

## Thematic content analysis of lockdown and domestic violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic in South Africa

 Dillo Justin Ramoshaba <sup>(a)\*</sup>  Theminkosi Peter Singwane <sup>(b)</sup>



<sup>(a,b)</sup> Lecturer, University of Limpopo, Department of Social Work, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa

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### ABSTRACT

South Africa has been battling the scourge of the COVID-19 Pandemic which has negatively affected many individuals and families. The South African government imposed a national lockdown to mitigate the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the lockdown also brought more challenges such as increased violence cases. Against this background, this study sought to analyse the COVID-19 lockdown and domestic violence in South Africa. A non-empirical research design was used where documents from search engines such as Google scholar, EBSCOhost and ProQuest were sampled and reviewed using keywords and phrases related to COVID-19, lockdown and domestic violence to filter relevant data, restricted to 2002-2022. The inductive Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was used to analyze the collected data. Findings reveal that the South African Lockdown has contributed to the rise of domestic violence cases during the COVID-19 pandemic. Results further indicate that victims of domestic violence face psychosocial challenges due to domestic violence. Programs that are aimed at creating awareness and empowering victims of domestic violence are recommended by this study. It is further recommended that policies protecting citizens against domestic violence be reviewed and strengthened.

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## Introduction

In March 2020, the World Health Organization [WHO] categorized the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic, resulting in government officials implementing restrictions such as lockdowns and restrictive social distancing policies to reduce the spread of the virus (WHO, 2020). This was inevitable for the South African government. On the night of the 23rd of March 2020, the South African government announced a 21-day national lockdown known as “Alert level 5” to come into effect from 26 March to 16 April 2020. The implementation of the Lockdown in South Africa created fear of increased domestic violence cases in some individuals (Joska et al., 2020). In the same breath, several studies show that upon the implementation of the lockdown, multiple organizations reported to the media that they were experiencing an increase in the number of people seeking help for domestic violence, compared to the same period in the previous year (Beggin, 2020; Graham-Harrison, Giuffrida, Smith, & Ford, 2020; Taub, 2020). There is less literature on the impact of the South African lockdown on domestic violence. It is from this background that the researchers developed a hunch to analyse the impact of the South African National Lockdown on domestic violence in South Africa.

This study adopted the non-empirical research method wherein existing literature was reviewed. The researchers reviewed and analysed documents on the South African national lockdown and domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. A narrative literature review was adopted as a research design due to its ability to identify and synthesize different books and journal articles about a chosen topic (Bruce et al., 2016). Considering this, researchers gathered secondary data from various journals using a purposive sampling technique since there are promenade papers on the impact of the South African National lockdown on domestic violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic. This secondary data was sourced from research engines such as Google scholar, EBSCOhost and ProQuest that focused on the topic in question. For purposes of relevancy, data collection was restricted to the years

\* Corresponding author. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6961-1972

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2002 to 2022 and the data collection was determined by data saturation (Maluleke, 2020; and Mokwena & Maluleke, 2020). The use of secondary data was motivated by Creswell (2014) who avows that researchers may collect data from qualitative documents such as accredited journals, internet sources and public documents. Furthermore, Matthews and Ross (2010) confirm that collected data can be qualitative in nature, for example, it may allow the researcher to determine the ideas that are expressed in a document or the underlying approach of a document. Moreover, the search was limited to work on the impact of the national lockdown on domestic violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The data was analysed thematically using inductive Thematic Content Analysis (TCA). This method allowed the researchers to identify, analyse and report patterns within the data set, allowing for the descriptive organisation of the data in a way that facilitates the interpretation of various aspects as O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) avers.

The following sections will cover the review of literature, the application of the theory underpinning the study, findings and discussions, conclusion and recommendations are also provided.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The overview of Violence in South Africa**

South Africa is ranked as one of the countries with high rates of domestic violence in the world (Dartnall & Jewkes, 2013). Much of the violence in South Africa is perpetrated by criminals. However, many violent incidents happen in the home and are perpetrated by family members on family members, including children (Davies & Dreyer, 2014). Research shows that the problem of domestic violence in South Africa persists despite the current strategies aimed at addressing it (Jewkes & Morrell, 2018). According to, Osamor & Grady (2016) some women in South Africa reported experiencing domestic violence from their intimate partners. The researchers view this challenge as being caused by a lot of factors such as historical background and the environment that one stays in. This is in line with the studies that acknowledged the role of apartheid in influencing black men's violence in South Africa (Clark, 2012; Morrell et al., 2012; Ratele, 2015). According to Morrell et al. (2012), apartheid was a political and social system which enforced racial discrimination against black people during the era of white minority rule in South Africa. However, the researchers believe that this does not imply that all the violence experienced in South Africa is a result of apartheid. Victims of Domestic of domestic violence face several challenges that may range from anxiety to depression. This is supported by Hossain, Pearson, McAlpine, Bacchus, Spangaro, Muthuri, Muuo, Franchi, Hess, Bangha and Izugbara (2021) who posit that domestic violence is linked to many poor health outcomes including long-term mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression. Victims of domestic violence can face more challenges such as being unable to go to work (Haj-Yahia et al., 2021). McCloskey (2016) avers that teenagers who are victims of sexual violence are likely to face challenges such as rapid repeat pregnancies during adolescence. The researchers view the effects of sexual violence as adverse since they can surface with more challenges such as sexually transmitted infections. This is in line with Wekerle, Goldstein, Tanaka and Tonmyr (2017) who found that sexual victimization results in more various sexual risk behaviours and negative sexual health outcomes. The effects of domestic violence disrupt the social lives of victims and make them suffer emotionally (Collins & Culbertson, 2013). Some individuals suffer from traumatic experiences of domestic violence which result in mental health problems (Lutwak, 2018).

