A conceptual framework of gender-based violence and femicide drivers in South Africa

Matolwandle M Mtowywa(a)*, Matsobane Ledwaba(b), Bekezela T Mambo(c), Zenani N Nkonzo(d), Rofhiwa Ntshagovhe(e), Azwihangwisi Negota(f)

(a) Director, Business and Social Research Institute, Centurion, 0157, South Africa
(b) Deputy Director, Gauteng Department: Community Safety, Johannesburg, 2000, South Africa
(c) Senior Researcher, Business and Social Research Institute, Centurion, 0157, South Africa
(d) Researcher, Business and Social Research Institute, Centurion, 0157, South Africa
(e) Deputy Director, Gauteng Department: Community Safety, Johannesburg, 2000, South Africa

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 19 May 2023
Accepted 15 July 2023

Keywords:
Gender-based violence, Drivers, Ecological system theory, South Africa.

JEL Classification:
J12, I31, I14.

ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) is a multifaceted complex phenomenon that needs urgent comprehensive attention in South Africa and other similarly or worse-off affected countries. Central to combating and eliminating GBVF starts with a systematic understanding of the drivers of GBVF. The research aims to develop a conceptual framework of drivers of gender-based violence and femicide, which can be applied to different GBVF improvement studies. The conceptual framework was developed using ecological system theory having 20 indicators relating to: microsystem – personal history and individual factors; mesosystem – interpersonal relationships; exosystem – community factors; macrosystem – societal factors; and chronosystem – significant changes over time. The framework interlinking these GBVF drivers allows for the diagnosis of the main drivers of GBVF and estimates its impact on the victims and their families. This, in turn, can help to combat and eliminate GBVF through moderation with GBVF policies and strategies. This study contributes to systematically demystifying of drivers of GBVF, especially in South Africa and similar African countries.

© 2023 by the authors. Licensee SSBFNET, Istanbul, Turkey. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Introduction

As reported by the World Health Organization (WHO) and other international bodies, gender-based violence (GBV) is a worldwide pandemic, with one in three women experiencing it during their lifetime (World Bank, 2019; World Health Organization, 2021; World Health Organization, 2022). This violence knows no boundaries as to geography, wealth, or culture. As long as it continues, no nation can claim to be making real progress toward development, equality and peace (Khatun & Rahman, 2012; Perrin et al., 2019). Based on inclusion for women and their access to justice and security, the worst countries in which to be a woman are Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Pakistan, Iraq, South Sudan, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Sierra Leone, while the best countries are mainly in Europe (Rodriguez, 2021). Several countries in the Middle East and North Africa also have a high prevalence of violence against women. In Egypt, for example, 25.6% of ever-partnered women aged 15-49 years have experienced intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. Similar trends are reported in parts of East Africa (UN Women, 2020). Although pervasive across the globe, some countries are less impacted than others, citing Papua New Guinea as a country with nearly zero violence against women (Heise et al., 2002). It is widely accepted that the cause of GBV cannot be attributed to one factor but to a combination of factors that influence a perpetrator’s life. This emanates from the power imbalance inherent in gender inequality and discriminatory patriarchal practices that often favour men over women. In South Africa, gender-based violence...
and femicide (GBVF) affects nearly every facet of society and is a major concern for government and citizens alike. Lifetime physical and/or sexual intimate partner and child marriages remain a considerable problem (Maluleke, 2012; UNICEF, 2022). The problem with gender-based violence and other sexual offences is evident from the crime statistics in South Africa reported for the second quarter of 2022, which showed a year-on-year increase of 11.0% in sexually related offences. The South African Police Services report attributes the increase to a 10.8% increase in rape, a 34.0% increase in attempted sexual offences and an 8.1% increase in sexual assault (South African Police Services, 2022).

The South African government understands the need for action against GBVF and has heeded the call to combat this problem and so, in 2018, set up structures such as the Presidential Summit on Gender-based Violence and Femicide with the most recent summit taking place in November 2022, (South African Presidency, 2022). As part of a comprehensive and systematic response to this profound and unacceptable problem that goes to the country’s fabric and threatens its future, the country developed a National Strategic Plan (NSP) on gender-based violence and femicide (Government of South Africa, 2020). Central to combating and eliminating GBVF starts with systematically understanding the drivers of GBVF (Bukuluki et al., 2013). This will ultimately help to design prevention and elimination strategies of GBVF. As such, the study aims to develop a conceptual framework of drivers of gender-based violence and femicide which can be applied to different GVBF improvement studies.

