

# The Intricacies and Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa: Forms, Causes and Mitigation Measures



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## ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence (GBV) is prevalent in South Africa, primarily attributed to historical systems of social inequality, patriarchy and racism that dominated during the apartheid regimes, with lasting impacts persisting today. Thus, this study explored the intricate dynamics and prevalence of GBV in the context of South Africa. To realize this objective, the study employed a qualitative research methodology. To collect data, the study employed a secondary data technique such as a literature review of existing sources. Different datasets were used such as Google Scholar, National Institutes of Health, Google, and Scopus. The criterion employed to source information was the use of keywords which are shedding light on the social, cultural, and economic factors contributing to GBV. The study explored the root causes and manifestations of violence against women and girls. It is found that South Africa is grappling with high rates of GBV due to poverty, unemployment, cultural beliefs, and legal factors. To mitigate the prevalence and causes of GBV, efforts to combat GBV should encompass legal reforms and protection, prevention education, awareness, and NGO programmes that address the profoundness and complexity of violence against women and girls. The study has a vast potential to contribute to the production of new knowledge on forms, causes and mitigation measures for GBV. It will also contribute by addressing gaps or limitations in the existing literature on the phenomenon being studied.

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### Publication History

Received: 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2024

Accepted: 10<sup>th</sup> June, 2024

Published online:

2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2024

**Keywords:** *Grievous Bodily Harm; Gender-Based Violence; Poverty and Unemployment, Patriarchal Systems, Legal Factors, Women, Men.*

## INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) encompasses violent acts directed towards individuals based on societal expectations regarding gender roles and behaviour, impacting women, men, boys, and girls, predominantly within relationships. While men and boys can also experience abuse, women and girls often bear a disproportionate burden due to prevailing power imbalances and societal norms that accord them lower social status. These disparities contribute to discrimination, hindering opportunities across various life domains. Particularly vulnerable groups include women, girls, children, older individuals, people with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community, emphasizing the need for targeted

interventions to address GBV within these marginalized populations.<sup>1</sup> Equally, the European Institute for Gender Equality indicates that GBV is a universal issue intricately linked to gender inequality, persisting as a prominent violation of human rights across societies.<sup>2</sup> It entails acts of violence targeting individuals based on their gender. While both women and men face GBV, the majority of victims are women.

In South Africa, there is an alarming spread of GBV in the name of love.<sup>3</sup> According to crime statistics for the second quarter of 2023/2024, the country recorded 14,401 assaults, 10,516 cases of rape, and 1,514 cases of attempted murder against women.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Gould reported a distressing situation where “827 children were tragically killed in South Africa in 2012/13. In the same year, 2,266 children were subjected to rape, and 141,130 experienced attempted murder, assault with Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH), and common assault”.<sup>5</sup> This surge in violence, particularly against women and children, poses a significant threat to the peace and stability of the nation and hinders the achievement of the "Social Cohesion and Safer Communities" project 6, which is a key priority of the South African Government.<sup>6</sup> Recognizing the urgency of addressing this pervasive issue in South Africa, the current state President, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa has signed the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence. This plan aims to combat the prevalent violence against women, describing GBV as encompassing physical, verbal, psychological, economic, and sexual abuse occurring in private homes or public spaces. Such violence jeopardizes peace, security, human rights, economic opportunities, and social cohesion in the country. The implementation of this strategic plan is crucial in curbing the escalating statistics of GBV and fostering a safer and more secure society.<sup>7</sup> With that being said, it can be argued that South Africa grapples with a pervasive and deeply rooted issue that transcends physical and psychological boundaries—GBV. GBV has emerged as a troubling and prevalent concern in a nation characterized by rich cultural diversity. Therefore, this study intends to explore the complexities and prevalence of GBV from a South African perspective.

This study is centred around the complexities of GBV, especially on the prevalence and the causes thereafter. Zinyemba et al. study revealed that changing cultural dynamics and socioeconomic variables were thought to be two of the main things worsening GBV.<sup>8</sup> The primary reasons for violence against women, according to the participants, are poverty and substance misuse. This situation is linked to men's increasing frustration stemming from their incapacity to support their families. The core causes of GBV have been recognized as cultural elements associated with the patriarchal system and the declining value of respect between men and women. The participants also held the government accountable for what they saw as "too many rights" for women, which led to men abusing their power. In addition, participants voiced worries about the feminization of GBV, claiming that men are as vulnerable to it. Partner infidelity and insecurities also contributed to GBV.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, Maguele, Taylor, and Khuzwayo also point out that previous research from a legal, sociocultural, and socioeconomic standpoint has already mapped out some of the elements that contribute to a high prevalence of gender-based violence.<sup>10</sup> These elements include the payment of lobola, drugs and alcohol usage.