### **Theoretical Framework Applications (Routine Activities Theory (RAT))**

Routine activity theory focuses on the role of people's activities and how these create crime opportunities by influencing the likelihood that a motivated offender will encounter a suitable target absent a capable guardian. This provided lenses for the researchers to understand how lockdown brought victims of violence closer to abusers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, routine activities were disrupted at the individual and collective levels. This is supported by Nivette et al., (2021) who posit that restrictions on movement were imposed in many countries and that many organizations required their staff to work from home than in offices (International Labour Organization, 2020). Studies show that routine activity patterns increased and decreased crime opportunities either by reducing the likelihood that offenders would encounter suitable targets or by increasing the amount of time people would spend at home and hence provide guardianship there (Ashby, 2020; Stickle and Felson 2020). In addition, Ashby (2020) examined changes to crimes such as assault. This study used Routine Activities Theory (RAT) to analyse the pitfalls of lockdown on Domestic Violence. Research inspired by the Routine Activities Theory has consistently shown that criminal victimisation is not randomly distributed in society but rather is associated with the lifestyles and daily routines of individuals as well as their demographics (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2003). This allowed the researchers to understand how the lockdown impacted domestic violence. Jackson, Gilliland and Veneziano (2006), explained that routine activity theories suggest that people's lifestyles or behaviour patterns increase their vulnerability to victimization by increasing their contact with potential offenders or by providing them with the opportunity to offend by increasing their contact with potential victims.

Through the lenses of this theory, the researchers were able to understand how the confinement of victims and their perpetrators at home increased the chances of violence by the perpetrators. It was understood that staying at home with perpetrators increased the vulnerability of domestic Violence Victims. This is in line with the research inspired by RAT that has consistently shown that criminal victimisations are not randomly distributed in society but are rather associated with the lifestyles and daily routines of individuals as well as with demographics (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2003). The authors further believe that when potential offenders meet their suitable targets without protection they strike. This theory allowed the researchers to fathom the vulnerability of domestic violence victims during the lockdown.

## Findings and Discussions

The researchers in this section present the findings that are dissected with the aid of the theoretical framework. From reviewing the literature, the following themes emerged; Lockdown and violence in South Africa, Home confinement and COVID-19, Alcohol use during COVID-19 lockdown, Mental health, and COVID-19.

### Lockdown and Domestic Violence in South Africa

According to Kamenetz, Treviño, and Bakeman (2020), during lockdown there was a 22% increase of rape and abuse cases. Kamenetz et al further avers that most of the minors who called hotlines for help reported that their perpetrator was a family member and some reported that they were currently living with that perpetrator. It was also found that there has been increase in mental health and suicide cases during the time period of many stay-at-home orders (Goodman, 2020; Jackson, 2020). According to Roesch, Amin, Gupta and García-Moreno (2020), cases of domestic violence increase during humanitarian crises such as pandemics. This was not exceptional with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The cases of domestic violence took a hike during the South African Lockdown due to several factors such as people being forced to be confined to their respective homes. This is supported by Mittal and Singh (2020) who found that factors such as alcohol consumption have contributed to a rise in the number of domestic violence cases during the South African lockdown. In the same breath, Roesch et.al (2020) found that cases of intimate partner violence which exposed some children to violent activities became more visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. Leslie and Wilson (2020) conducted a study in 14 different cities and found that there was approximately a 10% increase in domestic violence cases during the lockdown. This demonstrates that the impact of the pandemic on family stability and functioning was unfortunate. It further shows that the lives of many men, women and children were negatively affected by the pandemic and the lockdown. The researchers are of the view that although domestic violence has been a crisis in South Africa, the situation worsened during the COVID-19 lockdown. This is supported by Mohler et al., (2020) and Piquero et al., (2021) who revealed that the increase in the cases of domestic violence cases was as a result of the lockdown. However, we must not forget that when several governments including the South African government-imposed lockdown, the rationale was to help save lives and curb the spread of COVID-19 (WHO, 2020). The researchers concur with the view that the implementation of the South African lockdown has also negatively affected the lives of many individuals. However, the researchers are also cognisant of the possibility that more problems such as the stress of dealing with the loss of income and employment and having to be confined at home might have also contributed to the rise of domestic violence. This is in line with the studies that found that as a result of the national lockdown, many incomes and jobs were lost which created more problems such as mental health issues and domestic violence (Aushian & Abuya, 2020; Rahman & Matin, 2020; Sumner, Hoy, & Ortiz-Juarez, 2020). On the same wavelength, the rise of domestic violence cases as a result of the lockdown has contributed to a rise in the cases of mental health (Fetzer, Witte, Hensel, Jachimowicz, Haushofer et al., 2020). The researchers are of the view that the impact of the lockdown on domestic violence cases has surfaced with more challenges that may be long-term challenges. In the same breath, Settersten et al., (2020) posit that the health and well-being of people was negatively affected by the lockdown and the effects have got the potential of being long term.

