Assessment and Practice in Educational Sciences

Presenting a Model of Social Media Influence in Combating Parental Violence Against Children

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to design and explain a model of social media influence in combating domestic violence against children and its role in modifying and changing parental behavior. Utilizing a qualitative approach and grounded theory methodology based on Strauss and Corbin's paradigm model, this study sought to identify the discursive, contextual, intervening, and strategic components influencing parental behavior in response to media content related to domestic violence. The research population consisted of parents with experience using social media to gain awareness about children's rights and parenting issues. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 13 experts and specialists and analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding techniques. Findings indicated that social media, through experiential narratives, emotional messaging, real-life imagery, and advocacy campaigns, plays a significant role in enhancing empathy, sensitivity, and parental reflection on their own behaviors. The resulting model revealed that parental attitude and behavior change does not occur directly but through a chain of causal factors (e.g., history of exposure to violence), contextual factors (e.g., media literacy level and social status), intervening factors (e.g., counseling services and social support), strategic factors (e.g., parental engagement in sharing and online discussions), and consequential factors (e.g., changes in parenting style). This model can serve as a foundation for developing educational, counseling, and media-based programs to address domestic violence against children.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Social Media, Parents, Grounded Theory, Behavior Change, Children's Rights.

Introduction

In recent decades, the intersection of technology, family dynamics, and public health has become a focal point in discussions on domestic violence, particularly against children. Social media, once merely a medium for entertainment and interpersonal connection, has evolved into a multifaceted instrument capable of shaping attitudes, informing behaviors, and mobilizing communities. The proliferation of social platforms globally and regionally, including Iraq and other conflict-affected regions,

has introduced new tools to address social problems while simultaneously presenting novel risks and ethical dilemmas (1). Within this complex digital ecology, the role of social media in influencing parenting practices and mitigating or exacerbating domestic violence against children is gaining scholarly attention.

Domestic violence, including child maltreatment, is a critical public health concern, exacerbated by crises such as conflict, displacement, and pandemics. In conflict zones like Iraq and Syria, the convergence of war, institutional fragility, and limited social services has intensified the vulnerability of children to violence, often within their own households (2, 3). These structural and situational stressors interact with individual-level factors such as parental trauma, economic insecurity, and lack of support networks, creating an environment in which violent disciplinary methods may become normalized (4, 5). Moreover, traditional cultural values and intergenerational transmission of punitive parenting styles compound the challenge (6, 7).

The emergence of COVID-19 introduced an additional layer of complexity. During global lockdowns, families were confined in limited spaces with reduced access to support systems, resulting in an alarming increase in reported cases of domestic violence (8, 9). For children, this translated into prolonged exposure to abusive environments and limited opportunities for external intervention (5, 10). In this context, social media assumed a dual role: a space for exacerbation of harm through online abuse and misinformation, and a platform for public health education, advocacy, and behavioral transformation (11-13).

From an advocacy standpoint, the power of social media in raising awareness and promoting attitudinal change is well documented. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook are increasingly used by NGOs, educators, and healthcare professionals to disseminate narratives that challenge violence and model prosocial parenting (14-16). These platforms facilitate engagement through visually compelling and emotionally resonant content, such as survivor testimonials, educational infographics, and interactive campaigns. For instance, the deployment of hashtags and viral storytelling has enabled widespread diffusion of anti-violence norms across cultural and geographical boundaries (17, 18).

In Iraq, where traditional hierarchies often constrain open conversations about family violence, social media has offered an alternative public sphere where taboo topics can be explored anonymously or semi-publicly (19, 20). The cultural shift enabled by digital activism aligns with the broader global movement toward recognizing children's rights and redefining parental authority through the lens of emotional literacy and mutual respect (21, 22). Moreover, in societies where trust in formal institutions remains fragile, especially post-conflict, digital platforms are increasingly perceived as more accessible and less stigmatizing channels for seeking support or guidance (23, 24).

