

The Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad: Drivers of Intimate Partner Violence Against Men

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ABSTRACT

This article advances understanding of the drivers of intimate partner violence (IPV) by centering African men's qualitative experiences as victims within heterosexual unions. It develops the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad as an integrated conceptual framework to explain the mechanisms that precipitate IPV against men, extending beyond the predominantly female-focused literature. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 25 men in Johannesburg, the study illustrates how alcohol functions as a disinhibitor, reducing cognitive and emotional regulation; jealousy operates as a cognitive–emotional trigger, heightening relational insecurity and perceived threats to exclusivity; and explosive anger serves as the behavioral enactment through which violence is perpetrated. The triad conceptualizes these factors as a dynamic, mutually reinforcing escalation system, highlighting how situational disinhibition, perceived infidelity, and explosive anger converge to generate both physical and emotional abuse. The findings are discussed through the lens of disinhibition theory, alcohol myopia, and anger and I³ models, situating male victimization within broader theoretical frameworks. This article foregrounds men's victimisation and the interrelated mechanisms driving abuse and offers a theoretically grounded platform for empirical inquiry, policy formulation, and the development of inclusive IPV interventions.

Keywords: Alcohol, Jealousy, Anger, Intimate Partner Violence, Triggers for Men abuse.

INTRODUCTION

As awareness of intimate partner violence (IPV) against men is increasing, scholarly and policy interest remains disproportionately focused on female victimization, leaving a gap in our understanding of how to effectively prevent and respond to male victimization. Historically, IPV against women has been the primary focus of public health and feminist scholarship due to its pervasive global prevalence and severe health consequences (Kimberg, 2008; Corbally, 2014). However, a significant body of research, including large-scale meta-analyses and national surveys, indicates that men also experience substantial physical and psychological abuse within intimate relationships (Chan, 2011; Corbally, 2014; Malbon, Carson and Yates, 2018). Consequently, the persistence of a gender-exclusive lens in IPV research risks marginalizing the experiences of male victims and limiting the scope of available intervention.

Although extensive multidisciplinary research has identified alcohol misuse, sexual jealousy, and explosive anger as potent drivers of IPV perpetration; these factors have, however, predominantly been examined in the context of violence against women (Eckhardt, Parrott and Sprunger, 2015; Niekerk and Boonzaier, 2019). Alcohol has been consistently linked to IPV through mechanisms of cognitive impairment and disinhibition, often acting as a catalyst that escalates relational tensions into physical aggression (Goldenberg et al., 2016; Subramani, Parrott and Eckhardt, 2017). Similarly, jealousy serves as a significant cognitive-emotional trigger rooted in perceived threats to relational exclusivity, while explosive anger is frequently associated with poor conflict management and

emotional dysregulation (Flynn and Graham, 2010; Grigorian et al., 2019). Despite the explanatory power of these constructs, there has been limited integrative effort to analyze how these drivers converge in IPV research, or how they operate when men are the primary victims (Rowlands, 2022; Scott-Storey et al., 2022). To bridge this gap, this article proposes the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad as an integrated framework for understanding the mechanisms that precipitate violence against men. This framework synthesizes alcohol-related disinhibition, jealousy as a trigger, and explosive anger as a behavioral enactment into a dynamic model of escalation. Articulating the interconnected nature of these drivers, this article provides a theoretically grounded foundation for empirical inquiry and evidence-based policy.

Alcohol consumption is one of the most consistently identified drivers and risk factors for IPV in both international and South African research. A robust evidence base indicates that heavy drinking is strongly correlated with an increased likelihood of both IPV perpetration and victimization (Stappenbeck & Fromme, 2010; Testa et al., 2012). Pooled data from sub-Saharan Africa show that harmful alcohol use among men is associated with substantially higher odds of physical IPV perpetration, and women exposed to partners who are frequently intoxicated have markedly greater odds of experiencing violence (Greene et al., 2017; Ramsoomar et al., 2021). In South Africa, qualitative studies find that women frequently link their partners' alcohol use to incidents of severe IPV, with drinking contexts such as taverns and shebeens intersecting with dominant masculine norms and aggression (Hatcher et al., 2014; Pelowich et al., 2024; Laslett et al., 2025). Consequently, epidemiological research reports that men meeting the criteria for alcohol dependence are significantly more likely to perpetrate IPV and engage in other risky behaviors, highlighting the interconnected nature of alcohol misuse and violence (Mthembu et al., 2016).

Theoretical explanations for the alcohol–IPV link frequently draw on disinhibition and alcohol myopia theories to explain how intoxication facilitates aggression. Disinhibition theory posits that intoxication diminishes the cognitive and emotional controls that ordinarily inhibit aggressive acts, thereby increasing the risk of conflict escalation in close relationships (Subramani et al., 2017). Alcohol myopia theory further suggests that intoxicated individuals narrow their attentional focus to immediate provocations, such as perceived disrespect, while failing to consider long-term consequences or inhibitory cues (Eckhardt, Parrott and Sprunger, 2015). Longitudinal and meta-analytic work further supports the positive association between alcohol use and IPV, showing that consumption by either partner increases the odds of subsequent violence (Devries et al., 2013; Stappenbeck & Fromme, 2010). By narrowing attentional focus and lowering behavioral thresholds, alcohol acts as a potent catalyst that transforms relational tensions into physical aggression (Eckhardt, Parrott and Sprunger, 2015). However, while much of the literature has centered on male drinking as a predictor of violence against women, emerging studies examine how women's alcohol misuse relates to their own use of aggression in intimate relationships (Testa et al., 2012). Research on women's IPV aggression reveals that motivations such as presenting a 'tough guise' can mediate the relationship between alcohol misuse and the use of physical or sexual aggression, underscoring that alcohol-related IPV is not exclusively a male-perpetrated phenomenon (Nelson et al., 2020). Consequently, although alcohol is widely accepted as a significant contributor to IPV dynamics, its role in shaping conflicts that culminate in men's victimization remains poorly theorized. Exploring how alcohol interacts with relational stressors, such as jealousy, in contexts where men are the recipients of IPV is therefore critical for understanding the full spectrum of relational violence.

