




Beyond the Cheer: A Case Study on Policing Gender-Based Violence Crimes During Festive Celebrations, 2012-2023

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ABSTRACT

As festive celebrations unfold, the holiday season not only brings joy but also an unfortunate increase in gender-based violence (GBV) crimes. This qualitative study employs a systematic review, using indirect observation schedules to identify and describe existing literature. Using inductive textual content analysis, the study examines the challenges faced by law enforcement in addressing gender-based violence crimes during festive periods. It explored the factors contributing to the surge in violence. Beyond the cheer of the season, increased social activities, alcohol consumption, and financial stress exacerbate tensions within relationships, making both women and men vulnerable to abuse. The study examined the multifaceted strategies employed by police forces to address GBV, including enhanced visibility, community engagement, and collaboration with support organizations. Moreover, the findings shed light on the significance of public awareness campaigns and the use of technology to curb GBV incidents. Based on the findings, the study recommends the strengthening of alcohol regulation policies, by implementing stricter regulations on alcohol sales and consumption, particularly during festive seasons, to address its role as a contributing factor to GBV. Establish a national monitoring system to track the relationship between alcohol consumption and GBV rates over time. A comprehensive strategy should involve collaboration between community members and law enforcement agencies to ensure prompt reporting of GBV cases and to aid in the identification of perpetrators. By analyzing the intersection of festive celebrations and GBV, this paper seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of the challenges faced by law enforcement and the potential avenues for creating safer environments during the holiday season.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) is conceptualized in various ways by scholars and organizations, encompassing violence stemming from societal gender norms and power imbalances between genders. Essentially, GBV refers to violence triggered by expectations associated with gender roles and the power dynamics between different genders within a particular societal context.¹ This form of violence, which can affect women, men, and non-binary individuals alike, is both a violation of human rights and a criminal act. It directly contravenes the principles of equality and protection embedded in constitutional

¹ S. Bloom, *Violence against Women and Girls: A Compendium of Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators* (Chapel Hill, NC: MEASURE Evaluation, 2008).

rights.² During the festive holidays in South Africa, the season of joy and celebration is unfortunately marred by a concerning increase in GBV incidents. Despite the general atmosphere of happiness and family gatherings, many women are at increased risk of experiencing violence.³ GBV remains a critical issue for women in South Africa, where it is alarmingly prevalent. The country is often labeled the "rape capital of the world," with 10,818 cases of rape reported in the first quarter of 2022 alone.⁴ South Africa's rates of intimate partner homicides against women are notably high—five times the global average. When presenting the crime statistics for the second quarter of 2023/2024, Police Minister Bheki Cele highlighted that, during July, August, and September, 10,516 rapes, 1,514 attempted murders, and 14,401 assaults involving female victims were reported. Additionally, during this period, 881 women were murdered.⁵

In alignment with the international campaign of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, a recent survey by Afrobarometer's Round 9 (2021/2023) investigated African perspectives on GBV. In South Africa, most respondents condemned physical violence against women as unjustifiable, though many acknowledged that GBV remains prevalent in their communities and is a top priority for government action. Additionally, most citizens view domestic violence as a criminal issue and believe that law enforcement takes GBV cases seriously. The 2018 Victims of Crime Survey indicated an increase in crime from 2017/2018 compared to the prior year, coupled with decreasing feelings of safety and diminished trust in the criminal justice system.⁶ The rise in reports of violence against women and children in both private and public spaces in the past year has amplified awareness of the vulnerability of women in South Africa, as daily media and police updates consistently reveal harrowing accounts of GBV.⁷

This Paper asserts that, despite the strategies mentioned earlier, the South African Police Service (SAPS) continues to struggle to eliminate GBV, particularly during festive seasons. The holiday period often experiences an increase in social activities, gatherings, and alcohol consumption, contributing to a surge in GBV incidents. Law enforcement is tasked with managing a larger caseload during this time, leading to stretched resources and potential delays in response times and case investigations. Efforts to raise awareness of GBV may not be entirely effective, as there remains a potential lack of understanding or reluctance among the public to report incidents. While law enforcement often focuses on responding to incidents, preventing GBV requires a proactive approach. Developing and implementing effective preventive measures, such as community education programs and awareness campaigns, can be challenging but essential for long-term success.