This article is structured as follows: After the introduction, there is a review of the relevant literature that includes both theoretical and empirical research developing the framework of drivers of gender-based violence and femicide, which includes the impact of drivers of GBVF on victims and families as well as moderating effect of GBVF policies and strategies. Following is the application of the framework. The last section of this paper highlights the conclusion with limitations of the study and future direction for research.

Conceptual framework of gender-based violence and femicide

To acquire an understanding of the drivers of GBVF, we focused on the origins and structures that profile such behaviour and draw on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory later revised as the bioecological theory of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1994) to organise our conceptual framework. Although focused on childhood development, the bioecological theory is relevant to the development of GBVF behaviour. It was intelligently applied by several authors in gender-based violence studies through the lens of their scope and focused their studies using all the elements (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem) or some of these elements (Heise, 1998; Nelson & Lund, 2017; Maclin, 2022). In a quest to decipher violence against women, Heise (1998) proposed using the multi-level, integrated ecological framework as a guide to understanding the origins of gender-based violence. The author argued that one factor is inadequate to explain this phenomenon and therefore proposes a frame grounded in the interplay among personal situational and sociocultural factors. Tendencies towards GBV are moulded by the individual, community, economic and cultural factors (WHO, 2002). These factors align with theory and framework development and contrast to early theories that attribute the source of violence to the influences of psychology, sociology and criminology or the ideological and political agents of feminist activists who placed the source of violence solely on patriarchy and male dominance (Johnson, 2006). We propose that the ecological systems theory offers appropriate lenses to stratify drivers of GBVF. Figure 1 provides the conceptual framework of 20 GBVF drivers, classified within various systems: the microsystem – personal history and individual factors, mesosystem – interpersonal relationship, exosystem – community factors, macrosystem – societal factors and chronosystem – significant changes over time.
Figure 1: Drivers of gender-based violence and femicide. Source: Authors

Understanding these drivers allows for diagnosing the main drivers of GBVF and its impact on the victims and family. This can help combat and eliminate the GBVF through moderation with GBVF policies and strategies.

**Microsystem – personal history and individual factors**

A microsystem focuses on personal history and individual factors, including upbringing violence, stereotypic role modelling and individual factors such as substance abuse, stress and depression, and childhood experience and trauma.

*Childhood experience and trauma*

The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) reported that experiencing violence as a child or growing up in a household that uses violence as a means of communication contributes towards violence becoming normalised for the individual in later life (CSVR, 2016). Such victims are often subjected to physical assault leading to bodily harm, contracting HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and the possibility of unwanted pregnancies leading to unsafe abortions (Enaifoghe et al., 2021). The trauma of GBV translates into psychological health instabilities such as depression, fear, low self-esteem, mental illness and suicidal thoughts or action and in extreme cases, femicide (Weil, 2016). Additionally, the victim will suffer from a change in socioeconomic perspective in the form of stigmatisation, isolation and decreased earnings leading to increased poverty (Enaifoghe et al., 2021).

*Psychosocial-related substance abuse*

Many communities continue to be victims of crime, violence and substance abuse, and gender-based violence continues at untenable levels (Department of Social Development, 2021). Substance abuse (drugs and alcohol) was also highlighted as a primary driver of GBVF (Jewkes et al., 2002) and is used as an excuse for their behaviour. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) (2022) lists other behaviour as unpredictability, a bad temper, cruelty to animals, blaming the victim for anything wrong that happens, and abuse of other family members, amongst others (NCADV, 2022). To escape from the stresses of poverty, men tend to transgress into alcoholism which in itself is a driver of domestic violence (Heise, 1998), supporting the link between alcohol use and GBV where alcohol plays a vital role in the perpetuation of gender violence and in coping with victimisation among women, including increased exposure to sexual coercion, rape and domestic abuse (Shiva et al., 2021). Alcohol is thought to reduce inhibitions, cloud judgment, and impair the ability to interpret social cues (Jewkes et al., 2002).

**Mesosystem – interpersonal relationships**

The microsystem represents the immediate context in which abuse takes place such as family or other intimate relationships that provides a conducive setting for sexual coercion, childhood sexual abuse and physical abuse towards women. Although absent in Heise’s model, the mesosystem proposed by Bronfenbrenner in 1994 plays a crucial role in developing GBV norms as it provides a connection between the individual and other individuals within his/her microsystem (Berk, 2000). These interactions involve family, friends, neighbours or church members. The rhetoric of these interactions is profound as, overtime; they normalise GBV via any relationship insecurities, including cheating and love triangles, power relations and dependency, normalised harmful acts/behaviour within the relationship, and peer associations and pressures.
Relationship insecurities, including cheating and love triangles