<sup>1</sup> Kudakwashe Gracious Zinyemba and Khumbulani Hlongwana, “Men’s Conceptualization of Gender-Based Violence Directed to Women in Alexandra Township, Johannesburg, South Africa,” *BMC Public Health* 22, no. 1 (2022): 2235.

<sup>2</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, “What Is Gender-Based Violence?,” New York: European Institute for Gender Equality, 2024, [https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/what-is-gender-based-violence?language\\_content\\_entity=en](https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/what-is-gender-based-violence?language_content_entity=en).

<sup>3</sup> Enrique Bonilla-Algovia, Esther Rivas-Rivero, and José Juan Vázquez, “Impact of Gender-Based Violence on Psychological Distress and Happiness in León (Nicaragua),” *Health Care for Women International* 41, no. 6 (2020): 673–89.

<sup>4</sup> defenceWeb, “SA’s Second Quarter Rape Statistics Unchanged at over 10 000 Rapes,” defenceWeb, November 2023, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/security/civil-security/sas-second-quarter-rape-statistics-unchanged-at-over-10-000-rapes/>.

<sup>5</sup> L. M. Gould, “Fighting Discourse: Social Workers’ Strategies to Create a Counter-Discourse on the Position of Muslims in Dutch Society” (Utrecht University, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Gould, “Fighting Discourse: Social Workers’ Strategies to Create a Counter-Discourse on the Position of Muslims in Dutch Society”; Indiran Govender, “Gender-Based Violence—An Increasing Epidemic in South Africa,” *South African Family Practice* 65, no. 3 (2023).

<sup>7</sup> Republic of South Africa, *National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence & Femicide. Human Dignity and Healing, Safety, Freedom & Equality In Our Lifetime* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 2020), <https://www.justice.gov.za/vg/gbv/nsp-gbv-final-doc-04-05.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Zinyemba and Hlongwana, “Men’s Conceptualization of Gender-Based Violence Directed to Women in Alexandra Township, Johannesburg, South Africa.”

<sup>9</sup> Zinyemba and Hlongwana, “Men’s Conceptualization of Gender-Based Violence Directed to Women in Alexandra Township, Johannesburg, South Africa.”

<sup>10</sup> Z.M. Khuzwayo, “Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Umlazi, Ward 83 Durban” (Durban University of Technology, 2023).

While the South African government is fighting to combat the prevalence of GBV, there are challenges encountered by the government authorities in addressing this within their communities and intensifying the problem.<sup>11</sup> SaferSpaces indicates that "GBV is a deep and common problem in South Africa, impacting on almost every aspect of life".<sup>12</sup> Despite governmental initiatives, evidenced by legislation and policies, the persistence of violence against women and children remains a substantial challenge in South Africa, as highlighted by Balogun, Owoaje, & Fawole.<sup>13</sup> Studies indicate an ongoing vulnerability of female and girl children in democratic South Africa.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Beyene et al. emphasize that almost half of South African women have encountered violence from their partners or relatives, aligning with a global trend where three-quarters of men commit violence against women.<sup>15</sup> Gender-based violence is an overarching issue affecting societies globally, including provinces in South Africa such as Limpopo, KwaZulu Natal, Gauteng and Mpumalanga to name a few. According to Khuzwayo, "Gender-based violence is persistent and affects women of all societies, races, cultures, religions, socio-political and economic backgrounds.<sup>16</sup> It is deeply rooted in patriarchy and culture, where women are subjected to many forms of physical, sexual and/or psychological harm, rape, marital rape, forced marriage and 'honour' killings. Khuzwayo further argues that the women's rights and fundamental freedoms that are enshrined in the South African Constitution are being corrupted by traditional cultural practices that lead to gender-based violence.<sup>17</sup> In particular, every woman has the right to mental and physical integrity, dignity, liberty and security of the person. They have the right to be liberated from any inhuman or degrading treatment". Therefore, this study intends to explore the complexities and prevalence of GBV from a South African perspective.

## METHODOLOGY

In pursuit of the research objective, this study adopted a qualitative research methodology, aiming to explore deeply the complex aspects of the subject at hand. To gather comprehensive insights, the researchers utilized a secondary data technique, specifically through an extensive literature review of existing sources. The data collection involved consulting various datasets, including those available on Google Scholar, Google, Scopus etc. The research materials such as Journal articles, internet sources, books and book chapters were used. The selection of information was guided by specific criteria, focusing on the use of keywords that light the social, legal, cultural, and economic factors contributing to GBV. This approach ensures a characterized exploration of the intricate web of elements influencing GBV. By scrutinizing and synthesizing information from diverse sources, the researchers aim to provide a holistic understanding of the root causes and prevalence of violence against women and girls. The research approach looked at the fundamental causes of the complicated problem of GBV in addition to the level of occurrences. An analysis of the literature gathered is presented under the various themes presented in the Discussion section below.