Jealousy is widely recognized in relationship research as a significant precursor to IPV because it involves perceived threats to relational exclusivity (Pichon et al., 2025; Papa et al., 2026). It is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, where emotional jealousy reflects reactions to perceived threats, cognitive jealousy involves concerns regarding a partner's infidelity, and behavioral jealousy manifests as monitoring (Martínez-León et al., 2017; Degiuli, Andreis and Vučenović, 2023). Buunk's typology further distinguishes between reactive jealousy (a response to actual infidelity), anxious jealousy (ruminative worry about potential infidelity), and preventive or possessive jealousy, which involves mate-guarding efforts to restrict a partner's social contact (Buunk and Fernández, 2020; Buunk and Massar, 2023). Ultimately, these jealous dynamics, characterized by questioning a partner's whereabouts and intentions, generate relational conflict that frequently escalates into physical and emotional IPV (Kyejombe, Stern and Buller, 2021).

Historically, research has emphasized male jealousy as a tool of dominance and a reflection of traditional constructions of masculinity. Male jealousy is statistically associated with both physical and sexual IPV, often manifesting through controlling behaviors that regulate a partner's movements and sexuality (Buller et al., 2022). In South Africa, such controlling behaviors are identified as significant precursors to IPV victimization. Interestingly, in contexts with high ambient violence, some youth may interpret surveillance and restrictive behaviors not as control, but as a protective form of care and concern (Closson et al., 2021). Consequently, jealousy functions as a critical psychological mechanism through which relational insecurity and power imbalances are translated into overt aggression (Mthembu et al., 2021; Bolarinwa et al., 2023). However, scholarship that highlights the role of women's jealousy in precipitating IPV against male partners remains under-developed compared to

research on male perpetrators (Scott-Storey et al., 2022). Qualitative evidence among Somali refugees indicates that women's jealousy often sparked by the unequal distribution of resources or affection in polygynous or monogamous unions, can lead to physical aggression, such as damaging property or physical confrontations (Making Refuge, 2016; Abudulai et al., 2022). Furthermore, gendered pathways reveal that women frequently use questioning and monitoring as a response to suspected infidelity, which serves as a situational trigger for physical and emotional conflict (Kyegombe, Stern and Buller, 2021). Despite these findings, the specific mechanisms through which women's jealousy interacts with situational stressors such as explosive anger to drive male victimization remain unevenly theorized and require further empirical investigation.

Explosive anger constitutes a primary affective pathway in the emergence and escalation of IPV, yet its role in male victimization remains under-theorized compared with a female-centric framework. Psychological research consistently identifies anger - defined as a heightened state of displeasure with a readiness to aggress as a robust correlate of IPV perpetration across genders (Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015). Meta-analytic evidence involving 64 independent samples confirms that IPV perpetration is moderately associated with trait anger and hostility, and this association does not vary significantly by sex (Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015). From a theoretical perspective, anger serves as a critical "impelling" factor within the I³ model, where either dispositional or situational anger amplifies the urge to aggress when triggered by relational provocation (Finkel et al., 2011; Eckhardt, Parrott and Sprunger, 2015; Eckhardt and Parrott, 2016). Ultimately, individuals with poor emotion regulation and high negative urgency are more prone to poorly controlled angry reactions that escalate conflict into physical violence (Dugal et al., 2018; Halmos et al., 2018).

Empirical studies further emphasize the dynamic and often bidirectional nature of anger within intimate relationships (Liu et al., 2018). Anger is not merely a static trait but interacts with situational triggers and relational patterns; for instance, experiencing victimization increases emotional arousal, which can then precipitate retaliatory aggression (Sprunger, Eckhardt and Parrott, 2015; Mackay et al., 2018). Importantly, dyadic research utilizing actor-partner interdependence models reveals distinct gendered pathways: while problematic alcohol use significantly mediates the link between victimization and perpetration for men, anger dysregulation is a stronger mediator for women's perpetration in mutually violent relationships (Sprunger et al., 2015). This aligns with broader evidence identifying anger expression as a central mechanism linking childhood physical abuse to adult partner aggression, with individuals from abused backgrounds exhibiting a greater predisposition to anger and a reduced capacity for self-regulation (Maneta et al., 2012; Iverson et al., 2014). Although historical IPV literature has focused on male hostility as a primary risk factor, emerging studies recognize that women's explosive anger often serves as an active motivational force rather than a mere reaction (Bair-Merritt et al., 2010). Systematic reviews find that anger, retaliation, and an inability to get a partner's attention are pervasive themes in women's use of physical IPV, even when controlling for prior victimization (Bair-Merritt et al., 2010; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, McCullars and Misra, 2012). In the South African context, qualitative accounts highlight how explosive anger interacts with excessive alcohol intake and jealousy to produce specific mechanisms of violence against men remain insufficiently researched in mainstream scholarship.

Drawing on the established literature, this study advances the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad as an integrated framework for understanding the mechanisms of IPV against men. Rather than treating these variables as isolated risk factors, the framework conceptualizes them as a synergistic "triad" of mutually reinforcing triggers where the presence of one factor significantly amplifies the impact of others. This approach aligns with syndemic and socio-ecological models which suggest that multiple co-occurring stressors such as substance misuse and emotional dysregulation converge to produce higher probabilities of victimization than when analyzed in isolation (Capaldi et al., 2012; Stein, 2021). Consequently, by shifting the focus from individual variables to their interactional dynamics, the triad offers a more comprehensive lens through which to examine the complex escalation of relational conflict (Scott-Storey et al., 2022; Candia et al., 2023).