### Home Confinement and COVID-19

In a study by Roesch et al., (2020), it was found that cases of intimate partner violence became more visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tisane (2020) avers that, restrictions on movement during lockdown led to some people being stuck at home with their abusive partners. This is supported by Mohler et al., (2020) and Piquero, Jennings, Jemison, Kaukinen and Knaul (2021) who revealed that the increase in the cases of domestic violence was as a result of the lockdown which forced people to be confined to their respective homes. The researcher is also cognisant of the possibility that more problems such as the stress of dealing with the loss of income and employment and having to be confined at home might have also contributed to the rise of domestic violence. This is in line with the studies that found that as a result of the national lockdown, many incomes and jobs were lost which created more problems such as mental health issues and domestic violence (Aushian & Abuya, 2020; Rahman & Matin, 2020; Sumner, Hoy, & Ortiz-Juarez, 2020). It must also be noted that the rise in domestic violence cases during the COVID-19 lockdown may suffice with more challenges. This is in line with Fetzer et al., (2020) who posit that the rise of domestic violence cases during the lockdown has also contributed to a rise in the cases of mental health. Moreover, we must not forget that when several governments including the South African Government imposed lockdown, the rationale was to help save lives and curb the spread of COVID-19 (WHO, 2020).

### Alcohol use and domestic violence during COVID-19 Lockdown

Mittal and Singh (2020) found that factors such as alcohol consumption have contributed to a rise in the number of domestic violence cases during the South African lockdown. Studies show that alcohol consumption at above moderate levels is significantly associated with the rising cases of domestic violence (Mpani, 2015; Mpani & Nsibande, 2015). South Africa is one of the countries with the highest level of alcohol consumption in the world, and the availability and sales of alcohol are one of the main contributors to domestic violence (Nduna & Tshona, 2021). During the COVID-19 lockdown there was a known ban of alcohol sales, however the respondents have indicated that their partners consumed alcohol during the lockdown which led to their abuse. This could mean that some citizens still managed to sell and buy alcohol despite the government restrictions being announced and implemented. This is supported by Tisane (2020) who avers that numerous places that sells alcohol and households in South Africa could not be monitored during the lockdown which led to the ban on alcohol sales not preventing people from consuming alcohol. It must also be noted that

the South African government during the course of the lockdown has eased some of the restrictions which led in alcohol being sold at regulated times at specific establishments (Matzopoulos, Walls, Cook & London, 2020).

### Mental Health and COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic raised concerns for mental health issues that will surface during and after the pandemic. Studies revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on the mental health of people globally and increase cases of issues such as depression and suicide (Zhang et al., 2020). Rubin and Wessely (2020) avow that the fear of the unknown circumstances that may surface from the COVID-19 pandemic led to anxiety in healthy individuals as well as those with pre-existing mental health conditions. Ornell, Schuch, Sordi and Kessler (2020) posit that people started being afraid of death, social isolation, and family organization as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fear can bring destructive outcomes in the lives of people. This is supported by Pedrosa, Bitencourt, Fróes, Cazumbá, Campos, de Brito and Simões e Silva (2020) who state that fear has several destructive outcomes such as being suicidal. According to Mamun and Ullah (2020) and Sher (2020), during the COVID-19 pandemic there have been numerous reports of worries of the mental health impact of the pandemic and suicidal behavior in individuals due to fear-related issues. It was also observed that anxiety was associated with stress and reduced sleep quality, and the combination of anxiety and stress reduced the positive effects of social capital on sleep quality (Xiao, Zhang, Kong, Li & Yang, 2020). Studies have also shown that both objective social isolation such as living alone are associated with mental health issues which causes suicidal ideation and behavior (Calati et al., 2019). This was also a challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic as people were expected to isolate.

### Conclusions

Lockdown has contributed to the rise in the cases of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. It must not be forgotten that lockdowns are necessary and important for the protection of citizens against pandemics such as COVID-19; however, as much as lockdowns are implemented for positive reasons, it can also be deduced that they also create more challenges such as increased cases of Violence. Mental health issues are found to be resulting as one of the effects of domestic violence. This serves an alarm about the deleterious effects of domestic violence on the lives of individuals. Thus, the well-being of Individuals who experience domestic violence gets negatively impacted.

It is against the above background that the following recommendations are presented in this study:

- i. Future research should focus more on developing ways of intensifying the protection of domestic violence victims during lockdowns.
- ii. Introduction of programs that create awareness and empower victims of domestic violence.
- iii. The review and strengthening of Policies that focus on protecting citizens against violence during lockdowns.

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