At a mesosystem level, instances of GBVF are driven by interpersonal relationship pathology between parties who are married or in a relationship and include jealousy, relationship insecurity, normalised harmful acts and behaviour such as forcing a partner into sexual intercourse and rape and entitlement (NCADV, 2022). Such perpetrators may display behaviour various forms of jealousy. Romantic jealousy is considered a complex combination of thoughts (i.e., cognitive jealousy), emotions (i.e., emotional jealousy), and behaviours (i.e., behavioral jealousy) that result from a perceived threat to one’s romantic relationship (Rodriguez et al., 2015). These authors added that cognitive jealousy represents a person’s rational or irrational thoughts, worries, and suspicions concerning a partner’s infidelity and that a positive correlation was found between cognitive jealousy causing anxious attachment and partner abuse (Rodriguez et al., 2015). Jealousy will lead to the abuser displaying elements of possessiveness and controlling behaviour towards their partner, beginning with being a concerned partner and gradually becoming controlling to an extent where the partner will isolate the victim from family/friends and getting upset over a partner forming friendships and emotional bonds with others (Pollard et al., 2022). To maintain this control, the abuser will seek to gain financial control over the victim (Postmus et al., 2015), thus limiting the movement and purchasing of the partner. The abuser will attack the psychological well-being of the victim by harassing, demeaning and resorting to verbal abuse. Cheating and love triangles are also a problem within the relationship. Love and violence have a symbiotic relationship in some communities in South Africa due to dominant social norms that contribute to the construction of love relationships and legitimises high levels of controlling behaviour and violence by men and tolerance of this behaviour by women (Stern et al., 2016).

Power relations and dependency

Heise (1998) postulated that households where the male is dominant and controls the economic means, together with episodes of alcohol abuse, are likely to produce a violent environment. The consequences of GBV are immense and have a ripple effect on the victim, in some cases, the perpetrator, the families and friends of both parties, the community at large and the economy. The victim will additionally suffer from a socioeconomic perspective in the form of stigmatisation, rejection, isolation and decreased earnings leading to increased poverty (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2016; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021; Enaifoghe et al., 2021). Stark (2007), later supported by Postmus et al. (2015), postulated the “Wheel” of domestic violence as tactics used by an abuser to maintain power and control over the victim using manoeuvres such as restricting finances, sexual coercion, physical violence, isolating the victim, preventing the victim from working, and name-calling, all examples of coercive control.

Normalised harmful acts and behaviour in relationship

South Africa has one of the highest rates of sexual violence globally. To appreciate the cause of rape, Jewkes et al. (2010) conducted a study in a sample of men aged 18-49 years from the general population of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Their finding on the perpetrator’s motivation includes having a sense of sexual entitlement over women or as an act of bored men seeking entertainment. Others in the study stated that they used rape as punishment against their girlfriends and other women, adding a lack of consequences for their actions and no remorse. The researchers concluded that this stems from an accentuated gender hierarchy in South Africa. Love and violence have a symbiotic relationship in some communities in South Africa due to dominant social norms that contribute to the construction of love relationships and legitimises high levels of controlling behaviour and violence by men and tolerance of this by women (Stern et al., 2016). Such behaviour is more amplified in informal and rural settlements (Willan et al., 2019). Hunter (2010) referred to two types of love: ‘provider-love’ rooted in men supporting women through ‘lobola’ or by giving money and gifts; and ‘romantic-love’, displayed through men showing affection and kindness and spending time with their partner. In both cases, the love is accompanied by violence towards the women with some believing that if he does not assault her, then he is having an affair and or has lost love for her. In such relationships, young women believe that gifts hold more than a monetary value, as they reflect a woman’s desirability and a man’s love, with these actions within love-relationships being significantly influenced by the desire to be loved, respected and supported, and by constructions of love relationships (Willan et al., 2019).

Peer association and pressures

Susman et al. (1994) posited that individuals are susceptible to peer pressure because they admire their peers and consider their ideas credible. This is common in society, within ‘friends’ and peers who either grew up, worked, socialised or went to church together. Because of this relationship, they share what is happening and seek advice. This advice sometimes perpetuates masculinity or dominance as the man. This results in peer pressure which can lead to GBV (David et al., 2018). This is a challenge considering that friends are some of the group victims and perpetrators consult when they have psychosocial problems.