## DISCUSSION

### Understanding the Complexities and Forms of Gender-Based Violence in South African Communities

According to SaferSpaces, GBV encompasses different forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional, and economic violence.<sup>18</sup> Rooted in power imbalances, social norms, and inequality, GBV is

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<sup>11</sup> Kunle Oparinde and Rachel Matteau Matsha, "Powerful Discourse: Gender-Based Violence and Counter-Discourses in South Africa," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 8, no. 1 (2021): 1911035.

<sup>12</sup> SaferSpaces, "Gender-Based Violence in South Africa," 2024, <https://www.saferspaces.org.za/understand/entry/gender-based-violence-in-south-africa>.

<sup>13</sup> Mary O Balogun, Eme T Owoaje, and Olufunmilayo I Fawole, "Intimate Partner Violence in Southwestern Nigeria: Are There Rural-Urban Differences?," *Women & Health* 52, no. 7 (2012): 627-45.

<sup>14</sup> U Abdullahi, R M Cusairi, and S F Abdullah, "The Influence of Culture in Domestic Violence against Women in Nigeria," *J Islam Soc Econ Dev* 2 (2017): 273-86.

<sup>15</sup> Addisu Shunu Beyene et al., "Gender-Based Violence among Female Youths in Educational Institutions of Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Systematic Reviews* 8, no. 1 (December 25, 2019): 59, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-019-0969-9>.

<sup>16</sup> Khuzwayo, "Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Umlazi, Ward 83 Durban," 3.

<sup>17</sup> Khuzwayo, "Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Umlazi, Ward 83 Durban," 3.

<sup>18</sup> SaferSpaces, "Gender-Based Violence in South Africa."

a systemic issue that affects individuals across age, socio-economic status, and education levels. South Africa's history of apartheid and the struggle for equality has left a lasting impact on societal dynamics, contributing to the complexities of GBV. Equally, Violin & Nafi GBV is a multifaceted issue that encompasses different forms of violence and discrimination against women.<sup>19</sup> It includes physical, mental, or sexual harm, threats of such acts, oppression, and other denials of women's rights. The complexity of GBV is evident in its manifestation in different contexts, such as online spaces, universities, workplaces, and communities. For example, the digital era and the COVID-19 pandemic have led to increased cases of GBV online, which has not received sufficient attention.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, the lived experiences of women in male-dominated organizations highlight the influence of cultural and social practices on the concept of gendered embodiment, revealing the dynamics of how society marginalizes qualities and aspects of embodiment and dis-embodiment of women.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Piantato & Piantato state that intersectionality has been used as an analytical tool to understand the complexity of gender identity and women's oppression as it considers the interconnected nature of social categorization, such as race, class, and gender.<sup>22</sup> The complexity of GBV is multifaceted, involving various forms, causes, and contexts. Understanding and addressing GBV requires comprehensive approaches that consider the intersectionality of social categorization and the influence of cultural, social, and legal frameworks.

Lastly, TEARS Foundation concurs with the above scholars that Gender-based violence encompasses various forms, such as sexual harassment, rape, stalking, economic, physical, emotional, and child abuse.<sup>23</sup> Sexual violence involves any non-consensual sexual act, with coercion playing a central role through force or psychological intimidation. The South African Criminal Law defines sexual assault broadly, including all non-consensual sexual activities. Sexual abuse involves conduct that violates the complainant's sexual integrity, including sexually stimulating behaviour toward a child. Physical abuse constitutes acts or threats causing physical pain or injury, predominantly affecting children and women. Emotional, verbal, and psychological abuse involve degrading conduct, threats, and possessiveness, seriously invading privacy. Economic abuse is the unreasonable deprivation of financial resources or control over assets. Structural violence is embedded in unequal power relations and opportunities, perpetuated by social, political, and economic systems. Technological violence includes hacking, tracking devices, and monitoring via social media, while financial violence involves inflicting harm, workplace harassment, financial control, and damaging credit scores. These various forms collectively contribute to the complex and pervasive nature of gender-based violence.<sup>24</sup>

