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"It's Like We Have to Die Before Anyone Takes Us Seriously": Institutional Revictimization in the French Justice System Among Women Survivors of IPV

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Abstract

Institutional revictimization refers to additional harm generated through institutional practices, procedures, interactions, or omissions after survivors seek formal protection. This study examined how women survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) in France experienced and interpreted potentially revictimizing responses across their justice-system trajectories, with particular attention to socially shared meanings surrounding victimhood, credibility, violence, and institutional protection. Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 46 women who had initiated at least one legal action. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, with Social Representations Theory serving as a sensitizing framework. Five interrelated themes captured how survivors' agency, credibility, institutional continuity, cumulative harm, and experiences of protection were negotiated across justice trajectories. Survivors described disbelief, victim-blaming, repeated testimony, deficient communication, procedural delays, fragmented case management, and limited recognition of non-physical violence. Protective encounters were characterized by attentive listening, validation, clear information, continuity, and specialized support. Institutional revictimization emerged as a cumulative process rather than a series of isolated encounters, highlighting the importance of responses that preserve survivor agency, strengthen protection, and challenge gendered assumptions surrounding IPV and victim credibility.

Keywords: institutional revictimization; intimate partner violence; justice system; social representations; women survivors

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1. Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) against women is a global public health and human rights concern with profound and enduring physical, psychological, and social consequences for survivors (Falb et al. 2015; Tobin-Tyler 2023). The World Health Organization defines IPV as behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviours. Worldwide, nearly one in three women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence by a non-partner during her lifetime (World Health Organization 2026).

Rather than an isolated incident, IPV typically unfolds as a sustained and cumulative pattern of abuse that undermines women's well-being over time (Stubbs and Szoeke 2022; White et al. 2024). These harms are rooted in power asymmetries and embedded in sociocultural structures that normalize or minimize violence against women (Kelly 2011; Meyer

et al. 2024). State institutions, including the justice system, therefore play a pivotal role: they can either provide protection, recognize survivors' experiences, and interrupt ongoing patterns of abuse, or reproduce disbelief, trivialization, and institutional neglect.

In France, police and gendarmerie services recorded 272,400 victims of violence perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner in 2024, 84% of whom were women. Yet victimization survey data indicate that only around one in six victims files a formal complaint (Service Statistique Ministériel de la Sécurité Intérieure 2025). Despite recent policy measures, including Law No. 2019-1480 of 28 December 2019 on combating violence within the family (Loi n° 2019-1480 2019), which strengthened several mechanisms for protecting people exposed to domestic violence, as well as the 2019 Grenelle on domestic violence (Ministère de la Justice 2019), aimed at reinforcing interinstitutional responses, official responses remain uneven across institutional settings (Oddone and Blouin 2022). Persistent discrepancies between formal protection mechanisms and survivors' experiences of their implementation may undermine institutional trust and discourage continued engagement with the justice system (Garcia and McManimon 2011; Sanchez et al. 2024).

Within this context, many survivors encounter institutional responses that fail to guarantee their safety and generate additional forms of harm. Lengthy, fragmented procedures and persistent scepticism toward women's accounts may reproduce dynamics of discredit, loss of control, and powerlessness already present in abusive relationships. These experiences have been examined through related concepts, although their scope differs. Secondary victimization encompasses additional harm arising from responses to prior victimization, both within institutional settings and in the broader social environment, including family and personal relationships. Institutional betrayal, in turn, emphasizes the violation of expectations of trust and protection placed in institutions (Smith and Freyd 2013; Porter et al. 2025), whereas procedural injustice may occur independently of prior victimization (Tyler 2006). In this study, institutional revictimization specifically focuses on the additional harm produced or reproduced through institutional responses following primary victimization (Gezinski and Gonzalez-Pons 2022; Ortega-Pacheco et al. 2026).

In the French context, however, institutional revictimization remains comparatively underexamined as an analytical framework, particularly regarding how women themselves interpret potentially harmful institutional encounters across their justice-system trajectories. This article addresses this gap by examining institutional revictimization in France from a survivor-centred perspective and drawing on Social Representations Theory (SRT) to examine the socially shared meanings through which experiences of victimhood, credibility, violence, and institutional protection are interpreted and negotiated.

1.1. Institutional Revictimization in the Justice System

Research on institutional revictimization among women survivors of IPV, conducted primarily in North American and European contexts, has documented multiple forms of additional harm arising during justice-system encounters (Ortega-Pacheco and Le Barbenchon 2025). Such harm may arise through institutional rules, routines, and practices, including excessive bureaucratic hurdles, insufficient professional preparation in gender-based violence, ineffective interventions, and overt discrediting of survivors' testimonies (Gezinski and Gonzalez-Pons 2022).

Within the justice system, institutional revictimization operates on multiple levels. First, gender biases and deeply rooted stereotypes may shape assessments of survivors' credibility. Assessments by police officers, prosecutors, and judges may draw on an implicit 'ideal victim' figure—one who reports immediately, cuts all ties with the perpetrator, displays visible suffering, and behaves in accordance with normative expectations of fear and pain (Burgess-Proctor 2012; Saxton et al. 2021; Holmes et al. 2022). This figure implicitly privileges

linear, emotionally coherent narratives of victimization and assumes clear-cut ruptures with the perpetrator, leaving little room for the ambivalence, economic dependence, parenting obligations, and survival strategies that characterize many women's lives. Departures from this script—such as delayed reporting, continued contact for economic or parental reasons, or ambivalence—may be interpreted as inconsistency, exaggeration, or diminished credibility (Lorenz and Jacobsen 2024; Albertín Carbó et al. 2020; McPhedran et al. 2017). In practice, such deviations may prompt heightened scrutiny, moralizing judgments, or subtle forms of disbelief that can influence subsequent procedural decisions. Misinterpretations of trauma-related responses (e.g., flat affect or fragmented memory), together with victim-blaming assumptions and, where sexual violence is involved, rape myths, may further shape decisions at multiple points in the justice process, including case dismissal, charging, and prosecution (Franklin et al. 2020, 2023; Patterson 2011).

A second axis concerns procedural dynamics. Survivors are often required to recount their experiences repeatedly across successive institutional encounters, generating emotional exhaustion and additional distress (Garcia-Jimenez et al. 2019; Hohl et al. 2022). Having to reconstruct their account at successive stages may be experienced as a recurring demand to demonstrate credibility, turning routine case processing into a cumulative source of harm. Prolonged delays, lack of clear information, and failure to implement protection orders may prolong vulnerability and weaken confidence in the effectiveness of institutional protection (Bell et al. 2011; Woerner et al. 2024). The discrepancy between formal protection and its implementation may also reinforce perceptions that the burdens of pursuing protection fall disproportionately on survivors. In parallel, some perpetrators strategically instrumentalize the legal system—through delaying tactics, counterclaims, or repeated litigation—extending coercive control into the legal arena, a phenomenon described as 'legal abuse' (Douglas 2018). Such abuse can be facilitated by procedural gaps, including adjournments, appeals, and fragmented jurisdictional arrangements that prolong opportunities for contact, surveillance, or control under the guise of lawful proceedings.