The study thus employs the inductive textual content analysis to investigate the challenges law enforcement encounters in policing gender-based violence crimes during festivities.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology in this study takes a qualitative approach, using contextual analysis without relying on quantitative techniques. Researchers reviewed literature from January 2012 to December 2023, focusing on key issues such as the policing of GBV crimes during holiday periods, factors contributing to the rise in GBV, and the barriers law enforcement faces in addressing GBV in South Africa. Given the nature of this study, secondary data sources provided the primary information, including government gazettes, publications, periodicals, and other pertinent records. These sources were examined through content and context analysis, allowing researchers to distill relevant insights from the data collected.

Gender-Based Violence in South Africa

² Bloom, *Violence against Women and Girls: A Compendium of Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators*.

³ Sabelinah Tshoane et al., "Domestic Violence against Men: Unmuting the Reality of the Forgotten Gender," *Cogent Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (December 31, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2304990>.

⁴ Amanda Gouws, "Rape Is Endemic in South Africa. Why the ANC Government Keeps Missing the Mark," *The Conversation* 4 (2022).

⁵ South African Government, "Minister Bheki Cele: Second Quarter Crime Statistics 2023/2024," 2023; J. Felix, "SA Crime Stats: Nearly 7000 People Murdered, 13000 Sexually Assaulted in the Last Three Months," *News24*, November 17, 2023.

⁶ Statistics South Africa, "P0318 - General Household Survey (GHS), 2022. Republic of South Africa," 2023, https://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1856&PPN=P0318&SCH=73619.

⁷ "Emergency Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide," October 2019.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, President Cyril Ramaphosa described GBV as a "second pandemic"⁸ and reports indicate that instances of GBV increased as victims found it increasingly difficult to escape their abusers.⁹ The World Bank describes GBV as pervasive in South Africa, deeply entrenched in family settings, workplaces, and cultural practices.¹⁰ GBV is not a severe issue in only South Africa. It is also a global phenomenon affecting numerous other nations.¹¹ According to a 2012 study by Gender Links, the prevalence of GBV among women in South Africa varies by region, with 77% of women in Limpopo, 51% in Gauteng, 45% in the Western Cape, and 36% in KwaZulu-Natal having experienced some form of GBV. Although male victims of GBV are less frequently acknowledged, Statista reports that 8,294 men were affected by GBV in South Africa in 2023.¹² Furthermore, data from Gitnux Market Data Reports (2023) reveal that more than half of male victims do not report GBV incidents and those who do often face neglect, exclusion, and stigmatization. In 2023, about 34% of reported assaults on men were attributed to gender-based violence.

Globally, violence against women manifests in various forms, including incidents targeting women at public events in the United Kingdom, abuses related to public defecation in Bangladesh, assaults on female university students in Norway, and cases of female genital mutilation across numerous countries.¹³ The World Bank further estimates that, in some nations, violence against women can result in economic costs of up to 3.7% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), exceeding the budget allocations for education in many of these countries.¹⁴

This emphasizes the need to engage and educate men through discussions and educational programs to alleviate the widespread issue of GBV.¹⁵ Tshoane argues that by cultivating an equitable viewpoint, societies can progress toward a comprehensive comprehension of GBV, promoting cooperation and enacting strategies that tackle the intricate aspects of this challenging issue.¹⁶ Despite Police Minister Bheki Cele's call for law enforcement officers to give precedence to GBV cases over the festive season (20, December 2021), the Tears Foundation still recorded over 43,000 calls from victims of gender-based violence during the festive period of 2020. These calls reflect instances in which women bravely sought assistance. However, there may still be undisclosed cases that the organization cannot reach, as some women might be reluctant to acknowledge their victimization due to fear or other circumstances.¹⁷

South Africa remains a nation deeply affected by violence, grappling with the long-standing consequences of institutionalized racism, sexism, exclusion, structural violence, and other social issues that have hindered human development and social cohesion.¹⁸ The country has witnessed numerous high-profile cases of GBV, such as the 2013 assault and murder of 17-year-old Anene Booysen in Bredasdorp (September 2013), the 2017 discovery of 22-year-old Karabo Mokoena's burned body in Johannesburg,¹⁹ and the 2019 murder of 19-year-old university student Uyinene Mrwetyana at a post office in Cape Town.²⁰ These events, alongside the brutal killing of 28-year-old Tshogofatso Pule in 2020, who was eight months pregnant,²¹ and the 2021 murder of 23-year-old Nosiselo Mtebeni, whose