### **Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa**

Govender's study implies that statistics reveal alarming rates of GBV in South Africa, with women and vulnerable populations disproportionately affected.<sup>25</sup> The 'femicide capital' label underscores the severity of the issue, highlighting the urgent need for a comprehensive response. Factors such as high levels of poverty, substance abuse, and inadequate legal frameworks contribute to the perpetuation of GBV. GBV is a significant issue in South Africa, affecting both women and men. However, precise statistics are difficult to acquire for many reasons, including the fact that most incidents of GBV are not reported.<sup>26</sup> "The prevalence of GBV in South Africa is high. According to South African Police Crime Statistics, the prevalence of sexual offences, including GBV, is alarming. For instance, reported sexual offences increased to 52 420 in 2018/19 from 50108 in 2017/18, with most cases being rape. Additionally, from

<sup>19</sup> Gisela Violin and Yvonne Kezia Nafi, "Protection of Online Gender-Based Violence Victims: A Feminist Legal Analysis," *The Indonesian Journal of Socio-Legal Studies* 1, no. 2 (2022): 6.

<sup>20</sup> Violin and Nafi, "Protection of Online Gender-Based Violence Victims: A Feminist Legal Analysis."

<sup>21</sup> P.G. Martin, "The Experiences of Women in Male-Dominated Professions and Environments in South Africa" (University of South Africa, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> G Piantato and E Piantato, "Discussion about the Notion of 'Intersectionality' in Terms of Our Changing Understanding of Gender," *Working Paper of Public Health* 3, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>23</sup> TEARS Foundation, "Perceptions About GBV Prevention And Intervention Among Employees In South Africa," Johannesburg: TEARS Foundation, 2024, <https://tears.co.za/>.

<sup>24</sup> TEARS Foundation, "Perceptions About GBV Prevention And Intervention Among Employees In South Africa"; SaferSpaces, "Gender-Based Violence in South Africa."

<sup>25</sup> Govender, "Gender-Based Violence—An Increasing Epidemic in South Africa."

<sup>26</sup> Mercilene Machisa et al., "The War At Home," *Johannesburg: GenderLinks*, 2011, 1–19.

October to December 2021, 11, 315 rape cases were reported averaging 123 cases per day.”<sup>27</sup> According to Gouws, South Africa is considered to be the rape capital of the world, with 10,818 rape cases reported in the first quarter of 2022.<sup>28</sup> The rate at which intimate partners in South Africa kill women is five times higher than the global average.<sup>29</sup> The murder of a woman by her partner is the most extreme consequence of intimate partner violence (IPV). SaferSpaces indicated that “IPV is the most common form of GBV and includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and controlling behaviours by a current or former intimate partner or spouse and can occur in heterosexual or same-sex couples”.<sup>30</sup> According to Abrahams et al. in South Africa, a woman dies in the hands of their partner in the name of love every eight hours.<sup>31</sup> While there is considerable attention on GBV against women, it is essential to note that men are also victims of GBV in South Africa. However, there is a lack of attention to GBV against men, with little government, media, and police focus on this issue.<sup>32</sup>

These statistics highlight the imperative need for comprehensive interventions to address GBV in South Africa. For instance, in Limpopo Province, which is predominantly rural, it is not resistant to the escalating issue of GBV. The 2021 first-quarter GBV statistics released by the South African Police Services indicate a surge in violence, particularly sexual assault, rape, sexual offences, and murder, primarily affecting vulnerable populations such as women and children. According to the statistics, the province witnessed a significant increase of 97.6% in sexual offences, totalling 1,075 sexual assaults. Additionally, there were 899 reported rape cases, marking a 98% rise, 102 cases of sexual attacks with an 88.9% increase, sixty attempted sexual offences reflecting a 106.9% surge, and fourteen instances of contact sexual offences.<sup>33</sup> According to crime statistics for the second quarter of 2023/2024, the country recorded 14,401 assaults, 10,516 cases of rape, and 1,514 cases of attempted murder against women.<sup>34</sup> The fact that GBV occurs in communities where traditional laws and customs are respected and observed is genuinely concerning, particularly given that Limpopo is 80% rural.<sup>35</sup>

### Drivers and Causes of the GBV in Africa and South African Communities

Since there is a prevalence of GBV in South Africa and other African countries. It is important to understand the drivers and causes of GBV. Allen indicates that the correlation between African cultural beliefs reinforcing patriarchal systems is the driver and causes the widespread occurrence of GBV in the region.<sup>36</sup> The patriarchal structure that promotes male dominance, creates unequal power dynamics between genders, leading to the systematic oppression and disadvantage of women and normalizing violence against them. In several African nations, deeply rooted cultural norms emphasize male supremacy, exemplified by cases in Nigeria where women are relegated to entities available for prostitution and forced marriages, devoid of economic power and decision-making authority. Such perspectives contribute to an environment conducive to GBV, as evidenced by alarming statistics from various African countries. The analysis extends to the societal expectation of women's submission,

<sup>27</sup> Kate Olawumi Oladimeji and Oluyinka Osunkunle, “The Nexus of Gender-Based Violence and Print Media Portrayal: Echoes from Uitenhage, South Africa,” *African Journal of Gender, Society & Development* 12, no. 1 (2023): 43.