Interactions with the police often represent an early and consequential point in survivors' justice-system trajectories. Studies with women who have survived IPV or sexual violence indicate that experiences of disrespect, distrust, or unfair treatment are associated with higher post-traumatic stress symptoms and reduced willingness to report in the future (Srinivas and DePrince 2015; Rancher et al. 2021). By contrast, perceiving control and agency during the intervention—being able to make decisions, receiving comprehensible explanations, and having access to specialized support—is associated with more favourable evaluations of the system and greater likelihood of continuing with the process (Cattaneo 2010; Hohl et al. 2022). Procedural justice research underscores four interrelated dimensions as especially salient here—dignity and respectful treatment, trust in authorities, perceived neutrality, and the opportunity to have one's voice heard—which shape survivors' evaluations of the system and their willingness to report again in the future (Acquaviva and Gullion 2025; Lorenz and Jacobsen 2024). Research has also associated gender-stereotypical beliefs and organizational pressures within policing with dismissive, punitive, or negligent responses that survivors may experience as harmful or revictimizing (Tripathi 2023; Horwitz et al. 2011; Saxton et al. 2022; Gezinski 2022).

Finally, institutional revictimization is sustained by structural barriers: lack of accessible legal advice, financial costs, opaque legal language, scarcity of material resources, and poor coordination between services (Saxton et al. 2021; Postmus et al. 2009). When protection orders are not enforced, emergency resources are insufficient, and legal or economic alternatives prove unviable, survivors may face severely constrained options that prolong exposure to unsafe circumstances and generate psychological, social, and economic consequences (Lee et al. 2021; Gambetta and Vanoli-Imperiale 2025; Moe 2007). Taken

together, these structural dynamics may render formal protection fragile or contingent, contribute to disengagement from proceedings, and reinforce perceptions that recourse to the justice system carries substantial personal costs. Rather than functioning as a space of redress, the justice system may therefore become a setting in which harm is reproduced or amplified, eroding institutional trust and discouraging future recourse to formal protection.

1.2. Survivor Perspectives and Remaining Research Gaps

A substantial body of research has documented institutional responses to IPV, identifying recurrent practices such as discrediting survivors, minimizing harm, inadequate implementation of protective measures, and structural barriers to reporting and access to justice (Garcia-Jimenez et al. 2019; Gezinski and Gonzalez-Pons 2022; Voth Schrag et al. 2021; Wright et al. 2022). Qualitative studies have also increasingly foregrounded survivors' accounts, demonstrating how institutional encounters may be experienced as silencing, controlling, dismissive, or otherwise harmful.

However, less attention has been paid to how survivors themselves interpret these institutional encounters as part of broader justice-system trajectories and how they make sense of the assumptions embedded in them. Understanding institutional revictimization requires examining not only what institutional actors do—or fail to do—but also how women interpret experiences of being questioned, disbelieved, delegitimized, or protected, and how these encounters shape their understandings of the justice system (Lee et al. 2021; Ortega-Pacheco and Le Barbenchon 2025). This dimension is particularly underexamined in the French context, where little is known about how survivors connect institutional experiences across different stages of their justice trajectories or how their accounts draw upon, negotiate, and resist socially shared meanings surrounding victimhood, credibility, IPV, and institutional protection. Examining these processes from a survivor-centred perspective therefore complements institutional and legal analyses by foregrounding the meaning-making through which potentially revictimizing encounters are understood and negotiated.

1.3. The Social Representations Approach

Within this context, social representations theory (SRT) provides a conceptual and sensitizing framework for examining how socially shared meanings surrounding violence, victims, perpetrators, and institutions are produced, circulated, and negotiated. As socially constructed systems of knowledge rooted in everyday interaction, social representations shape how individuals and groups interpret events, organize experience, and delineate what is viewed as credible, legitimate, or morally valid (Moscovici 1981; Jodelet 2003, 2015).

Two core processes are central to this framework. Anchoring integrates unfamiliar or challenging phenomena into pre-existing categories and systems of meaning. In the context of IPV, for example, violence may be interpreted through familiar categories such as a 'relationship dispute' or a 'private matter', while survivors may be evaluated against culturally available expectations of an 'ideal victim'. Objectification renders abstract ideas more concrete and seemingly self-evident through images, categories, and recognizable attributes. Thus, abstract judgments concerning the seriousness of violence or the credibility of a survivor may become associated with tangible markers such as visible injury, immediate reporting, consistency of testimony, or expected displays of suffering (Moscovici 1981).

In research on violence against women, social representations have been widely mobilized to illuminate how cultural myths, gendered stereotypes, and justificatory narratives normalize abuse and uphold unequal power relations (Lelaurain et al. 2018; Rollero 2020). Less attention has been devoted to how such meaning systems are mobilized and negotiated within survivors' accounts of institutional encounters, particularly when assumptions about 'real' violence or a 'credible' victim intersect with practices such as evidentiary de-

mands, minimization of testimony, or procedural inaction. Rather than presuming that these practices directly express particular representations held by institutional actors, a social representations approach makes it possible to examine the socially available meanings through which survivors interpret and narrate these encounters (Ortega-Pacheco and Le Barbenchon 2025).

Applied to institutional revictimization, this perspective foregrounds how understandings of 'real' violence, credible victimhood, responsibility, and protection may be reproduced, negotiated, or contested in survivors' accounts of police and judicial encounters. This perspective also directs attention to survivors as active meaning-makers who may appropriate, question, or resist socially available understandings when making sense of their institutional trajectories.

Building on this perspective, and adopting a psychosocial orientation attentive to both lived experience and socially shared knowledge (Jodelet 2015), the present study aims to explore experiences of institutional revictimization among women survivors of IPV in France through the theoretical lens of social representations. Specifically, we ask the following questions: (1) What forms of institutional revictimization do women who survived IPV report when engaging with the justice system in France? (2) How do women's accounts draw upon, negotiate, or resist socially available meanings concerning victims, perpetrators, IPV, and justice institutions when interpreting their institutional trajectories?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Recruitment Strategy

A purposive sampling design was implemented in collaboration with formal institutions and non-profit associations in France that provide psychosocial and legal assistance to women affected by IPV. These organizations were formally briefed on the study objectives and invited to support participant recruitment. Once institutional agreement was obtained, digital and physical information materials summarizing the aims, inclusion criteria, and participation conditions were disseminated through partner networks to broaden outreach. The recruitment materials invited women who had experienced IPV and pursued at least one legal action to take part in a confidential interview about their experiences with the justice system.