⁸ Africa Health Organisation. Gender-based violence fact sheet: South Africa.(2021). <https://aho.org/fact-sheets/gender-based-violence-fact-sheet/>

⁹ Eyewitness News. 'It just got worse': Domestic violence surges under SA lockdown. 29 April, 2020.

¹⁰ World Bank, "Gender-Based Violence (Violence Against Women and Girls)," *IBRD. IDA*, September 25, 2019.

¹¹ Eyewitness News. 'It just got worse': Domestic violence surges under SA lockdown.

¹² Sabelinah Tshoane et al., "The Inadequacies of the South African Criminal Justice System against Male Victims of Domestic Abuse," *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development* 16, no. 06 (2023): 21–34.

¹³ DFID Afghanistan, "Operational Plan 2011–2015," 2012, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/afghanistan>.

¹⁴ World Bank Brief, "Gender-Based Violence (Violence against Women and Girls)."

¹⁵ Oxfam International, "Towards Ending Violence against Women in South Asia," *Oxfam Briefing Paper No. 66*. (London: Oxfam, 2004); Nancy Felipe Russo and Angela Pirlott, "Gender-based Violence: Concepts, Methods, and Findings," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1087, no. 1 (2006): 178–205.

¹⁶ Tshoane et al., "The Inadequacies of the South African Criminal Justice System against Male Victims of Domestic Abuse."

¹⁷ TEARS Foundation, "Perceptions About GBV Prevention And Intervention Among Employees In South Africa," Johannesburg: TEARS Foundation, 2024, <https://tears.co.za/>.

¹⁸ "Emergency Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide."

¹⁹ A. Saba, "Horror Details of Karabo Mokoena's Gruesome Murder Emerge," *Sunday Times*, May 14, 2017.

²⁰ B. Adebayo, "A Post Office Worker Was given Three Life Sentences for Raping and Murdering a Student. Now South African Women Are Saying Enough" (South Africa: CNN, November 15, 2019).

²¹ N. Seleka, "JusticeforTshogo: Her Death 'Hurts the Family' – Uncle of Murdered Pregnant Gauteng Woman," *News24*, June 9, 2020.

body was found in a suitcase,²² left the nation in shock and highlighted the severity of GBV. However, these represent only a fraction of the incidents that continue to affect the country. In the second quarter of the 2023/2024 crime statistics report, Police Minister Bheki Cele shared that in July, August, and September alone, South Africa recorded 10,516 rapes, 1,514 attempted murders, and 14,401 assaults against women, with 881 women murdered during this period.²³ According to the 2018 Global Peace Index, South Africa ranks among the world's most violent nations, with one of the highest murder rates outside war zones.

Causes of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa

South Africa has recently faced particularly high levels of GBV, even though it is often seen as a model of a peaceful transition to democratic governance after apartheid. Many scholars suggest that South Africa experiences some of the world's highest rates of violence outside of war settings.²⁴ GBV manifests across various sectors of society, including educational institutions. Domestic violence commonly begins when one partner seeks control over the other, often due to factors such as low self-esteem, jealousy, anger regulation issues, or feelings of inferiority in educational or socioeconomic status. Alcohol abuse is a significant trigger for domestic violence; Buddy notes that individuals under the influence may lack impulse control, become easily frustrated, and often turn to violence as a means of coping.²⁵ Additionally, mental health challenges can contribute to violent behavior in domestic settings, with Szalavitz highlighting certain psychological issues that increase the risk of abuse toward women.²⁶ South Africa's entrenched gender inequality and strong patriarchal norms also contribute to GBV, creating conditions where violence against women becomes more prevalent.²⁷