<sup>28</sup> A. Gouws, “Violence against Women Is Staggeringly High in South Africa – A Different Way of Thinking about It Is Needed,” 2022, <https://theconversation.com/violence-against-women-is-staggeringly-high-in-south-africa-a-different-way-of-thinking-about-it-is-needed-195053#:~:text=South Africa has notoriously high,rape incidence in the world.>

<sup>29</sup> World Bank Brief, “Gender-Based Violence (Violence against Women and Girls),” 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialsustainability/brief/violence-against-women-and-girls>.

<sup>30</sup> SaferSpaces, “Gender-Based Violence in South Africa.”

<sup>31</sup> N. Abrahams et al., *Every Eight Hours: Intimate Femicide in South Africa 10 Years Later! MRC Policy Brief* (Pretoria: Medical Research Council, 2012), <http://www.mrc.ac.za/policybriefs/everyeighthours.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Xolani Thusi and Victor H Mlambo, “South Africa’s Gender-Based Violence: An Exploration of a Single Sided Account,” *EUREKA: Social and Humanities*, no. 2 (2023): 73–80.

<sup>33</sup> SAPS, *Police Recorded Crime Statistics, Republic Of South Africa: First Quarter Of 2021/2022 Financial Year, (April To June 2021)* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2022), [https://www.saps.gov.za/services/downloads/april\\_june\\_2021\\_22\\_quarter1\\_presentation.pdf](https://www.saps.gov.za/services/downloads/april_june_2021_22_quarter1_presentation.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> defenceWeb, “SA’s Second Quarter Rape Statistics Unchanged at over 10 000 Rapes.”

<sup>35</sup> SAPS, “Speaking Notes Delivered by Police Minister General Bheki Cele (MP) at the Release Of The Quarter Two Crime Statistics 2022/2023” (Pretoria: Government Printer, November 23, 2022), <https://www.saps.gov.za/newsroom/msspeechdetail.php?nid=43497>.

<sup>36</sup> Sophia Allen, “The Lack of a Fully Intersectional Approach to Gender-Based Violence in South Africa” (Portland State University, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.531>.

impeding their full emancipation. While recognizing the potential positive impact of a community's traditional values on fostering a morally robust society, the passage raises concerns about traditional leaders perpetuating customs that contribute to GBV, calling for scrutiny of their role and commitment to combating such violence. In essence, the text underscores the vital link between cultural beliefs, patriarchal systems, and the prevalence of GBV in Africa, urging a re-evaluation of traditional practices that perpetuate this violence.<sup>37</sup>

Being a highly patriarchal nation, South Africa reinforces control over women through a variety of cultural and traditional events and activities. With lobola, many people mistakenly believe that a woman's property changes to a man the instant she is married, clouding the question of consent. A person must be able to comprehend the implications of giving their consent, and it must be freely provided and rescindable at any moment. The right to freedom and personal security, including freedom from all forms of violence, is explicitly stated in the South African Constitution.<sup>38</sup> Even in cases where laws and codes of conduct are in place, the government frequently finds it impossible to address GBV because it is entangled with gendered power relations that are established in certain cultures. Public attitudes support the institutional and political unwillingness to address GBV. GBV is accepted as a normal aspect of life in many countries, and the government is under little or no pressure to address it.<sup>39</sup> The literature asserts that patriarchy is identified as the fundamental cause of GBV. Klaasen argues that enduring hierarchies and patriarchal structures across various aspects of both women's and men's identities have fostered detrimental norms, particularly affecting girls and women.<sup>40</sup> GBV in men is linked to their cultural and traditional family backgrounds. The patriarchal influence, evident in biblical and cultural values, promotes socialization that instructs boys and men to embody traits such as leadership, authority, independence, strength, and aggression, while girls and women are expected to adopt roles of followership, obedience, and dependency.<sup>41</sup> Ratele states that sociocultural factors like language use, customs, belief systems, and gender inequality exacerbate gender-based violence.<sup>42</sup> The use of male-dominant language and African cultural practices indirectly reinforces the mistreatment of women.<sup>43</sup> For instance, cultural norms designating men as the sole economic providers aggravate gender abuse, and perpetuates the perception of men as primary providers and women as recipients of financial benefits, even in intimate relationships.<sup>44</sup> Bond-Nash contends that women are often socialized to perceive themselves as powerless, reinforcing this harmful trend.<sup>45</sup> Rahma, Sili and Wati argue that these stereotypes hinder women's progress in obtaining public positions.<sup>46</sup> Cultural practices dictating women as the property of their husbands, and requiring sexual submission, contribute to the justification of violence against them.<sup>47</sup> Many women, particularly customary wives facing abuse or rape, opt not to report to the police due to loyalty towards their husbands and families. Reporting abuse to the police and subsequently retracting due to family

