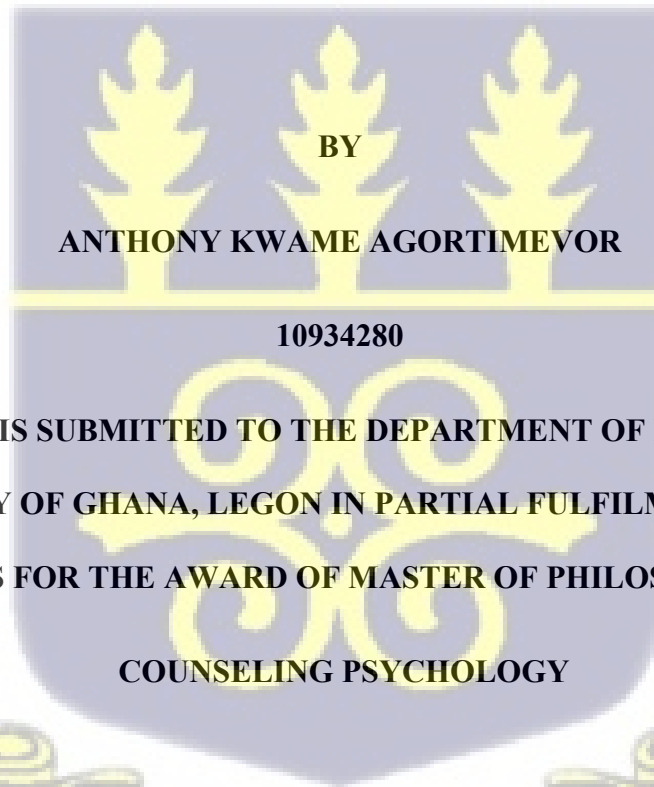


**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON**

**DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY**



**VICTIMS' PSYCHOSOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF POLICE RESPONSE TO  
INCIDENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN GREATER ACCRA REGION, GHANA**



**BY**

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**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY,  
UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE IN  
COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY**

**INTEGRI PROCEDAMUS**

**NOVEMBER, 2024**

**DECLARATION**

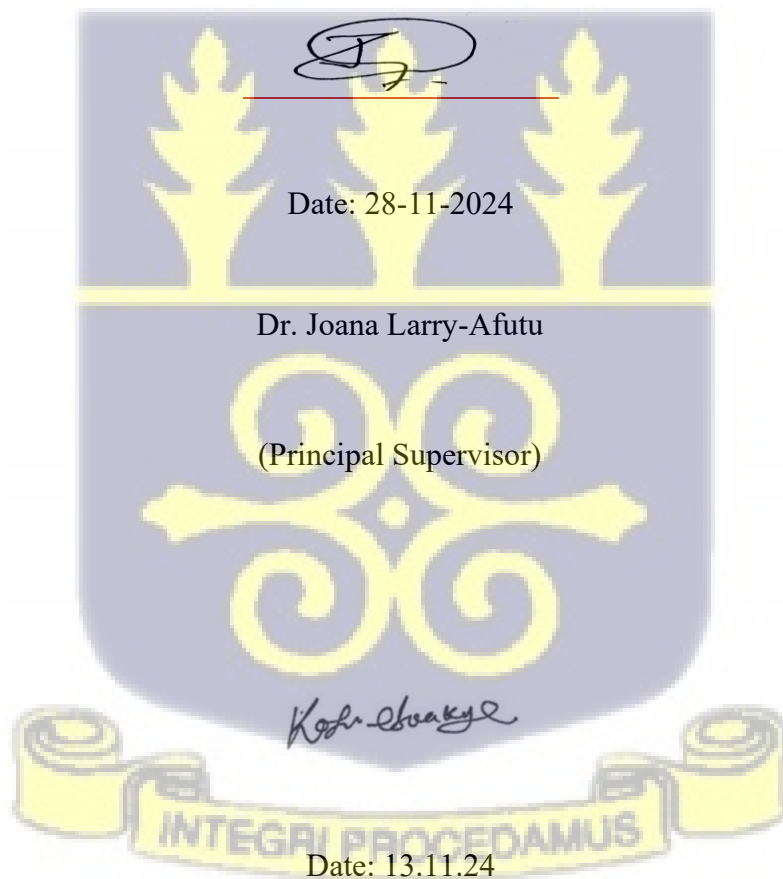
I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own research and no part of it has been presented for academic degree in this university or elsewhere to the best of my knowledge.

All information taken from other sources have been duly acknowledged.



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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God Almighty and my family, especially my wife Mawuli Gamor and Children Wilson, Pat, Etiam, Deladem and Elorm for their immense support which has contributed to the success of this research.



### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank the Lord for the strength to complete this research work. I would like to show my appreciation to my supervisors, Dr. Joana Larry-Afutu and Prof. Kofi Boakye for their guidance and patience throughout this research, God bless you for your efforts. My gratitude also goes to my Practicum Supervisor at Ho Technical University, Mr. Sedem N. Amedome, whose encouragement urged me on to complete this project. Dozen thanks goes to the department, lecturers, colleagues and all others who contributed in any form to make this project successful.



## ABSTRACT

Domestic violence (DV) is a pervasive global psychosocial issue with profound impacts on individuals, families, and communities. DV remains an issue in Ghana, particularly in the Greater Accra region, which has seen a steady increase in reported cases in recent years. A qualitative study was conducted among twenty participants who had experienced DV within Greater Accra. Twenty participants with ages ranging from 18 to 50 years were purposively selected for the study. Data was analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. This study demonstrated that victims of DV report their incident to the police because of the nature of violence they are exposed to. The likelihood of harm and death from the violence, with others reporting as a means to retaliate the violence, while others also report as an avenue for help. In dealing with the police, victims of DV are faced with challenges including negative police behaviors, resources constraint by the police and mishandling of victims' cases. It is therefore recommended that the police should be frequently provided with a requisite capacity building and adequately resourced to provide appropriate services for domestic violence victims (DVV). DVV often report feeling re-victimized or discouraged from pursuing legal actions due to the perceived lack of support and understanding from the police. Understanding the experiences of domestic violence victims in their interactions with the Ghanaian police force is crucial for identifying gaps in service provision, informing policy and training interventions, and ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of the criminal justice system's response to this social problem.

**Keywords:** domestic violence, Greater Accra, police, victims

**Table of Contents**

<b>DECLARATION</b> .....	i
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....	iii
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	iv
<b>LIST OF ACRONYMS</b> .....	ix
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	x
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> .....	1
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
1.1 Background to the Study.....	1
1.2 Statement of Problem.....	5
1.3 Research Objectives.....	7
1.4 Research Questions.....	8
1.5 Significance of the Study.....	8
1.6 Chapter Outline.....	9
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> .....	10
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	10
2.1 Introduction.....	10
2.2 Theoretical Review .....	10
2.3 Empirical Review.....	15
2.3.1 Domestic Violence in Ghana .....	15

2.3.2	Reasons for Domestic Violence Victims Reporting to Police .....	17
2.3.3	Forms of Support Provided by The Police to Domestic Violence Victims .....	21
2.3.4	Psychosocial Challenges for Domestic Violence Victims in Police Interactions ...	24
2.3.5	Psychosocial outcome of Police Response on Domestic Violence Victims.....	27
CHAPTER THREE .....		31
METHODOLOGY .....		31
3.1	Introduction.....	31
3.2	Research Design.....	31
3.3	Research Population and Sampling .....	32
3.4	Profile of Greater Accra Region and Domestic Violence Response .....	33
3.5	Data Collection Procedure.....	35
3.6	Data Analysis.....	36
3.7	Ethical Consideration.....	38
3.10	Trustworthiness of results.....	39
3.11	Reflexivity.....	41
CHAPTER FOUR.....		42
RESULTS .....		42
4.1	Participants' socio-demographic characteristics .....	42
4.2	Organization of Themes.....	43
4.3	Reasons for reporting domestic violence .....	46
4.3.1	Nature of violence.....	46

4.3.2 Reporting due to likelihood of harm and death .....	49
4.3.3 Reporting as a means to retaliate .....	51
4.3.4 Reporting as an avenue for help seeking .....	53
4.4 Forms of support received from police .....	54
4.4.1 Informational support.....	55
4.4.2 Tangible support .....	56
4.5 Psychosocial Challenges faced by DV Victims during their contact with police.....	58
4.5.1 Dissatisfaction with case handling.....	58
4.5.2 Negative police behavior .....	60
4.5.3 Resource constraint for the police.....	62
4.5.4 Exertion of external influence into victims' case .....	64
4.6 Psychosocial outcome of police response to victims of domestic violence.....	66
4.6.1 The trigger of emotional reactions.....	66
4.6.2 Case discontinuation .....	69
CHAPTER FIVE .....	71
DISCUSSION.....	71
5.1 Overview of the study.....	71
5.2 Reasons for reporting domestic violence.....	71
5.3 Forms of support received from the police by victims of domestic violence.....	74
5.4 Challenges experienced by domestic violence victims during the contact with police.....	75
5.5 Outcomes of police response to victims of domestic violence .....	78

5.6 Theoretical implication of study findings .....	80
5.7 Implications of study.....	82
5.8 Recommendations.....	83
5.9 Conclusion .....	85
REFERENCES .....	86
Appendices.....	102
Appendix 1: Consent form.....	102
Appendix 2: Interview guide .....	105
Appendix 3: Ethics approval letter .....	107



**LIST OF ACRONYMS**

CAPDV - Challenges and Adaptations in Police Handling of Domestic Violence Cases

CDC - Centre for Disease Control

DOVVSU - Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit

DV - Domestic Violence

DVV - Domestic Violence and Victim

ECH - Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Humanities

GBV - Gender-based violence

ISFPR - Impact of Sociocultural Factors on Police Response

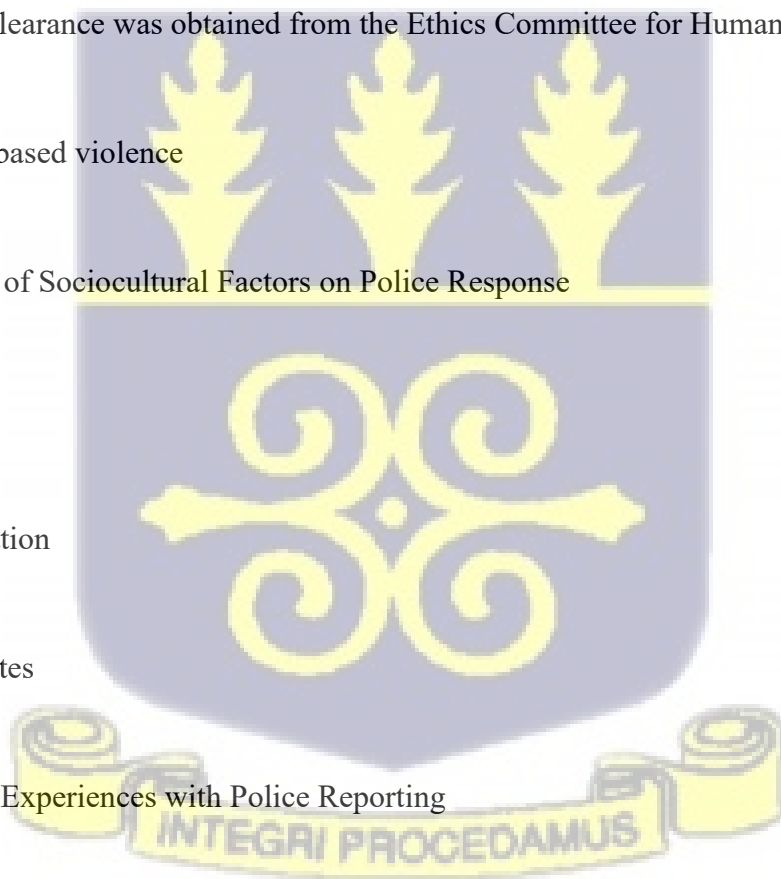
P - Participants

UN - United Nation

US - United States

VEPR - Victim Experiences with Police Reporting

WHO - World Health Organisation



**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1: Socio-demographic information of participants .....32

Table 2: Organization of Themes .....33



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

Domestic violence (DV) is a pervasive global issue with profound impacts on individuals, families, and communities globally (Lanchimba et al., 2023). One crucial aspect of addressing domestic violence is the response and handling of such cases by law enforcement agencies (Lantz, 2020). Victims of domestic violence's interactions with the police and the criminal justice system have important implications for victim safety, help-seeking behavior, and the overall effectiveness of the societal response to this problem (Shearson, 2021). Several studies have examined the experiences of domestic violence victims in their encounters with the police (Saxton et al., 2021; Gezinski, 2022; Fagerlund, 2021).

Globally, 1 in 3 women have been subjected to some form of physical and sexual violence, at least once in their lifetime (UN, 2023; WHO, 2023), whilst, 48,800 women and girls worldwide were killed by their intimate partners or other family members in 2023 (UN, 2023). Thirty percent (30%) of women aged 15 and older were the prime victims in 2022 (UN Women, 2023; WHO, 2022). In terms of death, 81,000 women and girls were killed in 2020, 47,000 (58%) of them died at the hands of intimate partners (Dawson & Vega, 2023). This is an average of one death every 11 minutes. For instance, in the UK, an estimated 1.6 million women aged 16 to 74 experienced DV (WHO, 2021). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) disclosed that 24 women and men are victimized by intimate partners each minute, equaling 14 million victims every year. From 2018 to 2022, intimate partner violence accounted for 58% of all homicides in the US; of those Intimate Partner Violence homicides, 70% of the victims were female (CDC, 2022). A study by Barbier et al. (2022) in Europe noted a 51.7% prevalence of DV. Most cases combine physical, emotional, and

sexual abuse (Barbier et al., 2022). These staggering statistics suggest that women mostly experience domestic violence (UN, 2022; WHO, 2021).

Many women across Africa and Ghana go through similar terrifying experiences, but, their plights have not been dealt with swiftly by the police service. Owusu-Adjah and Agbemafle (2023) exemplified that 33.6 % and 52 % of girls and women respectively in rural Ghana are victims of sexual abuse and gender-based violence but the police responses are inadequate and, in most instances, non-existent.

Incidence of DV affects victim's mental well-being, and it requires police's swift response as most countries in recent times have made laws that criminalize issues of DV (Aizer, 2020; Amaral et al., 2023; Owusu-Adjah & Agbemafle, 2023). For example, 155 countries out of the 195 countries in the world have passed laws on DV and 140 have legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace (World Bank, 2020).

Research indicates that victims often face significant barriers and challenges when reporting domestic violence incidents. Saxton et al. (2021) found that victims in Canada reported experiencing dismissive, minimizing, and even blaming attitudes from police officers, which deterred them from seeking help or pursuing legal action. Similarly, Taylor-Dunn et al. (2021) highlighted the reluctance of some victims in the UK to report harassment and stalking due to negative past experiences with police responses. The police response to domestic violence is further complicated by the complexities inherent in these cases. As noted by Saxton et al. (2022), officers often struggle to navigate the delicate dynamics within families, the challenges of evidence collection, and the need to balance victim safety with keeping families together. Inadequate training on trauma-informed practices and a lack of understanding of the unique experiences of domestic violence survivors can contribute to suboptimal police responses (Franklin et al., 2020). The police response to domestic

violence also exhibits gender-based disparities, with studies suggesting that male victims in particular face unique challenges in being recognized and supported by law enforcement (Boateng, 2021). Lysova et al. (2020) found that male victims in several English-speaking countries experienced dismissive, skeptical, and even hostile attitudes from police, which hindered their ability to access the justice system. Additionally, broader societal norms and expectations around masculinity can shape the police's perception and handling of domestic violence cases involving male victims (Yalley & Olutayo, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the challenges faced by domestic violence victims in their interactions with the criminal justice system. Walklate et al. (2022) observed that in England and Wales, the pandemic led to changes in police responses, including increased use of telephone-based risk assessments and a reduced ability to make in-person visits, which may have impacted the quality of support and safety planning for victims. Beyond the individual experiences of victims, the police response to domestic violence has broader societal implications. Effective police intervention can play a crucial role in disrupting the cycle of violence, connecting victims with support services, and holding perpetrators accountable. However, when the police response is inadequate or insensitive, it can further marginalize and traumatize victims, reinforcing their reluctance to seek help and undermining the credibility of the criminal justice system (Reeves & Meyer, 2021; Wheildon et al., 2022).

The challenges and complexities of the police response to domestic violence are not unique to Western countries. In Ghana and Nigeria, research has highlighted the persistence of gender-based biases and a masculine culture within the police force, which can shape officers' attitudes and actions in dealing with domestic violence cases (Yalley & Olutayo, 2020). The intersection of traditional gender norms, power dynamics, and institutional

structures within the police system can create significant barriers for domestic violence victims, particularly in resource-constrained settings. Meanwhile, while the existing literature provides valuable insights into the experiences of domestic violence victims in their encounters with the police, the majority of the research has been conducted in North America, Europe, and other high-income regions. There is a notable gap in understanding the experiences of domestic violence victims in sub-Saharan Africa, where sociocultural contexts, resource availability, and institutional capacities may differ significantly from the Global North.

Established in 1998 as a specialized unit within the Ghana Police Service, the Domestic Violence Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) operates under the legal framework of the Domestic Violence Act, 2007 (Act 732). This act mandates DOVVSU to protect the rights of vulnerable individuals facing various forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional/psychological, socio-economic, and culturally harmful practices. In fulfilling its mission, DOVVSU offers a range of free public services aimed at preventing and addressing domestic violence, such as crime detection, professional statement-taking, and maintaining a respectful approach to victim support. Victims are provided with regular updates on their cases, advice on crime prevention, and referrals to medical and psychological support services through partnerships with clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors from the Department of Social Welfare (Osei, 2019). While DOVVSU refers victims to clinical psychologists and counselors, the lack of in-house mental health professionals limits immediate trauma support. Many victims do not receive timely psychological intervention, which is critical in the early stages following abuse. Without comprehensive trauma-informed training, police officers in most cases unintentionally retraumatize victims. Training on empathetic communication and psychological first aid is therefore needed to

improve officers' sensitivity and effectiveness in dealing with victims (Yakubu & Chaudhuri, 2022).