Exosystem – community factors

The exosystem deals with community factors which are harmful cultural practices such as forced marriages, ‘Ukuthwala’, and misrepresentation of intentions of ‘lobola’, and stigmatisation which prevents victims from reporting GBVF as victims are fearful or made to be ashamed, so even vocalising what they believed is considered to be their fault. This also includes corruption and bribery, which is highly problematic in South Africa, resulting in the protection of the perpetrators and rigid gender roles and male entitlement and ownership of women.
Rigid gender roles

Rigid gender roles and stereotypes are established views and preconceptions that men and women are naturally suited to various activities and obligations, not based on their unique personalities but their gender. This includes house chores, childrearing, and financial provision (Fernández et al., 2016; Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). Sikwewiya et al. (2020) explained that the rigid and clear roles for men and women reflected how people thought and behaved. Bhattacharjee et al. (2020) explained that women are subjugated due to gender-based practices and the internalisation of manufactured distinctions among women. Relationship power dynamics favour men more than women, with men's influence over women present in many aspects of life, including decision-making, inflexible gender norms, and a lack of willingness to negotiate.

Harmful cultural practices

The macrosystem refers to cultural values and beliefs that form the social ecology of the community. Within a South African context, the macrosystem profoundly impacts individuals where traditional practices provide men with powerful positions relative to women, opening up avenues of abuse (CSVR, 2016). Lobola is a traditional African practice where the groom usually provides cattle gifts to the “bride-to-be’s” family as a token of appreciation. However, some men misconstrue lobola as a right to control and abuse their partner (Maluleke, 2012). As advice to the groom on managing his household, his Uncles often advise him to be hardheaded to control his family. In addition, Ukuthwala is a form of abduction involving the kidnapping of a girl or a young woman by a man and his friends or peers intending to compel the girl or young woman's family to endorse marriage negotiations (Maluleke, 2012). It has long been practiced in African culture and conducted in an arranged manner, with all parties being privy to the date and time of the abduction; it can also be done in such a way that the female is ignorant of the arrangement (Kheswa & Hoho, 2014). These authors added that it involves kidnapping, rape and forced marriage of minor girls by grown men, in some cases old enough to be their grandfathers. In some cases, cultural belief in African healing medicine and techniques exacerbates GBV. Some traditional healers are known to recommend sex with virgins as a cure for HIV and AIDS (Jewkes, 2004). The author explained that the rationale is that illness is conceptualised as a state of body dirtiness and sleeping with a virgin involves cleansing the body. Bisika et al. (2009) reported that in Malawia, traditional healers sometimes recommend having sex with a daughter to increase wealth.

Social stigma

Stigma manifests itself at the social environment’s structural, community, organisational, interpersonal, and individual levels. Social (e.g., cultural and gender norms) and structural (e.g., regulations and laws) aspects in a given setting influence the processes and manifestations of stigma (Stangl et al., 2019; Embleton et al., 2022). Barnett et al. (2016) posited that the stigma exacerbates gender-based violence as it hinders the victim from seeking help and increases the chances of further GBV. The consequences of GBV are immense and have a ripple effect on the victim, in some cases the perpetrator, the families and friends of both parties, the community at large and the economy. A common occurrence in South Africa is umulume (uncle), tasked with being a guardian but turns abuser. The family sweeps it under the carpet in fear of stigmatisation and disgrace. This thinking or stigma has to change if the battle against sexual abuse in children is to be won. The onus is, therefore, on the family and society at large to diagnose those warning signs of possible abuse. Combating the stigma surrounding GBV is critical for its survivors and their recovery (Nonviolent Peaceforce, 2019).

Corrupt practices and bribery

Corruption abuses entrusted power for private gain (Caarten et al., 2022). Corrupt practices and bribery are a heavy burden that drives gender-based violence and a counteraction in combating and eliminating GBVF. Not only does it hinder reporting, it also perpetuates it. Mtotywa et al. (2022a) highlighted that corrupt practices and bribery are one of the main reasons for not reporting GBV, as it results from the case not being taken forward where the perpetrators are prosecuted. In addition, GBV is also perpetrated by sextortion – “a gendered form of corruption where sexual favours are the means of exchange” (Caarten et al., 2022, p.45). A situation is considered to involve oppressive sextortion when a person in a position of authority withholds a service on the condition that a sexual service be done beforehand (Bauhr, 2017). Someone is engaging in opportunistic sextortion when they use the authority that has been bestowed upon them to take advantage of the vulnerabilities that have arisen due to imbalances, structural relations of power and marginalisation. On a structural level, men are more likely to hold positions of power and to engage in overt or covert acts of violence to control and preserve power positions and the resources associated with these positions. The fact that sextortion is an exchange that involves a sexual transaction is essential to understanding both its consequences and its invisibility. Although concentrating on the transaction and the kind of abuse of authority is a necessary starting-point for analysing sextortion within a corruption framework, this does not change the fact that this is a form of corruption (Eldén et al., 2020).

