



Exploring the Perspectives of Women on Unreported Experiences of Gender-Based Violence in South African Homes (Relationships)

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ABSTRACT

In many areas of South Africa, gender-based violence has continued to grow, and during COVID-19 lockdowns, it reached its highest heights. This study sought to differentiate between active gender-based violence and passive gender-based violence, as this distinction has always been ignored both in literature and in the South African legal system. While active gender-based violence (GBV) gets reported to the police and legally addressed, passive GBV happens in closets and cannot be reported. However, passive GBV leaves no physical scars that can be presented in court and is therefore not addressed in South African law. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposively sampled group of 10 women from Vhembe District (Venda), and thematic analysis was adopted. This study argued for women's psychological health to be equally recognized as well as their physical health. The core argument is that depression causes as much harm as physical scars. The findings of the study revealed that GBV offenses as omissions in relationships do affect South African women in serious ways, similar to those offenses reported as commission. The findings also showed that South African law only focuses on GBV by commission; this is because GBV by omission offenses have nowhere to report and no one investigates them. Furthermore, the study found that women in South Africa suffer from being victims of mental health problems due to the fact that they live with unreportable offenses of GBV by omission. Therefore, the study contends that cases of GBV by commission in the context of spouses are usually the end result of salient GBV by omission that has been happening for a long time with no ability to report or call for intervention. This study adds to the growing literature on combating GBV in South Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) can be defined as a kind of violence that predominantly targets a particular gender of humans due to their physical or psychological vulnerability.¹ Klazinga, Artz, and

¹ Zuze J Banda, "A Survey on Gender-Based Violence–The Paradox of Trust between Women and Men in South Africa: A Missiological Scrutiny," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (2020).

Muller also define gender-based violence as any form of violence that is directed at a group of people on the basis of their gender and perceived vulnerability.² In both of these definitions, what is clear is that GVB happens when one faces unfair treatment due to their gender and perceived vulnerability. Therefore, this study adopts a constitutive meaning of gender-based violence, that is, GBV is a kind of violence that includes the commission of harmful acts against a particular group of people due to their gender and the omission of desirable acts towards a group of people due to their gender. Many researchers and people, in general, have spoken and written volumes about gender-based violence from the perspective of commission in the sense that they narrate about the committed crimes, but no one looks at the omission perspective of GBV, whereby women get deprived of respect, fulfillment of desires, happiness, and conjugal rights.

This paper aims at unraveling the mystery of GBV by omission against women in some relationships and even marriages. It must be clarified upfront that women who happen to be common victims when talking about GBV fall into relationships with men and find themselves linked with those men to the level of staying together or being emotionally attached to them.³ Once there is that attachment of a woman to a man with whom they share a special relationship, there are expectations as well as non-expectations. For instance, a woman would reasonably expect to have conjugal sex with her husband and be protected from anyone who would attack her, while at the same time, it is a non-expectation for her to be deprived of those things. In short, once there is a relationship established between a man and a woman, there are some entitlements as expectations and non-expectations that should be fulfilled for the prevention of GBV, both as commission and omission. According to Britton, gender-based violence by commission can be enumerated from the cases of rape and physical abuse (stabbing, assault, and femicide), as these are easily available in court records.⁴ But there are no records of GBV that happens among partners at home in the form of omission, whereby women get deprived of what they deserve due to the fact that they are vulnerable and cannot do anything. Therefore, this study finds a gap in the literature with regard to this aspect of GBV by commission, hence the significance of this endeavour.

The objectives of this study are (a) firstly, to unravel the truth that GBV occurs in two folds rather than just one fold which is commission, (b) secondly, to argue that South African law fails to deal with GBV itself as they do not address GBV by omission, but since they deal with GBV by commission they are in fact addressing results of GBV, (c) thirdly, to outline the effects of GBV by omission on women, and lastly (d) to challenge the South African law to transform towards addressing GBV itself than addressing results as it currently does with only addressing GBV by commission. These objectives then make it the case that this study methodologically starts by addressing the understanding of GBV in South Africa by referring to the existing literature that defines it. Since this paper marks a clear distinction between the two folds of GBV, its explanation of this notion is then of two folds as well i.e. GBV by commission and GBV by omission, and that broadens the general definition currently available in the literature. This deeper analysis of the conceptual understanding of the GBV concept leads directly to the adoption of analytic theory because this study commits to giving a deeper analysis of the otherwise almost-known concept of GBV in South African law. It is that ambit of deeper analysis that Ntshangase and Ntshangase use a psychoanalytic approach to argue that some of the omissions when looking at a critical issue like this one of GBV may limit the human understanding of how deep the problem is.⁵ The argument here is that GBV must not only be understood as something that is always committed physically with evidence that can be presented in court, but it also happens through omission, whereby a woman is deprived of what she should be

² L Klazinga, L Artz, and A Müller, "Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and HIV in South Africa: An HIV Facility-Based Study," *South African Medical Journal* 110, no. 5 (2020): 377–81.

³ A Enaifoghe and T A Idowu, "The Attitudes and Perceptions toward Sexuality and the Social Influence on Gender-Based Violence in South Africa," *African Journal of Public Affairs* 12, no. 1 (2021): 153–70.

⁴ Hannah E Britton, *Ending Gender-Based Violence: Justice and Community in South Africa* (University of Illinois Press, 2020).