Eligibility criteria were: (1) women aged 18 years or older, (2) having experienced IPV, and (3) having initiated at least one legal action in response to the violence. Participation was entirely voluntary. Given the sensitivity inherent to disclosing victimization and institutional experiences, prospective participants were instructed to contact the first author directly via email to schedule interviews at a time and through communication channels they deemed safe.

All interviews were conducted by the first author, who had no prior relationship with participants before recruitment-related contact. His positionality as a male researcher working on gender-based violence was explicitly discussed within the research team, and reflexive notes were used to monitor how gender, professional background, and expectations might shape both the interview encounters and subsequent interpretation of the data. Ethical approval was granted by the Comité d'Ethique de l'Université d'Aix-Marseille (reference: 2024-02-15-14; 15 February 2024).

2.2. Participants

Of the 52 women who initially expressed interest in participating, 46 completed the study. Among the six who did not participate, four withdrew for personal reasons and two could not be reached to schedule the interview. The final sample comprised 46 women survivors of IPV aged 25–58 years ($M = 43.04$, $SD = 7.82$). Educational attainment ranged from

high school and associate-level qualifications to doctoral education and was concentrated at the master's ($n = 20$) and bachelor's ($n = 15$) levels. Eight participants had completed high school, two had an associate-level qualification, and one had a doctorate. Most participants were single ($n = 29$); the remainder were married ($n = 7$), divorced ($n = 6$), separated ($n = 3$), or cohabiting ($n = 1$).

Participants' experiences of IPV frequently encompassed multiple forms of violence. Within the sample, 32 women had experienced physical violence, 29 psychological violence, 14 sexual violence, and 10 economic violence. These categories were not mutually exclusive, as many participants had experienced multiple forms of IPV. IPV onset extended from 1995 to 2024, while first complaints were filed between 2002 and 2026. The number of complaints filed varied from one to 20, reflecting markedly different trajectories through the justice system. In two cases, participants reported police-initiated proceedings without having voluntarily filed a complaint. Institutional responses spanned immediate intervention, delays lasting several months or years, and the absence of any subsequent response. Detailed sociodemographic characteristics and reporting trajectories are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants.

1	32	Bachelor's Degree	Married	Physical	2021	2021	1	Immediate
2	35	Master's Degree	Separated	Physical & Economic	2022	2023	1	Police-Initiated Proceedings [a]
3	25	Doctorate	Single	Physical, Sexual & Psychological	2019	2021	5	Never
4	28	High School Diploma	Single	Sexual	2018	2021	1	Immediate
5	41	Associate's Degree	Separated	Physical	2013	2020	2	9 Months
6	40	Associate's Degree	Divorced	Physical, Sexual & Psychological	2019	2022	1	Never
7	46	Master's Degree	Separated	Sexual	2021	2021	1	Immediate
8	42	High School Diploma	Single	Physical	2023	2023	1	Police-Initiated Proceedings [a]
9	45	Master's Degree	Married	Psychological & Economic	2023	2024	1	Never
10	39	High School Diploma	Single	Physical	2009	2013	3	Next Day
11	40	Master's Degree	Single	Psychological	2020	2025	1	Immediate
12	42	High School Diploma	Single	Psychological	2001	2002	2	Never
13	56	Master's Degree	Married	Physical & Psychological	1995	2023	1	Never
14	42	Bachelor's Degree	Single	Physical, Sexual, Psychological & Economic	2015	2021	20	Immediate
15	38	High School Diploma	Single	Psychological & Economic	2019	2025	1	Never
16	42	Master's Degree	Single	Physical & Psychological	2015	2019	2	Never
17	58	Bachelor's Degree	Divorced	Physical	2019	2019	3	Never
18	39	Master's Degree	Divorced	Psychological & Economic	2018	2024	1	9 Months

Table 1. *Cont.*

19	37	Master's Degree	Divorced	Psychological	2022	2025	1	Never
20	46	Bachelor's Degree	Divorced	Physical & Psychological	2023	2026	3	Never
21	48	High School Diploma	Cohabiting	Psychological	2008	2015	19	6 Months
22	57	Bachelor's Degree	Single	Psychological	2002	2013	2	Never
23	51	Bachelor's Degree	Single	Physical, Sexual, Psychological & Economic	2004	2021	5	4 Years
24	52	Bachelor's Degree	Single	Sexual & Physical	2021	2023	1	Immediate
25	38	Master's Degree	Single	Psychological	2023	2024	1	Never
26	56	Master's Degree	Single	Physical & Psychological	2005	2005	2	Never
27	45	Bachelor's Degree	Married	Physical & Psychological	2003	2009	2	Never
28	42	Bachelor's Degree	Single	Physical & Psychological	2007	2024	8	6 Months
29	56	Master's Degree	Married	Psychological	1999	2006	5	1 Year
30	46	Master's Degree	Single	Sexual, Physical & Psychological	2008	2012	1	Never
31	41	Master's Degree	Single	Physical	2023	2024	2	Never
32	27	Bachelor's Degree	Single	Physical, Psychological & Sexual	2019	2019	1	18 Months
33	42	Bachelor's Degree	Single	Physical, Psychological & Sexual	2010	2023	1	Immediate
34	39	Master's Degree	Single	Physical	2021	2021	2	Never
35	43	Master's Degree	Single	Physical & Sexual	2023	2023	1	Immediate
36	48	Bachelor's Degree	Married	Psychological	2000	2026	3	3 Months
37	40	High School Diploma	Single	Physical	2023	2023	2	Immediate
38	48	High School Diploma	Married	Sexual, Psychological & Physical	2003	2024	1	8 Months
39	44	Master's Degree	Single	Physical, Psychological & Economic	2009	2024	1	Immediate
40	58	Master's Degree	Single	Physical, Psychological & Sexual	2021	2021	10	Immediate [b]
41	44	Master's Degree	Single	Physical & Psychological	2021	2023	1	3 Months
42	44	Bachelor's Degree	Single	Psychological, Physical & Economic	1999	2025	9	Never
43	45	Master's Degree	Single	Physical	2008	2014	1	Never
44	45	Bachelor's Degree	Divorced	Physical & Economic	2007	2022	5	2 Months

Table 1. *Cont.*

45	36	Bachelor's Degree	Single	Physical	2022	2022	1	Immediate
46	32	Master's Degree	Single	Sexual & Economic	2024	2025	1	Never

Note. NCF = Number of complaints filed. Education levels correspond to the French system: CAP/BEP = Lower Vocational Certification; "Bac" (baccalauréat) = High School Diploma; "Bac+3" = Bachelor's Degree; "Bac+5 or higher" = Master's Degree or higher. "Associate's Degree" is included as an approximate equivalent to French Bac+2 (e.g., BTS/DUT), although this credential does not formally exist in the French system. [a] Participant reported that formal proceedings were initiated despite her lack of consent. [b] An immediate response was received following the last complaint.