In the Ghanaian context, domestic violence remains a pervasive issue, with studies indicating high prevalence rates and significant barriers to help-seeking (Amoakohene, 2004; Amoakohene, 2019). The police are often the first point of contact for many domestic violence victims seeking assistance, but their response and handling of such cases have received limited scholarly attention. Understanding the experiences of domestic violence victims in their interactions with the Ghanaian police force is crucial for identifying gaps in service provision, informing policy and training interventions, and ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of the criminal justice system's response to this social problem.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

Domestic violence remains an extremely concerning issue in Ghana, particularly in the Greater Accra region, which has seen a steady increase in reported cases in recent years (Dome & Amoah, 2023; Musah, 2023; Ofosu-Koranteng, 2023). Despite the country's efforts to address this problem, such as the passage of the Domestic Violence Act in 2007, many victims continue to face significant barriers in accessing support and seeking justice (Kaburi & Kaburi, 2023; Rohn & Tenkorang, 2023, 2024).

One critical area of concern is the response of law enforcement personnel to incidents of domestic violence. Studies have highlighted persistent issues, such as insensitive attitudes, inadequate training, and a lack of proper procedures for handling these cases (Adelakun, 2023; Agleby & Dumenya, 2023; Apatinga & Tenkorang, 2023). Victims often report feeling re-victimized or discouraged from pursuing legal action due to the perceived lack of support and understanding from the police (Juliet Ike et al., 2023; Sedziafa & Tenkorang,

2024). This can further exacerbate the trauma and hinder the reporting of domestic violence incidents, contributing to the underreporting of this widespread social problem.

Moreover, the problem is particularly acute in the Greater Accra region, which is the most populous and economically significant area of Ghana. As the capital city and a hub of economic activity, Greater Accra attracts diverse populations and cultural influences, which can present unique challenges in addressing domestic violence (Aboagye et al., 2023; Ofose-Koranteng, 2023). Additionally, the region's dense urban environment and the influx of migrants from other parts of the country amplify the complexities surrounding domestic violence and access to support services (Aborisade, 2024; Indu, 2023).

While there is a growing body of research on domestic violence in Ghana, the majority of studies have focused on the experiences and perspectives of victims, with limited attention paid to the role and response of law enforcement (Uzobo & Ayinmoro, 2023). Existing studies have highlighted the need for improved training, policies, and protocols for police officers to better support and respond to victims of domestic violence (Adelakun, 2023; Apatinga & Tenkorang, 2023). However, these studies have primarily been conducted in other regions of Ghana and have adopted a more general approach, without delving deeply into the unique dynamics and challenges faced in the Greater Accra region.

To address this gap, this study aims to explore the experiences of domestic violence victims in Greater Accra concerning the police response to incidents of domestic violence. By focusing on this specific region and the critical intersection of victim experiences and law enforcement, the study would provide valuable data to inform policy, training, and the development of more effective and victim-centered approaches to addressing domestic violence in Ghana. Also, the study's importance is underscored by the significance of the Greater Accra region, which serves as the political, economic, and cultural center of Ghana.

As the region with the highest population and the largest concentration of domestic violence cases, understanding the dynamics of police response in this context can have far-reaching implications for the country as a whole (Dome & Amoah, 2023; Musah, 2023; Ofoosu-Koranteng, 2023). By shedding light on the experiences of victims and the challenges faced by the law enforcement agency, the study can inform the development of more comprehensive and effective strategies to combat domestic violence, ultimately contributing to the safety and well-being of individuals and families in Greater Accra and beyond.

Furthermore, the study aligns with the growing global emphasis on the importance of responsive and accountable law enforcement in addressing gender-based violence, as evidenced by initiatives such as the Spotlight Initiative and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16, which focuses on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (Aboagye et al., 2023; Juliet-Ike et al., 2023). By examining the experiences of domestic violence victims in Greater Accra, the study can provide valuable insights to inform policy and practice, ultimately contributing to the realization of these global commitments and the achievement of more equitable and just outcomes for all citizens.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are:

- a) To explore the reasons domestic violence victims, report domestic violence to the police
- b) To explore the support domestic violence victims, receive from the police
- c) To understand the psychosocial outcomes of police response on victims of domestic violence
- d) To understand the psychosocial challenges experienced by domestic violence victims during their contact with the police

#### 1.4 Research Questions

The study seeks to address the following research questions:

- a) Why do domestic violence victims report domestic violence incidence to the police?
- b) What support do domestic violence victims receive from the police?
- c) What are the psychosocial outcomes related to police response on victims?
- d) What psychosocial challenges are faced by domestic violence victims during their contact with police?

#### 1.5 Significance of the Study

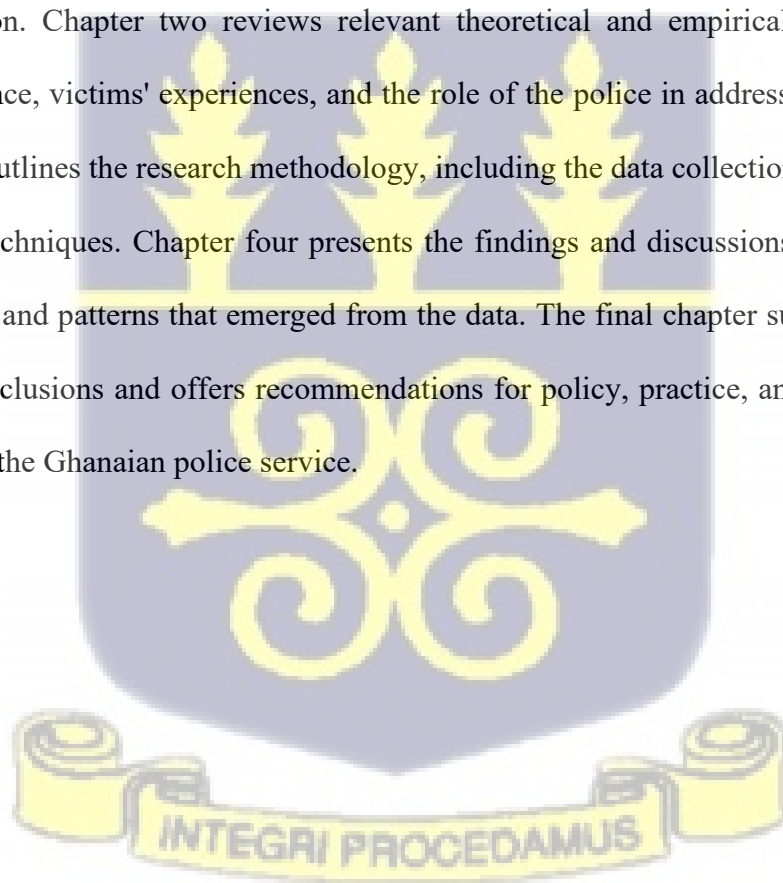
This study on victims' psychosocial experiences of the police response to domestic violence incidents in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana holds significant academic, policy, and institutional implications. Academically, it contributes to the limited body of research on the role of the criminal justice system, particularly the police, in addressing domestic violence in the Ghanaian context. While previous studies have explored the prevalence, risk factors, and help-seeking behaviors of domestic violence victims in Ghana (Rohn & Tenkorang, 2023; Rohn & Tenkorang, 2024), this study expands the understanding by focusing on the critical interface between victims and the police.

From a policy and regulatory standpoint, the study's findings can provide valuable insights to guide policymakers, the Ghana Police Service, and other relevant stakeholders in developing more effective, victim-centered approaches to addressing domestic violence. The study can inform the development of specialized training programs for police officers, the implementation of protocols and guidelines for responding to domestic violence cases, and the strengthening of coordination between the police, social services, and domestic violence support organizations.

At the institutional level, this study can help the Ghana Police Service to identify gaps in their response to domestic violence, promote organizational culture changes, and implement policies and practices that prioritize the safety and well-being of domestic violence victims. The insights gained can contribute to enhancing the effectiveness, accountability, and public trust in the Ghanaian criminal justice system's handling of domestic violence cases.

## 1.6 Chapter Outline

The study on victims' experiences of the police response to domestic violence incidents in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana is structured in five chapters. Chapter One provides an overview of the research problem, the study context, the objectives, and the significance of the investigation. Chapter two reviews relevant theoretical and empirical literature on domestic violence, victims' experiences, and the role of the police in addressing this issue. Chapter three outlines the research methodology, including the data collection methods and data analysis techniques. Chapter four presents the findings and discussions, highlighting the key themes and patterns that emerged from the data. The final chapter summarizes the study's key conclusions and offers recommendations for policy, practice, and institutional reforms within the Ghanaian police service.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This study examines police responses to domestic violence incidents, focusing on Greater Accra and the broader Ghanaian context. It explores key concepts, theories, and empirical findings relevant to understanding victims' experiences with police interventions in domestic violence cases. The review synthesizes existing knowledge on police practices in handling domestic violence, their impact on victims' safety and well-being, and the challenges faced in implementing effective response strategies. By analyzing current literature, the study identifies critical gaps in understanding how police can effectively address domestic violence, particularly in the Greater Accra region. This review of existing research and knowledge gaps provides a foundation for investigating victims' experiences with police responses to domestic violence incidents in Greater Accra, aiming to improve support for victims and enhance the effectiveness of law enforcement interventions in this context. This section will contain two main parts including; theoretical framework and empirical review.

#### 2.2 Theoretical Review

##### 2.2.1 *Social Learning Theory*

Social Learning Theory was developed by Albert Bandura. The social learning theorists opines people can learn through observation alone and their learning may not necessarily be shown in their performance (Bandura, 1977). This differs from the, behaviorists perspective that states that learning has to be accompanied by a permanent change in behavior.

The theory also states that individuals are capable of learning indirectly through observation of others' behavior and related consequences; where the anticipation of punishment or

reward is sufficient to shape behavior (Cronce & Larimer, 2013). This implies that learning may occur without it being evident in subsequent behavior.

The social learning theory posits that individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling (Bandura, 1977). The theory comprised of four main components that includes attention (behavior must first be noticed before it can be copied), retention (behavior must be remembered), reproduction (behaviors in memory must be put into action), and incentives (behaviors that are perceived to be positively rewarded are enacted) (Lelchhook & de Luque 2015).

At the individual level, social learning aids naive individuals acquire information from more experienced individuals that results into behaviors that have positive outcomes or result in the avoidance of negative ones (Lind et al., 2019). Within the group context, social learning helps in the transmission of behavior between individuals and across generations, that provides the opportunity for the establishment of traditions and other cultural phenomena (Galef, 1992 ; Richerson & Boyd, 2008; Hoppitt & Lala, 2013).

In the context of domestic violence and police response in Greater Accra, this theory suggests that both perpetrators and law enforcement officers may learn and reinforce behaviors based on societal norms and observed responses. Cochran et al. (2021) applied this theory to understand police officers' responses to domestic violence calls. In Ghana, Apatinga and Tenkorang (2023) explored how social learning influences coping strategies of female survivors of intimate partner violence. The theory helps explain why some police officers may respond inadequately to domestic violence cases if they've been exposed to cultural norms that minimize such violence. It also suggests that positive police responses can serve as models for both victims and other officers, potentially improving overall response to domestic violence incidents in Greater Accra.

The Social Learning Theory aids in the understanding the ideal that, perpetrators of domestic violence could imitate a behavior they learned from others. The theory further helps in understanding why DV victims will report their cases to the police. Also, from the perspective of this theory, victims of DV may be reporting DV to the police through observing others and imitating same. This implies that an individual who has observed a DV victim report their case to the police and have obtained a favorable response from the police will imitate by also going to the police if they are exposed to DV.

### ***2.2.2 Feminist Theory***

Feminist theory focuses on analyzing the conditions which shape women's lives and to explore cultural understandings of what it means to be a woman (Jackson & Jones, 1998). This theory argues that patriarchal structures contribute to the perpetuation of violence against women and shape societal responses, including those of law enforcement. Also, feminism has been described as 'the theory of the woman's point of view', 'equal rights for women', 'the ideology of women's liberation', and 'basically about women's experience' (Humm, 2015; Thompson, 2001). Feminists refuse that inequalities between women and men are natural and unavoidable and they insist that they should be questioned (Jackson & Jones, 1998). Moreover, liberal feminists also explain women's oppression as rooted in political, social, and legal constraints (Tong, 2001). It is worth noting that feminist theory is known to represent a diverse range of concepts, theories and principles (Finn & Brown, 2022).

Feminist Theory examines gender inequality and power dynamics in society, providing a crucial framework for understanding domestic violence and institutional responses. Goodmark (2018) used feminist theory to critique legal responses to domestic violence indicating that some legal officers have negative prejudice about women victimized in domestic violence. For the Greater Accra region, this theory helps explain potential biases

in police responses, where officers might downplay the severity of domestic violence due to ingrained gender norms. It also highlights the importance of gender-sensitive training for police officers and the need for policies that challenge patriarchal attitudes in law enforcement responses to domestic violence incidents.

### ***2.2.3 Ecological Systems Theory***

Ecological Systems Theory, proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979, emphasizes the interplay between individuals and their environment across multiple levels. The theory is also known as human ecology. It further explains that the development of an individual is shaped by interconnected environmental systems, from their immediate surroundings like family to broader societal structures like culture (Guy-Evans, 2025). Bronfenbrenner believed that an individual's development was influenced by everything in their surrounding environment and social interactions within it (Harkonen, 2007). Bronfenbrenner explained that the systems of influence within an individual's immediate life each impacted the individual in diverse ways and he added that the individual also had an impact on these systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Bronfenbrenner aimed at crafting a view of human development that could explain growth without examining deficits within the person, which was the common practice in many developmental models that were developed previously (Bronfenbrenner, 1983). The theory suggests that, child development involves a dynamic interaction between environment, societal, biological, and psychological factors (Tudge & Maria-Rosa, 2020). The theory specifically emphasizes the relevance of environmental factors and social influences in shaping behavior and development (Cherry, 2023).

The systems proposed by Bronfenbrenner in this theory include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, with each influencing growth and behavior.

The microsystem of Bronfenbrenner's theory denotes the things that have direct contact with a child in his or her immediate environment and it is the innermost level of the system. This includes the child's most immediate relationships and environments. For instance, a child's siblings, parents, classmates, teachers, and neighbors' forms part of their microsystem. The relationships in a microsystem are described to be bi-directional, meaning other people can influence the child in their environment and the child could also change other people's beliefs and actions. The interactions the child has with people and environments then directly impact its development. Here the child is not just a passive recipient but an active contributor in these bidirectional interactions (Guy-Evans, 2025).

The mesosystem is as the next level of the theory, comprised of all the relationships and interactions between the microsystems (Backonja et al., 2014). The mesosystem is explained as where a person's individual microsystems do not function independently but are interconnected and assert influence upon one another. The mesosystem entails the interactions between different microsystems in the child's life. Bronfenbrenner explained that these interactions can have significant impacts on a child's development. The third system known as the exosystem incorporates other formal and informal social structures such as friends of the family, local governments, and mass media (Guy-Evans, 2025). It is explained that, the exosystem may not directly interact with the child, but it still influences the microsystems.

The next proposed system is the macrosystem. The macrosystem targets how cultural elements affect a child's development, which entails cultural ideologies, attitudes, and social

conditions that children are immersed in (Guy-Evans, 2025). The macrosystem includes individualism, beliefs about gender roles, social issues, family structures, establish norms and values that spreads through the child's microsystems.

The last suggested system of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is called the chronosystem. It relates to environmental changes over a child's or individuals' lifetime (Guy-Evans, 2025). The changes proposed here may be predictable and it may include starting school, or unpredictable, like experiencing parental divorce.

The Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is particularly relevant to understanding the complex dynamics of domestic violence and police response also in Greater Accra. Since it considers how various systems - from immediate family (microsystem) to broader cultural values (macrosystem) - influence both the occurrence of domestic violence and the effectiveness of police interventions. Heise (1998) adapted this theory to create the ecological framework for violence against women. In Ghana, Owusu Adjah and Agbemafle (2016) used this approach to examine the determinants of domestic violence. Applied to Greater Accra, this theory suggests that effective police response to domestic violence requires understanding and addressing factors at multiple levels, from individual officer training to community attitudes and national policies on gender-based violence.

## **2.3 Empirical Review**

### **2.3.1 Domestic Violence in Ghana**

Domestic abuse is a global policy concern and a violation of fundamental human rights. The Ghanaian government passed the DV Act (Act 732) in February 2007 after years of lobbying by women's rights and civil society organizations. In 2008, the National Policy and Plan of Action (NPPOA) was developed. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Gender, Children,

and Social Protection's (MoGCSP) Domestic Violence Secretariat, the NPPOA outlined a plan for implementing the Domestic Violence Act.

According to the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) conducted in Ghana in 2008, 38.7 per cent of ever-married women between the ages of 15 and 49 years reported having experienced physical, psychological or sexual violence by a husband or partner at some point in their lives. Moreover, 66%, 76%, and 58% of Ghanaians are reported to know wives that perpetuated physical violence, psychological violence and sexual violence respectively (Issahaku et al., 2025).