⁵ M. X. Ntshangase and S. C. Ntshangase, "Psychoanalytic Rationality: A Critique of the Improper Feminist Approach to Teenage Pregnancy." *African Journal of Gender, Society & Development*, 13(2), (2023);145-161. <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3622/2023/v12n2a6>

getting in the relationship. In fact, most of the cases of committed acts of violence are an outburst of GBV by omission in the sense that a woman was firstly disrespected by her partner or spouse, and then later she gets physically abused.⁶

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender-Based Violence by Commission and Omission

The idea of differentiating between active Gender-based violence and Passive Gender-based violence makes sense because South African law only considers physical evidence to register a case. To this effect, Sanni and Ofana argue that some women do not even know where to go and report the abusive acts that have not yet exploded into physical scars that they can demonstrate when going to the police station.⁷ Zinyemba and Hlongwana corroborate this view as they argue that there needs to be a section for psychological support in South African police service stations in order to support those victims who are in the early stages of GBV.⁸ According to Olalere, South African law reports do not capture all cases of GBV offenses because they only focus on reported cases of exploded GBV crimes while ignoring these perpetual occurrences that women face on a daily basis.⁹ On one hand, the cultural belief in South Africa is that women must trust men/ husbands/ fathers/ brothers with their safety and provision of livelihood.¹⁰ On the other hand, men have become noticeable as perpetrators of GBV against women to the extent of even murdering them.¹¹ It is still worth noting that the recorded data on GBV cases only includes active reported cases of fully blown GBV crimes. The phrase “fully blown GBV crimes” here is specifically chosen to indicate that the reported cases in South Africa are cases of a complete cycle offense. According to Dlamini, a complete cycle offense is an offense that has reached its climax, for instance when someone has been actually assaulted or murdered.¹²

Gender-Based Violence by Commission

Scholars like Rapanyane, Amaechi et al., Dlamini, and Ndlovu et al. who have engaged in this topic of GBV have argued that GBV offenses committed in residences like homes are not easy to police.¹³ According to Olalere, most acts of GBV that happen in public spaces, like assault and murder, are commonly reported and get the necessary legal attention.¹⁴ Zinyemba and Hlongwana corroborate Olalere’s argument by citing references in case law as recorded in South African law journals found in SABINET and SAFLi.¹⁵ SABINET and SAFLi are large South African law journal indices that can be accessed by any law student in search of any legal reports and reported cases, and those help with more information if one has to do research in any legal aspect like this one of GBV. But all scholars,

⁶ Western Cape Government, “Men Who Have Been Abused Are More Likely to Become Abusive. Stop the Cycle. It Can End with You.” Western Cape Government: For You., 2023.

⁷ John Sodiq Sanni and Diana Ekor Ofana, “Recasting the Ontological Foundation of Ubuntu: Addressing the Problem of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa,” *South African Journal of Philosophy* 40, no. 4 (October 2, 2021): 384–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2021.1996143>.

⁸ 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.

⁹ Folasayo Enoch Olalere, “Gamification as a Tool for Social Change: A Case of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa,” *Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (EHASS)* 3 (13), <https://doi.org/10.38159/Ehass.20223135> (2022).

¹⁰ Makhura B Rapanyane, “Women in Trouble? A Critical Reflection on the Major Hindrances to Addressing Gender Based Violence in South Africa,” *African Journal of Gender, Society & Development* 10, no. 4 (2021): 209.

¹¹ Kingsley Eken Amaechi, Tsoaledi Daniel Thobejane, and Raymond Rasalokwane, “Feminist Reflections on the Impact of the South African National COVID-19 Lockdown on the Upsurge of Gender Based Violence in Mahwelereng Township of Limpopo Province, South Africa,” *Gender and Behaviour* 19, no. 1 (2021): 17186–203.

¹² Nobuhle Judy Dlamini, “Gender-Based Violence, Twin Pandemic to COVID-19,” *Critical Sociology* 47, no. 4–5 (July 30, 2021): 583–90, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920520975465>.

¹³ Rapanyane, “Women in Trouble? A Critical Reflection on the Major Hindrances to Addressing Gender Based Violence in South Africa”; Amaechi, Thobejane, and Rasalokwane, “Feminist Reflections on the Impact of the South African National COVID-19 Lockdown on the Upsurge of Gender Based Violence in Mahwelereng Township of Limpopo Province, South Africa”; Dlamini, “Gender-Based Violence, Twin Pandemic to COVID-19”; Ndlovu et al., “COVID-19 Impact on Gender-Based Violence among Women in South Africa during Lockdown: A Narrative Review.”

¹⁴ Olalere, “Gamification as a Tool for Social Change: A Case of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa.”

¹⁵ Zinyemba and Hlongwana, “Men’s Conceptualization of Gender-Based Violence Directed to Women in Alexandra Township, Johannesburg, South Africa”; Olalere, “Gamification as a Tool for Social Change: A Case of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa.”

like Rapanyane, Amaechi, Dlamini, Ndlovu, and others, unanimously agree in their works that GBV attacks or criminal acts occurring behind closed doors between a husband and wife are difficult to prevent. Scholars like Stauffer and Rapanyane, who have started doing research in this area of GBV, although using different approaches, report that it is difficult to investigate occurrences of GBV offenses that are not reported because they are not recorded in public records.¹⁶ In fact, Ndlovu et al. add that South African law protects people's privacy to such an extent that no one is allowed to ask questions that may seem like prying into personal information, and that means a researcher gets limited in finding personal issues that someone does not want to disclose regardless of being a GBV victim.¹⁷ Therefore, in some way, this study seeks to unravel a real gap in the literature, the one of GBV by omission, which seems not well addressed or not addressed at all.

Gender-Based Violence by Omission

This is an understudied or under-researched area for which there is less scope of literature to peruse. In this study researchers take recourse to the works of Rapanyane, Amaechi et al., Ndlovu et al., and Olalere wherein it clearly shows that South African legal reports and social or public reports only have records of active GBV, hereby referred to as GBV by commission.¹⁸ Scholars like Ndlovu et al. who have conducted many studies in this area clearly report that areas of GBV like conjugal deprivation, burdening mothers with child-rearing, financial abuse between spouses, and verbal abuse between spouses do not usually get reported.¹⁹ In fact, according to Frieslaar and Masango, women do not have any space to report GBV happening in their homes because they fear being viewed as people who embarrass their husbands/ partners.²⁰ Kiguwu and Stevens add that most women fear that if they go loud about GBV by omission happening in their homes they will be more abused by the public or by their abuser when the news have gone viral in public.²¹ However, Mutinta considers it another discovery worth exploring that sometimes it is women who start exclaiming that a lady is wayward when she goes loud complaining about sexual deprivation by her husband at home.²² Therefore, it is due to all these factors that this study holds that the reported/ active GBV crimes are the outburst of GBV offenses by omission that could not be reported and recorded anywhere.