Gender-Based Violence during Festive Occasions

Various factors contribute to the increase in GBV during the holiday season. Increase in social activities and gatherings heightens tensions and conflicts within relationships.²⁸ These factors exacerbate the prevalence of GBV during the festive season. Firstly, the upsurge in alcohol consumption, coupled with societal norms that endorse toxic masculinity, creates an environment conducive to aggressive behavior and heightened violence against women. Secondly, the financial pressures and societal expectations associated with the holidays contribute to elevated stress levels, exacerbating pre-existing conflicts within intimate relationships and increasing the likelihood of GBV incidents. Lastly, the convergence of families during the festive season acts as a potential trigger for GBV, with strained relationships, unresolved conflicts, and rigid gender roles that can lead to an increase in violence within households. The above-mentioned highlights the multifaceted dynamics influencing the escalation of GBV during the holiday season, emphasizing the importance of understanding and addressing these factors to develop effective preventative measures and support systems.

As an exemplification of the severity of such incidents, a tragic occurrence took place on December 25, 2021, in Limpopo, where a man fatally shot seven family members, including four children.²⁹ On December 1, 2023, in Hawaii Village near Bhukhanana outside Empangeni, situated to the north of KwaZulu Natal, Nomvula Zulu, a woman aged 30, was shot and killed instantly. Tragically, her younger sister, Noluthando, aged 20, succumbed to her injuries a few days later at Ngwelezane

²² M. Dayimani, "Murdered Law Student Wanted to Be a Constitutional Court Judge," *News24*, August 20, 2021.

²³ South African Government, "Minister Bheki Cele: Second Quarter Crime Statistics 2023/2024"; Felix, "SA Crime Stats: Nearly 7000 People Murdered, 13000 Sexually Assaulted in the Last Three Months."

²⁴ D. Peacock, "Engaging Men and Boys in Efforts to End Gender-Based Violence in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings," in *When Men Stop Fighting: Masculinities in Post-Conflict Societies Conference* (Vienna: Austria, 2012).

²⁵ Buddy T., "Domestic Abuse and Alcohol," 2014, <http://alcoholism.about.com/cs/abuse/a/aa990331.htm>.

²⁶ M. Szalavitz, "Mental Illness Increases Risk of Being Homicide Victim," 2013, <http://healthland.time.com/2013/03/07/mental-illness-increases-risk-ofbeing-homicide-victim/>.

²⁷ A.P. Viitanen and C. J. Colvin, "Lessons Learned: Program Messaging in Gender-Transformative Work with Men and Boys in South Africa," *Global Health Action* 8, 2015, [womenforchange.org](http://www.womenforchange.org).

²⁸ Eyewitness News. 'It just got worse': Domestic violence surges under SA lockdown.

²⁹ C. Ryan, "Gender-Based Violence," December 2021, <https://www.skillsportal.co.za/content/police-must-prioritise-gbv-cases-festive-season-cele>.

Hospital Philani.³⁰ On December 25, 2023, Roselyn Katlego Mutavhatsindi, a police officer stationed at Roslyn Pop SAPS, was reportedly shot and killed by her husband in Winterveld. Both individuals were serving as police officers at the same station. Subsequent police investigations led to the conclusion that the husband fatally shot Katlego before turning the gun on himself. On Friday, November 24, 2023, a 23-year-old man was fatally stabbed at a tavern in Nobody, within the Mankweng policing area. Preliminary investigations by police revealed that the victim had been stabbed and killed by a male suspect known to them, and the incident occurred within the premises of a tavern.

Between 2018 and 2019, South Africa increasingly recognized the crisis of gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF), understanding its profound impact on survivors, children, families, communities, and society at large.³¹ In 2023, the Tears Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to assisting GBV victims, revealed a concerning statistic indicating approximately 43,000 calls from GBV victims during the festive season alone. According to Mara Glennie, the Founder and CEO of the TEARS Foundation, a national, survivor-centered service providing free assistance, during the previous year's (2022) festive season, they received an overwhelming 42,962 calls for help related to gender-based violence. This marked a 57% increase from November 2020 and a 117% increase from October 2020. Most of these calls to the TEARS Foundation during the festive season were associated with issues of domestic violence and sexual assault.

The holiday season presents challenges in accessing crucial support services, as resources such as shelters and counseling facilities may operate with limited staff or limited hours. This scenario underscores the need for greater awareness of available resources and sustained accessibility throughout the festive period to ensure that women facing GBV can seek assistance effectively.