The framework is empirically grounded in qualitative narratives from 25 African men living in Johannesburg, whose lived experiences illuminate how these drivers manifest in real-world contexts. Research indicates that for many men in South African urban settings, alcohol consumption often acts as a gateway for the expression of repressed relational tensions, while jealousy and explosive anger serve as immediate behavioral catalysts for physical and psychological abuse (Niekerk and Boonzaier, 2019; Pelowich et al., 2024). In this study, the voices of African men were analyzed to uncover the direct and contributing elements of conflict that are frequently marginalized in gender-exclusive IPV scholarship (Rowlands, 2022; Simon et al., 2024). Thus, the proposed model provides a theoretically informed representation of the underlying mechanisms precipitating violence against men and offering a foundation for both empirical inquiry and more targeted intervention strategies.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. First, it outlines the methodological approach employed in generating and analyzing the empirical data, emphasizing the importance of qualitative inquiry in exploring sensitive topics of male victimization. This is followed by a presentation of selected narratives that illustrate the specific IPV experiences of the participants. The subsequent section details the study findings, followed by a discussion that

interprets these results through the lens of the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad and existing multidisciplinary scholarship. Finally, the article concludes by articulating the key policy and practice implications, offering reflections on the study’s contributions to broadening the current IPV discourse.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This article draws on qualitative data generated within a broader study examining the impact of IPV on African men’s constructions of masculinity in Johannesburg. While the larger project explored IPV experiences, identity, stigma, and help-seeking, the present analysis focuses specifically on the drivers and escalation dynamics of IPV against men, culminating in the development of the *Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad* as an integrated explanatory framework. By isolating men’s narratives about what precipitated violent episodes, this article shifts analytical attention from consequences to causation, foregrounding the relational, emotional, and situational triggers underpinning female-perpetrated IPV.

Study Design and Setting

This study employed a qualitative research design to generate in-depth insight into the lived experiences of African men in heterosexual relationships who had experienced IPV. Qualitative inquiry is particularly appropriate for examining complex and sensitive social phenomena within their natural contexts, enabling nuanced exploration of subjective meaning-making and relational processes (Niekerk and Boonzaier, 2019; Cormos et al., 2023). Given that violence against men remains socially silenced and under-theorized, an interpretive approach allowed participants to articulate not only what occurred, but how they understood the triggers, escalation patterns, and emotional climates surrounding violent incidents.

Fieldwork was conducted between October 2018 and February 2019 at a Referral Health Facility (RHF) in Johannesburg. As one of the Clinical Forensic Medical Service centres under the Gauteng Department of Health, the RHF provides specialised medical care to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. The setting was analytically significant: it offered access to men who had experienced sufficiently severe violence to require clinical intervention, while situating the research within a broader urban context marked by migration, economic precarity, and shifting gender norms. This institutional context enriched both data collection and interpretation.

Sampling Procedure

The study utilised non-probability convenience sampling to recruit 25 African men who presented at the RHF seeking medical care following IPV perpetrated by female partners. Convenience sampling is frequently employed in research involving hidden or vulnerable populations, particularly where stigma and underreporting complicate the development of a formal sampling frame (Metheny, 2019). Men’s reluctance to self-identify as victims of female partner violence due to shame, masculinity norms, and fear of disbelief -makes probability sampling especially challenging.

Eligibility criteria included: (1) identifying as an African man aged 18 years or older; (2) self-identifying as a victim of domestic violence perpetrated by a female partner; and (3) seeking medical attention at the RHF. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 58 years and were involved in marital, cohabiting, or dating relationships lasting between eight months and ten years. The sample included men from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Mozambique, Malawi, Eswatini, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, reflecting Johannesburg’s diverse migrant and urban population.

To enrich contextual understanding, five key informants were purposively selected: two medical doctors, one nurse, one police captain, and one police constable, each with substantial professional experience in handling IPV cases involving male victims. Purposive sampling enabled the inclusion of participants with specialised knowledge capable of illuminating institutional responses and recurring patterns observed in practice (Moore et al., 2024).

Data Collection

Data were generated through semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews. This method is well suited for eliciting detailed narratives on sensitive topics, allowing flexibility while ensuring conceptual focus. Interviews explored participants’ experiences of abuse and, crucially, their perceptions of what triggered violent episodes. Open-ended prompts such as “What usually led to the violence?” and “How did conflict escalate?” encouraged reflection on alcohol use, jealousy, anger, financial strain, and relational tensions.

Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and were conducted in English. Although English was not the first language of many participants, it functioned effectively as a shared medium. The researcher’s positionality as

an African male facilitated rapport and cultural resonance, which can enhance trust and depth in sensitive qualitative research (Rowlands, 2022). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to preserve accuracy and analytic rigor.

Participant observation was also undertaken during several weeks at the RHF. Observing men presenting with injuries and interacting with healthcare and law enforcement personnel provided contextual insight that complemented interview data. Detailed field notes strengthened credibility and enabled triangulation across data sources.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, which provides a systematic process for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. Transcripts were manually coded to facilitate deep immersion in the material and close engagement with participants' language and meanings (Blair, 2016). Initial codes capturing descriptions of conflict escalation, emotional triggers, substance use, and relational insecurity were iteratively refined into broader thematic categories.

Through this analytic process, three interrelated drivers - alcohol use, jealousy, and explosive anger emerged as recurrent and mutually reinforcing escalation factors. The analysis moved beyond descriptive categorisation to conceptual integration, resulting in the articulation of the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad. Verbatim quotations were retained to foreground participants' voices and to substantiate theoretical interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

The study obtained ethical clearance from the District Research Committee of Johannesburg Health District (NHRD Ref no: GP_20180_029), underscoring rigorous ethical oversight and adherence to high standards. Participants received an information sheet detailing the research purpose, their rights, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Researchers obtained robust informed consent, with participants signing agreements affirming their understanding and willingness to participate, a vital step in safeguarding autonomy in sensitive research (Sil & Das, 2017; Steinert, Shukla, & Satish 2024).