As many scholars have written volumes of work about cultural perspectives that seem to disadvantage women in different traditions, this study strictly focuses on those factors that constitute passive GBV in South Africa. From a cultural perspective, gender roles sometimes create confusion and subject women to stress when their husbands behave unjustly against them; then they end up facing pressure to fulfill their marital duties and have nowhere to report abnormalities.²³ In the social space, there is also pressure to present a happy couple and perfect marriage, which then makes women cover

¹⁶ Carolyn S Stauffer, "The Sexual Politics of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa: Linking Public and Private Worlds," *Journal of Sociology and Christianity* 5, no. 1 (2015); Rapanyane, "Women in Trouble? A Critical Reflection on the Major Hindrances to Addressing Gender Based Violence in South Africa."

¹⁷ G Nokukhanya Ndhlovu, Pius T Tanga, and V D Adjoh-Davoh, "The Interconnection between Youth Gangs, Toxic Masculinity, and Gender-Based Violence in South Africa," *Negotiating Patriarchy and Gender in Africa: Discourses, Practices, and Policies*, 2021, 73–83.

¹⁸ Rapanyane, "Women in Trouble? A Critical Reflection on the Major Hindrances to Addressing Gender Based Violence in South Africa"; Amaechi, Thobejane, and Rasalokwane, "Feminist Reflections on the Impact of the South African National COVID-19 Lockdown on the Upsurge of Gender Based Violence in Mahwelereng Township of Limpopo Province, South Africa"; Ndhlovu, Tanga, and Adjoh-Davoh, "The Interconnection between Youth Gangs, Toxic Masculinity, and Gender-Based Violence in South Africa"; Olalere, "Gamification as a Tool for Social Change: A Case of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa."

¹⁹ Ndhlovu, Tanga, and Adjoh-Davoh, "The Interconnection between Youth Gangs, Toxic Masculinity, and Gender-Based Violence in South Africa."

²⁰ Brent V Frieslaar and Maake Masango, "Blessings or Curses? The Contribution of the Blesser Phenomenon to Gender-Based Violence and Intimate Partner Violence," *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021).

²¹ P. Kiguwu and G. Stevens, "Troubling apprehensions of gender-based violence in South Africa: Fanon's sociology as a psychosocial lens." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 22(4), (2021); 256-265. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15240657.2021.1996733>

²² Given Mutinta, "Gender-Based Violence among Female Students and Implications for Health Intervention Programmes in Public Universities in Eastern Cape, South Africa," *Cogent Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (2022): 2079212.

²³ Frieslaar and Masango, "Blessings or Curses? The Contribution of the Blesser Phenomenon to Gender-Based Violence and Intimate Partner Violence."

the stresses that accrue from passive GBV happening in their homes.²⁴ Ndhlovu et al. also argue that it is quite difficult to police what happens in homes where couples are commonly alone by themselves because that might risk infringement of personal freedom.²⁵ That means no one can get to know about passive GBV unless there is a safe space to report it with a reasonable hope that it will be addressed.

Effects of Gender-Based Violence

In the case of gender-based violence, Allen argues that some people started paying attention when women were getting murdered during the COVID-19 lockdown.²⁶ That seems to mean that during lockdown, where everyone had to stay at home, cases of GBV increased to a highly noticeable level.²⁷ According to Ndlovu et al., in South Africa, women find themselves on the receiving end of GBV because they are less masculine and do not have anyone to take measures to prevent abuse at home.²⁸ Although reports show that women get abused by men, it is also worth noting that they sometimes get abused by their children and other fellow women.²⁹ As Mbandlwa notes, it is quite interesting that although women get harassed, raped, assaulted, and murdered by men, somebody took time to observe that GBV sometimes comes from other sources than men.³⁰ South African law, like other laws of countries like the United States of America, New Zealand, Britain, Brazil, and India, only registers cases with physical evidence, and that leaves passive GBV offenses unreportable and therefore not appearing in law reports.³¹ Moreroa and Rapanyane argue that sometimes the traditional view that women have to be home-keepers while men go out and fend for their families subjects women to being first-class victims of GBV as they are a considerable burden to men (partners or husbands).³² Based on studies conducted by scholars like Enaifoghe and Idowu and Ndlovu et al., there is more similarity in relying on published data via legal reports and public media.³³ It is also another similarity that GBV, by omission, is one of the untouched discussions in all the works of scholars like Mbandlwa, Moreroa, Rapanyane, Ndlovu, and Buqa, who have done much research in this area.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is committed to the analytical school of thought. Analytical philosophy emphasizes clarity and argument, which are often achieved through logical and linguistic analysis.³⁴ Frege is considered the father of analytical philosophy, a tradition that emphasizes the clarity of argument through the logical use of language in presenting thoughts.³⁵ Within this framework, Bertrand Russell found a

²⁴ Kiguwa and Stevens, "Troubling apprehensions of gender-based violence in South Africa: Fanon's sociogeny as a psychosocial lens."

²⁵ Ndhlovu, Tanga, and Adjoh-Davoh, "The Interconnection between Youth Gangs, Toxic Masculinity, and Gender-Based Violence in South Africa."

²⁶ 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>.

²⁷ Enaifoghe and Idowu, "The Attitudes and Perceptions toward Sexuality and the Social Influence on Gender-Based Violence in South Africa."

²⁸ Sithembiso Ndlovu et al., "COVID-19 Impact on Gender-Based Violence among Women in South Africa during Lockdown: A Narrative Review," *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 26, no. 7 (2022): 59–71.

²⁹ Wonke Buqa, "Gender-Based Violence in South Africa: A Narrative Reflection," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78, no. 1 (2022): 7754.