2.3. Data Collection

A semi-structured interview guide was developed drawing on a framework of institutional revictimization in justice-system contexts (Ortega-Pacheco and Le Barbenchon 2025). As presented in Table 2, the guide covered several domains related to survivors' experiences of the justice system and included corresponding open-ended questions. Participants were invited to discuss both harmful and supportive aspects of their institutional trajectories and to introduce experiences they considered relevant to their accounts. Core questions provided consistency across interviews, while additional prompts were adapted to issues raised during each conversation (Kallio et al. 2016). This format supported detailed exploration of the study domains while preserving participants' own ways of narrating and interpreting their experiences.

Table 2. Semi-Structured Interview Protocol.

Analytical Axis	Objective	Open-Ended Questions
Perception of the care provided	Identify how survivors evaluate the institutional response received	What is your perception of the care provided by the professionals who attended to you?
Experiences with judicial procedures	Explore interactions with the legal system and perceived barriers	What legal steps have you taken, and how was your experience with the professionals who assisted you during these processes?
Impact of professional attitudes and behaviours	Examine which attitudes/behaviours survivors experienced as supportive or harmful	What types of attitudes or behaviours from these professionals, in your opinion: 1. Had a negative impact on you during the care process?/2. Did it have a positive effect on you during the care process? Was this experience difficult for you, and if so, why?
Experience in disclosing personal narratives	Explore emotional impact and treatment during disclosure of abuse	When filing the complaint, how did you perceive the way you were treated?
		Could you share your experience of giving your testimony? And what emotions did it evoke for you?
Perception of follow-up and suggestions for improvement	Assess continuity of care and survivors' suggestions for better responses	How did you perceive the follow-up care provided by the professionals, and how do you think this process could be improved or modified?

All interviews were conducted in French by telephone, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and lasted approximately 60 min. Telephone interviewing facilitated participation among women residing in different regions of France and those facing mobility or logistical constraints, although access to nonverbal cues was necessarily limited. The in-

terviewer recorded brief contextual and emotional notes during and immediately after each conversation. Given the sensitivity of discussing IPV and institutional experiences, several safeguards were incorporated into the procedure. Identity was verified discreetly before each interview, safe communication windows and channels were agreed upon in advance, and participants were reminded that they could pause or end the conversation at any point. Informed consent was obtained orally before the interview and subsequently confirmed in writing by email. Participants also received information concerning confidentiality, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw without adverse consequences. At the end of each interview, contact information for relevant support services was also provided.

Data collection was conducted between November 2024 and April 2026. Sample adequacy was considered in relation to the principle of information power (Malterud et al. 2016), taking account of the focused study aim, the relevance of participants' experiences to the research questions, and the depth and richness of their accounts. The final corpus comprised 46 interviews encompassing diverse experiences of IPV and markedly different trajectories through the justice system.

2.4. Data Analysis

The first author transcribed the interviews verbatim and checked each transcript against the corresponding audio recording before analysis. Quotations selected for reporting were translated into English by the first author, with attention to semantic equivalence, readability, and preservation of participants' intended meanings. Analytic engagement began during data collection through repeated reading of the transcripts alongside contextual and reflexive notes recorded throughout the research process.

Data were interpreted through reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), informed by Braun and Clarke's approach (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2019, 2021a, 2021b, 2022). Analysis involved repeated familiarisation with the transcripts, iterative coding, development of candidate themes, and their progressive refinement across the dataset. Coding was primarily data-led, while Social Representations Theory (SRT) sensitised the interpretation of patterned meanings surrounding IPV, victimhood, perpetrators, credibility, and justice institutions across participants' situated accounts. The analysis therefore focused on participants' situated accounts of institutional encounters, while SRT informed the interpretation of the socially shared meanings through which those experiences were understood and narrated. Institutional experiences were interpreted as potentially revictimizing when institutional practices, interactions, or omissions contributed to additional harm, such as humiliation, invalidation, heightened distress, or insecurity. Negative experiences or distress arising from necessary legal procedures were not, in themselves, considered sufficient to constitute institutional revictimization.

The first author led coding and theme development. Both authors initially read the first two transcripts separately and subsequently discussed preliminary analytic observations, interpretive assumptions, and alternative readings of the material. These discussions served as reflexive dialogue around alternative interpretations and developing analytic possibilities. The second author contributed throughout the analytic process as a critical interlocutor, questioning developing interpretations and contributing to the refinement of thematic boundaries and organising concepts. Reflexive notes documented analytic decisions and shifts in interpretation.

The first ten interviews supported the development of a provisional analytic matrix in Microsoft Excel containing coded excerpts, analytic observations, and developing relationships across the material. Microsoft Excel was selected for its flexible tabular structure, which facilitated the organization and comparison of coded excerpts, analytic notes, and developing relationships as the analysis evolved. As the remaining 36 interviews were incor-

porated, codes and candidate themes were progressively refined across the enlarged corpus. Earlier transcripts were revisited as new accounts, contrasts, and variations informed the analysis. Candidate themes were examined in relation to the full dataset and research questions, with particular attention to patterned meaning, thematic boundaries, and the central organising concept underpinning each theme. Themes were merged, divided, renamed, or further developed as the analysis progressed, resulting in five interrelated themes and their associated subthemes (Table 3).

Table 3. Themes and Subthemes of Institutional Revictimization and Protective Responses Among Women Survivors of IPV in France.

Themes	Subthemes
Protection Without Voice	Inadequate Communication with the Survivor Procedural Action Without Meaningful Survivor Involvement Fragmented and Repetitive Testimony
Conditional Recognition	Blaming Questions Lack of Professional Empathy and Sensitivity Distrust and Questioning of Testimony Minimization and Stigmatizing Judgments Gendered Discrediting of Survivors
Fragmented Protection	Perceived Gaps in Professional Preparedness Fragmented Coordination and Case Management Structural Barriers and Procedural Delays
The Cost of Seeking Justice	Emotional Consequences of Institutional Responses Long-Term Consequences for Daily Life and Institutional Engagement
Being Heard and Supported	Respectful and Protective Police Intervention Support and Advocacy From Victim-Support Organizations

Illustrative quotations were selected to substantiate analytic interpretations, represent recurrent patterns across participants, and retain less prevalent or divergent perspectives when analytically significant. Reporting was guided by the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ; Tong et al. 2007) and the APA Journal Article Reporting Standards for Qualitative Research (JARS–Qual; Levitt et al. 2018).