However, the transformative potential of social media in this context is not without challenges. The dissemination of misleading parenting advice or harmful cultural narratives through unregulated content can reinforce harmful practices rather than dismantle them (25, 26). Likewise, the voyeuristic and often judgmental nature of online discourse—especially in comment sections of viral parenting videos—can discourage vulnerable parents from engaging with helpful content (27, 28). The balance between empowerment and surveillance, support and shaming, remains delicate (29, 30).

Another critical aspect is the digital divide—inequitable access to the internet, digital literacy, and content in native languages—which limits the reach and effectiveness of social media interventions in low-resource settings (31, 32). Furthermore, there are pressing concerns about data privacy and the ethical implications of exposing children's images and family dynamics to broad audiences, especially in cultures with strong norms around familial privacy (11, 14).

To address these complexities, scholars have proposed integrative models that combine grounded theory with digital ethnography to better understand how parental behavior evolves in response to online exposure (15, 33). For example, social media campaigns that use relatable visual content, interactive storytelling, and engagement by local influencers have demonstrated success in promoting parental self-reflection, empathy development, and adoption of non-violent discipline

methods (16, 26). These behavioral shifts are often supported by networked communities that provide moral and informational support, reinforcing new norms through peer validation and public accountability (34, 35).

Legal frameworks and governmental institutions also play a crucial role in reinforcing media-driven behavioral change. Where legislation on domestic violence is actively enforced and promoted through digital platforms, the synergistic impact is greater (36, 37). Public–private partnerships, involving tech companies, civil society, and legal authorities, have been identified as effective mechanisms for content regulation, educational outreach, and victim protection (11, 13).

Ultimately, the question is not whether social media can influence parental behavior—but under what conditions and through which mechanisms it does so most effectively. Current research underscores the importance of multi-level, culturally sensitive, and ethically grounded approaches to designing digital interventions for family violence prevention (10, 38). These interventions must integrate psychological insights, sociocultural context, and platform-specific affordances to maximize their impact.

The present study aims to fill a gap in the literature by developing a conceptual model, rooted in grounded theory, that explains how parents in Iraq interact with social media content related to domestic violence against children.

Methods and Materials

In the qualitative section of this study, the grounded theory approach based on Strauss and Corbin's (1998) paradigm model was employed. The primary aim in this phase was to deeply identify the factors, processes, and contexts through which social media influences parental behavior in relation to confronting domestic violence against children.

The statistical population in this phase included parents with children aged 6 to 12 years who had experience using social media regarding issues related to child-rearing and domestic violence. The sampling method used in the qualitative section was purposive sampling. Initially, interviews were conducted with 15 targeted participants, and the interviews began to show redundancy. After presenting the results to experts and specialists in the field and consulting with them to confirm the validity of the research, it was decided to continue interviewing other members of the study population. Accordingly, interviews were conducted with three additional informed individuals. As a result, after completing 13 interviews, theoretical saturation was achieved. Following validation by subject matter experts, the researcher concluded that no further interviews were necessary, and ultimately 13 individuals were identified as experts and specialists for the qualitative phase.

For data collection, in-depth and semi-structured interviews were used. The sampling process followed a theoretical sampling method. The selection of participants continued until the point of theoretical saturation, meaning that after the twentieth interview, no new information was added to the theoretical framework of the study. The interviews were conducted either in person or, in some cases, online via video calls. Each interview session lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

The collected data were analyzed using a three-stage coding process, including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. To enhance data validity, strategies such as participant validation, constant comparative analysis, and field note-taking were utilized to ensure the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the qualitative findings.

Findings and Results

Open coding is the first stage of data extraction, in which a semantic label is assigned to meaningful units (text, image, video, audio), functioning like valuable puzzle pieces that lay the foundation for theory development. It is noteworthy that in this study, MAXQDA software version 2020—one of the recognized tools for qualitative data analysis—was utilized. Preliminary coding refers to the initial assessment of documents and observations to prepare the data for the primary coding process.

In this section, all documents—including 13 in-depth and semi-structured interviews—were reviewed at the outset. Accordingly, the researcher conducted a thematic or latent content analysis of all these documents and extracted the initial or embryonic codes based on the results derived from the meaningful units previously identified in the preliminary coding phase. A total of 1,555 non-repetitive initial codes were identified (as observable in the Shannon entropy matrix). After eliminating duplicate codes and consulting with academic supervisors and advisors, the number of codes was reduced to 120 unique initial codes.