³⁰ Zamokuhle Mbandlwa, "Analysis of a One-Sided Narrative of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa," *Solid State Technology* 63, no. 6 (2020): 13227–40.

³¹ Lacey George, "Gender-Based Violence against Women in South Africa," *Ballard Brief* 2020, no. 2 (2020): 7; Karen Graaff, "The Implications of a Narrow Understanding of Gender-Based Violence," *Feminist Encounters* 5, no.1(2021):1–12.

³² M. C. Moreroa and M. B. Rapanyane, "A growing outcry of gender-based violence and gender inequality in South Africa: An Afrocentric perspective." *African Journal of Gender, Society & Development*, 10(2), (2021);7. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-aa_jgidal-v10-n2-a1

³³ Enaifoghe and Idowu, "The Attitudes and Perceptions toward Sexuality and the Social Influence on Gender-Based Violence in South Africa"; Ndlovu et al., "COVID-19 Impact on Gender-Based Violence among Women in South Africa during Lockdown: A Narrative Review."

³⁴ C. McGinn, *The Making of a Philosopher: My Journey through Twentieth-Century Philosophy* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002).

³⁵ G. Frege, "Begriffsschrift," *Grundgesetze Der Arithmetik* 2, no. 1 (1906), plato.stanford.edu/entries/frege/#BasFerLogPreCal.

space to argue for logicism and logical atomism.³⁶ According to Soames, logic and logical atomism refer to the practice of breaking the argument into basic propositions in order to understand its coherence as a whole.³⁷ Similarly, Hallen and Sodipo argue for the analytical breakdown of issues into simpler and logical thoughts through the use of logic in simple ordinary language.³⁸ Soames seems to hold the view that philosophical problems arise from misunderstandings of language, and all necessary truths are a priori, analytic, and true in virtue of the meaning of words depending upon how the world in fact is.³⁹ Analytic theory helps in producing philosophy that is not ideologically motivated but thought that is analytic and reflective.⁴⁰ Under Wittgenstein's inspiration, Rudolf Carnap sought to embed his analysis in logical positivism as a development of this tradition. Logical positivism holds that there are no specific philosophical truths and that the object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts.⁴¹ Carnap and other scholars contributed to this tradition by rejecting the doctrines of their predecessors of constructing artificial language to resolve philosophical problems.⁴² They argued that the Vienna Circle was erroneous because the "quest for systemic theories of language worked as a misleading intrusion of scientific methods into philosophy."⁴³

The analytic framework in this research work helps in acquiring a deeper or adequate understanding of the research problem prior to forwarding the personal views of the researchers. Since it is the framework that guides the methodology, it also helps to critically apply analysis that cannot be accused of any bias. This theoretical framework enables a researcher to be reflective and, at the same time, be within the guards of rationality while being critical of his or her thoughts. With the guidance of logical positivism, the researchers have been able to deal with dogmas and ideological speculations around the issue of gender-based violence while operating as neutral beings in the battle of ideas about current ways of understanding GBV. As Soames argues, logical positivism holds that there are no absolute philosophical truths, but the object of philosophy is to clarify thoughts.⁴⁴ This has helped the researchers to simplify their thoughts. This paper used ordinary language to produce the researchers' critical thoughts while at the same time analyzing the common thoughts that currently exist in the world. The use of ordinary language is due to the fact that this article deals with real issues that involve real human beings in the world other than some metaphysical fantasies. An analytical framework is adequately relevant when dealing with sensitive issues like this one of GBV by omissions versus GBV by commission because in South Africa there are no scholars who have rationalized GBV in this analytic manner. Therefore, this paper adopts this theoretical framework in an attempt to do something different, as Mahlo argues that it is not appropriate for a relevant scholar to emotionally weep in corridors without addressing the problems that humanity faces.⁴⁵

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach and utilized the interpretive approach.⁴⁶ A qualitative research methodology centers on the examination of phenomena that occur in natural

³⁶ S. Soames, *The Dawn of Analysis: Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

³⁷ Soames, *The Dawn of Analysis: Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*.

³⁸ B. Hallen and J O. Sodipo, *Knowledge, Belief, and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy* (California: Stanford University Press, 1997).

³⁹ Soames, *The Dawn of Analysis: Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*.

⁴⁰ B. Hallen, "Contextualism in Philosophy: Knowledge, Meaning, and Truth," in *Analytic Philosophy*. Goethe University, ed. G. Preyer and G. Peter (Frankfurt: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁴¹ L. Wittgenstein, "Mind Association," JSTOR 61, 1937, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2252298>; R. Carnap, *Logical Syntax of Language* (London: Routledge Publishers, 1961).

⁴² R. Carnap, *The Logical Structure of the World* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: Univ. Carnap, 1937).

⁴³ J H. Glock, *What Is Analytic Philosophy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁴⁴ Soames, *The Dawn of Analysis: Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*.

⁴⁵ Lebohang Mahlo, "The Capabilities Necessary for Effective ICT Integration in Teaching at Two Public Primary Schools in Khayelitsha in the Western Cape" (Cape Peninsula University of Technology, 2020).

⁴⁶ P. Liamputtong, *Qualitative Research Methods*, 5th ed. (Docklands, VIC: Oxford University Press Australia, 2020).

environments, and data are analyzed without the application of statistical techniques.⁴⁷ In addition, a case study methodology was considered appropriate since it allowed the researcher to obtain detailed information about the participants' perspectives and personal encounters with gender-based violence.⁴⁸ The researchers effectively assessed the manifestation of gender-based violence in these women's experiences by employing suitable methodologies in the case study.⁴⁹ The main study question focused on the diverse experiences of women with regard to gender-based violence within their homes or relationships. The selected participants' responses to the study inquiries, coupled with their personal experiences, facilitated the researcher's comprehension of the actualities of gender-based violence within their individual households and relationships. The participants' distinct real-life environments allowed them to develop a perception of their current lifestyles, to which they had adjusted. The researchers deemed it appropriate to collect data from participants by employing an interpretative paradigm, utilizing a single case study.⁵⁰ This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of how participants evaluated their surroundings.⁵¹ This paper used analytic theory as the sole framework for examining the issue of the overlooked perspective of gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa.