3. Results

Drawing on survivors' accounts, the reflexive thematic analysis generated five interrelated themes across women's justice-system trajectories: (1) Protection Without Voice, (2) Conditional Recognition, (3) Fragmented Protection, (4) The Cost of Seeking Justice, and (5) Being Heard and Supported. Each theme is developed through its subthemes and illustrated with participants' accounts.

3.1. Theme 1—Protection Without Voice

This theme captures how institutional processes intended to provide protection could also reduce survivors' voice and control. Participants described inadequate communication, limited involvement in procedural decisions, and repeated or fragmented testimony.

3.1.1. Inadequate Communication with the Survivor

Participants described receiving little or no information about procedures, timelines, case progression, or available protection measures. Some also perceived limited interest in their concerns.

> *"After that, it's true that once he was incarcerated, I didn't hear anything at all... I stayed stuck in my fear because I didn't know if he was still in prison."* (Participant 1).

> *"After all these complaints, we never hear anything... It's up to me, as the victim, to go looking for information... We, as victims, are not kept informed."* (Participant 43).

Communication gaps prolonged uncertainty about case progression and personal safety. For some women, the absence of timely information was experienced as intensifying fear and conveying institutional neglect, particularly when they remained uncertain about the perpetrator's detention status or the protection measures in place.

3.1.2. Procedural Action Without Meaningful Survivor Involvement

Some participants described legal actions or procedural decisions progressing without feeling sufficiently informed or involved in decisions affecting their cases. Although such interventions could be presented as protective, participants sometimes experienced them as restricting their ability to determine the pace and terms of their engagement with the justice system.

> *"The officer told me, 'Either way, even if you don't file a complaint, we'll open an investigation.' In the end, I was forced to go through with the process."* (Participant 6).

> *"It ended with a complaint that they forced me to file. I didn't want to file a complaint against him... They told me, 'If you don't sign the statement we have here, the court will prosecute directly and you'll have no control over it.'"* (Participant 14).

These experiences reduced participants' sense of procedural control and contributed to perceptions that important decisions were being made without meaningful involvement. Although legal obligations may require proceedings to continue independently of survivors' preferences, the potentially revictimizing dimension lies not in the intervention itself, but in how it is communicated and implemented, particularly when survivors are left uninformed, pressured, or excluded from meaningful involvement.

3.1.3. Fragmented and Repetitive Testimony

Survivors described repeatedly recounting their experiences across different services while also encountering interruptions or restrictions on what could be included in formal statements.

> *"It was difficult having to tell and retell the story all the time. They make us repeat, repeat, repeat. There is something that remains violent in having to repeat it so much."* (Participant 46).

> *"The officer kept interrupting me: 'That's enough, we're not putting all these details in the report.' I couldn't even finish my sentences."* (Participant 3).

Repeated recounting and fragmented listening were experienced as exhausting and distressing. Some women also felt repeatedly responsible for reconstructing their own account and re-establishing its credibility.

3.2. Theme 2—Conditional Recognition

This theme captures how survivors' credibility and victim status were evaluated through institutional responses marked by blame, disbelief, minimization, and gendered assumptions. Across these encounters, recognition often appeared contingent on conformity with expectations concerning legitimate victimhood and suffering.

3.2.1. Blaming Questions

Several women described questions that shifted attention from the perpetrator's conduct towards their own decisions, timing, or credibility.

> *"I got comments like, 'Why didn't you come sooner?' As if it was my fault for not filing a complaint earlier…"* (Participant 8).

> *"When I talked about the sexual violence, they asked me if I had 'enjoyed it'… it was horrible."* (Participant 3).

> *"Sometimes they tell you, 'You need to stop watching TV. You need to stop playing the victim. What did you do to make him angry?'"* (Participant 32).

These exchanges were experienced as assigning responsibility back to survivors and requiring them to justify both the violence and their responses to it. Such questioning positioned credibility as conditional on conformity with normative expectations regarding how a legitimate victim should behave, including prompt reporting and a coherent account of events.

3.2.2. Lack of Professional Empathy and Sensitivity

Several women described emotionally distant or impersonal responses during moments of pronounced distress, leaving them feeling disregarded and unsupported.

> *"There was a sense of weariness on their part. A lack of empathy, smiles, eye-rolling, sighs... You could feel there was no empathy. There were sighs, eye-rolling, and shrugs."* (Participant 17).

> *"I was in deep distress, crying, but they just said, 'Calm down, we have more urgent cases.' It was very hurtful for me."* (Participant 5).

These encounters were interpreted as signalling indifference and insufficient recognition of survivors' distress, reinforcing feelings of isolation and limited institutional support.

3.2.3. Distrust and Questioning of Testimony

Participants described encounters in which their statements were openly questioned or met with remarks casting doubt on women's credibility.

> *"After that, it was very, very, very difficult. They didn't believe me at all. The judge handling the interim measures said, 'No, there's not enough evidence. You lied.'"* (Participant 26).

> *"He kept repeating, 'Women lie all the time.' I felt like I had to prove that I wasn't a liar."* (Participant 3).

These exchanges placed survivors in a defensive position, requiring them to establish not only what had occurred but also their own credibility as complainants. Across the accounts, disbelief was experienced as shifting institutional attention from the violence itself towards an assessment of whether the survivor could be trusted.

3.2.4. Minimization and Stigmatizing Judgments

Participants described responses that diminished the seriousness of the violence, moralized their choices or presentation, or framed particular forms of IPV as insufficiently serious. Psychological violence and experiences without visible physical injuries were especially vulnerable to such minimization.

> *"Despite all the stab wounds, they just said I was still alive, so it wasn't that important."* (Participant 1).

> *"As one police officer said, 'Still, it would be easier if you had actually been hit, if you had marks…' Were you waiting for him to kill me before doing something? When I'm dead, then you'll have your proof. It's like we have to die before anyone takes us seriously."* (Participant 30).

> *"He told me, 'With the way you dress, you shouldn't be surprised…' I was in shock."* (Participant 7).

Minimization was also described in relation to institutional decisions or classifications that participants interpreted as reducing the gravity of their experiences or treating IPV as a private relationship matter.

> *"In the end, they decided to reduce the sentence and drop the attempted murder charge without truly listening to me… as if what I had endured wasn't serious."* (Participant 11).

> *"They told me, 'These are just relationship issues; the police don't care about that.' I was speechless."* (Participant 7).