Researchers maintained confidentiality by assuring participants that their identities would be protected through pseudonyms, and interviews were conducted in a private setting (social work office at the RHF) to ensure privacy and safety (Sil & Das, 2017; Subedi, 2025). This approach aligns with ethical guidelines prioritizing participant safety and well-being in trauma-focused research (Subedi, 2025).

Recognizing the potential for emotional distress from discussing IPV, participants were offered ongoing psychosocial support. This aligns with best practices in trauma-focused research, emphasizing care and support to minimize harm (Hellmuth & Leonard, 2013; Love et al., 2020). Interestingly, participants often found the interviews valuable rather than distressing, consistent with research suggesting that sharing experiences can be beneficial for survivors.

Results

This section presents the empirical findings on the drivers of IPV against African men in Johannesburg, interpreted through the lens of the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad. Analysis of participants' narratives revealed three interrelated and mutually reinforcing drivers: alcohol use, jealousy, and explosive anger. Rather than operating as isolated risk factors, these elements formed a dynamic escalation sequence that shaped the trajectory of abuse within intimate relationships. The findings are presented in two stages. First, the lived realities of IPV are outlined to contextualize the severity and patterns of abuse experienced by participants. Thereafter, the triad drivers are examined in detail, supported by verbatim excerpts that illuminate how alcohol, jealousy, and anger converged to precipitate violent episodes.

Lived IPV Realities

The men who participated in this study described complex, overlapping, and deeply distressing forms of abuse perpetrated by their female partners. Across interviews, participants recounted sustained patterns of emotional, psychological, economic, and physical aggression. Nearly all described cycles of intimidation, threats, verbal degradation, and social isolation that often preceded physical assaults. Many reported repeated incidents of close-contact violence severe enough to require medical attention at the Referral Health Facility (RHF).

Physical assaults included stabbing, biting, scalding with hot water, hitting with household objects, and other forms of extreme force. These accounts underscore the seriousness of the violence experienced and challenge

prevailing assumptions that IPV against men is minor or inconsequential. Emotional abuse frequently functioned as an antecedent to physical violence. Participants described recurrent accusations of infidelity, invasive monitoring of phones and movements, restrictions on contact with friends or children, public humiliation, and hostile confrontations. These patterns were often intensified in contexts involving alcohol consumption, perceived romantic threats, or episodes of explosive anger.

Economic control further compounded vulnerability, with some men reporting financial manipulation, destruction of property, or threats related to employment and livelihood. Although only one participant reported sexual harassment, his account reflected broader themes of dominance, coercion, and control. Collectively, these narratives reveal that IPV against men in this context is neither episodic nor incidental; rather, it unfolds through identifiable escalation processes in which alcohol lowers inhibition, jealousy heightens suspicion and relational insecurity, and explosive anger translates emotional volatility into enacted violence. These lived realities provide the empirical grounding for the detailed examination of the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad presented in the sections that follow.

Alcohol as Disinhibitor and Escalation Catalyst

Across participants' narratives, alcohol emerged as a recurrent precipitating condition in episodes of violence. While not all incidents occurred in contexts of intoxication, men consistently described alcohol use as significantly lowering their partners' behavioural restraint, intensifying emotional reactivity, and accelerating the transition from verbal disagreement to physical assault. Within the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad framework, alcohol functioned primarily as a disinhibitor—weakening cognitive control and increasing impulsive behavioural responses. Several participants explained that their partners' violent conduct was markedly different when sober compared to when intoxicated. Bafana, reflecting on repeated incidents, stated:

“When I ask, she says she was very drunk, she says she doesn't remember what she was doing.”

Here, alcohol appears not only as a trigger but also as a post-incident explanation, suggesting impaired self-regulation and diminished recall. The framing of violence as something occurring outside conscious awareness aligns with accounts of alcohol-induced cognitive narrowing, where attention becomes restricted to immediate emotional cues while longer-term consequences are disregarded (Stappenbeck and Fromme, 2010).

Similarly, Gwagwa differentiated sharply between his partner's sober and intoxicated states:

“You know, this person is a person that when she is drunk, she loses it, when she is sober, by now I think she is even shy of what she did. She has a problem; it's triggered by drink. When she is drunk, she loses brain.”

His description of “losing it” and “loses brain” conveys a perceived suspension of rational control. Importantly, he indicates that remorse appears only after sobriety returns, reinforcing the interpretation of alcohol as a catalyst that temporarily overrides inhibitory mechanisms rather than as a root cause of hostility itself (Devries et al., 2013; Testa et al., 2012).

For some participants, alcohol was not merely incidental but appeared to interact directly with relational tension. Tinyiko described a patterned sequence in which jealousy and alcohol consumption reinforced one another:

“When she is drunk, or when she sees me with some lady walking, she will start to drink, and then starts her fights when she is drunk.”

This account suggests that alcohol consumption sometimes followed a jealousy-triggering event, effectively intensifying pre-existing suspicion. In such instances, alcohol did not initiate conflict but escalated it by amplifying emotional volatility and reducing restraint (Goldenberg et al., 2016; Nelson et al., 2020). The deliberate act of drinking after perceiving a relational threat indicates that alcohol may operate as both a coping mechanism and an accelerant within conflict cycles.

Key informant testimony further contextualized these patterns within broader social environments. Mr. Shaka, working closely with affected men, described how alcohol use intersects with everyday relational strain:

“...after work they go to a tavern and drink and come home late or the following day in the morning, so women can't stand for that...”

Although this observation primarily references men's drinking behavior, it situates intimate conflict within a wider night-time economy characterized by tavern culture, late returns home, and heightened suspicion. In such contexts, alcohol becomes embedded in relational negotiations around trust, fidelity, and responsibility. When both partners participate in drinking environments, the potential for misinterpretation and confrontation increases.