Selection of the Participants

The study employed a purposive sampling approach to identify participants. The participants for this study were carefully selected based on their appropriateness for the investigation. For this study, a purposive sampling method was used to select 10 female participants aged between 27 and 37 from the Vhembe region in the Limpopo province. These women have diverse experiences with gender-based violence. Table 1 presents a concise overview of the selected participants' information.

Table 1: Profile of the Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Level of Education
P1	female	28	University degree
P2	female	30	Matric
P3	female	27	Matric
P4	female	29	University diploma
P5	female	32	Matric
P6	female	34	University degree
P7	female	37	University degree
P8	female	36	College certificate
P9	female	35	College diploma
P10	female	31	Matric

To ensure the confidentiality of the participants, we assigned pseudonyms to each of them.⁵² The pseudonyms utilized were P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P10. Participants were informed that they had the option to withdraw from the study if they experienced any discomfort, offense, or intimidation during the virtual streaming interviews.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were carried out after obtaining their explicit agreement, which was given verbally and sometimes in writing. The intention of maintaining participants' anonymity was

⁴⁷ Loraine Busetto, Wolfgang Wick, and Christoph Gumbinger, "How to Use and Assess Qualitative Research Methods," *Neurological Research and Practice* 2, no. 1 (December 27, 2020): 14, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42466-020-00059-z>.

⁴⁸ Claudia Wiesner, "Doing Qualitative and Interpretative Research: Reflecting Principles and Principled Challenges," *Political Research Exchange* 4, no. 1 (December 31, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736X.2022.2127372>.

⁴⁹ Sarah J Tracy, *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact* (John Wiley & Sons, 2024).

⁵⁰ Busetto, Wick, and Gumbinger, "How to Use and Assess Qualitative Research Methods."

⁵¹ D. Silverman, *Qualitative Research*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2021).

⁵² Silverman, *Qualitative Research*.

implemented during the interviews, which facilitated the participants in expressing their opinions freely during the semi-structured interviews.⁵³ The researchers transcribed all comments exactly as they were spoken and then analyzed them thematically, using the method described by Busetto et al.⁵⁴ The interviews were performed with the participant's consent and recorded using audio equipment. Every participant engaged in an individualized interview consisting of open-ended questions, with each session lasting around 30 minutes. These kinds of inquiries enabled the researcher to gain further insights into the personal and social backgrounds of the individuals.⁵⁵ Participants were allowed to reiterate or seek clarification on particular issues to ensure precision. The researchers employed probing and prompting approaches to obtain further clarification or elaboration, if needed, enabling the extraction of comprehensive and detailed information from the Grade R instructors.⁵⁶ This also enabled the researchers to differentiate between the viewpoints and outlooks of the participants. Through the process of analysis, the researcher obtained a valuable understanding of the perspectives held by the participating women regarding their experiences of GBV.⁵⁷ Prior to commencing the interviews, the chosen participants were required to sign consent papers that provided detailed information about the research processes, including the process of withdrawal.

Data Analysis

The researchers employed thematic analysis to derive significance from the data. Busetto et al. argue that thematic analysis is particularly useful for comprehending complex situations that involve multiple perspectives rather than a single absolute truth.⁵⁸ The study utilized thematic analysis to examine the emerging themes from the semi-structured interviews. The methodology of data analysis entails the process of dissecting, classifying, and reconstructing data in order to discern significant patterns and derive conclusions.⁵⁹ After transcribing, the researchers evaluated and merged all the pertinent data to create a coherent entity. According to Wiesner, data analysis is the systematic categorization of data in order to identify patterns and relationships.⁶⁰ Although the researchers employed this analytic methodology, they utilized the same procedures to classify data in order to ascertain correlations, themes, and patterns. Examining themes aids in effectively anonymizing the participants, as the results are presented as overarching themes rather than individual responses.⁶¹ In order to become acquainted with the data prior to converting speech into written text, the researchers engaged in multiple instances of listening to voice-recorded interviews.⁶² Their understanding of the data was further deepened through extensive readings of the interview transcripts. The technique of open coding was employed to cluster distinct themes together in a manner that aligns with qualitative research.⁶³ This facilitated the generation of preliminary data pertaining to the phenomenon under investigation by categorizing the material acquired.⁶⁴ The evidence supporting the findings was derived from excerpts of participants' responses to interview questions.

Ethical Considerations

Authorization to perform the study at research locations was obtained by ethically negotiating with the University of Limpopo's research ethics committee. The committee provided this authorization by providing ethical protocols to the researcher. The researchers acquired ethical clearance (number

⁵³ Wiesner, "Doing Qualitative and Interpretative Research: Reflecting Principles and Principled Challenges."

⁵⁴ Busetto, Wick, and Gumbinger, "How to Use and Assess Qualitative Research Methods."

⁵⁵ Liamputtong, *Qualitative Research Methods*.

⁵⁶ Tracy, *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*.

⁵⁷ P. Adu, *A Step-by-Step Guide to Qualitative Data Coding* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

⁵⁸ Busetto, Wick, and Gumbinger, "How to Use and Assess Qualitative Research Methods."

⁵⁹ D. Hunter, J. McCallum, and D. Howes, "Defining exploratory-descriptive qualitative (EDQ) research and considering its application to healthcare." *Journal of Nursing and Health Care*, 4(1); (2019). <http://dl6.globalstf.org/index.php/jnhc/article/view/1975>

⁶⁰ Wiesner, "Doing Qualitative and Interpretative Research: Reflecting Principles and Principled Challenges."

⁶¹ Adu, *A Step-by-Step Guide to Qualitative Data Coding*.

⁶² Liamputtong, *Qualitative Research Methods*.

⁶³ Silverman, *Qualitative Research*.