Macrosystem – societal factors

Normalised physical chastisement and corporate punishment

Verbal or physical abuse by parents or guardians, especially the male figure and his partner and children, is accepted by many household members as normal even though it constitutes GBV and abuse (Jewkes, 2004; Dawes et al., 2005; Breen et al., 2015). Morrell et al. (2012) posited that men’s use of physical force is generally accepted as the norm in many societies, such as South Africa. It remains a common practice to attribute the use of physical punishment to individual causes, such as the qualities of the child or the parent or teacher, and it is equally vital to understand the cultural enablers of this practice (Straus, 2010). At the level of
society, cultural norms and attitudes that approve of violence, the legality of physical punishment in households and schools, and cultural ideas about the necessity and effectiveness of physical punishment can all contribute to the use of corporal punishment. Therefore, the characteristics of society either increase or decrease the likelihood that a parent or teacher will physically discipline a child by hitting them (Straus, 2010). Mehlhausen-Hassoen (2021) posited that the parent–child connection was viewed as having suffered severe damage due to physical punishment. Even when the mother was the violent parent, the perception of the father–child relationship was considerably more negatively impacted by violent parental conduct than the perception of the mother–child relationship.

Equality and rights dynamics

The Constitution of South Africa and other legislation, such as the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act of 2000, was passed to ensure that no person may be unfairly discriminated against based on gender, traditional, or customary practices. These types of discrimination are harmful to the dignity and well-being of women and girl children (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2000). Musetsho et al. (2021) argued that even though the South African government has adopted several legislative mechanisms to address the issue of gender equality, progress is still unsatisfactory. As a consequence of this, there is a slowness and a delay in the process of ensuring that all South Africans have equal access to opportunities. This is further exacerbated by men who do not accept that equality must exist. In these men’s dialogue, it was evident that the legacy and culture which recognise men’s headship also drive GBV, especially in some cases of insecurity where a role is threatened by the realities of equality (Mtotywa, 2022a).

Men who subscribe to these patriarchal stereotypes tend to blame women and children when they deviate from the obedient and submissive behaviours expected of them, thereby justifying the use of violence as an acceptable method of social control (Namy et al., 2017). When men choose to resort to violence as a means of resolving disputes in their relationships, it is widely held that they do so to maintain power and dominance and interpret this as a way to maintain the status quo (Dekel et al., 2019).

‘Triple challenge’ – poverty-unemployment-inequality

The major problem is that poverty and unemployment are central to GBVF, with dependency, power relations, targeting or patterns of high GBVF in unemployed women in homes, pubs and shebeens, all factors contributing to hindering the reporting of incidences of GBVF (Mtotywa et al., 2022a). The high levels of inequality also exacerbate this. Despite the National Development Plan setting a goal of reducing inequality by 2030, South Africa still holds the unenviable position of being one of the most unequal countries in the world (Alvaredo et al., 2018; Manana, 2019; Statistics South Africa, 2020). The intersection between poverty and gender-based violence is well documented in the literature (Slabbert, 2017; Ghosh, 2015; Leung, 2014). Due to the inequality conundrum placed on women, those within the poverty realm greatly depend on their partners. At the same time, young girls will opt to leave home and stay with older men to escape poverty, perhaps only to find themselves in an abusive environment. Such dependency creates repercussions and taking action against domestic violence could result in the loss of housing and food or the loss of work and income for those employed (Slabbert, 2017). The biggest challenge facing the South African government and businesses is employment creation, with the youth being the most affected. Studies have shown that unemployment leads to social inactivity, and bored youth catalyses social criminal behaviour (Jewkes et al, 2010).

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) gave South Africa a Human Development Index (HDI) ranking of 114 out of 189 nations because of South Africa’s deteriorating living standards and increasing income disparity (UNDP, 2023). Since 2014, the country has fallen two rankings on the index and given the COVID-19 pandemic and social protest as seen in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces in 2021 and the resulting loss of jobs, this contributed to further pressure on South Africa’s HDI rating. As of 2022, around 18.2 million people in South Africa live in extreme poverty, with the poverty level set at R33.25 (US$1.90) (Statista, 2022). This is against high official unemployment levels of 33.9% reported by Statistics SA (2022) in the Quarterly Labour Force Survey for the second quarter of 2022.