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<sup>37</sup> Elspeth Burris, "Gender-Based Violence in South Africa: Thinking Beyond Carceral Solutions," 2022, <https://ruor.uottawa.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/a53c1988-e67b-4a7e-99e0-615a241bfdc7/content>.

<sup>38</sup> N. Nduna, "Complicating 'Tradition' and 'Modernity': Young South African Women's Perceptions of Lobola" (University of Western Cape, 2021); Govender, "Gender-Based Violence—An Increasing Epidemic in South Africa."

<sup>39</sup> Govender, "Gender-Based Violence—An Increasing Epidemic in South Africa."

<sup>40</sup> John Stephanus Klaasen, "Intersection Of Personhood And Culture: A Narrative Approach Of Pastoral Care To Gender-Based Violence," *Scriptura* 117, no. 1 (May 2018), <https://doi.org/10.7833/117-1-1348>.

<sup>41</sup> T.S. Maluleke and S. Nadar, "Breaking the Covenant of Violence against Women," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 114 (2002): 5–17.

<sup>42</sup> Kopano Ratele, "Analysing Males in Africa: Certain Useful Elements in Considering Ruling Masculinities," *African and Asian Studies* 7, no. 4 (2008): 515–36, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156921008X359641>.

<sup>43</sup> Brent V Frieslaar and Maake Masango, "Blessings or Curses? The Contribution of the Blesser Phenomenon to Gender-Based Violence and Intimate Partner Violence," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021).

<sup>44</sup> Frieslaar and Masango, "Blessings or Curses? The Contribution of the Blesser Phenomenon to Gender-Based Violence and Intimate Partner Violence."

<sup>45</sup> E D Bond-Nash, "Churches Say 'No' to Violence against Women: Action Plan for the Churches" (The Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Azizatur Rahma, Surya Sili, and Erna Wati, "Female Oppression toward Female Characters in Mars Needs Mom Movie," *Journal Ilmu Budaya* 1, no. 1 (2017): 13–18.

<sup>47</sup> Sunday B Fakunmoju and Shahana Rasool, "Exposure to Violence and Beliefs about Violence against Women among Adolescents in Nigeria and South Africa," *Sage Open* 8, no. 4 (2018).

pressure is not uncommon among South African wives, as Moore notes.<sup>48</sup> The tension within the family, the potential loss of financial security, and the perception that police might not arrest the abuser contribute to the reluctance of many abused women to report such incidents.<sup>49</sup>

According to the Council of Europe, when unemployment and poverty afflict men, it can become a catalyst for the assertion of masculinity through violent means, contributing to the causes of GBV.<sup>50</sup> Economic instability can trigger frustration, feelings of inadequacy, and a loss of traditional male roles, leading some individuals to resort to violence as a means of asserting control or dominance. In such circumstances, the perpetuation of patriarchal norms may intensify, further fueling aggressive behaviours as men seek to reaffirm their perceived societal roles. The nexus between economic struggles and GBV is particularly pronounced among young men who may experience a heightened sense of emasculation in the face of financial hardships. Council of Europe indicates that "the lack of economic resources generally makes women, but also LGBT+ people particularly vulnerable to violence."<sup>51</sup> It creates patterns of violence and poverty that become self-perpetuating, making it extremely difficult for the victims to extricate themselves. When unemployment and poverty affect men, this can also cause them to assert their masculinity through violent means."

In the context of South Africa, current statistics on unemployment underline the potential impact on GBV. High rates of unemployment can exacerbate the challenges faced by men, amplifying the risk of resorting to violence as a misguided expression of masculinity.<sup>52</sup> According to recent data, South Africa has experienced significant unemployment rates, particularly among the youth. "South Africa's unemployment rate rose to 32.1% in Q4 of 2023, up from a one-year low of 31.9% in the prior period, as the number of unemployed persons increased."<sup>53</sup> Thus, it can be argued that a lack of economic opportunities for young men may contribute to a sense of frustration and powerlessness, which, in turn, can manifest in violent behaviours. Therefore, addressing the root causes and drivers of GBV necessitates comprehensive efforts to tackle unemployment and poverty, recognizing their role in shaping the dynamics of masculinity and violence in society. Based on the above discussion, it is clear that the drivers and causes of GBV emanate from these factors;

- Cultural factors
- Economic factors
- Legal factors
- Political factors.