⁶⁴ Tracy, *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*

2022/09/07/31362338/13/AM) from the University of Limpopo to ensure the protection of both the participants' and researchers' rights during the study. Participants were provided with consent letters, which requested their involvement in the study. The letters clearly stated that participation was voluntary and emphasized their choice to deny the request or withdraw from participating if they so desired.⁶⁵ The consent letter was included in the ethical clearance application form that was submitted to the research ethics office. Anonymized pseudonyms were employed to safeguard the identities of the participants, and the confidentiality of their responses to interview inquiries was upheld.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This section discusses the women's perspectives on the unreported cases of gender-based violence in South African homes, including the effects of gender-based violence by commission and omission.

Gender-Based Violence Effects

Women were asked about their experiences with the effects of gender-based violence. These women pointed to issues such as lack of respect from their partners, spouse's contribution and assistance in the family, stress, and discipline. The participants had these to say:

Participant 1: I sometimes feel very disrespected when my partner shouts at me in front of children and tells me about how stupid I am and how I fail to support the family. This affects me in a very negative way because it makes me feel quite useless.

Participant 3: My boyfriend (the father of my two children) contributes little to the children's welfare because he is not working, and he uses that against me when he takes time out, claiming that he has been with friends trying to drown his sorrows.

Participant 4: I felt like he implied that I was a slave to carry the whole house on my shoulders without any help from him.

Participant 5: Even when I came home and told him about my friends who were furthering their studies, he shamefully said that they were not his wives or not even married.

Participant 7: Even when the knock-off time comes, I feel stressed because I have to face him and his children, who have now started to be disrespectful teenagers.

Participant 9: He sometimes even tells the children that their mother is just a child like them and that he is the only parent in the home. Children now only respect their father and see me as mere furniture in the house; I cannot even discipline them because, with their father, they take turns making me feel useless.

Participant 10: As our children have now grown up, they also go out with boyfriends, regardless of my disapproval of it, and their father seems to not care about my feelings about his behavior at all. I end up feeling very frustrated and depressed about all this abuse that I cannot even report or be assisted with anywhere.

The points that accrue from the reports of these participants show the pain felt by women during these GBV offenses that occur in their homes. This means women get hurt in different ways as their husbands or partners act in disrespectful ways without even considering their feelings. It is one thing to be violated, but another extreme is when one has nowhere to report or no one to talk with. This

⁶⁵ J. Choi, M. Lee, J.K. Lee, D. Kang, J. Y. and Choi, "Correlates associated with participation in physical activity among adults: a systematic review of reviews and update." *BMC public health*, 17, (2017); 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-017-4255-2>

whole home GBV situation becomes an insurmountable mountain to climb over, to the effect that women feel some sense of despair, which may lead to depression at times.

Gender-Based Violence By Commission

The commission's understanding of gender-based violence was determined. These women stated that some of the gender-based violence practices were reported to the police, but sometimes their voices were not heard by the courts of law. They also indicated that some of these incidents are, by nature, difficult to report because they want to protect their families. The participants said:

Participant 2: My dishes are all broken now because he demands food when he comes and breaks the plate while he eats because he cannot handle it well when drunk.

Participant 6: I think he is doing this to me because he is the only breadwinner in the house, and on some occasions, he has refused to let me search for a job. I get so stressed and think of going to report him somewhere. When I think about the police, I just get discouraged because they will not even bother listening to my story.

Participant 7: My husband is earning less than me, and he always shames me when I go for extra hours at work in order to earn extra money and support the home better. After his shouting and insulting me at home, I find myself very devastated at work and feeling angry with all the male clients; they just make me think of him and feel disgusted.

Participant 8: My boyfriend always has excuses to go out to dinners with his colleagues, and he does not take any heed to my request when I have to go out for workshops and extra classes as a teacher. This is abusive because it is one-sided. I harvest a barrage of insults and harsh words when I try to stop him from going to those late meetings and dinners. Most of all, he comes back home tired and drunk enough to even remember engaging in conjugal bedroom affairs.

Participant 9: My husband told me to stop working after we got married, and I found out that he wanted to abuse me financially in the sense that he wanted me to always be dependent on him. He even boasts about having bought all that we have in the house.

At this point, it becomes clear that women are aware of how they deserve to be treated, but they sometimes remain with their feelings ignored by their partners. It is depressing to be undermined while knowing that you are worth more than you deserve. From the words of these participants, it also becomes clear that abusers do not have respect for the feelings of their victims, as it is common knowledge that they cannot go and report such issues anywhere. It still shows how serious the issue of GBV is in some homes or residences where there is no one to police such offenses.

Gender-Based Violence By Omission

The women's experiences and understanding of gender-based violence by omission were also determined. These women indicated that their spouses perpetuate the GBV-related injustices because they are aware that courts of law do not address them. The participants had these to say:

Participant 2: Seeing my husband come home late and drunk in the middle of the night breaks my heart, and because I told him that such an act is abusive, I believe he is doing it to abuse me. Unfortunately, such abuse cannot be reported to the police.

Participant 4: Although we are both working, my husband comes home earlier than me and sits or sleeps. The problem is that he gets angry at me when I come home and rest before cooking and doing

other house chores. I suggested that we get a maid, but he said that could not happen because I am a wife and he paid lobola for me.

Participant 5: I felt very bad when my husband told me that I could not go back to school and further my education because I am now married while he is highly educated and has a good job.

Participant 6: My husband always goes to business meetings that end late (as he tells me),but I have checked his social media accounts and found many beautiful ladies who flirt with him and invite him during those times in which he claims to be in meetings.

Participant 10: I caught my husband cheating on me more than five times, and once he wanted to bring another woman into our house because he is the only breadwinner. Every time I confront him about his cheating, he silences me by saying he is a man and a woman's job is to keep the home well managed, not to monitor his love affairs.