Consequences of Gender-Based Violence during Festive Occasions

The impact of GBV during the festive season is extensive and severe, affecting individuals and society in general. Ott emphasizes that GBV can have serious physical, psychological, economic, and social consequences.³² Physical outcomes include unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Survivors often experience isolation and depression, with the effects of GBV affecting their ability to achieve economic potential due to trauma and stigma.³³ South Africa's long-standing issues with violence have fostered a "culture of violence" that permeates its social and cultural frameworks, shaping the country's gender violence landscape. This violence against women includes, but is not limited to, physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, such as domestic battery, sexual assault, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation, and other harmful traditional practices.³⁴ Additionally, certain factors, including age, disability, and poverty, heighten women's vulnerability to specific types of violence.³⁵

Strategies introduced to combat Gender-Based Violence and Femicide related crimes in South Africa

South Africa has established various frameworks and support mechanisms to address GBV, including the Constitution, the National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, and the 24/7 helpline provided by the Gender-Based Violence Command Centre.³⁶ The Department of Social Development collaborates with

³⁰ Ryan, "Gender-Based Violence."

³¹ Statistics South Africa (STATS SA), "General Household Survey," 2019.

³² M. Ott, "Series: What Does That Mean? Gender-Based Violence. Women-for-Women International," 2017, <https://www.womenforwomen.org/blogs/series-what-does-meangender-based-violence>.

³³ Andrew Osehi Enaifoghe, "Gender Based Violence and the Global Gendered Viewpoint Approaches to Building a Peaceful South Africa," *Journal of Social and Development Sciences* 10, no. 2 (S) (2019): 15–25.

³⁴ Enaifoghe, "Gender Based Violence and the Global Gendered Viewpoint Approaches to Building a Peaceful South Africa."

³⁵ World Health Organization, *World Health Statistics 2016 [OP]: Monitoring Health for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* (World Health Organization, 2016).

³⁶ "Constitution of the Republic of South Africa," Pub. L. No. Section 7-39, Bill of Rights (1996),

<https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b5de4.html>; J.D. Mujuzi, *Diversion in the South African Criminal Justice System: Emerging Jurisprudence* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2022); Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, "The South African Constitution," 2021, <https://www.justice.gov.za/constitution/index.html>.

civil society and other partners to enhance GBV services and reduce societal acceptance of violence against women and girls.³⁷

In 2022, President Ramaphosa signed into law three bills aimed at strengthening justice for GBV victims,³⁸ while the South African Police Service adopted a policy to reduce barriers to reporting sexual and domestic violence.³⁹

The South African government's approach to addressing gender-based violence GBV and femicide is comprehensive and is detailed in the National Strategic Plan for GBVF, launched in 2020. This plan has introduced substantial reforms, including changes to the legal system, the provision of evidence kits at police stations to support survivors, and improved access to psychological and social services. Another major initiative under this plan is the GBVF Response Fund, which channels resources toward combating GBV. In addition, the Thuthuzela and Khuseleka Care Centres have been strengthened to enhance support services for survivors. For the successful rollout of the six strategic pillars of this plan, including economic empowerment for women, an estimated R21 billion has been allocated over a medium-term period.⁴⁰

The National Strategic Plan (NSP) on GBVF is designed to coordinate the national response to GBV, based on the constitutional right of women to be free from violence. The NSP incorporates the 24 demands from the #TheTotalShutdown movement, the 2018 Presidential Summit Declaration on GBVF, and recommendations from the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation's (DPME) assessment of the state's response to violence against women and children. The plan also integrates feedback from the Department of Social Development's (DSD) review of the National Plan of Action, as well as the advocacy efforts of civil society groups through the Stop GBV NSP Campaign. Additionally, the NSP aligns with Priority Five, which focuses on Community Safety and Social Cohesion, providing a unified framework to help South Africa achieve key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG Targets 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 16.1 and 16.2.