Over the past three decades, significant strides have been made in Ghana to address and reduce domestic violence. Initial studies on domestic violence in Africa, including Ghana, emerged in the 1990s, with Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, and South Africa as key research sites (Hodgson, 2002; Ofei-Aboagye, 1994). These efforts were heavily influenced by activism, with grassroots groups playing a critical role in shaping and advocating for domestic violence legislation (Bowman, 2002; Kimuna & Djamba, 2008). Ghana's first legal measures against domestic violence reflected the international movement to recognize women's rights as human rights (Cook, 2011), catalyzed by ongoing advocacy from civil society and women's rights organizations. Key milestones include the 1992 Constitution, which prohibits sex-based discrimination, and several amendments criminalizing harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation (1995) and child abuse (1998).

In 2007, following years of persistent activism and research by organizations like the Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre, Ghana passed the Domestic Violence Act (Act 732), establishing a comprehensive legal framework for preventing and protecting against domestic violence. The Act broadened the definition of domestic violence, encompassing physical, sexual, economic, and psychological abuse, and outlined specific

protections for domestic violence survivors, including household staff and non-married partners.

Civil society groups and NGOs have been instrumental in raising awareness, providing education, and training public officials on domestic violence issues. In 2003, stakeholders from various civil society organizations formed the National Coalition on Domestic Violence Legislation, which worked both alongside and independently of the government to push for legislative change (Ampofo, 2008). Additionally, media coverage has played a complex role: while initially criticized for sensationalizing domestic violence, the media has also been crucial in shaping public understanding and awareness of the issue (Owusu-Addo et al., 2018).

Ghana's 2007 Domestic Violence Act is notable for its inclusion of culturally sensitive approaches to justice, such as alternative dispute resolution. It applies a broad, gender-neutral definition of domestic violence and recognizes a wide array of abusive behaviors, aiming to protect all individuals affected by domestic violence in diverse domestic contexts.

### **2.3.2 Reasons for Domestic Violence Victims Reporting to Police**

A variety of reasons lead victims to seek police involvement in DV cases. Safety concerns, social support, structural hurdles, and societal stigma all play a part in victims' decision-making. The victim's desire for safety and protection from impending danger is one of the main justifications for reporting domestic abuse to law authorities.

In identifying the factors associated with why victim report domestic violence to police, a review of twenty-one Australian and international quantitative studies was conducted. It was found that victims who experience frequent violence, are female, non-white and those who have been abused previously were more likely to report to the police (Voce & Boxall, 2018).

They also identified that being involved in a serious violence, having an intoxicated offender and/or child witnesses had an increase likelihood to reported to the police. Noting that victims of DV who have been previously abused will likely report to the police gives an indication that victims of DV may be reporting to the police to prevent the re-occurrence of the violence that meant they are seeking their safety with the police Voce & Boxall, (2018) adopting a system review method was appropriate to help them cover DV issues from the various geographical backgrounds and individuals in their study.

Also, Myhill and Hohl (2016) found DV victims to report their issue to the police if they were frequently exposed to violence like chocking. This previous study aimed at assessing the consistent risk factors in cases of DV reported to the police. Data was obtained from a random sample of risk identification interviews conducted previously with victims of DV by police officers. The study was a quantitative study where its data was reported to have been analysed using a latent trait model. Myhill and Hohl (2016) show that some victims may see the need to report DV cases only if it becomes persistent. This further implies that these individuals may endure their experience of violence at the initial periods since they have not witnessed it being frequent. Considering that Myhill and Hohl (2016) study above used an appropriate study design, they could have also blended a qualitative aspect to the quantitative one to provide them with a much detail information on the risk of factors of DV.

Moreover, in Bihar of India Bajwa et al. (2019) conducted a quantitative study using secondary data from the India 2015-2016 National Family Health Survey. The researchers assessed the rate of reporting DV among 1,053 married women in the state of Bihar. A multivariate logistic regression was adopted to analysed the study's data. They found women who had some level of education to be two times likely to report their experience of DV when compared to women with no education. Also, women who exhibited lasting

physical effects of violence like bruises, burns, scars, and others were more likely to report DV than women who had no lasting physical effects of violence. Women that were exposed to emotional violence alone or in addition with physical violence were found to be less likely to report DV as compared to women who experienced physical or sexual violence without a combination of emotional violence. The victims here reporting to the police base on the kind of violence they experienced suggest that they give priority in physical violence than other forms. The 1,053 married women used as study participants in Bajwa et al. (2019) is relatively large which may have contributed to the reliability of the study's results.

In a study conducted in Accra Central and Madina of the Greater Accra region of Ghana, the study explored the attitude of male DV victims through a qualitative study while adopting a phenomenological design. The study found that, men experiencing DV were mostly not reporting due to perceived male masculinity, stigma and the fear of not being believed (Mantey, 2019). The study used a purposive and social network sampling approaches to recruit ten men for the study who were engaged in-depth interviews. The above study conducted by Mantey (2019) unlike many other studies that focused only on female DV victims, was relevant due to it projecting the experiences of male DVV's since males in the Ghanaian are often perceived not to experience DV or show vulnerability. Males per the view of the Ghanaian society is expected to be strong in adversity. Therefore, a male DV victim may decide to decline reporting a DV incident to the police to maintain a sense of being strong and to hide from shame. The sense of shame is born of the idea that a man is not supposed to be abuse by a woman.

Again, in another study that was conducted in Accra of Ghana, the researchers assess how silence further triggers, sustains and strengthens opportunities for men to be violent. The study was conducted among twenty women and four key informants where semi-structured

in-depth interviews were used. Owusu (2016) found cultural and traditional practices, economic dependency of women on men and religious beliefs were the main reasons women are silent instead of rebelling and reporting DV. Twenty women participants were recruited using snowball sampling, while thematic analysis was employed to analyze the study's data. The use of snowball sampling in Owusu (2016) study could make selection of participants quite challenging since not every victim might know another victim of DV. The researcher could have rather consider the use of purposive sampling instead. Considering that the reported negative factors prevent victims of DV from reporting, there is the likelihood that the positive state of these factors could become the motivation for people to report DV cases. Cultural and traditional practices could be existing as major barriers for women who are DV victims to report violence to the police due to a limited acceptance of the police as mediator for domestic issues. Considering that most domestic violence is perpetuated by relatives or close ties individuals of the victims, family members often prefer to deal with it at home and among themselves. A victim reporting to the police is then perceived to have sent a family issue or dispute to outsiders. Some victims are therefore coerced to rely on this internal family mechanism to resolve their issue.

The reasons why people call the police to report domestic abuse are a result of a complicated interaction between safety requirements, resource availability, social and cultural factors, and personal opinions about how effective the police are. Policymakers and support networks can better work to meet much expectation of victims by creating interventions that promote reporting while safeguarding and assisting victims in ways that are appropriate for their culture and context.

### 2.3.3 Forms of Support Provided by The Police to Domestic Violence Victims

It is important to note that victims of DV when reaching out to the police expects to attain some form of support from the police. The police on the other hand also possibly knows the victims of DV need some form of support. Perez-Trujillo and Ross (2008) have reported that police officers' judgment on the level of risk a victim encounters and their decisions to provide a specific risk management strategy to aid a victim is influenced by the victim's level of fear. It could be inferred from this study that the police in this instance offers some risk management activities to victims in situation they perceive the victim to be exposed to much risk. The study assessed police decisions about risk in DV incidents when using a risk assessment instrument. The researchers assessed a sample of 501 risk assessments that were completed by the police in Australia through a quantitative study. Perez-Trujillo and Ross (2008) study was adequate to provide first-hand information from the police themselves on the support they provide to DVVs after supporting them with an intervention prior to assessing their risk level.

Comparably, Goodson et al. (2022) conducted a cross-sectional study that was focused on assessing police officers' decisions to provide service and to involve an advocate in formally-reported DV incidents. The study sampled 368 DV cases from an urban police department while using a stratified sampling method. As part of the analysis of the study's data, multivariate binary logistic regression was adopted. Goodson et al. (2022) found that the police will likely refer a victim of DV for other service when there is the presence of physical abuse on the victim and decreased perpetrators age. The provision of referral to victims by police indicates their provision of information to help a victim which becomes a means to support. The above study's results could be possibly skewed to reflect the ideas of DVV's in the urban areas since no case of DV in a rural setting was added. To provide a

more comprehensive assessment of the police decisions to provide service, the above study could have included cases from rural settings.

Among 2,831 people who reported experiencing IPV, Saxton et al. (2018) examined their rates of reporting to the police, experiences with, and perceived helpfulness of police. The study found that the police offered support of resources including the provision of information, options and explanation of the next steps to take (Saxton et al., 2018). The inclusion of both males and females as participants in Saxton et al. (2018) study was relevant to reduce sex related bias in reporting and also provide the study with a balanced view of both sexes on the support they received from the police when they experienced DV.

In the Ghanaian context, victims of DV are identified to report DV less to formal support networks like DOVVSU or the police, while, there is higher preference of reporting to informal support sources such as religious and community leaders, family members, and friends (Rohn, 2021). Rohn (2021) conducted a qualitative study among 30 women in the Ashanti, Upper East, and Greater Accra regions of Ghana. Victims may not be using the formal support network like the police due to the poor reception they may be receiving from the police. A poor means of support from the police to victims will possibly limit their reach to police. Noting that Rohn (2021) included participants from three regions of Ghana, the study may have presented a much varying and reliable perspective of Ghanaian women on the support the police provide them when they report DV issues.

Also, in a study of child sexual abuse victims in the Wa Municipality of Ghana, it was found that the police subjected the victims to similar investigative processes like adults such as undergoing repeat interviews, with the creation of delays in supporting the victims to seek medical help, and police officers encouraging home settlement sexual abuse cases in some instances (Agbley & Dumanya, 2023). The study used data from both questionnaires and

structured interviews which was obtained from respondents that included child sexual abuse victims, police officers, health and social workers. Agbley and Dumenya (2023) study depicts the police providing a poor form of support to child victims of sexual abuse. The police are seen to be insensitive in handling child sexual abuse victims since they did not consider the child victims medical state first.

On the other hand, Kaburi and Kaburi (2023) reported that in some instances police officers accompanied DVV's to the hospital and in an instance a police officer paid the medical bill of a DVV's. It was a descriptive cross-sectional survey that assessed the experiences of Ghanaian women survivors of DV with formal support services in conjunction with the provisions of the Ghana DV act and insights of subject experts. The study included 28 participants comprising of 21 women survivors of DV and 7 experts from the police, human rights, and health professions in Weija of Ghana. Kaburi and Kaburi (2023) study reflects a positive form of support provided by the police and this kind of act will encourage victims to report to the. However, the act of paying for a victim's bill by the police is not a kind of support that is sustainable.

Noting the resource constraints in the Ghana police system and the country as a whole. The police could be willing to provide or refer DV victims to gain other required care, however, the difficulty in logistics and resources in attaining this care might limit the extent of support they can provide. For instance, police from other jurisdictions are known to conduct risk management for DV victims which could result into the police securing a temporal accommodation for a victim if required. Within the Ghanaian setting temporal accommodation for DV victims are largely not available to the police to use to support victims. This limits the extent of support the police could provide in these instances and may not even conduct a risk management for DV victims. It is important to know that, the police

provide varying form of support to DV victims but these supports may be per the situation and individual.

#### **2.3.4 Psychosocial Challenges for Domestic Violence Victims in Police Interactions**

In the journey of DVV's, they are likely to face varying forms of challenges through their encounter with the police. Researchers have reported different challenges that impede the police response to DVV's. Powell and Henry (2016) reported lack of cooperation from internet and telecommunications service providers, cross-jurisdictional barriers (when either a suspected victim or the perpetrator is located overseas, or evidence is held by an international service provider), limited resources for forensic analysis and difficulty for professionals to keep up with advancements in technology as their challenges in responding to victims in technology-facilitated sexual violence. The study was a qualitative study conducted among 30 participants that entailed the police, legal services and domestic and sexual violence service sector providers. This specifically highlights much infrastructural challenge that DVV's face.

Another significant study by Duhaney (2022) involved a sample of black women from various socioeconomic backgrounds, recruited from Greater Toronto area. This research employed a qualitative study design to understand Black women's experiences with the police. Duhaney (2022) identified that most women expressed experiencing negative encounters with the police, which was bore out of the police's negative perceptions of them. The black women reported that after calling the police to intervene in an intimate partner violence incident they were subjected to great scrutiny and vulnerable to racialized and gendered police violence. Their findings suggested that minority women were more likely to experience biased treatment from police officers, which intensified their feelings of

distrust and fear. This study highlighted that minority victims often faced additional layers of stigma, which further complicated their recovery processes.

In a broader context, García-Moreno et al. (2005) provided a comprehensive review of the global landscape of police responses to domestic violence. Their findings emphasized that inadequate training and resources for law enforcement contribute to poor outcomes for victims, as officers may not be equipped to handle the complexities of domestic violence cases sensitively. This systemic issue perpetuates a cycle of trauma and underreporting, as victims are discouraged from seeking help due to negative prior experiences.

With the aim of documenting institutional challenges to delivering domestic violence services in Ghana and determine whether the challenges cause further harm to victims Sedziafa and Tenkorang (2024) conducted a qualitative study among 16 women with a history of domestic violence and 10 DOVVSU personnel in Greater Accra, Ashanti, and Northern regions. The study identified lack of investment to create risk mitigation strategies and in developing the infrastructure needed to address inaccessibility to domestic violence services.

In addition, Asante-Poku and Dery (2024) examined the factors influencing the quality of police response, identifying several key challenges. They identified challenges including inadequate training of officers in handling domestic violence cases, resource constraints that limit the police's ability to respond effectively, and deeply entrenched cultural attitudes that may influence how seriously domestic violence is taken. However, their study also highlighted promising initiatives, such as gender-sensitive policing programs, which have shown positive outcomes in pilot areas where they have been implemented. Improving police response is crucial for enhancing victim safety and confidence in the justice system.

Rohn (2021) also identified the barriers to help-seeking by victims of IPV to include stigmatization, lack of trust in formal support channels, fear of divorce, presence of children in their relationship, sociocultural norms emphasizing gender role expectations, and family privacy. Challenges identified to affect DVV's from an institutional perspective was inadequately trained personnel, location of DOVVSU offices, inadequate resources, like limited administrative and logistical support, lack of privacy at DOVVSU offices, and financial constraints. Rohn (2021) conducted a qualitative study among thirty women and fifteen staff at DOVVSU from Ashanti, Upper East, and Greater Accra regions of Ghana. The researcher intended to explore IPV victims' experiences of help-seeking. The data from this study was analyzed using thematic analysis. Rohn (2021) could be said to have obtained results that reflect the broader perspective of individuals experiencing IPV since it included participants from the northern, middle and southern regions of Ghana.

It is not surprising Rohn (2021) study has identified inadequately trained police personnel, location of DOVVSU offices, inadequate resources, lack of privacy at DOVVSU offices, and financial constraints to be impediments in DVV's encounter with the police. These difficulties largely stem from the general syndrome of limited resources reported in most Ghanaian institutions.

The empirical literature reveals that police interactions with DVV's is opposed significant by psychosocial challenges. The qualitative and quantitative studies reviewed highlight the need for trauma-informed approaches and other remedies within law enforcement to mitigate the adverse effects of poor police encounters. By understanding these dynamics, stakeholders can work towards improving police training, enhancing support services, and ultimately fostering a more supportive environment for domestic violence victims.

### 2.3.5 Psychosocial outcome of Police Response on Domestic Violence Victims

The police in responding to DV is expected to leave a positive response on victims that approach them for help. However, in certain instances the police acts in contrary than what is expected of them.

To illustrate, it has been identified that a more negative response from the police is significantly associated with higher post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms (Srinivas & DePrince, 2015). They also found that several women who reported DV to the police thought the investigating officer "yelled at me for wasting their time" and "made me feel like crap."

Srinivas and DePrince (2015) study were a cross-sectional study that aimed at assessing the psychological impact of institutional support for survivors of intimate partner violence. The study sample involved 5,236 female intimate partner violence survivors. The study above included a good number of participants in their study. Noting the good number of participants used in this study, it could fairly reflect police response to females who experienced intimate partner violence. Moreover, the results may differ if it had male participants.

Also, in analyzing the data of 400 domestic violence and abuse victims, it was identified that a victim's gender, state of vulnerability (including mental health) and incident type impact the progression of cases through the criminal justice system by the police. These factors were associated to victims withdrawing their cases. The data was obtained from a previous study conducted in England that used a multi-stage sampling method. The study aimed at assessing trajectories of reports made to the police, and the various factors that influence their progress through, or attrition from the criminal justice system. This highlights a bias response to DVV's which gives them no option than withdrawing their case. These actions by the police could also be linked to patriarchal values that some police officers often males

could harbor. These values could influence the officer's decision to discontinue a DV case if they feel it does not fit into their patriarchal beliefs.

Myhill (2019) conducted a qualitative study among thirty-two police officers who respond to DV where the focus was on police officers' decision-making with regards to actions taken at the scene of a domestic violence incidents, with emphasis on the decision to arrest a perpetrator. In-depth interviews obtained from the study participants were analyzed using thematic analysis. Other documents such as police case-files with crime and incident reports, risk assessments, and others like witness statements were also used in the study. Myhill (2019) found that police officers are likely to arrest in instances where there is clear evidence of a criminal offence and where they perceived the likelihood of the risk of further harm. Some police officers were also identified to use craft work to avoid making an arrest in situations they consider to be a disproportionate response. This response by the police could result into varying good and negative emotions among DV victims since these actions made by the police may not meet the expectation of DVV's. Adopting different forms of data like crime and incident reports, risk assessments, and witness statements for this study may have increased the reliability of the results since it gave the researcher the opportunity to compare data. Considering that victims of DV will have different experience during an encounter with the police, this could be due to the competence of specific officer attending to victims.