This shows that there is still a portion of men who think in a patriarchal fashion, which then makes them believe that there must be no equality between men and women. Some men who are perpetrators of GBV in homes do not see women as valuable human beings in an equal stance with men, and that makes them believe that women must accept what men cannot accept. Issues like having multiple sex partners or relationships and coming home late from meetings, which men cannot accept, are believed to be accepted by women. This is a climax of disrespect and devaluation meted out to women by their husbands or partners who are GBV perpetrators, and this is the reality of what is hereby referred to as GBV by omission in this study.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Theme 1: Understanding GBV in South Africa encompasses only physical

The findings in this study happened to be much broader and needed to be curtailed to a manageable size. That required translation into the English language and summarizing into three themes to thematically present and analyze them. Therefore, three themes have been used to enable the discussion of the findings in this study. Those are: (a) GBV offenses as omission in relationships do affect South African women in serious ways similar to those offenses reported as commission; (b) Literature reports and South African law only focus on GBV by commission; this is because GBV by omission offenses have nowhere to report and no one investigates them; (c) Women in South Africa suffer as victims of mental health problems due to the fact that they live with unreportable offenses of GBV by omission. Therefore, the study contends that cases of GBV by commission in the context of spouses are usually the end result of salient GBV by omission that has been happening for a long time with no ability to report or call for intervention.

The common understanding of GBV in South Africa is that a person must have physical scars accrued from being abused due to her or his gender.⁶⁶ Graaff argues that most victims of GBV in reported cases are women in South African statistics.⁶⁷ This seems to suggest that men are, to a greater extent, free from being victims of GBV, and some even participate as perpetrators of this societal vice. It is for that reason that this paper strictly focuses on the views of women about GBV in South Africa. One of the dominant points that women raise during interviews is that GBV is viewed only as a physical thing that can always be easily reported to the police and the perpetrator arrested. According to SABC News, some of the forms of abuse are not easy just go to the nearest police station and report.⁶⁸ The uneasiness to report can be traced to some basic elements required for one to have a case

⁶⁶ C. Ramaphosa, President Cyril Ramaphosa addresses the Presidential Gender-Based Violence Summit 2022. *The presidency of the Republic of South Africa*. <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za>

⁶⁷ Graaff, "The Implications of a Narrow Understanding of Gender-Based Violence."

⁶⁸ SABC News, "Gender-Based Violence Is South Africa Winning the Fight against GBV? ," 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zja3_fqbp0I.

under the South African policing law, said Mutinta.⁶⁹ The elements to register a case in the South African police station are: (a) there must be physical evidence like scars or wounds; (b) the police officers must have a clear understanding of what is being reported to them; and (c) the law known to the police officers must recognize the nature of what is reported as a crime. At least if these elements are established, then the case reported gets to be recorded; otherwise, the police officers do not take that matter seriously.

Theme 2: GBV by omission is considerably unreportable and leaves women in despair

These necessary elements do not represent kinds of women abuse at home through (a) lack of respect whereby a husband is cheating with multiple partners; (b) abuse of home finances with excessive drinking or substance abuse; (c) being verbally harsh to the wife due to his own stress; and (d) instances whereby a husband is no longer sleeping at home and providing conjugal rights. All these kinds of GBV by omission are not able to be reported at the police station because no one will take them as seriously as they are to the reporting victim. However, as things come to light, Shea argues that all these kinds of abuse create serious stress for women, to such an extent that some women end up suffering anxiety and depression.⁷⁰ According to Oparinde and Matsha, some women in South Africa end up not loving their children and not being friendly even in their workplaces due to the trauma that they face at home.⁷¹ Therefore, GBV should not only be viewed as being perpetrated by the commission of physical attack or violence; it also happens by omission, like the neglect of social and intimate duties. Olalere argues that GBV by omission may be one of the factors that contribute to the increase in women being admitted to psychiatric hospitals with mental issues.⁷² In this study, there is a distinction being made between GBV offenses by commission and GBV offenses by omission. This distinction is important because South African reports only recognize those GBV offenses that fall within commission while at the same time neglecting all those that fall within omission. According to Yesufu, police officers also assist the perpetrators of GBV by omission when they do not take seriously a case reported by a woman who has been insulted or threatened by her husband.⁷³ Perhaps this is a sign that police stations in South Africa need to have a psychologist on standby to properly respond or intervene in cases where a woman reports something that officers deem not serious while a woman is really suffering.

According to Leon and Aizpurua, some African traditions have a way in which they may be interpreted to allow other forms of GBV against women.⁷⁴ For instance, the idea of a wife staying at home, keeping the home, and producing children with no right to find a job.⁷⁵ In other words, besides the fact that a housewife will be stressed by loneliness when her husband has gone to work, she also gets more frustrated by the fact that she is barred from working and her husband makes her feel useless in terms of supporting the family. Sometimes it sounds like love and following tradition when a husband tells his wife to stay home and raise babies while he goes to work for the family, but later it creates some power imbalance such that the woman ends up being a GBV victim. Stewart et al. seem to corroborate what one of the participants said when he says that sometimes the tradition demands that a woman keep her marriage and not speak ill of her husband, and that makes her think that telling

⁶⁹ Mutinta, "Gender-Based Violence among Female Students and Implications for Health Intervention Programmes in Public Universities in Eastern Cape, South Africa."

⁷⁰ Patricia Shea, "Violence against Women: The End Begins with Men," |Patricia Shea |TEDxNashville [Interview]. YouTube., 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-cxFYJ1gJk>.

⁷¹ Kunle Oparinde and Rachel Matsha, "Powerful Discourse: Gender-Based Violence and Counter-Discourses in South Africa," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 8, no. 1 (2021): 1911035.

⁷² Olalere, "Gamification as a Tool for Social Change: A Case of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa."

⁷³ Shaka Yesufu, "The Scourge of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) on Women Plaguing South Africa," *EUREKA: Social and Humanities*, no. 1 (January 28, 2022): 96–100, <https://doi.org/10.21303/2504-5571.2022.002261>.