In contemporary South Africa, most families are challenged by unemployment and poverty, making economic provision within these households that much more difficult. These high levels of unemployment further worsen the exposure of women to GBV and dependency on male partners. Lack of economic independence among women is one of the primary instigators of GBV, as it is hard for a woman who is economically dependent on her male partner to leave such a relationship (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005). Despite this, research has contextualised the argument that a blanket approach cannot be used to assess the issue of unemployment and domestic violence but instead investigate it from a male-versus-female angle (Anderberg et al., 2016). This British study hypothesised that an increase in male unemployment decreases the incidence of intimate partner violence (IPV), while an increase in female unemployment increases domestic abuse. Inequality, poverty and unemployment are interdependent socio-economic phenomena labelled the ‘triple challenge’ in South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2022). The interconnectedness of poverty, inequality and unemployment (PIU) is obvious in South African society and exposure of vulnerable citizens to the triple challenge institutes imposed negative behaviour, one of which is gender-based violence (Leburu-Masigo, 2020).

Religious practices and certain doctrines

Religion and its corresponding practices are responsible for shaping human conduct and behaviour. South Africa is very violent and highly religious, with churches being the most powerful institution after the government. Religion strongly advocates the doctrine of
family and the role men and women play in married life (Cornelius, 2013). This supports a patriarchal culture and reinforces gender inequality where men drive for superior roles and women the subordinate ones. However, religion affords the family structure a sacred status where abuse is an abomination making it difficult to disclose abuse (Nason-Clark et al., 2018). The authors elaborated that a woman experiencing GBV may believe that because her marriage vows were said before God, that she must endure the abuse, or tear apart her sacred commitment, creating a deep-rooted fear for the woman to leave the marriage or divorce. Religious leaders are sometimes unwilling to preach about abuse as it is a taboo topic, thus causing a stigma allowing perpetrators to abuse without retribution. Findings by Landman & Mudimeli (2022) obtained from GBV survivors’ view about the church are that they do not see the church being a safe place to report GBV as men’s violence and abusive behaviour are excused as it is perceived that the devil or evil spirit caused it. Thus, women are mostly unwilling to report the abuse and would rather pray that things improve as they regard a good woman as obedient and preserving. The macrosystem engages with harmful religious and certain doctrines, such as not recognising LGBTQIA+ community marriages even though it is entrenched in the South African Constitution and laws, and congregants not being allowed to divorce, irrespective of their circumstances, to mention a few. Religious leaders have a critical role to play in changing the perception of gender roles within the family structure and offering definitive support to the victims – all leading to the reduction in GBV cases.

**Ineffective justice system**

Despite having a forward-thinking constitution and sound legislation, the number of instances of GBV in South Africa continues at an alarmingly high level. At the same time, the economic and social impact of GBV is significant. Part of the problem is that sometimes officials are reluctant to offer assistance to victims of domestic violence because they view it as a private matter (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2016). Studies have also indicated that inaccessibility to courts and police stations, particularly in rural regions, unfamiliarity with the court procedure, and delays in processing domestic violence applications are all factors that contribute to a lack of reporting of incidents of domestic violence (Tholaine & Calvino, 2022). In their report, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (2021) found that South Africa had violated the rights of women in the country by failing to adequately investigate, prosecute, and punish domestic violence cases and by failing to provide systematic and effective capacity building for the judiciary and law enforcement bodies. The United Nations Women (2020) stated that survivors of domestic violence in South Africa were repeatedly violated due to the country’s low prosecution and conviction rates in such cases and the police’s frequent failures to serve and implement protection orders. Central to this ineffectiveness of the justice system was inadequate training of the law enforcement members, inadequate resources needed to effectively perform their job and lack of accountability. This ineffectively, emboils the perpetrators as they feel that they can get away with their bad deeds (Cameron, 2020; Machisa et al., 2022).

**Chronosystem – significant changes over time**

The overarching chronosystem consists of environmental changes over the individual’s lifetime such as significant life transitions and historical events (McLeod, 2023). The identified elements are technological advances, media transitions (exposure), colonisation and apartheid legacy and remnants, immigration and xenophobia, and pandemics (such as COVID-19).