Collectively, these accounts indicate that alcohol functioned less as an isolated causal factor and more as a situational amplifier. It lowered inhibition, intensified perceived provocation, and weakened emotional regulation, thereby increasing the probability that jealousy or frustration would transition into aggression. Within the triadic model advanced in this article, alcohol operates as the threshold-lowering condition that makes escalation more likely, particularly when combined with cognitive triggers such as suspicion or affective states such as anger.

Importantly, participants did not portray alcohol as excusing violence; rather, they described it as creating conditions in which violent responses became more immediate and less restrained. The empirical evidence therefore supports the positioning of alcohol as the first escalation node within the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad, an enabling factor that interacts dynamically with relational insecurity and emotional dysregulation.

Jealousy as Cognitive–Emotional Trigger

If alcohol functioned as a threshold-lowering condition, jealousy emerged as the most consistent cognitive–emotional trigger preceding violent episodes. Across interviews, participants described recurrent accusations of infidelity, invasive monitoring behaviours, and confrontations triggered by perceived threats to relational exclusivity. Within the triadic framework, jealousy operated as the interpretive mechanism through which ambiguous situations were reframed as betrayal, thereby activating emotional escalation (Martínez-León et al., 2017).

A common pattern involved surveillance of mobile phones and interrogation of social contacts. Mandla described repeated invasions of privacy:

“You see sometimes she check my phone... she take my phone take all the number in my phone and start to call people...”

This behaviour extended beyond suspicion into active verification and confrontation. The act of calling contacts directly reflects heightened relational insecurity and an attempt to assert control over perceived rivals. Importantly, such surveillance frequently preceded conflict rather than followed it, suggesting that jealousy was not merely reactive but anticipatory and possessive in nature (Buunk and Fernández, 2020).

Similarly, Kgaogelo identified jealousy as a persistent driver of hostility:

“She’s jealous that is why she’s doing all these things... by the time I come home she started fighting me again.”

His narrative suggests that conflict was often pre-formed before interaction occurred. The anticipation of infidelity, rather than confirmed betrayal, appeared sufficient to generate aggression. In this sense, jealousy functioned cognitively as a threat appraisal mechanism or what is called anxious jealousy (Buunk and Massar, 2023), heightening sensitivity to ordinary relational behaviors such as delayed return home or routine communication.

In more acute instances, jealousy escalated rapidly into physical violence. Thabo described a confrontation that followed his involvement with a new partner after separation:

“She just hit me with a bottle... and said, ‘Hit me.’”

This incident reflects how perceived replacement or romantic displacement can intensify possessive responses. The invitation to retaliate (“Hit me”) indicates not only anger but an emotionally charged challenge dynamic, often associated with attempts to reassert dominance or provoke escalation (Kyegombe, Stern and Buller, 2021).

Key informant testimony reinforced the centrality of suspicion in violent incidents. Mr. Mabaso observed:

“A man suspects that ‘my woman is cheating’... or the woman will suspect that ‘my man is cheating’ so she is going to attack him physically.”

This framing highlights jealousy as reciprocal in intimate relationships, yet in the context of this study, it manifested in female-perpetrated aggression toward male partners (Buller et al., 2022). The suspicion of infidelity, whether grounded in evidence or imagination, was frequently described as sufficient justification for confrontation and, in several cases, physical assault.

Across narratives, jealousy rarely operated in isolation. It was often amplified by alcohol consumption or accompanied by escalating anger. However, as a standalone construct, jealousy served as the interpretive spark that transformed everyday relational ambiguity into perceived betrayal. In contexts marked by economic stress, shifting gender expectations, and fragile trust, jealousy appeared particularly volatile. The monitoring of phones, restriction of social interactions, and interrogation of whereabouts created climates of tension in which minor incidents were reinterpreted as confirmation of infidelity.

Within the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad, jealousy therefore functions as the cognitive–emotional activator. It translates situational cues into threat narratives, heightens emotional arousal, and sets the stage for anger to emerge as a behavioral response. When combined with disinhibition from alcohol, the likelihood of rapid escalation into violence significantly increases.

Explosive Anger as Behavioural Enactment

While alcohol lowered inhibition and jealousy activated relational threat perceptions, explosive anger emerged as the behavioural mechanism through which violence was ultimately enacted. Across participants’ accounts, anger was described not merely as irritation or frustration, but as intense, dysregulated emotional outbursts that rapidly escalated minor disagreements into physical confrontation (Dugal et al., 2018). Within the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger

Triad, anger represents the enactment phase - the moment at which cognitive suspicion and emotional arousal crystallise into aggression.

Several participants characterised their partners' anger as chronic and disproportionate to the triggering event. Thokozani described recurring threats during arguments:

"She just tells me ngizokugwaza wena! Which means I will stab you... She is always angry."

The phrase "always angry" suggests not episodic frustration but persistent emotional volatility. Importantly, the threat of stabbing indicates that anger frequently carried an element of intimidation and potential lethality, even when physical injury did not immediately occur.

Similarly, Khathu emphasised the pervasive nature of his partner's emotional reactivity:

"She has too much anger... She is just angry about everything..."

This portrayal reflects a pattern of low-threshold activation, where everyday relational interactions become sites of disproportionate emotional escalation (Birkley and Eckhardt, 2015). In such cases, anger appears to function less as a response to a singular event and more as an overarching affective state that structures conflict dynamics within the relationship.

In other narratives, relatively minor domestic disagreements rapidly transitioned into severe physical violence. Makwakwa described an incident triggered by a simple dispute over food:

"She took a glass and hit me next to my eye."

The triviality of the precipitating issue underscores the disproportionate behavioural response. What begins as routine domestic disagreement escalates into assault, illustrating the breakdown of constructive conflict resolution processes.