The NSP acknowledges the importance of preventing GBV and is informed by the 2016 White Paper on Safety and Security, which outlines the overarching strategy for crime prevention and public safety. This policy, issued by the Civilian Secretariat for Police, emphasizes six priority themes, which the NSP further develops. The plan also considers the role of GBV prevention in achieving South Africa's seven priority areas for the coming five years: economic transformation and job creation, improved education and healthcare, quality public services, spatial integration, social cohesion, governance reform, and fostering a more stable and prosperous Africa.⁴¹

Creating a safer South Africa

South Africa's Safer Festive Season Operational Plan is a countrywide initiative implemented across all provinces to create a safer environment for all South African residents during the holiday season. The plan focuses on seven essential areas, including gender-based violence and femicide, severe and violent crime, border security, reinforcing by-laws, road safety, and illegal mining. It features an increase in police presence, regular roadblocks, stop and searches, and tracking down wanted suspects. Additionally, SAPS has introduced a service rating platform for the public to assess the service they receive from police stations throughout the country.⁴²

South Africa Launches Safer Festive Season Operations

On October 31, 2018, SAPS announced the launch of the annual National Safer Festive Season Operations for 2018/2019. South Africa has embarked on a nationwide effort to ensure a safer festive

³⁷ South African Government, "Minister Bheki Cele: Second Quarter Crime Statistics 2023/2024."

³⁸ South African Government News Agency, "Over 4, 000 Parolees Released to Make Social Distancing Possible," 2010, <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/over-4-000-parolees-released-make-social-distancing-possible>.

³⁹ S. Philip, SAPS steps up to help victims of gender-based violence. (2017). Civilian Secretariat for Police Service, Policy on reducing barriers to the reporting of sexual offences and domestic violence (2017).

⁴⁰ State of the Nation Address (SONA) by President Cyril Ramaphosa Cape Town City Hall 9 February 2023.

⁴¹ "Department of Women Beijing +25 South Africa's Progress Made on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action 2012 - 2019," n.d.

⁴² Amanda Keddie, "Gender Equality Reform and Police Organizations: A Social Justice Approach," *Gender, Work & Organization* 30, no. 3 (2023): 810–25.

season, involving increased deployment of police personnel and additional resources to effectively combat criminal activities. The SAPS has demonstrated a strong commitment to this initiative by conducting operations such as the seizure of counterfeit goods valued at R75 million and R200,000 in cash at a shopping center in Bellville, Cape Town. This operation signifies a more robust strategy in the ongoing fight against crime, with the primary goal of safeguarding the nation's citizens during the approaching festive season.⁴³

The Safer Festive Season Operational Plan, implemented in all provinces, prioritizes seven key areas, including GBVF, severe and violent crime, border security, reinforcement of by-laws, road safety, and illegal mining. The objective is to address these critical issues comprehensively and establish a safer environment for all residents of South Africa.⁴⁴

Police Minister General Bheki Cele emphasized the paramount importance of prioritizing safety and security during the bustling holiday season, stating, "We are not going to co-govern with criminals. We are going toe-to-toe with them; our priority is the safety and security of all the inhabitants of this country and their property." To ensure a more potent response to crime, the police are intensifying efforts by implementing regular roadblocks, conducting stop-and-search operations, and actively pursuing wanted suspects.⁴⁵

Community involvement is of significant importance in the Safer Festive Season operations, serving as a cornerstone of collaborative efforts between the police and the communities they safeguard. The increased police presence, reinforced resources, and strategic initiatives, such as roadblocks and stop-and-search operations, demonstrate the commitment to ensuring public safety during the festive period. Moreover, the introduction of the "Rate My Service" online platform by SAPS underscores a proactive approach to engaging the community in evaluating the performance of local police stations. This service rating platform allows users from within South Africa's borders to provide feedback through a predefined questionnaire, offering an opportunity for the public to share their experiences with SAPS. The accessibility of the platform to everyone encourages citizens to actively participate in shaping and enhancing service delivery, fostering a stronger relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve. Additionally, there is a need for a symbiotic relationship between community involvement, policy initiatives, and technological tools to create a safer and more collaborative festive season environment.⁴⁶

The Safer Festive Season Operational Plan aims to ensure a secure environment for South African residents during the holiday season, focusing on critical areas such as gender-based violence, severe crime, border security, by-law reinforcement, road safety, illegal mining, and cybercrime. In the Western Cape, the police force has been reinforced with thirty-six vehicles to increase visibility in areas affected by gang-related homicides, facilitating crime prevention through enhanced patrols.⁴⁷