Furthermore, Shearson (2021) explored the application of Landenberger's model of entrapment in and recovery from violent relationships to understand victims' help-seeking needs when they access police services. The study was a qualitative study that used a grounded theory approach. Sixteen victims living in a culturally diverse Western metropolitan region of Melbourne, Australia were involved in an interview conducted with a semi-structured interview guide. The study found that all victims hoped to find a powerful

ally in the police and factors like diminished agency on the part of the police and low expectations of legal protection constrained victims' help-seeking aspirations and sometimes resulted in a cycle of chronic police intervention (Shearson, 2021). Noting that victims are sometimes left to continuously approach the police to act on their incident could cause dissatisfaction among the victims with regards to how the police had treated them.

Saxton et al. (2018) also recorded in their study that some victims of DV believe they were exposed to potential harms for seeking help from police or the justice system in their incident and they felt their case will be handled appropriately if they get the right police officer and had some luck on their side. Legal responses to intimate partner violence (IPV) can determine whether and how those exposed to IPV seek help. Understanding the victim's perspective is essential to developing policy and practice standards, as well as informing professionals working in policing and the justice system. This was a survey conducted among 2,831 people who reported experiencing intimate partner violence. The study aimed at assessing the rates of reporting to the police, victims' experiences' with, and perceived helpfulness of the police. The study employed the use of both closed and opened-ended questions which was reported to be analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis respectively. The idea of anticipating a potential to be harmed after contacting the police when exposed to DV could signify a negative police behaviour to victims which will in-turn trigger negative emotions in them.

Understanding the psychosocial impact of police responses on DVV's is essential. It could be said that the psychosocial outcome of DV victims may be dependent on the kind of support or service the police provide to victims during their encounter. The complex interplay between police interactions and the psychosocial state of victims highlights the

need for support mechanisms that mitigate distress and promote healing for victims of domestic violence.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed to examine the experiences of domestic violence victims regarding police response to incidents in Greater Accra, Ghana. The methodology is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how law enforcement agencies, particularly the Ghana Police Service, handle and respond to reported cases of domestic violence. This section details the research design, approach, data collection methods, and analytical techniques used to address the study's objectives as well as ethical consideration in the conduct of the study. The chosen methods aim to uncover the factors influencing police response, the types of interventions made, and their alignment with legal requirements and best practices in handling domestic violence cases. This study seeks to contribute valuable insight into the landscape of domestic violence response in Greater Accra, potentially informing policy decisions and improving support services for victims. The subsequent sections will elaborate on each component of the methodology, providing a clear road-map for the research process, including participant selection, ethical considerations, and data analysis techniques.

#### 3.2 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative narrative research design to investigate the experiences of domestic violence victims regarding police response to incidents in Greater Accra, Ghana. The phenomenological approach is particularly suitable for this research as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of victims within the context of their interactions with law enforcement (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design enables the

researcher to capture the nuances of victims' perceptions, emotional responses, and the impact of police interventions on their lives and well-being. Furthermore, the focus on Greater Accra allows for an intensive analysis of police response within a specific urban context, considering the unique socio-cultural factors that may influence both the incidence of domestic violence and law enforcement practices in this region.

This approach is supported by Smith et al. (2022), who emphasize the value of phenomenological studies in providing detailed, contextual insights into sensitive social issues like domestic violence. By centering the voices and experiences of victims, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the effectiveness and challenges of police response to domestic violence in Greater Accra, potentially informing policy improvements and enhancing support services for survivors.

### **3.3 Research Population and Sampling**

The population for this study comprises individuals in Nungua, Teshie, La, Osu, and Gamashie territories of Greater Accra who have experienced domestic violence and reported incidents to the police. Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, purposive sampling was employed to select participants who could provide relevant and insightful information about their experiences with police response.

The sample included twenty (20) individuals from various backgrounds and demographics to ensure a comprehensive perspective on police interactions in domestic violence cases. Participants were recruited purposely through collaboration with domestic violence support organizations, counseling centers, and women's rights groups in Greater Accra. This approach allowed for a diverse range of experiences to be captured, including variations in the types of domestic violence reported, the police stations involved, and the outcomes of the cases.

To ensure a holistic view, the study aimed to include participants who had interacted with different levels of law enforcement, from front desk officers to specialized Domestic Violence Support Units. This approach allowed for insight into various aspects of police response at different stages of the reporting and investigation process. The final sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation, where interviews were conducted until no new significant themes or patterns emerged from the data. This approach ensured that the study captured a comprehensive range of experiences and perspectives on police response to domestic violence in Greater Accra.

### **3.4 Profile of Greater Accra Region and Domestic Violence Response**

Greater Accra, the capital region of Ghana, has seen a concerning rise in reported cases of domestic violence in recent years. As the most populous and economically significant area of the country, Greater Accra faces unique challenges in addressing this pervasive social issue. The Ghana Police Service, through its Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU), is the primary agency responsible for responding to and investigating cases of domestic abuse in the region. DOVVSU was established in 1998 (initially as the Women and Juvenile Unit) to provide specialized services for victims of domestic violence, sexual offenses, and child abuse. In Greater Accra, DOVVSU operates dedicated units in major police stations across the region's 29 districts. These units are staffed by officers who receive specialized training in handling domestic violence cases and supporting victims.

Despite these efforts, challenges persist in the police response to domestic violence in Greater Accra. A 2022 study by the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of Ghana found that only 23% of domestic violence victims in the region reported their experiences to the police. Reasons cited for low reporting rates included fear of retaliation, lack of trust in the justice system, and societal stigma surrounding domestic

abuse. For those who do report, experiences with police response vary. Some victims report receiving empathetic support and thorough investigations, while others describe encountering dismissive attitudes, delays in response, and inadequate follow-up. A 2023 survey by the Domestic Violence Coalition of Ghana found that 45% of victims who reported incidents in Greater Accra were dissatisfied with the police handling of their cases.

Efforts are underway to improve police response to domestic violence in the region. In 2021, the Ghana Police Service launched a comprehensive training program for all officers in Greater Accra on trauma-informed approaches to domestic violence cases. Additionally, a pilot program initiated in 2022 pairs specially trained social workers with DOVVSU officers to provide more holistic support to victims. The Ghana Police Service has also implemented technological solutions to enhance its response. A dedicated hotline (0800-111-222) was established in 2020 for reporting domestic violence incidents in Greater Accra. In 2022, a mobile app called "SafetyNet" was launched, allowing victims to discreetly alert police and share their location in emergency situations.

Despite these initiatives, significant challenges remain. Resource constraints, including limited personnel and vehicles, often hamper timely response to reported incidents. Cultural attitudes that view domestic violence as a private family matter continue to influence both victim-reporting behavior and some officers' handling of cases. As Greater Accra continues to grapple with the complex issue of domestic violence, understanding victims' experiences with police response is crucial for developing more effective interventions and support systems. This research aims to contribute valuable insights to inform policy improvements and enhance the region's capacity to protect and support victims of domestic violence.

### 3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data for this study was primarily collected through semi-structured interviews with victims of domestic violence who had reported incidents to the police in Greater Accra. The Kpeshie division police headquarters station at Nungua in the Krowor municipal and the Ministries police station in the Klottey Korle municipal were the sites for data collection. These sites were selected based on their popularity and the presence of a Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit with the notion that many domestic violence victims will report to these police stations. At a selected police station, the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit was reached. Individuals that came to the unit to report domestic violence incidents were referred for the study. The aim and relevance of the study were then explained to the individuals. Individuals that consented to participate in the study while others who declined participation were free to go. The individuals were then interviewed for the study until no new information was obtained from them or data saturation was reached.

The interview guide was designed to gather information on several key themes: reasons for reporting, experiences with police response, challenges faced, evaluation of police interactions, emotional impact, and recommendations for improvement. It consists of open-ended questions allowing for in-depth responses and probing follow-up questions to explore participants' experiences fully. The interviews began with demographic questions and an open invitation for participants to share their stories. Subsequent questions explored specific aspects of their interactions with the police, including initial reporting, measures taken by police, positive aspects of the response, challenges encountered, and factors contributing to the police response. Participants were also asked about the emotional impact of police interactions, the influence on their case outcomes, and their overall satisfaction. The interview guide also included questions on participants' expectations regarding confidentiality and empathy from the police, as well as any counseling or referrals provided.

It also sought recommendations for improving police support for domestic violence victims and encouraging reporting.

This approach allowed for the collection of rich, qualitative data that provided insight into victims' experiences with police response to domestic violence in Greater Accra. The semi-structured nature of the interviews enabled flexibility to explore unique aspects of each participant's experience while maintaining consistency across core themes. This method was particularly suitable for capturing the nuanced and often sensitive nature of domestic violence victims' interactions with law enforcement.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

This study employs qualitative data analysis techniques, primarily thematic analysis, to examine the experiences of domestic violence victims with police response in Greater Accra. Semi-structured interview was adopted to collect data, with thematic analysis used to identify patterns or themes, and insights from the gathered data while acknowledging the researcher's role in interpreting the data. The data collected from the respondents was analyzed with Nvivo 12 while using thematic analysis approach.

Data acquired in this study was analyzed as guided by the constructivist paradigm of epistemology. Jonassen (1991) explains that in the constructivist paradigm of epistemology, knowledge is developed in the process of interpreting and constructing personal knowledge representations. This study's analysis was then conducted while noting the subjectivity of the DV victims and the researcher, and taking into consideration the understanding of participants experience. This approach will allow for a comprehensive understanding of victims' experiences with police response to domestic violence incidents, the challenges they face, and the factors influencing the quality of police interventions. The findings will be interpreted within the context of Ghana's legal and social framework for addressing domestic

violence, as well as relevant literature on police responses to domestic violence globally. This process will enable the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions about the current state of police response to domestic violence in Greater Accra region of Ghana.

### ***3.6.1 Transcription***

The recorded interviews of each participant were converted into text. In transcribing the interviews of the participants, their statements were typed “word-for-word”. Each transcript was reviewed to ensure it represented the statement made by each participant. All the transcription were done by the student researcher.

### ***3.6.2 Thematic Analysis***

The analysis of data in this study was performed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is described as a process that entails recognizing and examining qualitative data through six phases (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The six phases include; familiarization of the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up the findings through contextualizing themes in previous literature.

The student researcher and his colleague who all have a background in counselling psychology performed the analysis of this study. The student researcher and his colleague read through the transcripts and also compared them to audio recordings obtained through the interviews. This process provided them the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the data. The student researcher and his colleague separately then performed the coding of data with guidance from research supervisors.

Various statements that the study respondents made in relation to specific research questions were noted and assigned with codes. A code is a term given to a statement that explains an idea as expressed by a respondent. Some codes recorded during the analysis with regards to

reasons for reporting DV include; beating, hit by an object, insults, arrest, discipline husband, ensuring safety, prevention and others.

After generating the codes, the student researcher and his colleague who performed the analysis met to discuss the codes they individually generated to determine the accuracy of the codes. Further guidance on the generated codes were also provided by the research supervisors. The accepted codes after the review were then grouped into sub-themes. The sub-themes were later also grouped to create main themes through the guidance of the research supervisors. Braun and Clarke (2006) define a theme as a word or a group of words containing information about the data that relates to a research question of interest and also describes a meaning or patterned response (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis of data using thematic analysis produced main themes as follows; four for reasons for reporting DV, two for forms of support received from police, three for psychosocial impact of police response to DV victims and three for challenges faced by DV victims during encounter with police. In reporting the analysis of the study's data, a unique number was assigned to each respondent. Some statements of respondents were quoted to support the explanation of a particular theme.

### **3.7 Ethical Consideration**

This study adheres to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the integrity of the research process and protect the rights and well-being of participants, particularly given the sensitive nature of domestic violence. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Humanities (ECH 007/23-24) of the University of Ghana, and permission was secured from the Ghana Police Service (BF.330/344/01<sup>R</sup>/23) before commencing the research. Before data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, clearly explaining the study's purpose, potential risks, and benefits. The researchers ensured that participants fully

understood their rights and the nature of their involvement. Given the sensitive subject matter, extra care was taken to explain the support services available to participants if needed. Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were strictly maintained throughout the research process. All data was securely stored and accessible only to authorized researchers. Pseudonyms were used in all documentation to protect participants' identities. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. The researchers were trained to recognize signs of distress and were prepared to pause or terminate interviews if necessary, prioritizing participants' well-being.

The research design and methodology were carefully developed to minimize any potential re-traumatization of domestic violence victims. Interviews were conducted in safe, private locations chosen by the participants. The study also respects the policies and procedures of the Ghana Police Service, ensuring that any information related to ongoing investigations or sensitive police matters is handled with utmost discretion and used solely for academic purposes.

### **3.10 Trustworthiness of results**

To ensure the trustworthiness of the results the criteria explained by Shenton (2004) as outlined by Guba (1981) was used. The criteria that were followed to ensure trustworthiness was credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility of the study was attained through the following practice or methods. The student researcher and his supervisors discussed and agreed on the research method for this study, and this was scrutinized as well to ensure its appropriateness. The student researcher is knowledgeable about the services being rendered by the police to victims of Domestic violence. Participants were chosen based on the idea that they could provide information

about their experience of domestic violence without considering a random sampling. The student researcher and his colleague that also assisted with the analysis of the study's data are all Master's students of counseling psychology while the research supervisors all have doctorate degrees in psychology. Frequent debriefing sessions were held throughout the period of the study by the student researcher and his supervisors to help address various issues of that came up. A colleague psychology student was also engaged to scrutinize various steps of the research process and provide feedback on things or areas that could have been better modified.

To ensure transferability in this study to other sites, the below information could be looked at. All the study participants were staying in the Greater Accra region. Twenty participants were engaged in this study and they comprised of two males and eighteen females. Fifteen participants were married with a few not in a romantic relationship. All the victims were staying with their perpetrators in the same vicinity. The participants were recruited from three community engagements. The participants were within varying age groups comprising of young and middle-aged women. The interview sessions with the participants lasted between 16 to 25 minutes. The data collection process was performed in a month and about two weeks. The idea of police response represented the activities that the police performed in the process of dealing with domestic violence victims. All participants were engaged in the research freely. Participants who were engaged were individuals who have contacted the police in the Accra metropolis. Interviews were adopted as method of data collection for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide which explored in-depth information about victims reached.

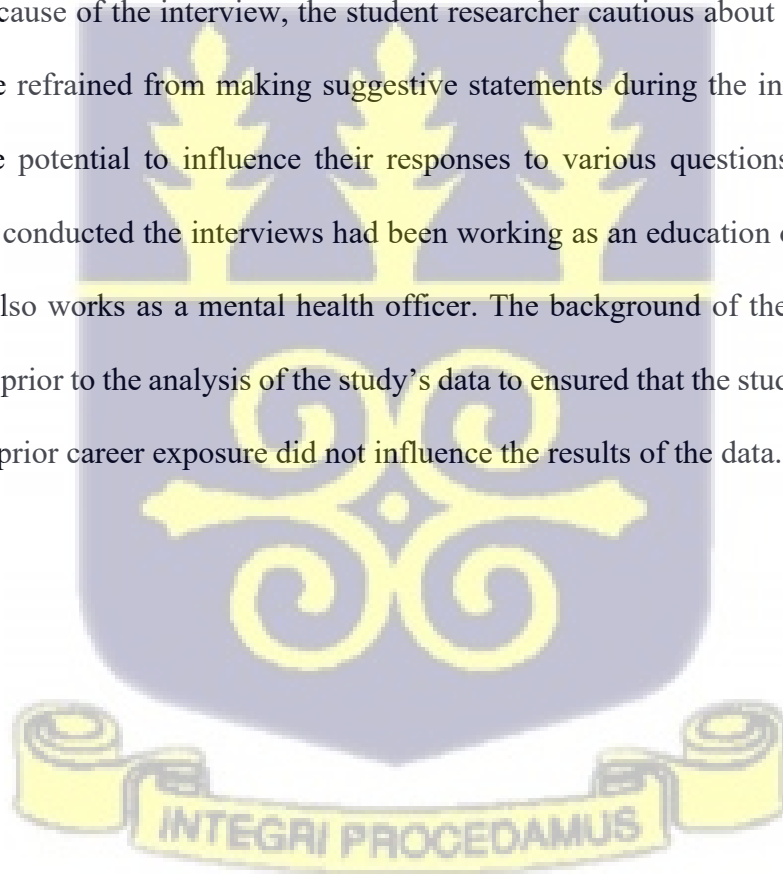
In ensuring confirmability, the student researcher and a colleague psychology student conducted the data collection for this study. The study's data was analyzed by the student researcher and a colleague separately. Both the student researcher and a colleague

scrutinized the data analysis with suggestions discussed and considered. The analysis process was also scrutinized by the research supervisors who made suggestions and were considered in the analysis process.

Dependability could be ensured while following detailed procedures outlined in this study including research design, data source and data collection, research population and sampling, study site, data analysis, and others. In case of a possible replication of this study, researchers could follow the steps in the study.

### **3.11 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity here focuses on the consideration of the role of subjectivity in the research process. In the course of the interview, the student researcher was cautious about the statements he made and he refrained from making suggestive statements during the interview which would have the potential to influence their responses to various questions. The student researcher who conducted the interviews had been working as an education officer and the colleague who also works as a mental health officer. The background of these individuals was considered prior to the analysis of the study's data to ensure that the student researcher and colleagues' prior career exposure did not influence the results of the data.