In fact, through 13 interviews and the subsequent categorization of these initial codes (to be presented in the following sections), the researcher reached the point of theoretical saturation. The researcher's interpretations are based on the outcomes of the latent content analysis of the interviews, and the frequency of codes does not play a decisive role in the analysis. However, to assess the quality of each document and the specific insights each one provides, the researcher generated scientometric diagrams for the extraction of scientific codes from each of the 13 documents that contributed to saturation. These diagrams, generated by MAXQDA software, are presented in this section.

In the next phase—categorization—the researcher grouped the initial codes that held meaningful relationships with each other. This was accomplished using abstract focused coding. As stated in the previous section, some of the initial codes possess higher levels of conceptual and abstract meaning and thus act as overarching categories encompassing more operational codes. In consultation with academic supervisors and advisors, the researcher compiled a table (Table 1) outlining the potential main and sub-categories.

Table 1. Initial Codes and Main Categories

Initial Codes	Main Categories
Hopelessness about financial future – Parental unemployment – Lack of standard housing	Economic Factors
Lack of access to social services – Lack of government support – Social inequalities – Lack of access to social education	Social Factors
Values – Beliefs – Gender superiority – Attitude	Cultural Factors
Poor anger management – Inability to resolve conflicts – Lack of interactive skills with the child – Lack of communication skills with the child	Lack of Communication Skills
Hitting the child – Physically harming the child – Forceful pushing – Branding the child	Physical Violence
Threatening the child – Insulting the child – Humiliating the child – Threatening the child with isolation – Emotional punishment – Inducing guilt in the child	Psychological Violence
Depression – Anxiety – Alcohol addiction – Drug addiction – Divorce	Parental Individual Tensions
Promoting a culture of critique in media – Promoting Islamic values in media – Promoting human values in media – Promoting empathy in the family – Promoting respect in the family – Promoting respect for child dignity in media	Promotion of Human Values in Media
Online educational workshops – Online educational seminars – Conscious media-based advertisements – Broadcasting visual documentaries	Online Educational Interventions
Use of Instagram – Use of YouTube – Use of Snapchat – Use of WhatsApp – Use of Facebook	Engagement with Digital Platforms
Lack of social acceptance of parents – Lack of cultural acceptance of parents – Lack of specialized knowledge – Lack of specialized education	Deficiency in the Cultural System
Limitations in effective legislation – Limitations in public awareness – Lack of clear and explicit laws – Weak law enforcement	Deficiency in the Legal System
Limited access to psychological education – Limited access to training workshops – Limited access to parenting literacy	Deficiency in Access to Information
Use of celebrities in media – Use of influential figures in media – Use of expert professionals in media	Role Models in Media
Online social campaigns – Creation of related hashtags – Online educators	Virtual Support Networks
Production of educational films – Production of educational music – Production of educational literature and articles – Production of educational podcasts	Aligned Cultural Productions
Use of infographics – Use of appealing educational images – Use of engaging educational stories	Educational Visualization
Cooperation of the judicial system – Cooperation of governmental institutions – Cooperation of non-governmental institutions – Cooperation of NGOs	Institutional Networking
Joint educational programs for parents – Joint educational programs for children – Parenting education programs in media – Joint online counseling programs	Collaborative Online Institutional Programs
Strengthening family relationships – Enhancing family cohesion – Creating meaning in family relationships – Increasing emotional bonding in family relationships	Strengthening Family Relationships

Improving parental mental health – Improving child mental health – Strengthening child–parent relationship – Increasing parental self-confidence – Increasing child self-confidence – Preventing cycles of violence – Reducing parental anxiety and stress	Normative Reactions
Enhancing parents' information literacy – Enhancing parents' interactive literacy – Enhancing parents' psychological literacy	Multilevel Literacy Enhancement

Axial coding is essentially the process of linking categories to subcategories, allowing the researcher to arrive at a conceptual framework with the highest degree of abstraction. This process is termed "axial" because the coding revolves around a central category, and the categories are interrelated across various dimensions and properties. The aim of axial coding is to reassemble the data that was deconstructed during open coding. It is worth noting that the researcher, at this stage, can utilize the paradigm model of Strauss and Corbin (1998), which is designed for grounded theory methodology—categorizing the themes into such elements as causal factors, consequences, strategies, context, and background.