This operational plan is significant, as it represents a crucial initiative to protect the well-being and security of South Africa's citizens during the holiday season. The increased law enforcement presence, allocation of additional resources, and targeted attention to key areas underscore a dedicated commitment to addressing crime and building a more secure nation. The implementation of an online service rating platform further aims to enhance transparency and responsible communication between SAPS and the communities they serve.⁴⁸ Police Minister Bheki Cele strongly condemned the abuse of women and children during an address in Port Elizabeth, aligning with Cabinet-approved programs for comprehensive implementation of funded initiatives outlined in the GBVF National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2020-2030. The NSP serves as a coordinated framework to address GBV at the national level. Minister Cele, dissatisfied with the crime situation in the Eastern Cape during a Safer Festive Season inspection tour, emphasized the crucial role of the police in restoring community respect, instilling fear among

⁴³ South African Police Service, 2017/18 Annual Report. (Pretoria. South African Police Service, 2018) 30-385 https://www.saps.gov.za/about/stratframework/annualreports_arch.php. Accessed 18/10/2024.

⁴⁴ South African Police Service, 2017/18 Annual Report.

⁴⁵ South African Police Service, 2017/18 Annual Report.

⁴⁶ South African Police Service, 2017/18 Annual Report.

⁴⁷ South African Police Service, 2017/18 Annual Report.

⁴⁸ South African Police Service, 2017/18 Annual Report.

criminals, and ensuring safety for law-abiding citizens. This visit is a vital part of the South African Police Service's broader efforts to combat crime during the festive season.⁴⁹

The Challenge of Law Enforcement

Despite significant progress in legal reforms and visible political commitment, GBVF remain alarmingly prevalent in South Africa.⁵⁰ Women aged 20 to 39 are particularly vulnerable, with this age group experiencing some of the highest GBV-related murder rates.⁵¹ The National Gender-Based Violence Command Centre has also reported a worrying increase in cases, citing a threefold rise in calls, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, when complaints surged to 2,320 within the first week—a 37% jump over the weekly domestic violence cases recorded in 2019, according to Police Minister Bheki Cele.⁵²

While efforts to address GBVF are undeniable, sustained community engagement is critical to change. At a recent United Nations review in Geneva, South Africa was questioned on issues like femicide and corruption, with the Human Rights Council urging the country to accelerate anti-corruption initiatives to safeguard GBV-related funds.⁵³ As noted by the European Institute for Gender Equality, GBV is deeply rooted in gender inequality and is a widespread human rights violation affecting both women and men.⁵⁴

During the past ten years, South Africa has significantly increased its budget for the criminal justice system, rising from R46.6 billion in 2005/6 to R126.71 billion today.⁵⁵ The South African Police Service (SAPS), the largest recipient, saw a 139.1% funding boost, largely aimed at workforce expansion to address public concerns about crime. The SAPS expanded by more than 68,000 posts between 2002/03 and 2011/12, reaching around 200,000 personnel by 2016/17. Researcher David Bruce highlighted that while this recruitment drive promoted racial balance and contributed to the growth of a black middle class within the SAPS, it did not necessarily improve policing outcomes, as rapid recruitment strained training systems, prioritizing quantity over quality.

Despite increased spending on the criminal justice system, violent crime rates have not significantly decreased. This is attributed to the system's reactive nature, intervening after crimes occur. Although effective policing can reduce certain types of crime, such as armed robbery, addressing interpersonal violence requires initiative-taking strategies. While the criminal justice system has made strides in its constitutional duty to address violence against women, the focus has remained on criminal justice solutions, which primarily respond to incidents rather than prevent them.

The Way Forward

Current efforts are commendable, especially through legal channels, policing, and support programs for victims and offenders. However, a shift from addressing the aftereffects of GBV to preventing it is necessary. Prevention strategies should address the underlying causes of GBV and include educational programs that encourage a societal shift against violence. This broader focus on prevention will lead to more sustainable reductions in violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the study suggests the strengthening of alcohol regulation policies, by implementing stricter regulations on alcohol sales and consumption, particularly during festive seasons, to address its role as a contributing factor to GBV. This could include limiting operating hours for alcohol

⁴⁹ South African Police Service, 2017/18 Annual Report.