**Technological advances**

Technologies are converging in new ways to change how we live, work and organise (Mtotywa et al., 2022b) but this has also become a sharp driver of GBV as perpetrators have repurposed its noble use to monitor, harass, threaten, intimidate, impersonate and stalk victims (Hinson et al., 2018). The authors define technology-facilitated GBV as action by one or more people that harms others based on their sexual or gender identity or by enforcing harmful gender norms using the internet and/or mobile technology. Ongoing advancement of technology is providing abusers with tools to become stalkers using a selection of sophisticated tools, including mobile telephones, surveillance, and computer technologies to monitor and harass current and former intimate partners (Southworth et al., 2007). Technology has evolved to include cellular telephones, Internet communications, global positioning system (GPS) devices, wireless video cameras, and other digitally based devices which abusers have used to frighten, stalk, monitor, and control their victims. Although stalking is not a new phenomenon, the ubiquity of digital technology has greatly extended the perpetrators ability to control and abuse their current or ex-partners (Leitao, 2021). Perpetrators strive to inflict control over their victims through cyberstalking, repeated threats and/or harassment using electronic mail or other computer-based communication that would make a reasonable person afraid or concerned for his/her safety (Southworth et al., 2007). Burton and Mutongwizo (2009) had earlier highlighted that South Africa had a high prevalence of online harassment. To a large extent, the proliferation of online harassment and hate can be attributed to the accessibility of a global audience on social media (Klein, 2017; Kilvington, 2021). A further danger for public figures and other Internet users is that they may be subjected to hate speech and personal victimisation in a public forum where everyone may observe and participate in the harassment (Kilvington, 2021). Harris and Woodlock (2018) termed it digital coercive control in describing perpetrators’ use of technology within the context of GBV. In inflicting this control, perpetrators employ various technology-related tactics such as overt surveillance where the victims know they are being monitored or covert surveillance where the victims do not know they are being monitored (Leitao, 2021), often resulting in intimate partner violence if the victim is deemed to have done something or gone somewhere that would trigger jealousy and anger. Southworth et al. (2007) added that some abusers install global positioning systems to monitor the victims’ live locations, installing computer monitoring software, keystroke logging hardware, and others use telephonic devices to leave hundreds of messages or emails in a single day. On
the flip side, mobile devices are an invaluable economic asset and essential tool for not only strengthening social ties but also as a means of seeking help for the victim. Abusers are known to restrict access to devices and in extreme cases breaking or destroying them to gain total control over the victims (Leitao, 2021). Social media platforms allow abusers to follow partners’ or ex partners’ profiles to seek information about new romantic partners, leading to often adverse reactions and feelings.

**Media transitions (exposure) and reporting**

Traditional media consumption is robust and widespread and remains the most potent source of information, learning and entertainment. Even as new mass media appeared and reduced its market share, the medium that has evolved is now finding rebirth on digital platforms such as internet radio (Sari et al., 2021). Since the birth of the internet, a new type of media has evolved, and websites, apps, and social media are new ways for individuals to communicate with each other and with vast audiences (Ferguson & Greer, 2018; Silva et al., 2018). The media also influence the gender-based violence discourse in two main fronts, which are on their reporting of the incidences and shaping acceptable norms through entertainment and related exposure to society. There is evidence from this study of a counter-narrative in the fight against GBV in the country including counter reporting within the media, in social media and sometimes by lack of balanced reporting regarding the victim. Some situations show that GBVF in South Africa is pervasive and a daily occurrence, and this is in public discourse. The media structure drives this reality as it is a plurality of voices thus guiding a communication route (Madalena et al., 2014). A perspective, supported by empirical evidence, on media exposure as a cause of GBV was suggested by Gavin & Kruis (2021). Using the Cultivation Theory, the authors postulated that exposure or representation of violence against women in the media has increased acceptance of attitudes favouring domestic violence. Previous studies had not empirically proven the correlation between media and GBV but suggested that media impacted perception towards GBV in movies and video games (Savage & Yancy, 2008; Simpson-Beck et al., 2012). Recently, in 2021, Squid Game was flighted, and despite its popularity there were arguments that it has helped perpetuate outmoded and misogynistic stereotypes about Korean women. Squid Game depicts weak, patriarchal women and even scene of sexual violence (Molisso, 2022). In militaristic and neoliberal Korea, ‘brutality against the weak is normalised’ (Park, 2016: 20).

**Colonisation and apartheid legacy and remnants**

In a South African context, the chronosystem encompasses historical injustices of colonialism and apartheid which created strong patriarchal traditions where women of all ‘races’ and cultures have been oppressed, exploited and kept in positions of subservience for generations (Snodgrass, 2016). The author posited that GBV in South Africa is supported by the ideologies of apartheid (racism) and patriarchy (sexism) linked and based on systemic humiliation of groups of people to render them inferior. This created an environment where sexism and racism intersected and black women suffered the major brunt of this discrimination and continue to be on the receiving end of extreme violence. The mechanism of apartheid was carefully orchestrated into the centre (Europeans / colonisers) and the periphery (non-Europeans / Africans) whose restrictions and inequality were socially engineered to be impoverished through denial of state benefits and resources. (Lephakga, 2016). This resulted in the colonised being less educated and experienced far higher unemployment, with men employed in the mines/farms thus creating a patriarchal society that directed GBV towards women (Snodgrass, 2016). The author observed that the post-apartheid era has not brought much reprieve to the situation with South Africa having one of the highest rates of GBV in the world.