Table 2. Axial Coding Results

Initial Codes	Main Categories	Axial Code
Hopelessness about financial future – Parental unemployment – Lack of standard housing	Economic Factors	Macro Multidimensional Indicators
Lack of access to social services – Lack of government support – Social inequalities – Lack of access to social education	Social Factors	
Values – Beliefs – Gender superiority – Attitude	Cultural Factors	
Poor anger management – Unresolved conflicts – Lack of interactive skills with the child – Lack of communication skills with the child	Lack of Communication Skills	
Hitting the child – Physically harming the child – Forceful pushing – Branding the child	Physical Violence	Domestic Violence Against Children
Threatening the child – Insulting the child – Humiliating the child – Threatening isolation – Emotional punishment – Inducing guilt in the child	Psychological Violence	
Depression – Anxiety – Alcohol addiction – Drug addiction – Divorce	Parental Individual Tensions	
Promoting critical culture in media – Promoting Islamic values in media – Promoting human values in media – Promoting empathy in the family – Promoting respect in the family – Promoting child dignity in media	Promotion of Social Values in Media	Online Social Activism
Online educational workshops – Online educational seminars – Media-based conscious advertising – Broadcasting visual documentaries	Online Educational Interventions	
Use of Instagram – Use of YouTube – Use of Snapchat – Use of WhatsApp – Use of Facebook	Engagement with Digital Platforms	
Lack of social acceptance of parents – Lack of cultural acceptance – Lack of specialized knowledge – Lack of professional training	Deficiency in Cultural System	Infrastructure Deficiencies
Limited effective laws – Limited awareness-raising – Lack of clear legislation – Weak law enforcement	Deficiency in Legal System	
Limited access to psychological training – Limited access to educational workshops – Limited access to parenting literacy	Limited Access to Information	
Use of celebrities in media – Use of influential figures – Use of expert professionals in media	Role Models in Media	Comprehensive Online Support
Online social campaigns – Creation of hashtags – Online educators	Virtual Support Networks	
Production of educational films – Educational music – Educational literature and articles – Educational podcasts	Aligned Cultural Productions	
Use of infographics – Use of attractive educational images – Use of engaging educational stories	Educational Visualization	
Cooperation of judiciary – Government institutions – NGOs – Civil society organizations	Institutional Networking	Inter-organizational Assistance
Joint educational programs for parents – Joint programs for children – Parenting education programs in media – Joint online counseling programs	Collaborative Online Institutional Programs	
Strengthening family bonds – Enhancing family cohesion – Creating meaning in relationships – Increasing emotional bonding	Strengthening Family Relationships	Multifaceted Empowerment
Improving parental mental health – Improving child mental health – Enhancing child–parent relations – Boosting parental self-confidence – Boosting child self-confidence – Breaking the cycle of violence – Reducing parental stress and anxiety	Normative Reactions	
Enhancing parents' informational literacy – Enhancing parents' interactive literacy – Enhancing parents' psychological literacy	Multilevel Literacy Promotion	

The conceptualization process was presented in the tables above, which led to the extraction of seven highly abstracted semantic units. In axial coding, categories are systematically developed and connected to subcategories; however, it must be noted that research findings transform into a theory only when the core categories are integrated into a larger theoretical framework. Therefore, selective coding is defined as the process of integrating and refining categories and axial codes and establishing their relationships.

In fact, this coding approach is a novel method in which hypotheses are suggested by the software, allowing the researcher to select relevant hypotheses and construct a new model based on the research and their analytical abilities. MAXQDA software uses a matrix called the *Code Relation Browser* to analyze the simultaneity or overlap of codes and categories, presenting the result in matrix format to the researcher. At this stage, the researcher can rely on strong or even moderate overlaps as a highly valid tool for hypothesis generation and model construction.