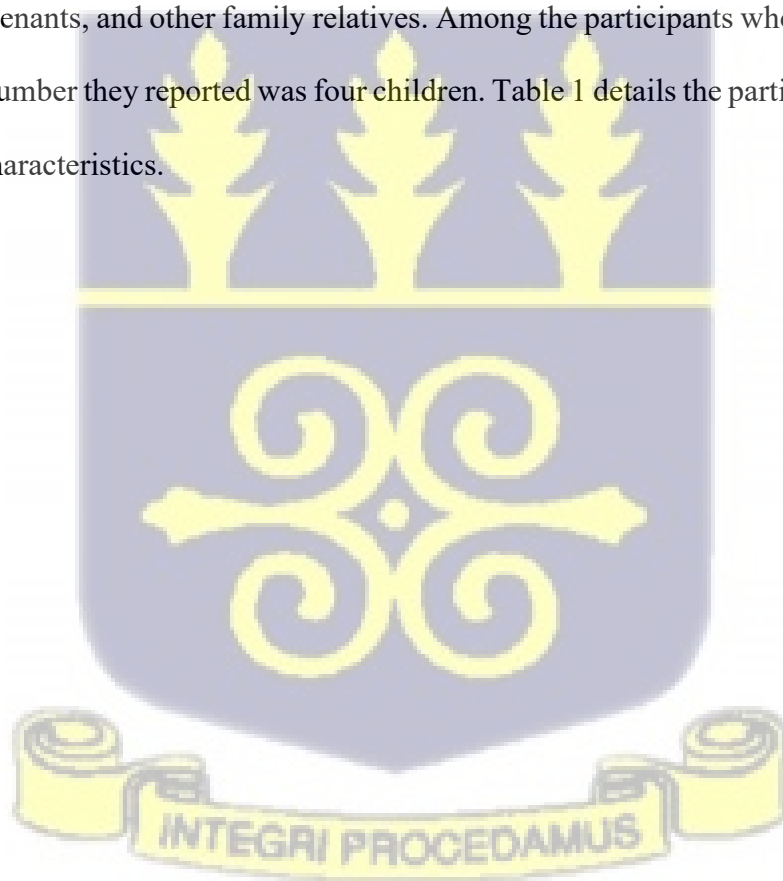


## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### 4.1 Participants' socio-demographic characteristics

Twenty respondents aged 18 to 50 years participated in this study. The participants (P) were all females. The participants described themselves as being either married or single. The respondents were in varying occupations, including government employment like teaching and nursing, with others working in self-employed jobs like seamstress, waakye selling, and others. The participants described their violence perpetrators to include husbands, boyfriends, co-tenants, and other family relatives. Among the participants who had children, the maximum number they reported was four children. Table 1 details the participants' socio-demographic characteristics.



**Table 1**

*Socio-demographic information of participants*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Number of children</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Perpetrators of violence</b>
P1	30	Female	Nurse	Four	Married	Husband
P2	26	Female	Waakye seller	Zero	Single	Boyfriend
P3	18	Female	SHS graduate	Zero	Single	Aunt
P4	24	Female	Indomie seller	One	Single	Uncle
P5	31	Female	Teacher	Zero	Single	Boyfriend
P6	35	Female	Trader	Two	Married	Husband
P7	38	Female	Trader	One	Married	Husband
P8	43	Female	Seamstress	Two	Married	Husband
P9	29	Female	Trader	Three	Married	Husband
P10	50	Female	Trader	Two	Married	Husband
P11	34	Female	Porridge seller	Four	Married	Husband
P12	22	Female	Trader	One	Married	Aunt
P13	25	Female	Indomie seller	One	Single	Uncle
P14	40	Female	Trader	Three	Married	Husband
P15	33	Female	Trader	Three	Married	Husband
P16	28	Female	Okro seller	Three	Married	Husband
P17	45	Female	Trader	Four	Married	Co-tenant
P18	38	Female	Trader	Three	Married	Husband
P19	34	Female	Trader	Two	Married	Co-tenant
P20	40	Female	Teacher	Two	Married	Husband

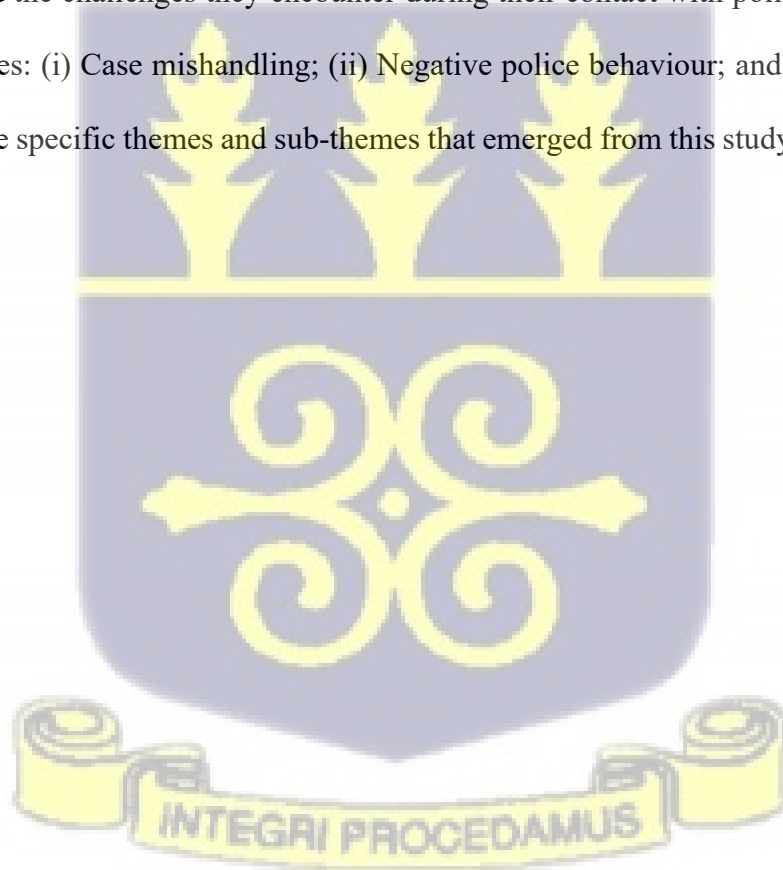
*Source: Data from fieldwork (2024)*

#### **4.2 Organization of Themes**

This section contains themes that denote respondents' experiences of this current study questions include; Why do domestic violence victims find it important to report domestic violence incidents to the police? What support do domestic violence victims receive from

the police? What are the psychosocial impacts of the police responsiveness on victims? and What psychosocial challenges are faced by domestic violence victims during their contact with police?

Four themes: nature of violence, Likelihood of violence causing harm and death, means to retaliate, and Avenue for help were found as the reasons explaining why participants report domestic violence incidents to the police. The forms of support domestic violence victims (DVV) receive from the police were found to be Informational support and Tangible support. Police response to victims of domestic violence was found to yield emotional triggers, exert of external influence, and a sense of inappropriate actions. The victims of domestic violence also highlighted the challenges they encounter during their contact with police through the following themes: (i) Case mishandling; (ii) Negative police behaviour; and (iii) Resource constraints. The specific themes and sub-themes that emerged from this study are presented in Table 2.



*Table 2: Organization of Themes*

<b>Super-ordinate Themes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	
<b>DV Victims’ psychosocial experiences on violence and reporting</b>	Nature of violence	Physical abuse Emotional abuse	
	Reporting due to likelihood of harm and death	Frequency of violence Harm infliction Possibility of death	
	Reporting as a Means to retaliate	Fear instillment Provision of punishment Provision of justice	
	Reporting as an avenue for help seeking	Reporting as an avenue for escape Violence prevention	
	<b>Forms of support received from police</b>	Informational support	Directing to help
		Tangible support	Help to prosecute Initiation of punishment
<b>Psychosocial challenges faced by DVV during their contact with police</b>		Case mishandling	Administrative delays Bad judgement
	Negative police behavior	Limited commitment to cases Dismissive acts Intrusive questioning	
	Resource constraints	Absence of an interpreter Limited means of transport Sales of essential policing items	
	Exertion of external influence	Family influence Influence of religious leaders	
	<b>Psychosocial impacts of police response to victims of domestic violence</b>	The trigger of emotional reactions	Sense of distress Sense of satisfaction Unempathetic feeling
		Case discontinuation	Inactions of the police Mismanagement of cases

### 4.3 Reasons for reporting domestic violence

In determining the reasons why domestic violence victims report their encounter of violence to the police, four main themes; Nature of violence, reporting due to Likelihood of harm and death, reporting as a Means to retaliate and Reporting as an Avenue for help. These explained the basis of triggering the process of reporting and subsequent reporting of domestic violence to the police

#### 4.3.1 Nature of violence

The nature of violence theme had two sub-themes thus; physical abuse and emotional abuse. The participants described various forms of abuse which were triggered by issues of loss of items or money, cheating, disagreement on disciplining a child or a relative, and the issue of conjugal duties. All abuse described to have been experienced by the participants were emotional and physical abuse.

##### *Physical abuse*

Physical abuse is described as an intentional bodily injury that includes slapping, choking, kicking, shoving, pinching, or physical restraints. The respondents described it as being subjected to beatings intended to cause injury to their bodies. One participant, in describing how she was physically abused on account of suspicion of cheating reiterated;

*“When I went to the police station, my husband accused me of cheating. One day he came from work and saw a man with me without knowing the man. So, he started accusing me. When I was trying to explain, he didn't listen to me and he started beating me. So, I took him to the police station”* (P1, Age; 30, Female).

Again, a participant explained how a fight with her husband about their son resulted in her receiving slaps and kicks;

*“... my husband beat our son mercilessly, even though the boy was at fault. But I just uttered "oh, but it is too much". Then, suddenly, he started slapping me from left to right, stamping my abdomen and I fell unconscious. Then a few minutes later, I came to myself and I went to the police station to report the case (P10, Age; 50, Female).*

One woman who was also abused due to a misunderstanding with her husband about marrying another woman stated;

*“Hmm. One night, I was sleeping, and my husband tapped me to wake up. When I woke up, he just said he wants to marry another woman. And I said, what? Another woman? At this moment? In this Ghana that we are? No, it can't be possible. We have to take care of the children for the meantime. And the time I realized he slapped me and he held my neck. And I was trying to, I was struggling, but he pushed me and I used my head to hit the bed. And I managed myself till the next day. So early in the morning, I dress up and I went to the police station first to report the case” (P11, Age; 34, Female).*

Physical abuse was not only limited to couples, there were incidents, were guardians physically abused children. For instance, a participant explained her ordeal which arose from breaking a plate;

*“Yeah. When I completed senior high school, there wasn't money for me to further my education. So, an idea came up that I should go and help my auntie to sell Waakye, to help her sell Waakye, so that I could gather some money to go ahead. So, one day I was with her helping her, and then I mistakenly broke some plates. So, she got angry and then slapped me and used my head to hit the wall. So, she was going to the other end to remove firewood to hit me. So, I have to run away to the police station (P12, Age;22, Female).*

This denotes the exertion of physical pain through various forms to victims. The physical abuse identified in this situation was the beatings and fight melted out on victims. The physical abuse was mostly cause by male partners; however, females were also found to be abusers.

### ***Emotional abuse***

Emotional abuse denotes behaving or saying things to hurt someone psychologically without physically touching the individual. Some respondents described how their perpetrators abused them emotionally. The emotional abuse here described behaviors and actions that caused psychological distress to the victims. To explain the emotional abuse, a respondent reported how she was exposed to insults because she asked for school fees from her husband;

*“Whenever I ask him to give support, school fees, and other things, he’ll be annoyed and be insulting me”* (P16, Age; 28, Female).

Another participant described how she was exposed to some insults that were later followed by other acts of violence when she tried to separate a fight between her child and her perpetrators’ child;

*“So immediately I went there and then I was separating them. Immediately the woman also came out asking me what was wrong and I said they were fighting but I was trying to separate them. This woman just started imposing insults on me. I was surprised because we were not having any quarrel previously, but this woman started imposing insult on me”* (P17, Age; 45, Female).

Again, one victim had this to say about how her husband had been telling her hurtful things;

*“I had an issue with my husband. Actually, he started abusing me emotionally and verbally, and I could no longer contain the emotional stress and trauma I was going through”* (P 20, Age; 40, Female).

These instances of abuse describe how victims were exposed to some form of emotional pain due to the words and actions of their perpetrators. The emotional abuse mostly emerged as the result of some misunderstanding experienced by individuals. The victims were seen to mostly highlight their exposure to insults as the main form through which they experience emotional abuse.

#### **4.3.2 Reporting due to likelihood of harm and death**

Participants cited this theme as one of the motives for reporting domestic violence to the police. This theme reflects reporting incidents of DV to the police as a means to prevent themselves from incurring injuries or death. The sub-themes under this theme were frequency of violence, harm infliction, and the possibility of death. The theme seems to connote with victims measuring the severity of violence they are exposed to with regards to its frequency, extent of harm and death.

##### ***Frequency of violence***

One of the considerations for reporting domestic violence to the police is the frequency with which they suffered DV. In responding to the continuous exposure to violence, one participant who was beaten by her boyfriend stated that;

*“The pain and the beatings were too much, so I didn't have any other option than to report him”* (P5, Age; 35, Female).

Another respondent recounted how her husband continuously beat her;

*“He kept beating me any time he feels like, he kicks me, slaps me and does anything he wants to me” (P7, Age; 38, Female).*

The victims based their reason to report violence on the number of times they were exposed to the violence. This implies that the victims had experienced some form of violence which may have not been reported until they experienced subsequent ones that may make them felt the violence were becoming often or common.

### ***Possibility of death***

A participant expressing why she was motivated to report incidents of domestic violence to the police indicated that;

*“Oh, that man, he can kill me. What I went through that night, I know he can kill me. So, I decided to report the case” (P11, Age; 34, Female).*

Another participant reiterated,

*“Yiee, I had to report, because yeah, he would have killed me if I hadn't gone to the police station” (P4, Age; 24, Female).*

These described victims reporting their experience to violence due to the likelihood of the perpetrators exposing victims to death. This also implies that the victims reporting to the police becomes a means of preventing their perpetrators to cause their death.

### ***Harm infliction***

The level and nature of harm inflicted on some participants led them to report the violence to the police. Here the victims seem to have assessed the extent of harm caused them by the

perpetrators and based on that to make a decision on reporting the violence to the police. A participant who was physically abused by her husband explained why she reported her husband to the police;

*“because of how he injured me, he beat me and injured me”* (P9, Age;29, Female).

Another participant described how her uncle injured her;

*“Later, I checked myself and I saw blood coming out at my shoulder and my face. All my body was weak, so I had to do something”* (P4, Age;24, Female).

With regards to these participants, their perpetrators of violence were reported to the police since they could have caused them serious injury and death. These participants could then be said to have reported domestic violence to the police as a way to prevent injury or death.

#### **4.3.3 Reporting as a means to retaliate**

A *‘Means to retaliate’* here implies that the victims of domestic violence reported their experience of violence as a way to get back at their perpetrators. This theme emerged with sub-themes that included fear instillment, provision of punishment, and provision of justice.

##### ***Provision of punishment***

With this sub-theme, some participants expressed that they reported their perpetrators to the police because they wanted the police to punish the perpetrators for their acts of violence. For instance, one participant expressed that ...

*“It was necessary for me to report it to the police because of my safety and so that the police would come in and discipline him”* (P1, Age; 30, Female).

A victim, physically abused by her aunt described her reason for reporting as;

*“I was expecting they could have even dealt with my auntie. So that she would even be careful since I'm still with her...Maybe they'll ask her to pay some fine or even arrest her”* (P6, Age; 35, Female).

### ***Provision of justice***

Again, one victim indicated that she reported her incident to the police as a way

*“... to seek justice and prevent similar incidents from happening in the future”* (P2, Age; 26, Female).

Another respondent further explained that;

*For me, I did not want to also hurt him in return for people to say I have done something bad. I gave the issue to the police to do the right thing and question her about her behaviour* (P20, Age; 40, Female).

This demonstrates that the victims believe the police could provide them with justice.

### ***Fear instillment***

One participant wanting the police to instill fear in her violence perpetrator stated that;

*” ...so that they can put some fear in him because he nearly killed me* (P9, Age; 29, Female).

Another reiterated...

*“You see the beatings was too much, if they catch him like that, he will be scared to do that to me again. They had to arrest him for it to put some fear in him, next time he won't repeat it again.* (P16, Age; 28, Female)

These respondents reported the incidents to the police because they believed the police had the power to help them pay perpetrators back for the hurt and pain they went through from their perpetrators. Focusing on the idea that the victims reported to the police with the idea of the police punishing perpetrators, providing them justice against perpetrators and instilling fear in perpetrators the victims sought for vengeance on their perpetrators through their report to the police. This indicates that they were possibly helpless, so they contacted the police as a stronger opposition to face their perpetrators.

#### **4.3.4 Reporting as an avenue for help seeking**

The “*Reporting as an avenue for help seeking*” theme had two sub-themes; available resort and violence prevention explaining it. This theme denotes respondents’ reason to report a domestic violence act to the police with the idea that police custody is a safe haven and can help prevent further violence.

##### ***Reporting as an avenue for escape***

One victim described reporting domestic violence to the police as the appropriate step for escape from the perpetrator and suggested that ....

*“I thought it was the right thing to do so that he doesn’t get to me again.*

*I needed to tell the police”* (P2, Age; 26, Female),

while another who saw reporting to the police as the best option had this to say;

*“Because I didn't have anybody and that was the only best option for me to get away from the perpetrator”* (P3, Age; 18, Female).

This denotes victims aim of getting away from their perpetrators or preventing the perpetrators from reaching out to them to cause further havoc. Therefore, victims reporting to the police providing them with a chance to escape the violence that could be melted out to them.

### ***Violence prevention***

Some respondents reported domestic violence acts to the police because they saw the police station as a place that could help provide them with safety by preventing the violent acts from being meted out to them. Among these respondents, some explained that;

*“It was necessary for me to report it to the police because of my safety...”*

(P1, Age; 30, Female)

and another added that;

*“I believe it was necessary to report it to ensure my safety and the safety of others”* (P7, Age; 38, Female).