### **Proposed Measures and Recommendations to Mitigate the Prevalence of GBV in South Africa**

Based on the findings highlighting the complexities and prevalence of GBV in South Africa, and recognizing the drivers and causes as outlined in the text, here are proposed measures to mitigate GBV:

#### **• Education and Awareness Programme**

Implement extensive educational campaigns aimed at raising awareness about the root causes of GBV, challenging traditional gender norms, and promoting gender equality. These programmes should target all age groups, including schools, communities, and workplaces, emphasizing the importance of consent, respect, and non-violent conflict resolution.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Elena Moore, "'My Husband Has to Stop Beating Me and I Shouldn't Go to the Police': Family Meetings, Patriarchal Bargains, and Marital Violence in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa," *Violence against Women* 26, no. 6–7 (2020): 675–96.

<sup>49</sup> Moore, "'My Husband Has to Stop Beating Me and I Shouldn't Go to the Police': Family Meetings, Patriarchal Bargains, and Marital Violence in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa."

<sup>50</sup> Council of Europe, "CHAPTER 1: Gender Identity, Gender-Based Violence and Human Rights," 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/chapter-1-gender-identity-gender-based-violence-and-human-rights-gende/16809e1595>.

<sup>51</sup> Council of Europe, "CHAPTER 1: Gender Identity, Gender-Based Violence and Human Rights."

<sup>52</sup> Govender, "Gender-Based Violence—An Increasing Epidemic in South Africa"; SaferSpaces, "Gender-Based Violence in South Africa."

<sup>53</sup> StatsSA, *South Africa Unemployment Rate* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 2024), <https://tradingeconomics.com/south-africa/unemployment-rate>.

<sup>54</sup> A.R. Pandea, D. Grzemny, and E. Keen, *Gender Matters: A Manual on Addressing Gender-Based Violence Affecting Young People* (New York: Council of Europe, 2020), <https://rm.coe.int/chapter-2-activities-to-address-gender-and-gender-based-violence-with-/16809e1597>.

- **Economic Empowerment Programmes**

Develop and implement initiatives that address economic disparities and empower both men and women economically. This can include job creation, vocational training, and entrepreneurship programs targeted at vulnerable populations, especially young men facing unemployment. Economic stability can reduce frustrations that may contribute to violent behaviour. For instance, currently, “South Africa's unemployment rate rose to 32.1% in Q4 of 2023, up from a one-year low of 31.9% in the prior period, as the number of unemployed persons increased” according to StatsSA.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, addressing the root causes and drivers of GBV necessitates comprehensive efforts to tackle unemployment and poverty, recognizing their role in shaping the dynamics of masculinity and violence in society.

- **Legal Reforms, Enforcement, and Institutional Responses**

GBV is a global issue. GBV against women and girls is a global issue, faced by countries everywhere and across socio-economic groups. South Africa has made strides in developing legal frameworks to address GBV, including the Domestic Violence Act and Sexual Offences Act. However, effective implementation and enforcement remain challenges. Strengthening the justice system's response, providing support services for survivors, and fostering collaboration between government, NGOs, and communities are essential steps forward. The legal and institutional responses of South Africa to GBV have been a significant focus because of high-profile cases of violence against women.<sup>56</sup> According to Hughes, the country has experienced a widespread politicized focus on violence against children and women leading to an accelerated public call to mobilize against GBV and address the conditions that enable it.<sup>57</sup> Many countries in Africa, including South Africa have adopted laws criminalizing GBV but the enforcement of such laws is often weak, with many cases never brought to court and victims encouraged to accept reconciliation with their offenders instead of prosecution.<sup>58</sup> Women's movements in Africa have played a significant role in influencing the implementation of rape laws, demonstrating the capacity of civil society organizations to influence policy, specifically in challenging areas such as women's rights. These responses reflect the ongoing efforts to address GBV in South Africa and Africa. Calvino & Matadi indicate that strengthening legal frameworks related to GBV ensures that laws are comprehensive, accessible, and effectively enforced.<sup>59</sup> This includes measures to criminalize all forms of GBV, providing support and protection for survivors, and holding perpetrators accountable. Additionally, efforts should be made to address any cultural practices that perpetuate violence.