⁵⁰ Tshoane et al., "The Inadequacies of the South African Criminal Justice System against Male Victims of Domestic Abuse."

⁵¹ Eunice Masson, "South African Police Are Failing Victims of Gender-Based Violence, Report Shows," Mail&Guardian, July 2022, <https://mg.co.za/news/2022-07-13-south-african-police-are-failing-victims-of-gender-based-violence-report-shows/#:~:text=South African police stations are,analysing DNA is often prolonged.>

⁵² Z Pikoli, "Is Gender Based Violence Not a Serious and Violent Crime, Minister Cele," *Maverick Citizen*, 2020.

⁵³ Marko Phiri, South Africa grilled by UN on Xenophobia, Femicide and Corruption, *Mail & Guardian National*, 17 November 2022.

⁵⁴ European Commission, 2019 Report on Equality between Women and Men in the EU. (2019a). [https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f3dd1274-7788-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1/.](https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f3dd1274-7788-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1/)

⁵⁵ National Treasury, "Budget Review" (Pretoria, 2005), [http://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/national_budget/2005/review/Chapter1.pdf.](http://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/national_budget/2005/review/Chapter1.pdf)

vendors and increasing excise taxes on alcoholic beverages. Conduct community-based awareness campaigns that emphasize the link between excessive alcohol consumption and GBV. These campaigns should target both urban and rural areas and involve collaboration with local leaders and organizations.

The government must provide law enforcement officials with specialized training focused on handling GBV cases more effectively, including those linked to alcohol-induced situations. This training should include conflict resolution skills and victim-centered approaches. Expand the availability of support services, such as hotlines and shelters which are inclusive of all genders, during the festive period when GBV incidents are more likely to rise. Ensure these services are accessible and well-publicised.

It is also recommended that the government should encourage the use of festive bonuses for constructive purposes through financial literacy programs and community initiatives. Promote family-oriented and alcohol-free events to reduce exposure to risky environments. Establish a national monitoring system to track the relationship between alcohol consumption and GBV rates over time. Use these data to inform policy decisions and measure the effectiveness of interventions. By addressing the underlying factors contributing to GBV, such as alcohol overconsumption, these recommendations aim to mitigate its prevalence and foster safer communities.

CONCLUSION

Using an inductive textual content analysis, this study sought to investigate the challenges law enforcement encounters in policing Gender-Based Violence crimes during festivities. Despite the implementation of legislation, policies, and acts by the Republic of South Africa aimed at addressing GBV, this study reveals that the country continues to experience alarmingly high rates of GBV, which tend to escalate during festive seasons. While law enforcement officials undergo training to address GBV throughout the year, the findings indicate that, despite GBV being declared a pandemic in South Africa, the training provided appears insufficient to effectively combat the issue. The findings indicate that GBV tends to increase during festive seasons, potentially due to extended periods spent at home because of widespread company closures during this time. The distribution of bonuses during the festive season, which can lead to excessive alcohol consumption and visits to new or unfamiliar places and environments, emerges as a contributing factor in the escalation of GBV incidents in some cases.

The study indicates that the persistently high rates of GBV are linked to underlying factors, such as excessive alcohol consumption. South Africa ranks among the countries with the highest rates of alcohol consumption globally, and alcohol consumption per capita has increased over the past decade.

GBV is a societal issue with far-reaching negative impacts, not only on individuals' lives but also on the economy. Therefore, it requires a multisectoral approach, involving all relevant stakeholders to address the surge of GBV incidents during festive seasons and to combat the problem year-round. A comprehensive strategy should involve collaboration between community members and law enforcement agencies to ensure prompt reporting of GBV cases and to help identify perpetrators.

Furthermore, although women and children are the most common victims of GBV, it is essential to educate society that GBV affects all individuals, regardless of gender. Accountability should be enforced consistently, ensuring that all perpetrators face consequences, irrespective of their gender. Emphasizing and implementing a framework of accountability and prosecution for GBV offenders is crucial to achieving justice and reducing the incidence of GBV.

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