Across these accounts, recognition of violence appeared contingent on criteria such as visible injury, perceived severity, and normative judgments concerning survivors' conduct. The distinction participants encountered between violence regarded as sufficiently serious and violence treated as minor or private contributed to experiences of invalidation and the need to justify the legitimacy of their victimization. From a social representations perspective, these narratives illustrate how understandings of IPV may be anchored in familiar categories of private conflict, while visible injuries become concrete markers through which the seriousness of violence is evaluated.

3.2.5. Gendered Discrediting of Survivors

Women also described explicitly gendered remarks that portrayed them through derogatory stereotypes or suggested that male behaviour and women's endurance of it were socially expected.

> *"The officer said, 'This is just another story of a hysterical woman trying to get revenge.' It was blatantly sexist."* (Participant 7).

> *"When I asked to submit my evidence quickly, I was told that the investigation needed time because some women claim violence that never happened and fabricate evidence to make their husbands pay financially and to leave them. That is what I was told when I asked for protection."* (Participant 28).

Participants interpreted such remarks as gendered forms of discrediting that diminished the legitimacy of their complaints. Across these accounts, women were positioned as emotional, vindictive, unreliable, or expected to tolerate male behaviour, reproducing familiar gendered expectations surrounding victimhood and intimate relationships. By explicitly identifying such remarks as sexist, some survivors challenged gendered assumptions that portrayed women as unreliable or vindictive, rather than accepting these judgments as legitimate.

3.3. Theme 3—Fragmented Protection

This theme captures how organizational and procedural fragmentation weakened the continuity and responsiveness of institutional protection. Participants described perceived gaps in professional preparedness, poor coordination and case management, and procedural barriers that often left them responsible for navigating disconnected justice trajectories.

3.3.1. Perceived Gaps in Professional Preparedness

Participants interpreted some professional responses as reflecting limited preparedness to recognize different manifestations of IPV and respond sensitively to survivors experiencing acute distress.

> *"The fact that I was in tears, unable to express myself clearly—they didn't know how to react… It felt like they had no training whatsoever."* (Participant 6).

> *"Another gendarme told me, 'I don't know whether we are trained to receive this kind of testimony and listen to victims like you. Perhaps it would be better for you to go to the Family Protection Centre, which specializes in listening to victims.'"* (Participant 21).

From participants' perspectives, limited professional preparedness was reflected in difficulties responding to distress and recognizing forms of violence that were not immediately visible or readily categorized. Such encounters weakened confidence in professionals' capacity to understand their circumstances and respond appropriately.

3.3.2. Fragmented Coordination and Case Management

Participants described limited coordination across police, courts, and victim-support organizations, including failures in case management, the transmission of critical information, and follow-up across services.

> *"I had to repeat everything and act as the 'coordinator.' I felt like the police, the judge, and the association were all working separately, with no communication."* (Participant 1).

> *"It's like a puzzle; it isn't organized. I have cases in Nîmes, Avignon, Carpentras, Grasse. They are not coordinated at all... The family court judge, the criminal judge, and the sentence enforcement judge—it seems as though they don't speak to one another, or to the prosecutor."* (Participant 15).

> *"The computers didn't even show that he was prohibited from approaching me. So they released him... With the serious danger phone, I had been told that if he contacted me, he would be immediately incarcerated. And that didn't happen."* (Participant 41).

Fragmentation across services left some survivors navigating disconnected institutional pathways and assuming responsibility for connecting information across different actors. The absence of clear guidance compounded this burden, particularly when women were uncertain about subsequent procedural steps or which service held responsibility for their case. Failures in information transmission and follow-up further weakened confidence in the continuity of institutional protection.

3.3.3. Structural Barriers and Procedural Delays

Survivors described procedural and environmental barriers during reporting and subsequent justice proceedings, including inadequate privacy, prolonged delays, case disruptions, and the need to restart procedural steps.

> *"I had to share my story in front of other people in the waiting room. There was no privacy at all."* (Participant 8).

> *"It took a year to locate my case file, and then another judge was assigned, so we had to start everything over again."* (Participant 4).

These conditions added practical and emotional demands to survivors' justice trajectories. Inadequate privacy exposed women during sensitive disclosures, while prolonged or disrupted procedures extended uncertainty and required some participants to repeat steps they believed had already been completed.

3.4. Theme 4—The Cost of Seeking Justice

This theme captures the emotional and longer-term costs that survivors associated with harmful institutional encounters across their justice trajectories. Participants described institutional responses as intensifying existing distress, undermining trust, and, in some cases, contributing to disengagement from legal proceedings.

3.4.1. Emotional Consequences of Institutional Responses

Participants described some institutional encounters as intensifying distress already associated with IPV. Repeated testimony, perceived judgment, disbelief, and limited recognition were associated in their accounts with humiliation, emotional exhaustion, renewed distress, and feelings of abandonment.

> *"Having to repeat my story and feeling judged every time made me cry even more. It felt like reliving the trauma all over again."* (Participant 5).

> *"It was an additional trauma... Their reaction intensified it. Above all, it was an additional trauma to have to fight against the justice system, to see that justice was not moving forward and was not responding."* (Participant 14).

These accounts illustrate how the emotional consequences attributed to institutional encounters were experienced as additional to, and sometimes intertwined with, the distress generated by IPV itself. Repeatedly recounting traumatic experiences while feeling judged or disbelieved intensified some survivors' sense of exhaustion and abandonment and, in certain cases, weakened their willingness to remain engaged with the justice process.

3.4.2. Long-Term Consequences for Daily Life and Institutional Engagement

Some participants described consequences extending beyond the immediate institutional encounter, particularly in relation to trust in justice institutions, willingness to continue legal proceedings, financial strain, and their broader sense of safety and autonomy. These longer-term effects were often difficult to disentangle completely from the consequences of IPV, yet participants sometimes explicitly connected their withdrawal, exhaustion, or loss of institutional trust to their experiences within the justice process.

> *"I gave up on the legal process because I was mentally exhausted. It made me lose faith in the institutions... and in myself."* (Participant 3).

> *"I was being summoned every month or every month and a half and spending two or three hours at the gendarmerie defending myself against things I had never done... It continued even though I was no longer with him."* (Participant 35).

> *"I had to pay €4900 in legal fees for my children, even though I didn't have that money. I took out consumer loans."* (Participant 23).

For some survivors, accumulated frustration and emotional exhaustion contributed to withdrawal from legal proceedings and diminished confidence in institutional protection. Loss of trust could persist beyond the immediate encounter, affecting how participants evaluated the value and personal cost of continued engagement with the justice system.

3.5. Theme 5—Being Heard and Supported

This theme captures responses through which survivors experienced recognition, protection, and greater agency across their justice trajectories. Attentive listening, timely intervention, clear information, continuity, and advocacy contributed to feelings of safety and greater confidence when navigating institutional procedures.