⁷⁴ Carmen M. Leon and Eva Aizpurua, "Do Youth Dream of Gender Stereotypes? The Relationship among Gender Stereotyping, Support for Feminism, and Acceptance of Gender-Based Violence," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20, no. 3 (January 30, 2023): 2439, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20032439>.

⁷⁵ Leon and Aizpurua, "Do Youth Dream of Gender Stereotypes? The Relationship among Gender Stereotyping, Support for Feminism, and Acceptance of Gender-Based Violence."

anyone about the violence at home is badmouthing her husband.⁷⁶ So, there comes the idea of portraying a happy marriage in public as a way of keeping the marriage or partnership going. Within the traditional perspectives, Pesando mentions the idea of cheating, as one of the participants in this study did, that traditionally some men do argue that polygamy is allowed, and that means wives must accept that their husbands will have concubines and other wives coming to share the husband.⁷⁷ Therefore, there seems to be a way in which some African traditions can be used to perpetrate passive GBV, whether extremely interpreted or downright misinterpreted.

Theme 3: Traditional patriarchy sometimes serves as the cause of GBV in homes

Dirik argues for a different view in the sense that she argues that sometimes men fall into abusing their wives due to fear of losing power and control of the house.⁷⁸ According to Amoniyi and Eboiyehi, men who grew up in a patriarchal society tend to believe that if a woman can be powerful financially and in other ways, she will commit many acts of disrespect or downright misbehavior.⁷⁹ Therefore, it is from that backdrop that some men will feel it is necessary to demonstrate harshness against their wives or girlfriends. This might be what influenced Poto and Peng et al. to argue that sometimes those men who abuse women are also victims of epistemological interpretations of their culture in their societies.⁸⁰ Although Košir and Lakshminarayanan and Peng et al. seem to be defending some perpetrators of GBV, this study argues that if everyone can agree about what violence is, then there is no way that a man who perpetrates GBV at his home does not know what he is doing.⁸¹ In this study, the definition of violence can be reduced to the words of Lange and Young, wherein they argue that once someone does what he would not like done to himself, then there is no doubt that he has fallen into what fits the description of being an offense or violence.⁸² With that understanding, then, this study holds that all perpetrators of passive GBV in homes are fully aware of what they are doing, and it is what they want to do as they know that there is nowhere to report it. Enaifoghe et al. argue that since there has been an increase in arrests of active GBV perpetrators in South Africa after COVID-19 lockdowns, now all those perpetrators of active GBV are careful as they know that the law will deal with them.⁸³ That means the only problem that plagues South Africa now is passive GBV, which goes unnoticed or unreported due to a lack of verification procedures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although some recommendations cannot be easily implemented due to resource limitations in South Africa, at least awareness of some things that need to be done might help. Therefore, this study submits three recommendations, which are as follows: (a) more research needs to be done or presented to convince the South African legal system that GBV is not only a physical phenomenon but also happens by omission; (b) there is a need for more awareness campaigns organized by communities to empower

⁷⁶ Rebecca Stewart et al., "Gendered Stereotypes and Norms: A Systematic Review of Interventions Designed to Shift Attitudes and Behaviour," *Heliyon* 7, no. 4 (April 2021): e06660, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e06660>.

⁷⁷ Valentina Rotondi et al., "Leveraging Mobile Phones to Attain Sustainable Development," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, no. 24 (2020): 13413–20.

⁷⁸ Deniz Dirik, "Leader Power Bases and Perceived Leader Effectiveness: Conservation of Gender Stereotypes," *Current Psychology* 40, no. 12 (December 9, 2021): 6175–86, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-01169-2>.

⁷⁹ Paul Awoniyi and Friday Eboiyehi, "Women and Rural Water Management: Unequal Power Relations and Gender Stereotypes, Ondo State, Nigeria," *Journal of Gender and Power*, 2022, 9.

⁸⁰ Margherita Paola Poto, "Dis-Empowering Gender Stereotypes," in *Gender Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Academia: A Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Transformation. Gender Series* (Routledge, 2023), 1–10; Altman Yuzhu Peng et al., "'She Uses Men to Boost Her Career': Chinese Digital Cultures and Gender Stereotypes of Female Academics in Zhihu Discourses," *Social Semiotics* 33, no. 4 (2023): 750–68.

⁸¹ Suzana Košir and Radhika Lakshminarayanan, "Do Visual Constructs in Social Science Textbooks Evince Gender Stereotypes and Bias? A Case Study from India," *Gender and Education* 35, no. 1 (2023): 69–88; Peng et al., "'She Uses Men to Boost Her Career': Chinese Digital Cultures and Gender Stereotypes of Female Academics in Zhihu Discourses."

⁸² Elizabeth Lange and Susan Young, "Gender-Based Violence as Difficult Knowledge: Pedagogies for Rebalancing the Masculine and the Feminine," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 38, no. 3 (May 4, 2019): 301–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2019.1597932>.

⁸³ Andrew Enaifoghe et al., "The Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence against Women in South Africa: A Call for Action," *African Journal of Gender, Society & Development* 10, no. 1 (2021): 117.

women against both GBV by commission and GBV by omission in South Africa; and (c) this study also recommends that psychological intervention to women victims of GBV must be offered in South African police stations in order to address the issues of GBV by omission.

CONCLUSION

There are two dimensions of gender-based violence that exist in South Africa, but the only one legally addressed is GBV by commission. The perspective of GBV by omission is either viewed as insignificant or not worth addressing while it has a serious impact on the life of a woman. Some participants in this study even argued that the physical GBV by commission, which the South African legal system only focuses on, is the result of GBV by omission. South African women sometimes suffer anxiety, frustration, and depression as a result of the psychological trauma of unreportable GBV cases. It is unfair to the women GBV victims that there is no intervention offered to them when they suffer from GBV by omission situations. It also became clear in this study that GBV by omission is as dangerous as GBV by commission because it poses a threat to women's health or even to their lives. GBV by omission includes different facets of a woman's life, like finance, intimacy, emotional wellbeing, relationships, psychological wellbeing, and her parenting ability.

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