Essentially, the overlap matrix demonstrates the semantic relationship between codes using geometrical shapes, similar to a correlation table in quantitative research, though represented qualitatively. It reveals, on a spectrum, which two categories or even axial codes share meaningful conceptual links. These overlaps are further illustrated using graphical charts generated by the software. It is noteworthy that these overlaps form the basis for hypotheses that are explored in the subsequent stages of the research.

Ultimately, after analyzing the software outputs and further reviewing the relevant literature, the comprehensive model of the study was extracted. This theory was developed using Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory strategy and obtained through the three-stage coding process, and is presented in the paradigm model. The model consists of seven axial codes (constructs), which were interconnected through five empirically validated hypotheses via the software. In the quantitative phase of the research, these hypotheses were analyzed using statistical software to enhance the generalizability of the results.

As stated, the paradigm model of the research includes seven axial codes that, based on their importance and the analysis of qualitative data, have been positioned in different components of the paradigm model. Accordingly, the axial code Macro Multidimensional Indicators, with four components (economic factors, social factors, cultural factors, and lack of communication skills), was identified as the causal condition influencing the central phenomenon.

The contextual conditions of the model include the axial code Online Social Activism, which encompasses three components (promotion of social values in media, online educational interventions, engagement with digital platforms) and influences the strategies.

Next, the axial code Infrastructure Deficiencies, including three components (deficiency in cultural systems, deficiency in legal systems, and limited access to information), was identified as intervening conditions affecting the strategies in this paradigm model.

The axial code Multifaceted Empowerment, with three components (strengthening family relationships, normative behavioral responses, and multilevel literacy promotion), was recognized as the outcome of the paradigm model.

Additionally, the axial code Domestic Violence Against Children, consisting of three components (physical violence, psychological violence, and parental individual tensions), was identified as the central phenomenon influencing the strategies.