3.5.1. Respectful and Protective Police Intervention

Alongside harmful encounters, some participants described police responses characterized by prompt intervention, attentive listening, clear communication, and explicit concern for their safety.

> *"I was fortunate to encounter an officer who listened to me without interrupting, took notes, and said, 'We're going to protect you.'"* (Participant 8).

> *"When I called the police, they came immediately. They documented my injuries, took me to the hospital, and said, 'We can't leave you like this.'"* (Participant 3).

> *"They really took the time to listen to me… The gendarme asked me the question again, without judging me. Gradually, I realized that I existed too and that my suffering had to be taken into account."* (Participant 27).

These encounters were experienced as affirming survivors' accounts and communicating that their safety was being treated as an institutional priority. Timely intervention, attentive communication, and subsequent contact reduced uncertainty and contributed to a stronger sense of being heard, protected, and taken seriously.

3.5.2. Support and Advocacy from Victim-Support Organizations

Participants also described specialized victim-support organizations as important sources of continuity, information, advocacy, and practical assistance during justice proceedings. Their involvement was particularly salient when survivors encountered informational, emotional, or procedural gaps elsewhere in their trajectories.

> *"Without the association, I would have been completely alone. They explained my rights and supported me through every step of the process."* (Participant 1).

> *"They told me that the day I felt ready to leave, they would find me accommodation that same evening... I called them and said, 'Today is the day.' That evening, we were taken somewhere safe."* (Participant 34).

> *"I was seen by legal professionals, psychologists, doctors, and care coordinators. They explained that, based on what I was describing, I should return to file a complaint for psychological and sexual violence."* (Participant 21).

These organizations provided continuity across otherwise fragmented trajectories by clarifying rights and procedures, facilitating access to legal or practical resources, and accompanying survivors through different stages of the process. Participants often described this support as reducing isolation and making justice procedures more understandable and manageable.

4. Discussion

This study examined how women survivors of IPV in France experienced and interpreted institutional revictimization and protective responses during contact with the justice system. Drawing on 46 interviews, the analysis generated five interrelated themes:

Protection Without Voice, Conditional Recognition, Fragmented Protection, The Cost of Seeking Justice, and Being Heard and Supported. Related difficulties have been documented across North America (Gezinski and Gonzalez-Pons 2022), Latin America (Evangelista García et al. 2016), Europe (Garcia-Jimenez et al. 2019), Australia (Douglas 2018), and West Africa (Rohn and Tenkorang 2023). Within the French context, survivors' narratives particularly foregrounded tensions surrounding credibility, recognition of different forms of IPV, continuity across justice trajectories, and access to protection.

Institutional revictimization emerged through interconnected relational, procedural, and organizational dynamics rather than through a single form of harmful treatment. Survivors described situations in which their voice and control were constrained, their credibility or victim status became subject to scrutiny, and fragmented institutional processes increased the burden of seeking protection. Scrutiny of survivors' conduct and credibility is especially consequential in the context of IPV, where professional interpretations of disclosure, emotional reactions, and inconsistencies may reflect limited recognition of trauma-related effects on memory, affect, and narration (Franklin et al. 2020; Fleming and Franklin 2021). In this study, seemingly routine professional exchanges and procedural practices became revictimizing when women experienced them as conveying disbelief, shifting responsibility back onto them, or leaving them uncertain about case progression and available protection.

A particularly salient pattern concerned the conditions under which survivors felt their statements were regarded as credible and the violence as sufficiently serious to warrant institutional recognition. Women described reactions that privileged visible physical injury, questioned delayed reporting, minimized psychological violence, or invoked assumptions that they might exaggerate, fabricate allegations, or act from vindictive or financial motives. These expectations can be understood in relation to normative constructions of legitimate or 'ideal' victimhood, in which credibility becomes associated with particular forms of injury, behaviour, emotional presentation, and conduct towards the perpetrator (Meyer 2016; Ricciardelli et al. 2021). Gendered assumptions concerning women's credibility and expected reactions to IPV have likewise been documented within institutional and social evaluations of victimization (Serrano-Montilla et al. 2023). When survivors departed from such expectations, some found themselves having to explain not only the violence they experienced but also their own decisions before, during, and after it.

The findings further indicate that institutional revictimization cannot be understood solely through individual professionals' attitudes or conduct. Repeated legal proceedings described by some survivors may also reflect dynamics of legal abuse, through which perpetrators extend coercive control beyond separation (Douglas 2018). Fragmented coordination across services, delays, inadequate privacy, incomplete transmission of case information, failures in follow-up, and disruptions in case management complicated women's navigation of the justice process. In the French context, accounts involving protection measures, including the téléphone grave danger [serious danger telephone], further illustrate the importance of coordination and information continuity in institutional protection.

Across several trajectories, survivors found themselves connecting services, monitoring case progression, or reconstructing information across institutional actors. Previous research has similarly documented how deficient coordination, prolonged waiting periods, and limited follow-up can increase the practical and emotional demands associated with seeking institutional protection (Childress et al. 2022; Rohn and Tenkorang 2023). Such circumstances may also shift substantial responsibility for navigating safety and legal procedures onto survivors already managing the consequences of IPV and other practical demands (Pérez-Martín et al. 2023). The present analysis extends this perspective by indi-

cating that organizational constraints were experienced alongside interpersonal responses rather than merely as a background to them.

The consequences extended beyond participants' immediate evaluations of particular professionals or procedures. Some women explicitly associated institutional interactions with intensified distress, humiliation, exhaustion, diminished trust, or withdrawal from legal proceedings. Others emphasized the cumulative demands of repeated appearances, protracted proceedings, and financial costs. Previous research has associated adverse institutional experiences with diminished trust and reduced willingness to remain engaged with legal processes (Acquaviva and Gullion 2025; Lorenz and Jacobsen 2024), while inadequate institutional support has also been related to emotional distress among survivors (Srinivas and DePrince 2015; Rancher et al. 2021). Importantly, these effects unfolded within trajectories already marked by IPV and could not always be clearly disentangled from those attributed to the violence itself. Even so, several women explicitly connected their exhaustion, disengagement, or diminished confidence in institutions to their involvement with the justice system.

Protective responses provide an important counterpoint to the revictimizing patterns described above. Some women reported police interventions characterized by attentive listening, prompt action, clear communication, and explicit concern for their safety. Specialized victim-support organizations also provided continuity, procedural guidance, advocacy, and practical assistance, particularly when women faced informational or organizational gaps elsewhere in their trajectories. Rather than suggesting that contact with the justice system is inherently revictimizing, these findings indicate that survivors distinguished clearly between practices experienced as harmful and those that conveyed recognition, safety, and respect for their agency. Research on survivor-centred and trauma-informed responses similarly emphasizes the relevance of validation, continuity, specialized support, and sensitive professional communication when responding to gender-based violence (Crann and Barata 2021; Brodie et al. 2025; Kennedy et al. 2024). In the present study, protective experiences therefore illuminate specific relational and organizational conditions under which women felt heard, taken seriously, and supported during justice procedures.