Key informant testimony reinforced this interpretation. Mr. Mabaso reflected on repeated cases he had encountered:

"I think its anger and also the lack of conflict management. Because sometimes you ask them why she is beating you, and you find that the reason is not that heavy, for example, this person sustain burns because I think he broke a cell phone charger by mistake, he told her am goanna buy a new one and then the women was frustrated she waited for the man to go and sleep and then she boil and that was it."

This observation highlights two interrelated dynamics: anger dysregulation and inadequate conflict management skills. The phrase "the reason is not that heavy" points to a mismatch between trigger and response - a hallmark of explosive anger. The escalation to boiling water further demonstrates how quickly emotional intensity can translate into dangerous physical action. This disproportionate escalation reflects the I³ model (Finkel et al., 2011), where anger functions as an impelling force that amplifies aggressive urges when inhibition is weakened.

Across accounts, explosive anger often appeared as the culmination of preceding dynamics. Jealousy created suspicion and confrontation; alcohol weakened restraint; anger then provided the immediate emotional energy for aggression. However, even in the absence of alcohol, anger alone was sometimes sufficient to drive violence, particularly in relationships marked by chronic tension or unresolved grievances.

Within the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad, anger therefore represents the behavioural endpoint of escalation. It is the affective force that converts cognitive threat perception into physical action. Importantly, participants' narratives suggest that this anger was frequently impulsive rather than strategic. The violence described was often sudden, emotionally charged, and poorly regulated, rather than premeditated. In all, this empirical evidence positions explosive anger as the enactment node within the triadic system, the moment at which disinhibition and jealousy converge into overt aggression. The next section integrates these components to demonstrate how the three forces interacted dynamically as a mutually reinforcing escalation model.

The Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad in Action: A Dynamic Escalation Model

While the preceding sections examined alcohol, jealousy, and explosive anger as analytically distinct drivers, the participants' narratives demonstrated that these drivers operated not in isolation but as a dynamically interacting system forming a patterned escalation system in which each component intensified the others. Drawing on disinhibition and alcohol myopia theories (Eckhardt, Parrott and Sprunger, 2015; Stappenbeck and Fromme, 2010), Buunk's typology of jealousy (Buunk and Fernández, 2020; Buunk and Massar, 2023), and the I³ model of aggression (Finkel et al., 2011), the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad is theorised here as a patterned escalation loop in which instigation, impellance, and inhibition deficits converge to increase the likelihood of IPV against men.

Within the I³ framework, aggression is most likely when instigating triggers (e.g., perceived infidelity), impelling forces (e.g., anger), and weakened inhibiting forces (e.g., intoxication) co-occur (Finkel et al., 2011; Eckhardt and Parrott, 2016). The empirical accounts align closely with this architecture. Jealousy functioned as the primary *instigator*, activating perceived threats to relational exclusivity (Martínez-León et al., 2017). Alcohol operated as a *disinhibitor*, narrowing attentional focus to provocative cues while diminishing cognitive restraint (Subramani,

Parrott and Eckhardt, 2017). Explosive anger emerged as the *impelling force* translating emotional arousal into behavioural aggression (Birkley and Eckhardt, 2015).

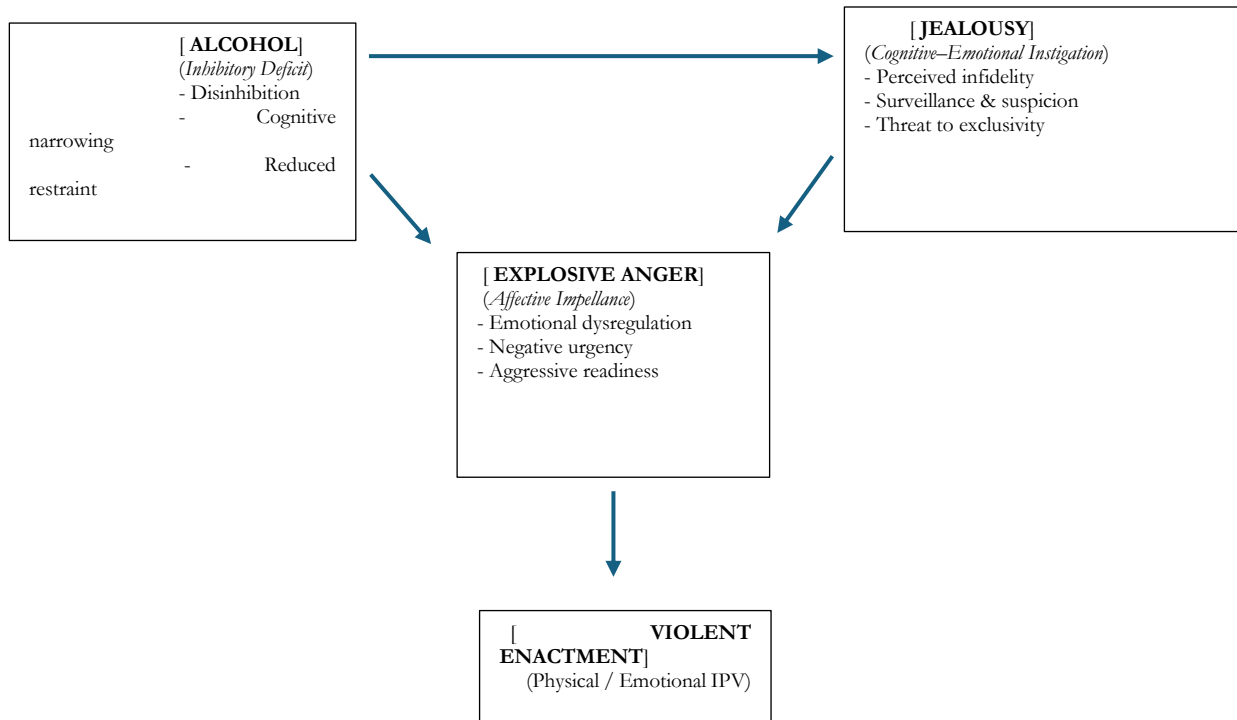
Importantly, the sequencing was not strictly linear. In some cases, jealousy preceded alcohol consumption, with drinking serving to amplify emotional volatility. Tinyiko, for example, described how suspicion of infidelity triggered alcohol consumption, which in turn intensified conflict: “When she is drunk, or when she sees me with some lady walking, she will start to drink, and then starts her fights when she is drunk.” This narrative reveals a deliberate escalation pathway. The perception of a rival activated jealousy; drinking followed as an emotional amplifier; and confrontation ensued under conditions of reduced inhibition. Alcohol did not create suspicion, but it magnified its emotional intensity and reduced the capacity for restraint. This is consistent with alcohol myopia’s prediction that intoxication intensifies salient emotional cues while suppressing long-term consequences (Flanagan et al., 2020). In other instances, alcohol preceded and fuelled jealous confrontation. Andile recounted a pattern in which intoxication coincided with accusations and physical aggression. After returning home, his partner, already under the influence, confronted him about suspected infidelity, and the argument escalated into assault. The sequencing is critical: intoxication narrowed cognitive focus, jealousy framed the interaction as betrayal, and anger culminated in violence. Regardless of sequence, the clustering of the three elements remained consistent, reinforcing syndemic perspectives that co-occurring stressors amplify violence risk beyond additive effects.