- **Breaking the Silence**

Silence often covers GBV, as survivors may face stigma, fear, or lack of support. Breaking this silence requires multifaceted efforts, including public awareness campaigns, educational programs, and community engagement. Grassroots initiatives that challenge harmful gender norms and promote gender equality are vital to fostering a culture of respect and non-violence. Breaking the silence around GBV in South Africa demands a multifaceted approach that involves various stakeholders and sustained efforts to create a society where everyone can live free from violence and discrimination.<sup>60</sup> To break the silence of GBV, it is essential to implement measures that address the underlying social norms and institutional culture. Below are several strategies to break the silence:<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> StatsSA, *South Africa Unemployment Rate*.

<sup>56</sup> Tamara Shefer, “Critical Reflections on Contemporary Responses to Gender Violence within Public, Political, Health and Research Contexts,” *African Safety Promotion: A Journal of Injury and Violence Prevention* 11, no. 2 (2013): 1–13.

<sup>57</sup> Christine Hughes, “Legislative Wins, Broken Promises: Gaps in Implementation of Laws on Violence against Women and Girls,” 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Peace A Medie, “Fighting Gender-Based Violence: The Women’s Movement and the Enforcement of Rape Law in Liberia,” *African Affairs* 112, no. 448 (2013): 377–97.

<sup>59</sup> L.R. Calvino and M.T. Matadi, *Enforcement of Gender-Based Violence Legislation in South Africa: The Need for a Paradigm Shift* (London: IntechOpen, 2023), <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/1157567>.

<sup>60</sup> Nonhlanhla Sibanda-Moyo, Eleanor Khonje, and Maame Kyerewaa Brobbey, “Violence against Women in South Africa: A Country in Crisis 2017,” 2017, <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/1446580/violence-against-women-in-south-africa/2078348/>.

<sup>61</sup> Anthony Collins et al., “Nobody’s Business: Proposals for Reducing Gender-Based Violence at a South African University,” *Agenda* 23, no. 80 (2009): 33–41.

- Breaking the culture of silence: encourage open dialogue and reporting of GBV incidents and provide support for those who come forward.
  - Establish explicit norms for social behaviour: Defining and promoting transparent and visible norms for respectful and non-violent social behaviour within communities and institutions.
  - Providing adequate support mechanisms: ensuring victims access comprehensive support services, including counselling, legal aid, and safe shelters.
  - Developing policy and practices: establishing an effective body or authority specifically mandated to develop and implement policies and practices.
  - Educational opportunities: providing intellectual opportunities for reflection on values and practices and enhancing positive skills for participating in diverse social environments.
  - Institutional reforms: Implementing a comprehensive understanding of GBV through institutional reform and establishing centres of authority to drive these changes.
- **Community-Based Support Systems and Engagement with Traditional Leaders**

SaferSpaces indicates that there is a need to enhance community-based support systems, including counselling services, safe spaces for survivors, and community outreach programmes.<sup>62</sup> Encourage community members to actively participate in preventing and addressing GBV, breaking the silence around the issue, and fostering a culture of reporting and intervention. Equally, Teffo-Menziwa, Mullick & Dlamini indicate that working closely with traditional leaders to challenge and reform cultural practices contributes to GBV.<sup>63</sup> Encourage leaders to become advocates for gender equality and change agents within their communities. This may involve sensitization programs, training, and collaboration with traditional authorities to redefine cultural norms that perpetuate violence. These proposed measures should be implemented comprehensively and collaboratively, involving government institutions, NGOs, community leaders, and individuals to create a holistic and sustained approach to combat GBV in South Africa. Addressing the multifaceted nature of the issue requires a combination of legal, economic, cultural, and educational interventions to create lasting change.

## CONCLUSION

GBV is prevalent in South Africa. This is primarily attributed to historical systems of social inequality, patriarchy and racism that dominated during the apartheid and colonial regimes, with lasting impacts persisting today. While the SAPS is tasked with preventing and addressing GBV, their effectiveness has been questionable. SAPS officers often dismiss survivors of GBV based on stereotypes, inadequately investigate cases, and, in some instances, engage in acts of GBV themselves.<sup>64</sup> Consequently, addressing GBV in South Africa necessitates a collective commitment to dismantling entrenched norms that perpetuate violence. Education, advocacy, and legal reforms are crucial components of a comprehensive strategy. By fostering a society that recognizes the intrinsic value of every individual, irrespective of gender, South Africa can embark on a journey toward a future where abuse is unequivocally recognized as incompatible with love and respect. Only through such collective efforts can the nation aspire to create an environment where everyone can live free from the chains of GBV.

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<sup>62</sup> SaferSpaces, "Gender-Based Violence in South Africa."

<sup>63</sup> Mantshi Teffo-Menziwa, Saiqa Mullick, and Prince Cedza Dlamini, "The Role of Traditional Leaders in Preventing and Addressing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: Findings from KwaZulu-Natal, Northwest and Limpopo Provinces in South Africa," 2010.

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