Social Representations Theory offers a useful interpretive framework for examining the shared meanings surrounding IPV, legitimate victimhood, credibility, and institutional protection that surfaced throughout survivors' narratives (Moscovici 1981; Jodelet 2003, 2015). Particularly salient were familiar distinctions between violence regarded as sufficiently serious and experiences treated as ambiguous, private, or less deserving of intervention. Visible physical injuries, rapid reporting, consistency of testimony, and particular forms of emotional presentation appeared repeatedly as markers through which participants perceived the legitimacy of their victimization to be evaluated. Conversely, psychological violence, delayed disclosure, continued contact with the perpetrator, or conduct departing from conventional expectations of victimhood were sometimes described as attracting scepticism or minimization. These patterns can be interpreted in relation to socially available constructions of the 'ideal victim' and gendered understandings of IPV that organize judgments concerning credibility, responsibility, and deservingness (Meyer 2016; Taccini and Mannarini 2025).

From this perspective, anchoring is particularly relevant to understanding how complex or less readily visible experiences of IPV may be interpreted through familiar categories such as physical injury, mutual relationship conflict, credible victimhood, or female vindictiveness. Participants' descriptions of remarks concerning fabricated allegations, financial motives, hysteria, or insufficiently serious violence illustrate how such categories can enter the interpretation of women's situations. At the same time, abstract evaluations of credibility and seriousness were often associated with concrete indicators—marks on the body, timing

of disclosure, consistency of narration, or expected behaviour after violence. These tangible markers can be understood in terms of objectification, through which abstract judgments about credibility or the seriousness of violence become associated with concrete and recognizable attributes. Rather than treating these patterns as direct evidence of representations held by justice professionals, the present analysis situates them as recurring meanings identified within survivors' descriptions of their institutional trajectories. SRT therefore contributes to understanding the symbolic dimension of institutional revictimization without reducing harmful treatment to individual prejudice alone.

The findings also draw attention to how repeated contact with justice institutions contributed to participants' own understandings of protection, credibility, and the value of continued legal engagement. Some women described declining confidence after prolonged delays, disbelief, fragmented procedures, or repeated efforts to obtain information, whereas supportive interventions could affirm that their experiences warranted recognition and protection. Social representations are constructed and negotiated through communication and social experience rather than remaining fixed individual beliefs (Jodelet 2003, 2015). From this perspective, justice trajectories constitute one setting in which meanings concerning institutional reliability, protection, and legitimate victimhood may be reinforced, questioned, or revised. Research indicating that negative experiences with formal services can influence subsequent willingness to seek institutional assistance provides an important context for this interpretation (Holmes et al. 2022; Lorenz and Jacobsen 2024). The present findings nevertheless underscore considerable variation. Women did not describe the justice system uniformly as either harmful or protective, and evaluations could differ across professionals, services, and stages of the same trajectory.

This variation is theoretically important. It indicates that revictimization cannot be attributed solely to formal procedures or to stable cultural representations detached from everyday practice. Survivors' narratives instead point to an interplay between socially available meanings, professional interactions, organizational arrangements, and concrete procedural circumstances. Harmful and protective responses could coexist within the same trajectory, revealing how recognition, credibility, safety, and agency were negotiated differently across institutional settings. In this respect, addressing institutional revictimization requires attention not only to procedural coordination and access to protection but also to the meanings through which IPV and survivor credibility are interpreted. Specialized training, clearer communication, continuity across services, and professional practices attentive to the diversity of survivors' trajectories may therefore address both the organizational and symbolic dimensions identified in this study.

4.1. Strengths and Limitations

The study draws on 46 interviews encompassing varied experiences of IPV and markedly different justice trajectories, providing a substantial qualitative corpus for examining both revictimizing and protective responses. The reflexive thematic analysis also preserved variation across participants rather than treating institutional contact as uniformly harmful. Several limitations nevertheless warrant consideration. Recruitment through support organizations may have underrepresented women with limited or no contact with specialized services, and the findings are not intended to estimate the prevalence of institutional revictimization. Race, ethnicity, migration status, and other intersecting social positions were not systematically examined. The predominance of highly educated participants may further limit the transferability of findings to women facing greater barriers to institutional access. Telephone interviews facilitated participation across different regions of France but restricted access to nonverbal communication. The interviewer's gender may also have influenced participants' willingness to disclose sensitive experiences, although

its specific effects cannot be determined from the interview data. The study examined survivors' accounts of institutional encounters and therefore does not establish the perspectives or social representations held by justice professionals themselves. In addition, participants' justice trajectories extended across different periods and institutional contexts. As the analysis did not systematically compare experiences across historical periods, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of temporal continuity or change in institutional practices.

4.2. Implications for Practice, Policy, and Research from Survivors' Perspectives

Practice: Survivors' accounts highlight the value of professional training addressing trauma, gendered assumptions, credibility assessments, and the diversity of survivor trajectories. Clear communication, respectful listening, continuity of information, and attention to survivor agency should accompany effective risk assessment and protection.

Policy: The findings highlight the importance of coordination across police, courts, and specialized support services to address procedural fragmentation, repeated disclosure, delays, and gaps in case management. Policies should also strengthen access to specialized victim-support organizations, whose continuity and advocacy were frequently experienced as protective.

Research: Future studies should examine institutional revictimization across more diverse survivor populations and institutional settings, including intersectional analyses and comparisons across national contexts. Research involving justice professionals could also examine directly how shared understandings of IPV, credibility, victimhood, and protection inform professional interpretations and practices. Quantitative research using validated measures may complement qualitative evidence by estimating the distribution and correlates of institutional revictimization.

5. Conclusions

This study documents how women survivors of IPV in France experienced institutional revictimization and protective responses across their justice-system trajectories. Institutional revictimization was experienced through constrained voice and agency, conditional recognition of survivors and their experiences, fragmented protection, and the cumulative costs associated with seeking justice. At the same time, attentive communication, timely protection, respect for survivors' agency, and specialized advocacy were experienced as protective. From an SRT perspective, the findings highlight the relevance of socially available meanings surrounding credible victimhood, the legitimacy and seriousness of violence, and institutional protection in survivors' interpretations of justice. Addressing institutional revictimization therefore requires attention to both organizational and procedural conditions and the meanings through which IPV and survivor credibility are interpreted.

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