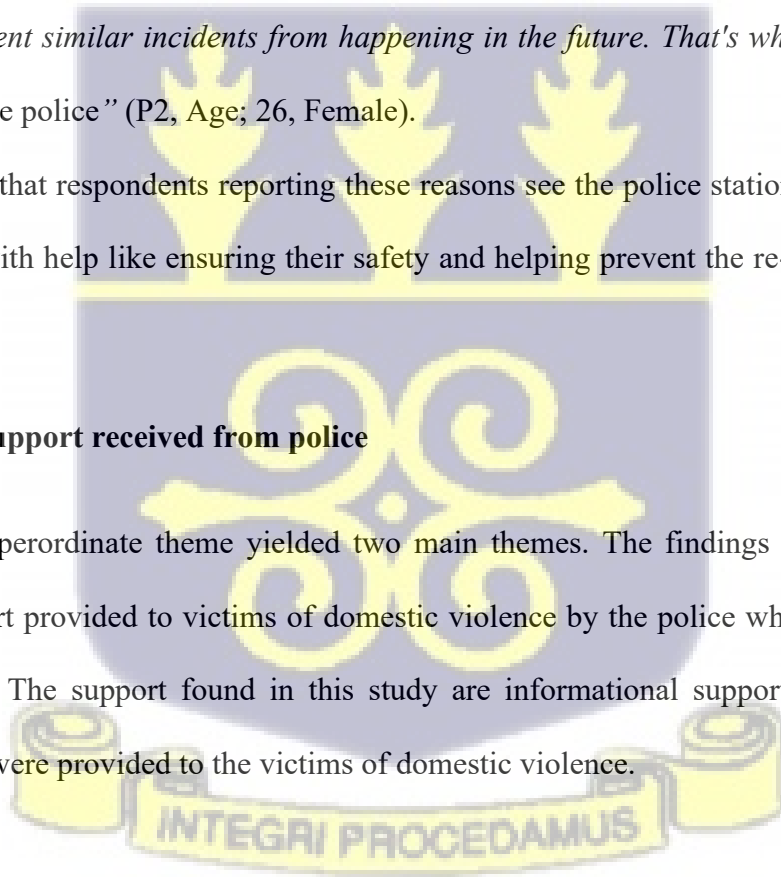
A participant continued that, the report of domestic violence to the police would

*“... prevent similar incidents from happening in the future. That's why I went to the police”* (P2, Age; 26, Female).

It can be noted that respondents reporting these reasons see the police station as a place to provide them with help like ensuring their safety and helping prevent the re-occurrence of violence.

### **4.4 Forms of support received from police**

This second superordinate theme yielded two main themes. The findings identified two forms of support provided to victims of domestic violence by the police when they report their incidents. The support found in this study are informational support and tangible support which were provided to the victims of domestic violence.



#### 4.4.1 Informational support

This theme explained how the police provided domestic violence victims with information that could help with the processing of their case of abuse. The informational support theme has one sub-theme which is ‘directing to help’. For instance, participants obtained informational support through the police initiating, guiding, and directing the participants to write their report of the incidents as a statement and also direct them to go to the hospital for medical assessment to support their case.

##### *Directing to help*

Directing to help implies the police providing information to victims which directs them to a means of help. This was explained by one participant as;

*“Well, initially when I got there, they took my statement and that of my fiancée’s. They took his contact and then they gave me a form to visit the hospital, which I did” (P5, Age; 31).*

In addition, another participant stated;

*“Well, they asked me for my statement, which I wrote. After that, they gave me a medical form to go to the hospital” (P4, Age; 24, Female).*

Moreover, a respondent, in explaining her encounter with the police had this to say...

*“They took my statement and gave me a medical form to go to the hospital”  
(P13, Age; 25, Female)*

while another explained that;

*“They gave me a form. I wrote my statement. Then the second thing was that, they gave me a medical form to fill. I filled it and sent it to the hospital”* (P10, Age; 50, Female).

This form of support describes a procedure the police follow to process the case for justice and help a victim attain additional medical care for injuries they had sustained through the violence. This was mainly information that was provided to victims on the next appropriate step to take in helping them with their issue. This direction or information provided by the police becomes a significant form of support in the remedy of the domestic violence experienced by victims.

#### **4.4.2 Tangible support**

Tangible support includes taking on responsibilities for someone else’s for them to deal with a problem. This theme refers to instances where the respondents depended on the police to help them fix their issues. The theme had two sub-themes namely help to prosecute and initiation of punishment.

##### ***Help to prosecute***

*Help to prosecute* implies that the police performed a responsibility on behalf of the victims to prosecute their perpetrators. To illustrate, victims who reported their issues to the police did so since they believed the police could help them prosecute their perpetrators. This view was seen in the statement of some participants who said;

*“They (police) pressed charges against my husband. That was what they did”* (P7, Age; 38, Female),

with another adding that;

*“When he (boyfriend) got there, they questioned him. They pressed charges against him “(P2, Age; 26, Female).*

These portray a responsibility to press charges on a perpetrator of domestic violence executed on behalf of the victim. The victims of DV in this instance have realized the significance of the police in helping them find justice and were looking up to the police to seek justice.

### ***Initiation of punishment***

Other respondents derived some support from their reliance on the police to initiate some form of punishment in the view of the victims through picking up perpetrators, questioning, and processing them for justice. For instance, one participant explained how the police arrested her boyfriend;

*“... they asked him to come to the police station. Initially, he didn't want to come, but while I was at the hospital, I was told the police had gone to pick him up. This will make him feel some pain for what he did to me” (P5, Age; 31, Female).*

Another participant narrated that;

*“After taking my statement, they followed me to the house to arrest him and take him to the police station. He spent some time there (at the police station) and people saw him being arrested, so that alone is punishment. It can prevent him from doing that again” (P8, Age; 43, Female).*

These narratives show how the police stepped in to punish perpetrators on behalf of the victims. It is important to note that, despite it being the duty of the police to help victims

solve issues of violence, rendering this help translates into tangible support where the police took on the responsibility of helping victims of domestic violence solve their issues.

The police in these situations provided physical and practical steps that resulted in the initiation of prosecution and providing perpetrators with some form of punishment. These were acts originating and executed by the police in response to supporting victims of DV.

#### **4.5 Psychosocial Challenges faced by DV Victims during their contact with police**

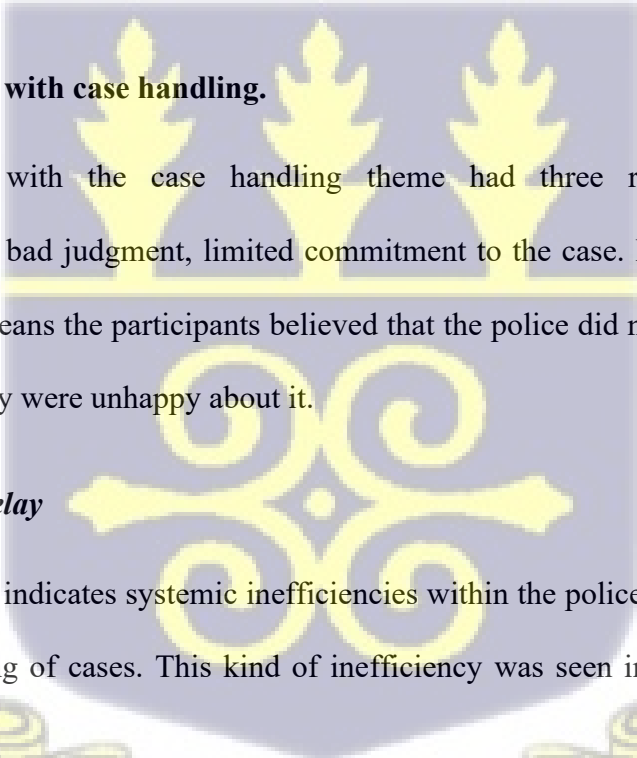
The victims of domestic violence reported three major challenges that confronted them when they contacted the police. The challenges identified included case mishandling, negative police behavior, and resource constraints.

##### **4.5.1 Dissatisfaction with case handling.**

The dissatisfaction with the case handling theme had three related sub-themes; administrative delay, bad judgment, limited commitment to the case. Dissatisfaction with case handling here means the participants believed that the police did not handle their case appropriately and they were unhappy about it.

##### ***Administrative delay***

Administrative delay indicates systemic inefficiencies within the police system that tend to impede the processing of cases. This kind of inefficiency was seen in a respondent who stated that;



*“The challenges were too much. Going up and down. come today, come tomorrow. Wait, the officer is not yet in. Sit down and wait for him. And then they just said, go, come tomorrow. When I come again, the same thing continues. It was too much” (P10, Age;50, Female).*

Again, a participant who was concerned about the administrative delays in processing their case had this to say;

*“When I went, the police, they delayed. Yeah, When I went from the beginning, they were doing me, Kona Bra, Kona Bra, I should go and come. But I insisted because I know what I want. So, the number of hours that I spent there, I cannot tell, I waited for them so that they will come for him. Because when I go back, I don't know what will happen again”* (P9, Age; 29, Female).

A participant also outlining her challenges added that

*“... the delays in filing the reports were a challenge”* (P7, Age; 38, Female).

These impediments in processing cases which victims of domestic violence reported were detestable by them.

### ***Lack of empathy***

Respondents also described how the police did not show empathy about their cases. Respondents narrated how they saw the police to be rather concerned about them following their procedures while they were nursing severe pain. One participant stated that;

*“... they told me to write statements with what I was facing, but the condition in which I was, didn't help at all”* (P3, Age; 18, Female).

Another also expressed her concern about how the police did not seem to be concerned about her pain;

*“Hmm, I realized that he was only interested in writing when I got there. I was in pain and it looked like he didn't care about my pain but did his own thing”*

(P16, Age; 28, Female).

This shows that the participant felt the police did not show empathy in handling their cases.

### ***Limited commitment***

Other respondents also expressed views that suggested that the police showed limited commitment to their plight. For instance, one stated that;

*“The challenges are that... go and come, go and come, go and come, come today, tomorrow, like they didn't care and then I was fed up”* (P1, Age;30, Female)

with another respondent reporting that;

*“When I went there, the way I was expecting them to handle the case, it wasn't like that. So, I didn't know what to do”* (P2, Age; 26, Female).

All these acts by the police indicate the mishandling of domestic violence cases. These indicated that the police failed to meet the expectation of DV victims in some circumstances due to the conduct and means of handling DV cases. The conduct of the police with regards to the handling of DV cases resulted in a dissatisfaction among victims.

### **4.5.2 Negative police behavior**

Negative behaviors of police in this context entailed certain utterances, demeanor, and actions of the police that seem to discourage the victims from pursuing their domestic violence cases. This theme had two sub-themes including dismissive acts and intrusive questioning.

### ***Dismissive acts***

Dismissive acts denote behaviors of police shown towards victims and have the potential to discourage people from reporting abuse. In expressing the negative behavior of the police through their dismissive acts, a respondent indicated;

*“Actually, I wasn't happy because one policeman was shouting at me, is it not part of your culture? Everything you will bring it to the police station.... police station. So, I wasn't happy with that statement at all”* (P11, Age; 34, Female).

This participant describes a policeman admonishing her not to report her perpetrator since the violence is supposed to be part of their culture. Also, a respondent recalled how a police officer suggested that the police involve family members in the domestic violence case which she disliked. This participant had this to say;

*“Oh, okay. After reporting the issue, yeah, they said I should call in my family members, that was what I didn't like about them”* (P12, Age; 22, Female).

### ***Intrusive questioning***

This entailed the police asking many confidential questions that make a victim uncomfortable. A participant also stated;

*“I didn't like the way he was asking me questions, some of his questions were becoming personal and annoying to me”* (P2, Age; 26, Female),

while another added that;

*“They were asking too many private questions which made me uncomfortable”* (P7, Age; 38, Female).

It could be said that this behavior shown by the police could discourage the victims from reporting and discontinuing their cases with the police.

These describe some behaviors DV victims were not expecting the police to exhibit especially when responding to DV cases. Therefore, the showcase of an intrusive method of questioning and dismissive acts by the police were behaviors that victims disdained and were not hoping to experience.

#### **4.5.3 Resource constraint for the police**

The victims of domestic violence also reported varying constraints in resources required by the police in their work. With this theme, the absence of an interpreter, limited means of transport, and sales of essential policing items to victims emerged as the sub-themes. This constraint in resources of the police had many negative effects on the victims.

##### ***Limited means of transport***

One respondent elaborated on how a vehicle became an impediment when she was working with the police to get her uncle who abused her arrested;

*"My place was far but because they didn't have a vehicle, I had to always get taxi for them to be able to go and when they go and they couldn't get my uncle they came back. That is what I faced"* (P13, Age; 25, Female).

Also, a participant who was affected by the police having no vehicle to perform their duty reported that;

*"So, I had to pick a car for them to go and arrest my uncle. So, I've been, when they go and they couldn't find my uncle, they would go back. Anytime I see my uncle, I would pick a car, go to them to come back to come and arrest my uncle"* (P4, Age; 24, Female).

##### ***Sales of essential policing items***

A participant was asked by the police to pay for a form due to the police's inability to provide the form for free explained that;

*“When they were giving me the medical form, they asked me to pay. But the thing is, I was in pain when I got there. I didn't prepare for anything. So, when they asked me to pay, there was no money to pay. So, it started with an argument” (P5, Age; 31, Female).*

One woman also stated why she felt the sales of the form were not right;

*“You see, this thing where they sell forms is not right. You have been beaten and you rush to the police to help and when you get there you have to buy a form. It was an issue for me buying the form” (P10, Age; 50, Female).*

Another participant further explained that ... *“They ask you to buy forms... I was thinking, because not everybody that goes there has the money. Some are students, some are not even depending on themselves, taking care of themselves. So, coming that maybe they need help from you, and you are asking them to pay again, you are worsening the situation of the person” (P6, Age; 35, Female).*

The victims perceived the purchase of forms at the police station to be problematic. They described how they may not seem to have the capacity to buy these essential items that they need to prosecute their case.

#### ***Absence of an interpreter***

Respondents described how language barrier was also a problem in communication with the police in the absence of an interpreter;

*“...because of language differences, the communication was a bit difficult and that was a challenge” (P7, Age; 38, Female)*

Moreover, a respondent also expressed the difficulty she experiences with regards to language barrier;

*“I have not been at the area for long and you know I can't speak this language*

*(English) well, so I struggled to explain myself well and I did not feel they understood me better. If I had spoken in my own language for someone to tell them then it would have been good” (P11, Age; 34, Female).*

These challenges highlighted by the participants span across vehicular, language barrier and other logistics constraints.

These highlight the presence of logistic and human resource constraints that impeded the process of providing remedy to DV related cases. These constraints either limited mean of transportation, absence of an interpreter and sales of essential police forms to victims were described by victims to further expose them to more burdens in their quest to seek help.

#### **4.5.4 Exertion of external influence into victims’ case**

This theme represents how the victims of domestic violence described the police to have suggested or initiated the involvement of other people into the reported abuse cases by the victims. The theme had family influence and the influence of religious leaders as its sub-themes.

##### ***Family influence***

In describing the exertion of external influence like family influence into victims’ case through their encounter with the police, one participant described how the police allowed family members and a religious leader to meddle in the case. The participant had this to say;

*“... the family and our imam came in that they will handle the case in the house. That was where I wasn't happy with it at all” (P11, Age; 31, Female).*

Another participant described how the police delay on case gave way to family members getting on her case;

*“You are bringing back tears, Sir. When I went initially, I thought the matter would be dealt with, you know, hurriedly so that I'd be given justice. But they waited for some time for the family members to be involved. And you know, when the family members also come in, there's nothing you can do. So, I also relaxed, that the matter should be brought home and be settled. Though I wasn't happy, because they came in” (P5, Age; 34, Female).*

### ***Influence of religious leaders***

Highlighting the police role in initiating religious leaders to influence victims' case, one participant narrated how the police invited a pastor into resolving her case. She said;

*“The police invited our pastor into the case because of the kids so that we can go home and solve it amicably. But I wasn't happy. I wasn't happy at all. How I want them to put fear in him...I wasn't happy but... because of the children, I have to admit it” (P9, Age; 29, Female).*

The displeasure identified among victims due to the influence of others in their DV case signifies their disagreement of the police in allowing other external entities into their case. The DV victims in this instance expected the police to pursue their issue rather than shifting their task to others.

These also signify an end goal of inviting external people in some domestic violence cases when the police were contacted. The involvement of external influences in such matters is becoming a norm in Ghana, and is usually deemed appropriate in amicable settlement of DV. Obviously, the victims are not happy with external influences because they may not get the redress they expect from the case.

#### 4.6 Psychosocial outcome of police response to victims of domestic violence

These impacts reflect the effects the police response had on the psychosocial well-being of the victims. The police response gave rise to some actions concerning victims' cases that later paved the way for some emotions and some direct feelings that victims experienced. The response of the police to victims of domestic violence yielded two areas of impact. The police response to the victims resulted in the trigger of emotional reactions and case discontinuation on the part of the victims.

##### 4.6.1 The trigger of emotional reactions

With reference to the method and ways of the police in handling the cases of domestic violence, it triggered some emotional reactions from the participants. The trigger of emotional response yielded three sub-themes including; sense of distress, sense of satisfaction and non-empathetic behavior.

##### *Sense of distress*

Some victims felt uncomfortable during their encounter with the police and a participant explained by stating that;

*“Well, it has affected me because I thought the police would have a way of disciplining him and for the police to tell me that because of the children, so I should let it go. That made me feel bad”* (P1, Age; 30, Female).

Also, another one explained that;

*“But emotionally, I wasn't happy about how they treated me and how they spoke about our religion* (P11, Age; 34, Female).

A victim also described how her encounter with the police affected her through the impatience and harsh approach of the police;

*“Hmm... when I went, they weren't patient with me at the beginning because I was beaten and my voice was even gone. But they were so harsh on me that I was even scared to even explain what happened”* (P13, Age; 25, Female).