The strategic axis in this model includes the axial code Comprehensive Online Support, consisting of four components (role models in media, virtual support networks, aligned cultural productions, and educational visualization), and the axial code Inter-organizational Assistance, which includes two components (institutional networking and collaborative online institutional programs).
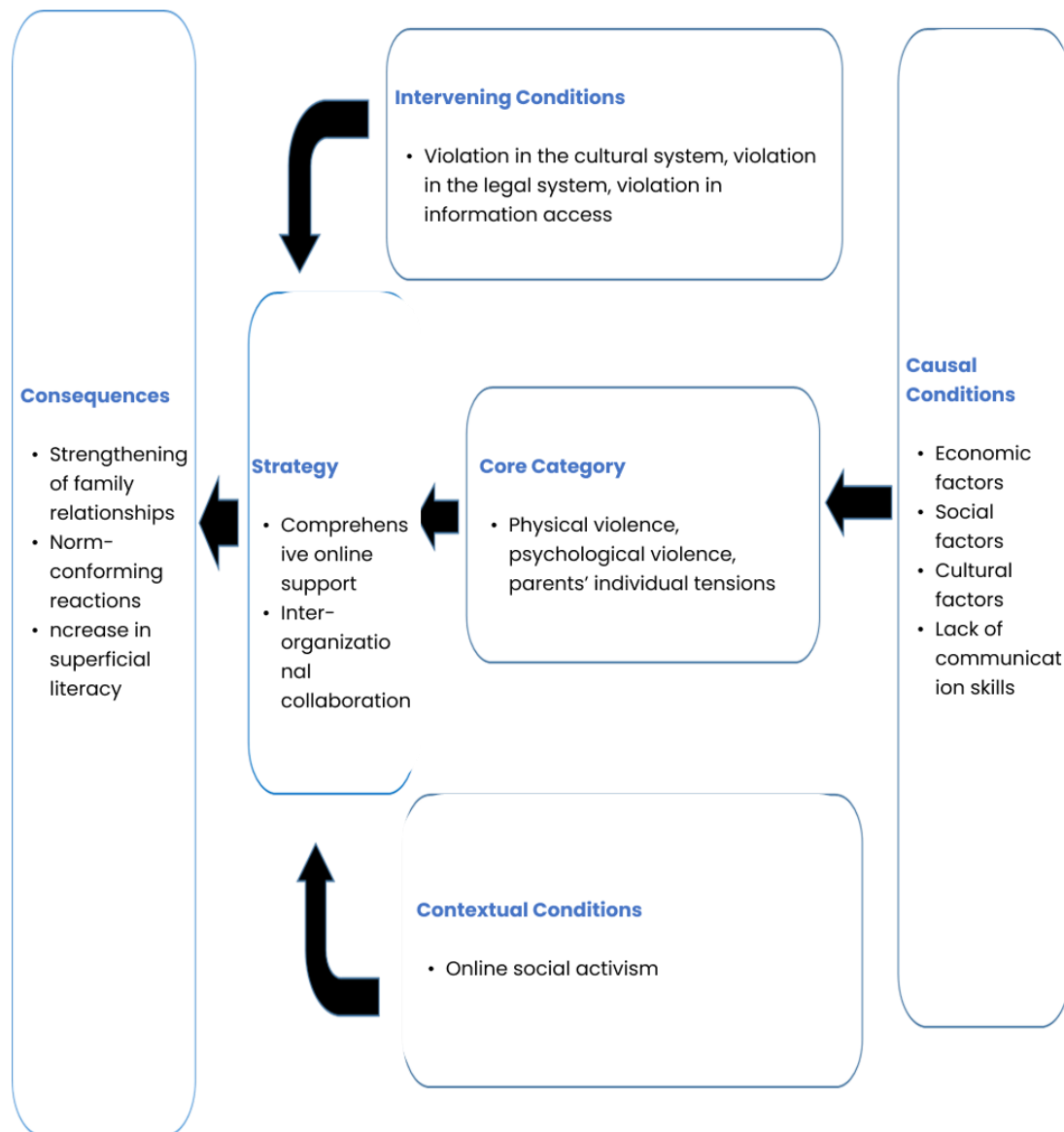
Figure 1. Paradigm Model of Media Influence in Combating Parental Domestic Violence Against Children

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the present study revealed a nuanced and multidimensional understanding of how social media influences parental behavior in the context of domestic violence against children. Through axial and selective coding, the final paradigm model demonstrated the interaction of causal, contextual, intervening, strategic, and outcome-based categories. Specifically, seven central constructs were identified: *macro multidimensional indicators*, *online social activism*, *infrastructure deficiencies*, *comprehensive online support*, *inter-organizational assistance*, *domestic violence against children*, and *multifaceted empowerment*. These elements formed an interconnected framework showing that social media acts as both a trigger and a mediator in reshaping parental behaviors and attitudes toward child-rearing and nonviolent discipline.

The identification of *macro multidimensional indicators*—economic, social, cultural, and communicational deficits—as core causal factors is aligned with a significant body of research emphasizing the sociostructural foundations of domestic violence. Studies conducted in post-conflict societies like Iraq show that war trauma, poverty, low parental education, and rigid patriarchal norms contribute to a cultural acceptance of harsh parenting practices (3, 7). These findings support the current

study's recognition of structural deprivation as a root cause in the perpetuation of family violence, confirming similar patterns observed among displaced or conflict-affected populations (2, 38).

Another key finding relates to the category of *online social activism*, which encompassed digital educational campaigns, value-based narratives, and digital platform interactions. Participants in the study consistently highlighted the transformative effect of social media content that combined storytelling, emotional appeal, and practical advice. This finding is strongly supported by literature demonstrating how digital narratives can evoke empathy, facilitate moral engagement, and trigger behavioral re-evaluation in parents (15, 16). Social media has been observed to not only disseminate anti-violence messages but also create discursive spaces where harmful norms are contested and new parenting ideologies are socially reinforced (18, 34).

