, family pressure, and inadequate institutional support contribute to prolonged silence. The outcome also corroborates the findings of Effiong, Ibeagha, and Iorfa (2022), who established that prolonged exposure to intimate partner violence creates traumatic bonding between victims and perpetrators. According to the authors, victims become emotionally attached to abusive partners despite continuous victimization, making them reluctant

to report violence to the police. Their study concluded that traumatic bonding weakens victims' emotional resilience and contributes to delayed help-seeking behaviour. Likewise, Afolabi and Balogun (2023) found that survivors suffering from severe psychological trauma frequently anticipate victim-blaming and negative treatment by law enforcement officers, thereby reducing their willingness to report abusive experiences.

The findings further demonstrated a significant relationship between trauma-related emotional responses including fear, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and traumatic bonding and victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant negative relationship between these trauma-related emotional responses and reporting behaviour. This implies that as victims' psychological trauma increases, their willingness to report abuse decreases. In practical terms, victims experiencing high levels of fear, emotional distress, depression, PTSD, or traumatic bonding are considerably less likely to seek legal protection or cooperate with law enforcement authorities. These findings highlight the critical role of psychological well-being in determining victims' reporting decisions. This result agrees with Okeke and Eze (2023), who reported that emotional trauma adversely affects victims' confidence, memory, emotional regulation, and decision-making abilities, thereby reducing their readiness to disclose abuse to police authorities. The present finding is equally consistent with Ogunwale and Adebayo (2025), who found that survivors who previously experienced insensitive treatment from law enforcement officers developed greater fear and distrust of the criminal justice system, resulting in lower reporting intentions. Furthermore, Alade et al. (2025) concluded that trauma, poverty, limited institutional trust, and inadequate victim support services significantly reduce help-seeking behaviour among survivors of intimate partner violence in Nigeria. Their findings reinforce the argument that psychological trauma and institutional barriers jointly discourage formal reporting. The hypothesis testing further established that psychological trauma has a statistically significant influence on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies. Since the probability value ($p < 0.05$) was less than the chosen significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This indicates that psychological trauma significantly predicts victims' reporting behaviour. The implication is that unresolved trauma substantially reduces victims' confidence in law enforcement institutions and discourages them from seeking legal protection against abusive partners. Consequently, improving victims' psychological well-being is likely to enhance reporting behaviour and increase the effectiveness of criminal justice interventions against intimate partner violence. This finding strongly supports Trauma Theory as proposed by Judith Herman (1992), which explains that repeated exposure to violence profoundly affects victims'

emotional functioning, cognitive processes, and behavioural responses. According to the theory, survivors of chronic abuse frequently develop PTSD, depression, anxiety, emotional withdrawal, and fear, all of which impair their willingness to engage with law enforcement agencies. The current findings demonstrate that trauma significantly influences reporting decisions, thereby confirming the relevance of Trauma Theory in explaining victims' behaviour following repeated intimate partner violence. The result also validates the assumptions of Learned Helplessness Theory, developed by Martin Seligman (1975). The theory posits that repeated exposure to uncontrollable abuse causes victims to believe they cannot alter their circumstances, resulting in passive acceptance of violence. The findings indicate that prolonged traumatic experiences encourage feelings of hopelessness, emotional dependency, and reduced self-efficacy, making victims perceive reporting abuse as futile. This theoretical explanation is supported by Nwankwo and Chukwu (2021), who argued that repeated victimization gradually diminishes survivors' confidence and increases passive acceptance of abuse. Similarly, Adeyemi and Ojo (2026) observed that unresolved trauma and previous negative encounters with justice institutions significantly reduce victims' willingness to cooperate with law enforcement agencies.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of psychological trauma on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence (IPV) to law enforcement agencies. The findings established that trauma is a significant determinant of reporting behaviour among survivors of intimate partner violence. The descriptive analysis revealed that respondents generally agreed that psychological trauma substantially affects victims' decisions to report abuse, as evidenced by the grand mean exceeding the acceptable decision benchmark. This indicates that victims who experience prolonged physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual abuse are more likely to suffer from fear, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), shame, traumatic bonding, and learned helplessness, all of which reduce their confidence in seeking assistance from law enforcement agencies.