### ***Non-empathetic feeling***

Other respondents also describe how unempathetic the police were towards them. Their encounter made them feel, the police did not understand them and their situation. A participant opined that;

*“Oh, ok. When I came, the first time, I didn't like the way they (police) welcomed me, as if I'm a child to them”* (P12, Age; 22, Female).

One also added that;

*“I was thinking when they see me immediately with my condition, they would be able to feel pity and help me immediately, but it wasn't like that”* (P6, Age; 35, Female).

Another respondent expressed that;

*“I was thinking they would be in my shoes with the pain I was going through so they could take immediate action. But they were relaxed. The way I was thinking they would be able to take good care of me over there and maybe do other things, they didn't do that so it affected me”* (P3, Age; 18, Female).

These narratives imply that victims who report their cases to the DV unit expect some empathy from the police. Some of these respondents who perceived that the police were unempathetic towards them were psychologically affected because they felt the police did

not attach the same importance they attached to the case.

### *Sense of satisfaction*

Some respondents also portrayed a sense of satisfaction after their encounter with the police.

One reported;

*“Their response made me feel more in control of the situation. And then it made me reduce the fear and anxiety I had towards the incident that happened to me” (P7, Age;38, Female).*

Another victim of domestic violence commented on her encounter with the police resulting in an arrest. The participant stated that;

*“Well, I was happy they were able to arrest my uncle when I reported the case” (P4, Age;24, Female).*

Again, a participant in describing her satisfaction about the arrest of her aunt that abuse her stated;

*“Okay, even the arrest of my auntie. They arrested her. I was happy about the arrest of my auntie” (P12, Age; 22, Female).*

A participant also had this to say about her experience with the police;

*I have confidence in them and a sense of relief when they talk with me. So, I realised I was somewhat okay (P2, Age; 26, Female).*

These narratives imply that some victims endorsed some approaches of the police in handling their issues.

The victims' emotional reactions to the police were dependent on the kind of response they received from the police. The police were not able to meet the expectations of some victims and that made them unhappy with the actions of the police, since the DV victims say the police provided them with limited support. On the other hand, the police meeting some expectations of DV victims that included arresting their perpetrator was enough to make the victims much satisfied.

#### 4.6.2 Case discontinuation

This theme emerged with two sub-themes; inactions and mismanagement of case. Participants here described their meeting with the police to result in the discontinuation of their cases which is associated to police inactions and mismanagement of cases.

##### *Inactions of the police*

Some participants described that the police did not act significantly to address their cases after they had reported to them. For instance, a participant stated that;

*“They didn't take it serious at the first place. Until they heard the true issue,”*

(P12, Age; 22, Female).

Another victim expecting an arrest of her uncle who abused her reiterated that;

*“... I thought they would arrest him; they would jail him for at least some months for him to learn his lesson not to do that again. So, they couldn't do that and that was what affected me most. My feelings too”* (P8, Age;43, Female).

Some victims had to discontinue their cases because they felt that the police did not act as expected.

*Mismanagement of case*

Some participants also discontinued the reported case because they felt their cases were not properly handled. To illustrate, one respondent stated;

*“They arrested my uncle and took him to the police station. And through investigation, they decided to make the case a home case. But I wasn't happy about it (P4, Age; 24, Female),*

while another who wanted the perpetrator to be processed to court reported that;

*“They were saying that because of the family, the police couldn't process it to court” (P1, Age; 30, Female).*

Other victims whose cases were also discontinued, explained how the police influenced the discontinuation of their case. One had this to say;

*“They told us to bring the matter to the house and settle, and then after, we should report back to the police” (P5, Age; 31, Female).*

A participant also added; *“okay, the police wanted us to bring the case home, because of the children, because of my marriage, like I should let the case slide” (P9, Age; 29, Female).*

In the view of some victims, the police mismanaged the case by convincing them to settle the case in ways that they did not appreciate.

DV victims considered the inactions and the mismanagement of their case by the police to make a decision of the case. These imply that the police mismanagement of DV cases and their inactions resulted in the discontinuation of their case that affected the victims.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Overview of the study

The study explored the experiences of domestic violence victims in Greater Accra and the police response to incidents of domestic violence. The study's data was analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. It was found that the nature of violence, reporting due to the likelihood of harm and death, reporting as a means to retaliate, and reporting as an avenue for help seeking were the reasons why participants reported domestic violence incidence to the police. When victims contact the police, they were noted to be provided with informational support and tangible support during their case processing. The response of the police to victims of domestic violence was also identified to produce emotional triggers, exert external influence, and a sense of inappropriate actions within DVV's. The victims noted case mishandling, negative police behaviors and resource constraints as the challenges they believe to impede the police's response to DVV's.

#### 5.2 Reasons for reporting domestic violence

Knowing that the majority of domestic violence victims do not report the incident to the police, it is quite worth considering the reasons that propelled other victims to report to the police. Domestic violence victims in this present study reported their experience of violence to the police while considering the nature of the abuse they are exposed to, likelihood of violence resulting in harm or death, reporting as a means to retaliate, and reporting to the police as an avenue for help. Similarly, in a national survey conducted in Ghana, it was found that victims of domestic violence reported to the police due to their inability to endure

the abuse further, being encouraged by friends and family, and the extent of injuries sustained (Institute of Development Studies et al., 2016).

The reasons found to propel victims to report their incident to the police including; the nature of the abuse they are exposed to and the likelihood of violence resulting in harm or death could be compared to the inability to endure abuse which was recorded as a reason for victims to report to the police in the previous study. DVV's may have reported to the police based on the nature of the abuse they are exposed to and the likelihood of violence resulting in harm or death possibly due to the detrimental effects of the violent act. Focusing on these reasons to report to the police could mean, victims aim to prevent the danger they are being exposed to during the violence. Moreover, from the social learning theory perspective, it could be said that the victims might have learned over the years from other people that, when you are exposed to physical and emotional abuse that has the potential to harm or kill you, then you need to report to the police to handle the issue.

The lasting effects of domestic violence have also been found to be significantly associated with victims reporting their incidents to the police in Bihar, India (Bajwa et al., 2019). This corresponds to this current study's result on the likelihood of violence resulting in harm or death. Women who might be focusing on the likelihood of violence resulting in harm or death as a reason to report their incident to the police might be doing so to prevent the worsening of the abuse they experienced. Since many women are often exposed to DV, it could be said that males are perpetrating these acts due to the social system of men being the heads of social units as explained by the feminist theory.

Again, Birdsey and Snowball (2013) stated that domestic violence victims were more likely to report to the police if they had an apprehended violence order against the offender, if their property had been damaged, if they were physically injured, if the abuse was physical or

sexual, if they felt their children were at risk or if they had reported previous DV incidents. Moreover, in analyzing the report of domestic violence through a hotline in some Latin American countries during the COVID-19 pandemic period, victims were found to report physical abuse and more psychological abuse, and it was suggested that the victims reported their incidents based on the severity or type of incident being experienced (Perez-Vincent & Carreras, 2022). The results of these previous studies are comparable to the reasons including nature of abuse and the likelihood of DV causing harm or death seen in this present study. This implies that the likelihood of violence resulting in harm or death and the nature of violence one is exposed to are very important considerations victims make before they decide to contact the police about a DV incident.

In a systematic review of victim self-report data of Australia and international individuals, it was found that victims who are female, non-white, experiencing frequent violence, exposed to incidents that involve serious violence, an intoxicated offender, and or child witnesses, and those abused in the past are more likely to report to the police (Voce & Boxall, 2018). Whiles in Quebec of Canada, it is believed that victims of DV when confronted with police intervention they had not personally initiated, some of them will choose to process the incident with the police (Boivin & Leclerc, 2016). Noting that issues of the harm DV could cause and the availability of police intervention play a role in victims reporting their DV incidents to the police as seen in previous and this current study. It is also important to recognized the role social learning play to initiate this phenomenon. Victims of DV may be reporting to the police after learning from others that, the police could be the place for help for these situations. It could also be argued that all other reasons that may influence victims to report DV to police might be linked to the likelihood of causing harm or death as a reason for reporting DV to the police. It is worth noting that other reasons for reporting DV such as providing an avenue to seek help, retaliate, nature of violence and others could be

prominent due to the idea of victims working to prevent experiencing further harm. through DV.

### **5.3 Forms of support received from the police by victims of domestic violence**

The police in this present study were found to mainly provide informational and tangible support to DVV's as part of their duty. Relatively, Kaburi & Kaburi (2023) reported some victims of DV within Ghana to have attained some form of support after their incident which involved at least one contact with a women's rights organization and was provided information on their supporting services like legal services, psychosocial support, and temporary shelter. Kaburi & Kaburi (2023) study demonstrates the provision of informational support to these victims that may have been either or not initiated by the police. It has also been found that the police will likely refer a victim of DV for other services when the perpetrators' age is decreased and when there is the presence of physical abuse on the victim (Goodson et al., 2022). The study of Goodson et al. (2022) also highlights the provision of informational support by the police to victims of DV in their processes. One could argue that the police officers in this current and previous studies may be seen providing these forms of support to DVV's primarily due to these support services being required by their guidelines in handling DV cases. Beyond the police being required to provide DV victims with information in their routine work, the police in Ghana could be acting out of sympathy to provide victims with more information to help them with their case.

Ekström and Lindström (2016) study reports that social support given at the police station to DV victims enhanced the likelihood of prosecuting their cases. This further infers the police's role in providing social support that emerges as tangible support to the victims. The police in this current study, per victims' description provided them a tangible support that could be said to be a police-required services like an arrest of a perpetrator that is affected

in some situations. Victims seem to perceived this act as a deliberate means of the police to support them with their issue. The arrest of a perpetrator for instance alone could become a basis for victims to acknowledge the police to have supported them.

Furthermore, victims reported that the police provided them with resources like options, information, and explanation of next steps, while others reported that the perpetrator was spoken to or warned by the police, or was arrested and charged when they contacted the police (Saxton et al., 2018). Saxton et al. (2018) identified various forms of support provided by the police to victims of DV that denotes various forms of information and tangible support as seen in this present study. Police in various jurisdictions and in Ghana as seen in this present study tend to be providing victims with similar support. Police in Ghana at certain instances are seen to provide helpful information to individuals that access the services of the police. This may be associated to the idea of police officers' learning over the years that, victims of DV will need this support when they contact them as suggested by the social learning theory. From the perspective of ecological systems theory, it could be said that the various systems like policies and guidelines in police services on DV have influenced the police to provide varied forms of support to the victims of DV.

#### **5.4 Challenges experienced by domestic violence victims during the contact with police**

Undoubtedly, victims of DV are exposed to varying challenges when seeking for help. In the Ghanaian society, some DV victims themselves do not seek for help from the police because of the belief that domestic violence is a private and a family issue (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014). One would expect these victims to encounter limited challenges when they finally gather the courage to report their issues to the police. Unfortunately, this present study found DVVs who accessed the services of the police in their DV incident were met with issues like mishandling of their case, negative police behavior and resources constraint that impede the

work of the police. These challenges if persistent will continuously discourage victims of DV from reporting to the police and will in-turn embolden the criminal acts of the perpetrators.

In Decker et al. (2019) study, race-based inequity was found to undermine women's safety and access to the police when women are exposed to DV. The act of race-based inequity stated forms part of the negative police behavior reported by DVVs in this current study. Since the police could be a reflection of the larger society, societal perceptions, misconceptions and misinformation about DV could be engraved in them and these ideals are likely to be reflected in their work with victims of DV. Some police officers in which victims of DV were exposed to in this present study, might have been influence by their beliefs of domestic violence being a family affair and not an issue for the police. This might have been seen by the victims as a poor behavior of a police that created a barrier during their contact with the police.

In other situations, the processing of cases through the criminal justice system by police has been found to be influence by inequality factors like a victim's gender, nature of one's vulnerability (including mental health) and the kind of incident (McPhee et al., 2021). The focus on inequality factors being eminent in the services rendered by the police to victims of DV also highlights negative behavior as seen in this present study which is not required in the police. This poor behavior of the police towards victims of DV tend to serve as a challenge to the victims because it portrays the police as being against the help the victims are seeking.

Again, issues of diminished agency on the part of the police and low expectations of legal protection by victims were found to impede victims' help-seeking intentions from the police (Shearson, 2021). The issues highlighted by Shearson (2021) reflects a possible mishandling

of domestic violence cases as also reported in this current study. To be specific, issues of diminished agency, limited commitment and administrative delay as reported by the previous and this present study all reflect a process of poor handling of DV cases. It is important to note that, even though the perceptions of the police about DV could make them mishandle DV cases, there is a possibility that the police in some instances might be faced with genuine impediments in processing cases. Some of these constraints to the police in Ghana include, the limited means of transport for the police, and facing much procedural difficulties to prosecute perpetrators in court. From the ecological systems theory perspective, it could be said the challenges faced by DV victims occurred as a result of various unit structures to deal with DV within the police possibly not working appropriately and as a result emerges as challenges to victims.

In other instances, the police themselves have reported a number of challenges they believe to affect the help they provide to victims of DV. For instance, in providing help for victims in technology-facilitated sexual violence the police have reported, cross-jurisdictional barriers (when either a suspected victim or the perpetrator is located overseas, or an evidence is held by an international service provider), lack of cooperation from internet and telecommunications service providers, limited resources for forensic analysis and difficulty for professionals to keep up with advancements in technology as their challenges in responding to victims (Powell & Henry, 2016). The issue of limited resources reported by police officers in the above study could be compared to the resource constraints reported by victims of DV in this present study. A challenge with resource for police works certainly limits their efficiency. The issue of resource constraint like the police having to sell police forms to victims instead of having to produce it as free for victims and the limited police presence to affect an arrest in this current study impeded the work of police to victims of DV due to inadequate resourcing of the police.

### 5.5 Outcomes of police response to victims of domestic violence

The police response of domestic violence in this current study impacted the victims through the trigger of emotional reactions including satisfactory and unsatisfactory feelings, victims having the sense of inappropriate actions on the part of the police and the police exerting external influence into victim's case. Comparably, Shearson (2021) study reports on how the response of police to DV is based on the level of violence perpetrated, the concern for victims' immediate physical safety, and the help-seeking aims of victims, while victims were also seeking to stop the violence, hoping to find a supportive friend in the police, seek to maintain long-term safety and, apply their rights to freedom and protection from abuse. It is vital to note that, the impact of the police to victims in this present study resulted in much negative effects while Shearson (2021) study portrays victims to be much optimistic in contacting the police.

Despite, the structured services of the police in Ghana, their service provision may not be that robust. This accounts for the variation in the impact police response had on victims from varying areas. Focusing on Greater Accra region, it is imperative to establish that effective police response to domestic violence requires understanding and addressing factors at multiple levels, from individual officer training to community attitudes and national policies on gender-based violence.

Myhill (2019) also highlights that, the police in responding to DV are determined to arrest when there is clear evidence of a criminal offence and in a situation, they perceive to have a potential of further harm. This response by the police could result into varying good and negative influences among victims likewise the observation in this current study. Considering that victims of DV will have different experience during an encounter with the

police, this could be due to the competence of specific officer attending to victims. Therefore, the police officers attending to victims in this present study may not have been much competent in handling issues of DV which yields much poorer impact on victims.

Also, when police decide to take no further action on DV case whiles citing retractions or a decision not to support investigations, its corresponding effect on DVV's has been found to be a withdrawal of their case (McPhee et al., 2021). This could be related to mishandling of cases of DV as seen in this current study. These actions could also be linked to patriarchal values as outline by the feminist theory that some police officers (often males) could harbor. These values could influence the officers' decision to discontinue a DV case or suggest a family settlement as mostly reported in the Ghanaian society, if they feel it does not fit into their patriarchal beliefs.

Jennings et al. (2020) have opined that the enactment of violence against women act in the United States of America has had an impact on police responses to domestic crimes and added that the police response have evolved to include the reduction of barriers for victims, improved police officer attitudes toward victims, increase presence of victim advocates and advancing processes for obtaining protection orders for DVV's. The presence of policies and acts on DV is enough to direct police in the way they should act to produce positive feedback in victims. However, these policies and acts do not imply that the police officers will adhere to the guidelines for handling DV related cases as seen to unfold in police officers in this current study.

Again, some victims of DV believe they were exposed to potential harm in seeking help from police or the justice system in their incident and they felt their case will be handled appropriately if they get the right police officer and a bit of luck on their side (Saxton et al., 2018). Anticipating a potential to be harmed after contacting the police when exposed to DV

could signify a negative police behavior to victims. This potential of harm could have emerged from bad policing. Again, the potential of harm results in dissatisfaction of the general police response to DVV's as seen in some instances in this current study, where victims saw the police to be impatient and made them unhappy in their encounter.

It must be noted that this present study recorded the exerting of external individuals into DV cases by the police because, the Ghanaian system could differ from the study sites of the previous reported studies. This is based on the idea that, Ghana is a collectivist society, and the police finds it appropriate to involve external people into DV cases without seeing any wrong doing as opposed to police officers in individualistic societies.

### **5.6 Theoretical implication of study findings**

Victims of domestic violence in this current study were found to report their experience of violence to the police based on the nature of the abuse they are exposed to, the likelihood of violence resulting in harm or death, reporting as a means to retaliate, and reporting to the police as an avenue for help. It is also important to recognize the role social learning play to initiate this phenomenon. It could be said that the victims of DV might have learned to report their issues to the police over the years from other victims. This implies that when the victims are exposed to physical and emotional abuse that has the potential to harm or kill them, they report to the police to handle the issue due to their prior knowledge of others reporting. Again, focusing on the perspective of the social learning theory, victims of DV may be reporting to the police after learning from others that, the police could be the place for help for these situations. Moreover, since the feminist theory is interested in promoting equality between females and males, the female victims identified within this current study could be reporting DV acts to the police as a means to fight for their rights from the perpetrators of violence.