Importantly, the study showed that *comprehensive online support*—consisting of media role models, virtual peer networks, and culturally resonant media products—was central to fostering behavior change. This aligns with research on social capital and digital resilience, which highlights the role of perceived community, relatability, and collective efficacy in promoting psychological readiness for behavioral shifts (26, 31). Participants emphasized that relatable content delivered by respected influencers, educators, or survivors fostered trust and credibility. This mirrors findings from studies that underscore the importance of content source in affecting cognitive and emotional receptivity to anti-violence messaging (21, 35).

Moreover, *inter-organizational assistance*, including institutional collaboration between media, educational entities, and legal systems, emerged as a strategic pillar. The synergistic impact of coordinated efforts between governmental bodies and digital initiatives was perceived by participants as a reinforcing mechanism for sustained change. This supports global findings that show interventions are more effective when legal awareness campaigns, community outreach, and digital education are integrated (11, 36). In this context, the lack of legal enforcement and social support structures was identified as a major barrier, consistent with observations that policy-level deficiencies often dilute the effectiveness of behavioral interventions (12, 13).

The role of *infrastructure deficiencies*—limited media literacy, poor internet access, and lack of formal training—was identified as a major intervening factor. While social media holds significant potential, its benefits are inequitably distributed. This resonates with prior studies emphasizing the role of the digital divide in limiting engagement with constructive content (23, 39). For instance, parents in rural or underserved areas may encounter barriers not only in technological access but also in understanding media messages, particularly when content is not localized or linguistically appropriate (19, 32).

One of the study's most compelling outcomes is the recognition of *multifaceted empowerment* as a long-term consequence of social media engagement. Participants reported increased emotional bonding, improved communication with children, and a decrease in impulsive reactions as outcomes of exposure to supportive online content. These self-reported changes are supported by broader literature on the psychological impacts of digital parenting communities, which often function as therapeutic environments fostering reflection and emotional growth (14, 30). Moreover, the emphasis on *normative reactions* such as guilt, shame, and empathy in response to emotionally charged content corroborates findings that emotion-driven narratives are instrumental in prompting behavioral introspection (10, 25).

The findings also support the growing discourse that effective change does not stem from mere exposure to information but from a complex process involving reflection, decision-making, and community reinforcement. This reinforces theoretical models that prioritize psychosocial and environmental conditions as precursors to sustainable behavior modification (29, 33). Social media, in this regard, acts not simply as a medium of information but as a dynamic catalyst for sociocultural transformation.

Despite the strength of the study's qualitative design and the depth of its theoretical framework, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample was limited to a specific socio-cultural context (urban Iraqi parents), which may affect the

generalizability of findings to other regions or communities with different media habits and parenting norms. Second, the self-reported nature of the interviews may have introduced social desirability bias, as participants might have been inclined to portray themselves as more reflective or responsible than they are in practice. Third, the cross-sectional design captures only a snapshot of a dynamic and evolving phenomenon. Longitudinal studies would be better suited to assess sustained behavioral change. Lastly, the study did not include children's perspectives, which could offer critical insight into the perceived effects of parental behavioral shifts.

Future research should consider employing mixed-methods designs that combine qualitative interviews with large-scale surveys to enhance the robustness and generalizability of the findings. Including participants from rural areas and minority communities would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how social media functions across demographic and cultural spectrums. Moreover, it would be valuable to explore the role of specific platforms (e.g., TikTok vs. WhatsApp) and content types (e.g., memes vs. testimonial videos) in influencing parenting practices. Longitudinal designs could track behavioral change over time to evaluate the sustainability of impact. Additionally, incorporating children's voices and experiences could provide richer, more balanced data that inform future policy and intervention designs.

To leverage social media as an effective tool in reducing domestic violence against children, practitioners should focus on designing culturally resonant, emotionally engaging, and easily accessible content tailored to parents' literacy levels and cultural backgrounds. Collaboration between digital media experts, child protection agencies, legal institutions, and local influencers is critical for coherent and ethical content dissemination. Community-based digital literacy training can empower parents to critically engage with online material and adopt prosocial parenting behaviors. Moreover, institutional actors should create mechanisms for content validation, psychological support, and referral services within social media platforms to ensure continuity of care and safe online environments for vulnerable families.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adheried in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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