The study further found a significant negative relationship between trauma-related emotional responses including fear, anxiety, depression, PTSD, and traumatic bonding and victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence. This implies that increasing levels of psychological trauma are associated with decreasing willingness to disclose abuse or seek legal intervention. Victims experiencing severe emotional distress often fear retaliation, social stigmatization, family rejection, economic hardship, and secondary victimization, leading many to remain silent despite continuous abuse. Consequently, unresolved trauma

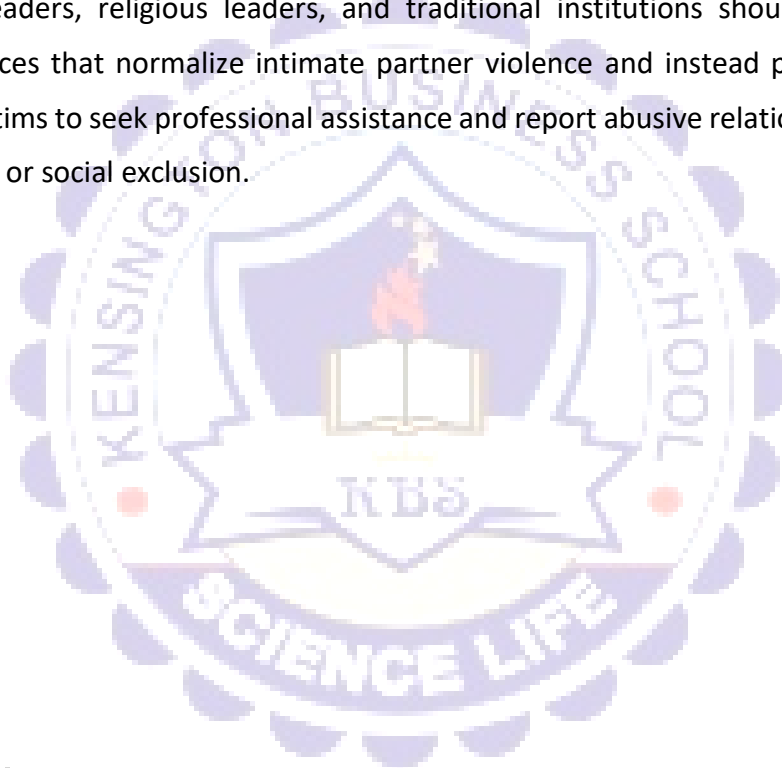
contributes significantly to the persistent under-reporting of intimate partner violence in Nigeria. The hypothesis testing also demonstrated that psychological trauma has a statistically significant influence on victims' willingness to report intimate partner violence to law enforcement agencies. The rejection of the null hypothesis confirmed that trauma is a strong predictor of reporting behaviour. This finding reinforces the assumptions of Trauma Theory and Learned Helplessness Theory, which explain that repeated exposure to abuse alters victims' emotional functioning, cognitive processes, and perceptions of available support, thereby discouraging them from seeking formal justice. The study concludes that psychological trauma constitutes a major barrier to reporting intimate partner violence in Nigeria. While legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms for addressing gender-based violence continue to evolve, their effectiveness will remain limited if the psychological needs of survivors are not adequately addressed. Therefore, strengthening trauma-informed policing, expanding access to psychosocial support services, enhancing public awareness, and improving institutional responses are essential for increasing victims' confidence in law enforcement agencies and encouraging the reporting of intimate partner violence. Addressing psychological trauma alongside legal and social interventions will not only improve reporting rates but also enhance victim protection, offender accountability, and the overall effectiveness of Nigeria's criminal justice response to intimate partner violence.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Nigeria Police Force should adopt trauma-informed policing practices by providing specialized training for police officers on the psychological effects of intimate partner violence. This will enable officers to respond with empathy, professionalism, confidentiality, and sensitivity, thereby increasing victims' confidence in reporting abuse.
2. Government at the federal and state levels should strengthen psychosocial support services by establishing additional trauma counselling centres, crisis intervention units, and mental health services for survivors of intimate partner violence. Access to qualified psychologists, counsellors, and social workers will help victims recover from trauma and improve their willingness to seek legal protection.
3. Law enforcement agencies should establish confidential and survivor-friendly reporting mechanisms, including dedicated gender desks, toll-free emergency hotlines, online reporting platforms, and private interview facilities, to reduce victims' fear of retaliation, embarrassment, and stigmatization during the reporting process.

4. The Ministry of Women Affairs, National Human Rights Commission, civil society organizations, and non-governmental organizations should intensify public awareness campaigns to educate communities on the psychological consequences of intimate partner violence, the rights of survivors, and the importance of reporting abuse to appropriate authorities. Such campaigns should also challenge harmful cultural norms that encourage silence and normalize domestic violence.
5. The implementation and enforcement of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act and related domestic violence laws should be strengthened across all states of the federation. Government should ensure prompt investigation, prosecution, and punishment of perpetrators while guaranteeing adequate legal protection and safety for victims who report abuse.
6. Healthcare institutions should integrate routine trauma screening into medical services for patients presenting with injuries or symptoms associated with intimate partner violence. Early identification of trauma will facilitate timely referrals for counselling, legal assistance, and social support, thereby improving victims' recovery and reporting behaviour.
7. Community leaders, religious leaders, and traditional institutions should actively discourage cultural practices that normalize intimate partner violence and instead promote attitudes that encourage victims to seek professional assistance and report abusive relationships without fear of discrimination or social exclusion.



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