The triad therefore operates as an amplification loop rather than a simple cause-and-effect chain. Jealousy cognitively reframes ordinary relational events - a delayed return home, a phone notification as a betrayal. For example, Sfiso described an episode that began with phone surveillance, escalated through accusation, and culminated in physical attack. The discovery of a female contact triggered intense suspicion. The argument that followed rapidly transitioned into aggression. Although alcohol was not explicitly foregrounded in this incident, the pattern nonetheless reflects the triadic structure: jealousy activated emotional arousal, and anger functioned as the behavioral outlet. Simba offered another example of escalation from a seemingly minor trigger: “When I got home she was angry... she took the kettle and poured hot water on me.” In this account, delayed arrival home provoked suspicion, which quickly transformed into intense anger and severe violence. Although alcohol was not always present, the structure of escalation remained consistent: perceived relational threat activated emotional volatility, and the absence of effective conflict management mechanisms allowed anger to convert rapidly into assault.

Furthermore, the rapid escalation described by participants, often occurring within minutes, is theoretically consistent with negative urgency and poor emotion regulation pathways identified in IPV scholarship (Dugal et al., 2018). Indeed, alcohol reduces inhibitory control, making aggressive responses more probable. Anger, particularly when dysregulated, provides the immediate behavioural energy that culminates in assault. This interactional dynamic reflects dyadic findings that anger dysregulation is a particularly strong mediator of women’s IPV perpetration in mutually violent relationships (Sprunger, Eckhardt and Parrott, 2015), while alcohol use by either partner increases the odds of escalation (Devries et al., 2013). Minor triggers were cognitively magnified through jealousy schemas; emotional arousal intensified; inhibition weakened; and anger discharged physically. Violence thus emerged not as an isolated event but as the behavioral culmination of interacting cognitive, affective, and situational forces.

Conceptualising IPV against men through the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad shifts analysis from single-variable explanations to relational dynamics. It integrates established alcohol-aggression theory, jealousy typologies, and aggression models into a gender-inclusive framework that accounts for female-perpetrated violence without abandoning theoretical rigour. In doing so, the triad provides a coherent explanatory model for the repetitive yet seemingly unpredictable nature of violent episodes described by participants. Violence becomes understandable as the patterned convergence of relational insecurity, situational disinhibition, and affective emotional dysregulation - a dynamic escalation system embedded within intimate partnerships rather than an anomalous occurrence.

Figure 1: The Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad as a Dynamic Escalation Model



Logical Flow:

- **Alcohol → Jealousy:** Intoxication narrows attention to provocative cues and heightens sensitivity to perceived relational threats.
- **Jealousy → Anger:** Cognitive appraisals of betrayal generate affective arousal.
- **Alcohol → Anger:** Reduced inhibitory control increases the likelihood of anger expression.
- **Anger → Violent Enactment:** Emotional impellance translates into aggression.
- **Circular Feedback Loop:** Violent episodes reinforce relational insecurity, increasing future jealousy sensitivity and alcohol use, thereby restarting the cycle.

Source: Author

DISCUSSION

This study advances a theoretically integrated understanding of the drivers of intimate partner violence against men through the development of the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad. The findings extend existing scholarship on alcohol-related aggression, jealousy-driven violence, and anger dysregulation by demonstrating how these forces interact dynamically in cases involving male victims. Ultimately the triad analyzes the convergence of these factors and shifts focus from isolated variables to a multifaceted escalation loop, addressing the conceptual fragmentation that often excludes men from IPV research (Capaldi et al., 2012; Scott-Storey et al., 2022).

Consistent with disinhibition and alcohol myopia theories, participants’ narratives indicate that alcohol functions primarily as a threshold-lowering mechanism (Stappenbeck & Fromme, 2010; Eckhardt, Parrott and Sprunger, 2015). Alcohol consumption did not create aggression in a vacuum; rather, it narrows cognitive processing and heightens the emotional salience of immediate provocations while reducing behavioral restraint (Giancola et al., 2011; Fairbairn & Sayette, 2013; Eckhardt, Parrott and Sprunger, 2015). This aligns with meta-analytic evidence and global reports demonstrating strong associations between heavy episodic drinking and physical aggression (Foran & O’Leary, 2008; Butchart et al., 2015). While much of the literature centers on male perpetration, these findings show that similar mechanisms of cognitive impairment and reduced inhibition operate

in female-perpetrated violence against men (Devries et al., 2013; Rowlands, 2022). Consequently, the study supports longitudinal data indicating that alcohol use by either partner significantly increases IPV risk (Stappenbeck & Fromme, 2010; Devries et al., 2013).