Police in this present study provided informational and tangible support to DVV's during their encounter. From the ecological systems theory stand point, It could be said that the activities of various police units to DVV's have been adequately structured to respond appropriately to issues of DV. However, the services of the police in Ghana may not be robust across areas. This accounts for the variation in the impact police response had on victims from varying areas. Again, the support provided by the police to victims may be associated to the idea of police officers' learning over the years that, victims of DV will need this support when they reach out to them as suggested by the social learning theory. Also, from the perspective of ecological systems theory, it could be said that the various systems like policies and guidelines in the police services on DV have influenced the police to provide varied forms of support to the victims of DV.

Furthermore, DV victims reported constraints including mishandling of their case, negative police behaviour and other resource challenges that impeded the work of the police. Based on the ecological systems theory perspective, it could be said the challenges faced by DV victims occurred as a result of various sectors that function as structures to deal with DV within the Ghanaian police possibly not working appropriately, and as a result emerges as challenges to DV victims. Also, when police decide to take no further action on DV case whiles citing retractions or a decision not to support investigations, its corresponding effect on DVV's has been found to be a withdrawal of their case (McPhee et al., 2021). relative to the findings of this present study in which mishandling of cases of DV was reported by DV victims. These actions by the police could also be linked to the adherence of patriarchal values as outline by the feminist theory that some police officers (often males) may be practicing. The police officers could view the DV cases as issues that should be discuss with some family elders (mostly males) and the spouses, and not by outsiders.

### 5.7 Implications of study

Among spouse or couple who still stay in a relationship, therapist should help them deal with the issues that influence the abuse and also work with them to prevent future abuse. With victims who are continuously exposed to abuse, there is a need for therapist to help them explore why they are consistently exposed to abuse and why they continue to stay. This is relevant to help them understand their situation and make an informed decision to stay or leave their abusers.

Victims did not report the police to have directed them for any counseling help. This may imply that they did not attain any means of counseling after the period of their domestic violence incident. Therefore, the police should be encouraged to always direct or assist DVV's to seek for counseling due to the trauma of the abuse.

The Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit of the Ghana police which is dedicated to help DVVs cannot be found at many local police stations. It will be appropriate to inculcate the management of DV cases into the training of all police personnel. With police officers already in the services, they should be periodically provided with skills to enhance their capacity to handle DV cases.

Again, it will be helpful if research could be conducted among the police in Ghana to determine their preparedness, readiness and needs in handling DV cases. This is required to determine the areas they fall short and to improve the police capacity in required areas. The police could also be assessed to determine their perspective on the challenges they encounter in dealing with DV victims and processing their cases. This will help inform policies regarding police handling of DV cases.

## 5.8 Recommendations

In identifying that some DV victims lamented on the mishandling of their cases, it will be important to conduct periodic training for the police on what is expected of them as police officers when handling DV cases. This is required to help them improve on their professionalism, decrease some exhibited negative behaviours such as initiating or suggesting the involvement of external people into DV cases and the limited commitment they show to DV related cases. Again, there is a need for the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit of the police to also increase the pace at which they process DV cases purposely to decrease the delays victims reported to face when they report DV incidents.

Moreover, it will be appropriate to effectively provide good counselling services for victims when they contact the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit of the police to handle their cases. This will be imperative due to victims complaining about less empathy shown them by the police and the harm they derive from the abuse. The counselling service may be provided internally within the Ghana police system or referring the victims to an appropriate place to attain psychological care.

With reference to victims identifying that the police showed them little empathy and caused them distress when they reached out to them with their DV cases, the police at the DV units may need some psychological debriefing from the secondary trauma they are exposed to in their line of duty. The continuous exposure of the police to DV case might have initiated compassion fatigue among them that is seen as their limited empathetic expression and causing of distress to victims

In identifying that some DV victims lamented on the mishandling of their cases, it will be important to conduct periodic training for the police on what is expected of them as police officers when handling DV cases. This is required to help them improve on their

professionalism, decrease some exhibited negative behaviours such as initiating or suggesting the involvement of external people into DV cases and the limited commitment they show to DV related cases. Again, there is a need for the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit of the police to also increase the pace at which they process DV cases purposely to decrease the delays victims reported to face when they report DV incidents.

Moreover, it will be appropriate to effectively provide good counselling services for victims when they contact the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit of the police to handle their cases. This will be imperative due to victims complaining about less empathy shown them by the police and the harm they derive from the abuse. The counselling service may be provided internally within the Ghana police system or referring the victims to an appropriate place to attain psychological care.

With reference to victims identifying that the police showed them little empathy and caused them distress when they reached out to them with their DV cases, the police at the DV units may need some psychological debriefing from the secondary trauma they are exposed to in their line of duty. The continuous exposure of the police to DV case might have initiated compassion fatigue among them that is seen as their limited empathetic expression and causing of distress to victims.

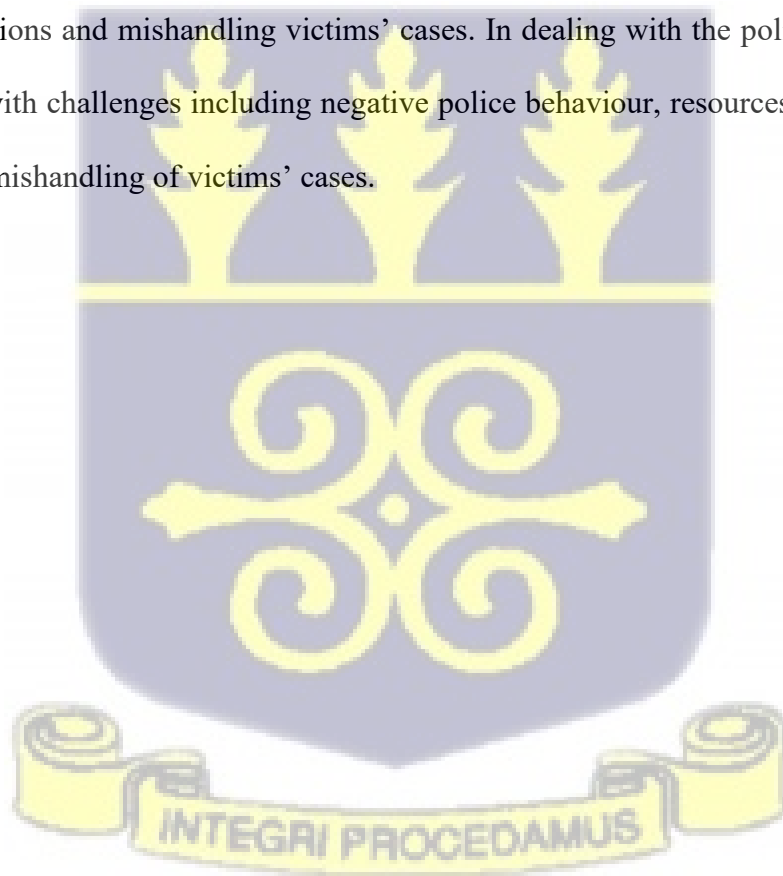
It would also be appropriate to have a one-stop shop, where the DV units of the Ghana police service may have the complement of psychologists, social workers, medical practitioners and any other helping professionals whose expertise would be relevant in supporting DV victims.

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and any other helping professionals whose expertise would be relevant in supporting DV victims.

## 5.9 Conclusion

This study demonstrated that victims of DV will report their incident to the police because of the nature of violence they are exposed to, the likelihood of harm and death from the violence, with others reporting as a means to retaliate the violence, while others also report as an avenue for help. When victims of DV contact the police, they are provided with informational and tangible support by the police. Moreover, the police response to the victims of DV resulted in the exert of external influence into victim's case, the trigger of emotional reactions and mishandling victims' cases. In dealing with the police, victims of DV are faced with challenges including negative police behaviour, resources constraint by the police and mishandling of victims' cases.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Consent form

#### CONSENT FORM

#### Section A- BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Principal Investigator:	Anthony Kwame Agortimevor
Certified Protocol Number	

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

##### **General Information about Research**

This study aims to Assessing the impact of police response to incidence of domestic violence on victims' psychological well-being within the Greater Accra region. You will be required to spend 30 to 45 minutes of your time for a one-on-one interaction/interview with the researcher on the lived experiences of burns survivors.

##### **Benefits/Risks of the study**

This study does not present any direct risks or benefits to participants. However, in terms of risks, participants may be required to recall some experiences that may be discomforting. In this case, there is the opportunity to contact the researcher for appropriate referral or assistance. The benefit from this study may be indirect where findings will inform mental health treatment modules in Ghana and policy decisions.

### **Confidentiality**

Any and all information obtained from you during the study will be confidential. Your privacy will be protected at all times. You will not be identified individually in anyway as a result of your participation in this research. By this, you will not be required to provide your name. Your responses to the questionnaires shall not be made available to any other person(s) except the results of the written report.

### **Compensation**

There is no form of compensation for the time spent in this study. However, participants have the opportunity to inquire about available support for challenges they face as a result of their traumatic experiences. Participants may also request for the findings of the study by contacting the principal investigator through the contacts provided below.

### **Withdrawal from Study**

**Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.** You may refuse to participate in this research. Such refusal will not have any negative consequences for you. If you begin to participate in the research, you may at any time, for any reason, discontinue your participation without any negative consequences. If your response to the questionnaires is incomplete, your participation will be revoked.

### **Contact for Additional Information**

Please feel free to ask any questions about anything that seems unclear to you and to consider this research and consent form carefully before you sign. You may also call the student researcher (Anthony Kwame Agortimevor) on 0246516660 or [akagortimevor@st.ug.edu.gh](mailto:akagortimevor@st.ug.edu.gh) for clarifications.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant in this study you may contact the Administrator of the Ethics Committee for Humanities, ISSER, University of Ghana at [ech@ug.edu.gh](mailto:ech@ug.edu.gh) or 00233- 303-933-866.

**PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT**

"I have read or have had someone read all of the above, asked questions, received answers regarding participation in this study, and am willing to give consent for me, my child/ward to participate in this study. I will not have waived any of my rights by signing this consent form. Upon signing this consent form, I will receive a copy for my personal records."

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature or mark of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**If participant cannot read and or understand the form themselves, a witness must sign here:**

I was present while the benefits, risks and procedures were read to the volunteer. All questions were answered and the volunteer has agreed to take part in the research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of witness / Mark

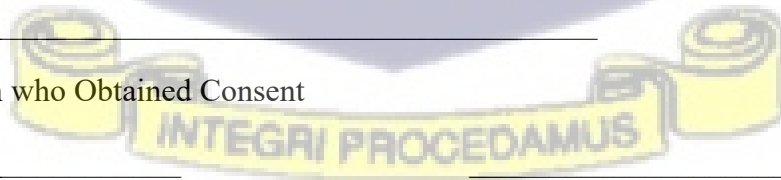
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I certify that the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research have been explained to the above individual.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Person who Obtained Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



**Appendix 2: Interview guide**

**INTERVIEW GUIDE**

1. Please can you tell me about yourself

2a. What took you to the police station?

2b. why do you think it was necessary to report this matter to the police

3a. After reporting to the police about your case what measures did they take to address the issue?

4. Share with me more of your experiences during your encounter with the police when you reported your incidence of domestic violence to the police

What in particular did you like about the response of the police (probe for as many points as possible)

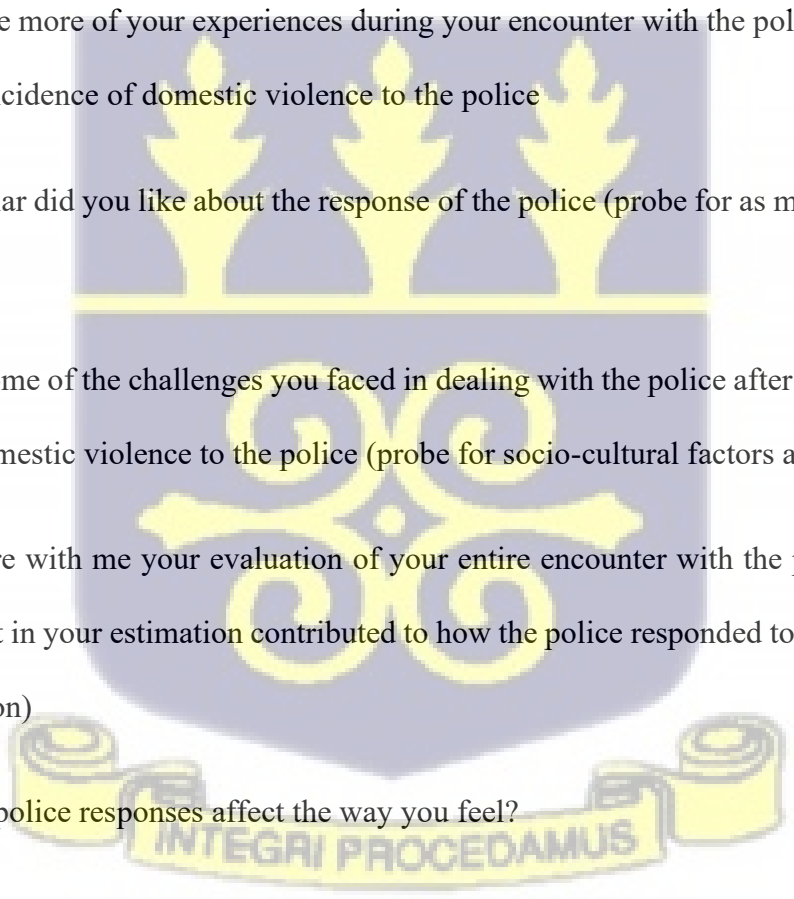
5. What were some of the challenges you faced in dealing with the police after reporting the incidence of domestic violence to the police (probe for socio-cultural factors as well?

6. Can you share with me your evaluation of your entire encounter with the police during the period (what in your estimation contributed to how the police responded to the domestic violence situation)

7. How did the police responses affect the way you feel?

How did the police response influence the case?

Were you happy about the outcome of the case?



8. In your view what can the police do to support people who report domestic violence issues to them

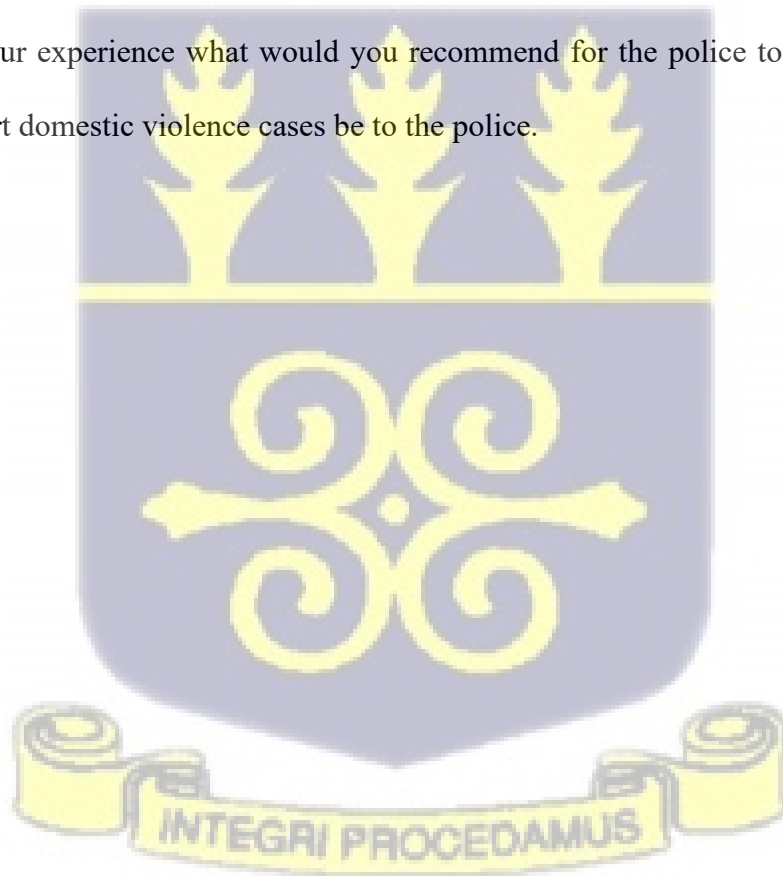
9. What level of confidentiality would you expect from the police when you report domestic violence issues to them and why?

10. How would you expect the police to empathize with you report your case and why

11. Were you given any counselling by the police or referred to a trained counsellor?

12. Tell me if think other support could have help and what kind of help and what kind of help could that be

13. So from your experience what would you recommend for the police to do encourage victims to report domestic violence cases be to the police.



Appendix 3: Ethics approval letter



**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**  
**ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR THE HUMANITIES (ECH)**

*P. O. Box LG 74, Legon, Accra, Ghana*

*My Ref. No: ECH/007/23-24*

October 12, 2023

Anthony Kwame Agortimevor  
Department of Psychology  
University of Ghana  
Legon

**ETHICAL CLEARANCE**  
**(ECH 007/ 23-24)**

The Ethics Committee for the Humanities (ECH) conducted full board review and approved your protocol titled:

**ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF POLICE RESPONSE TO INCIDENCE OF  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON VICTIMS PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: ANTHONY KWAME AGORTIMEVOR**

Please note that the final review report must be submitted to the Committee at the completion of the study. Your research records may be audited at any time during or after the implementation. Any modification of this research project must be submitted to ECH for review and approval prior to implementation.

Please report all serious adverse events related to this study to ECH within seven (7) days verbally and in writing within fourteen (14) days.

This certificate is valid until October 11, 2024. You are required to submit annual reports for continuing review.

Please accept my congratulations.

Yours Sincerely,

**Professor C. Charles Mate-Kole**  
ECH Chair

Cc: Dr. Joana Larry-Afutu, Department of Psychology, UG  
Dr. Kofi Boakye, Department of Psychology, UG