Jealousy emerged as a central cognitive–emotional trigger within the triad, often manifesting as anxious or protective jealousy expressed through surveillance and confrontation behaviors aimed at mate guarding (Martínez-León et al., 2017; Kyegombe et al., 2021). These patterns of surveillance, phone monitoring, and accusations of infidelity resonate with evolutionary accounts of threat appraisal and the psychological framework of coercive control (Pratto, 2001; Stark, 2007). Rather than being a strictly male-perpetrated phenomenon, the data corroborate research identifying women’s relational insecurity and possessive jealousy as potent situational triggers for conflict escalation (Kygombe et al., 2021; Abudulai et al., 2022). Furthermore, jealousy-induced threats to relational exclusivity have been shown to intensify emotional arousal and directly precipitate aggressive tendencies from either partner (DeSteno et al., 2006; Abudulai et al., 2022). Thus, jealousy serves as the cognitive catalyst that activates the triadic cycle when relational trust is perceived to be compromised (Martínez-León et al., 2017; Kygombe et al., 2021).

Explosive anger functioned as the behavioral enactment mechanism within the triadic system, facilitating a rapid transition from relational dispute to physical assault (Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015). This process is effectively explained by the I³ (Instigation–Impellance–Inhibition) framework, where jealousy acts as an instigating provocation and alcohol weakens inhibitory controls, allowing anger to serve as the impelling force for aggression (Finkel et al., 2011; Sprunger et al., 2015). The disproportionate nature of many violent episodes, where minor tensions escalate into severe violence, reflects a breakdown in emotional regulation and conflict management skills (Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015; Halmos et al., 2018). Therefore, anger dysregulation is not merely a reactive state but a critical behavioral component that drives the intensity and severity of the violence (Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015; Sprunger et al., 2015).

This study moves beyond additive risk-factor models by demonstrating the synergistic interaction of these elements in an escalation loop where alcohol, jealousy, and anger are mutually reinforcing (Spencer et al., 2020; Stein, 2021). In this framework, jealousy operates as an instigating trigger, alcohol reduces inhibitory capacity, and anger serves as an impelling force driving aggression. Put differently, alcohol amplified jealousy; jealousy intensified anger; anger, under conditions of reduced inhibition, translated rapidly into violence. This triadic approach addresses longstanding calls for multi-level explanatory frameworks that capture the simultaneous cognitive, affective, and situational processes of violence (Heise, 2011; Malbon et al., 2018). By situating men’s experiences within these established theoretical perspectives, the research validates male victimization as a legitimate dimension of IPV scholarship (Douglas & Hines, 2011; Scott-Storey et al., 2022). Overall, the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad offers a structured and theoretically grounded lens to inform more inclusive prevention strategies and policy analysis.

Policy and Practice Implications

The Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad has significant implications for prevention, intervention, and service provision. Traditional IPV interventions often isolate risk factors — focusing separately on substance abuse treatment, anger management, or relationship counseling. The triadic model suggests that such siloed approaches may be insufficient. Effective intervention should simultaneously address: alcohol misuse (through screening and brief interventions), cognitive jealousy and possessiveness (through relational trust-building and cognitive restructuring), anger regulation and conflict management skills. Integrated programs that combine substance use treatment with emotional regulation and communication training may be particularly effective.

Given alcohol’s threshold-lowering role, routine alcohol screening in primary healthcare and emergency settings should incorporate IPV risk assessment for both women and men. Similarly, practitioners should assess for patterns of jealousy-driven surveillance and emotional volatility, which may signal escalation risk even in the absence of current physical violence. Furthermore, IPV policy frameworks frequently center exclusively on women’s victimization. While gendered violence against women remains a critical concern, the present findings underscore the need for inclusive service models that recognize male victimization. Support services, shelters, counseling programs, and legal remedies must be accessible and responsive to men experiencing abuse.

The triad model supports a public health approach to IPV that addresses alcohol availability, harmful drinking norms, and emotional regulation education at the community level. Public awareness campaigns should highlight how jealousy and uncontrolled anger, particularly when combined, with alcohol can escalate into violence regardless of gender. Moreover, educational programs focusing on healthy relationship norms, communication skills, and emotional regulation could mitigate jealousy-driven conflict. Teaching young adults about cognitive distortions related to infidelity and developing non-violent conflict resolution skills may interrupt the triadic escalation pathway before it becomes entrenched.

CONCLUSION

This study advances a theoretically integrated explanation of intimate partner violence against men through the development of the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad. Drawing on empirical narratives from African men in Johannesburg, it demonstrates that alcohol-related disinhibition, jealousy-driven threat perception, and explosive anger operate not as isolated risk factors but as an interacting escalation system.

By situating male victimisation within established theoretical frameworks of alcohol myopia, jealousy theory, and anger dysregulation, the article bridges a critical gap in IPV scholarship. It challenges the marginalization of men’s experiences while remaining grounded in the broader literature on violence dynamics. The triadic model contributes conceptual clarity by illustrating how situational disinhibition, cognitive suspicion, and affective volatility converge to produce violence.

Importantly, the findings call for integrated prevention and intervention strategies that address substance use, emotional regulation, and relational insecurity simultaneously. Recognizing the dynamic interaction among these drivers provides new avenues for policy development, clinical practice, and future research.

Ultimately, understanding IPV through the Alcohol–Jealousy–Anger Triad moves the field beyond fragmented risk-factor analysis toward a systemic account of escalation. In doing so, it strengthens both the theoretical architecture and the applied relevance of contemporary IPV research.

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