**Immigration and xenophobia**

Migration is another critical element of the chronosystem. It has long been a male-dominated phenomenon but in recent times, in search of a better future, women have engaged in this practice from a cross-border trade, temporary and circular migration and longer-term settlement migration perspective (Kwakwa et al., 2021). South Africa’s perceived thriving economy, strong Constitution, freedom of speech and expression and its very porous borders have made it an immigration destination of choice. However, some women who migrated to South Africa are plagued by their illegal status rendering them vulnerable and predisposed to GBV. In South Africa, African migrant women tend to experience a combination of racism, patriarchy and xenophobia as these are intertwined (Mbiyozo, 2018). The author reported that these women are subjected to violence at all stages of the migration process with GBV and sexual violence being the most common, including conflict-related violence, with susceptibility increasing if men did not accompany them. The immigration process is dominated by patriarchal nuances and discriminatory policies that promote the perception of females as the weaker sex and second-class citizens (Mbiyozo, 2019). The social integration for female migrants is a challenge due to men in host countries who view the migrant women as easy targets for harassment and abuse aggravated by xenophobic attitudes (Kwakwa et al., 2021). Such women often fall into the trap of prostitution where they are at risk of GBV from clients who often engage in abuse of alcohol and drugs, and in some cases from the police who are meant to protect them. In their study on GBV against young women in selected provinces in South African, Kwakwa et al. (2021) found that GBV often commences with the smugglers who sometimes demand sex and financial payment to get the women across the borders. In addition, GBV occurs in the workplace with the victims being reminded of their immigration when they mention reporting such cases.

Xenophobic violence is caused by numerous factors including communal crises, poverty and unemployment, cultural and biological differences, contestations on religion, and criminal activities including human trafficking, as well as further aggravation from state agencies, provocative statements by leaders and divisive reporting (Goddey, 2017). It can also be viewed as culturally based racisms fueled by ethnicity, speech patterns and accents, economic and social inequalities, cultural and ethnic differences, and social and territorial origins (Tafira, 2011). The women migrants experience incessant xenophobic attacks and GBV in the form of intimate
partner violence from South African partners, partners from their countries of origins and strangers. In anecdotal findings, Nyambuya et al. (2022) reported that the abuse is not only from locals but also from foreign nationals who foster this behaviour.

### Societal pandemics

The Department of Social Development (2021) conceded that the main issues affecting South African families are poverty and inequality, unemployment, housing, health concerns, including HIV and AIDS, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors have a causual relationship and cannot be looked at in isolation. As people worried about infection with COVID-19 and the effect of lockdowns on the economy, many women shouldered the added burden of worrying about their safety within their own homes as lockdowns created a “nest” and “feeling of entrapment” for women experiencing gender-related violence (Segalo, 2022). The plight of women and girls is exacerbated by lockdown orders that leave them trapped with their perpetrators for long periods and diminishing access to support systems due to travel restrictions (John et al., 2019). This then made it more difficult for them to leave these abusive relationships. In a drive to save lives, much needed resources are diverted towards emergency service provision, life-saving critical health and social services are often de-prioritised and/or deemed non-essential and become scarce, heightening the vulnerability of women and girls. The impact of COVID-19 on GBV was immense. The Guardian (2020) highlighted the plight of desperate women as they tried to reach out for help in the early days of COVID-19 restrictions. It reported a notable surge in domestic violence cases around the world. These included up to a 50% increase in Brazil, a 20% increase in Spain, a 30% increase in calls to the GBV helpline in Cyprus and the UK. Domestic Violence Helpline increased by 25%. Bradley-Jones and Isham (2020) noted that, unintentionally, lockdown measures may grant people who abuse greater freedom to act without scrutiny or consequence, making it difficult for people to speak out about, let alone leave, abusive situations due to feelings of shame and embarrassment. The authors stated that the restrictions caused troubling paradox of social distancing and isolation measures while creating a haven for abusers—similar trends where experienced in Africa. In Kenya, rates of GBV started going up, as the government began imposing restrictive policies to contain COVID-19 (John et al., 2021). Likewise, physical violence increased from 33% to 43%, while sexual violence doubled from 2.5% to 5%. A Kenyan NGO dealing with GBV reported that in the six weeks following the COVID-19 lockdown, a total of 793 adolescent and young women presenting to their clinics reported experiencing violence, a stark increase from pre-COVID times (Ngunjiri et al., 2020). Despite the rising numbers, the authors noted that GBV was still not considered a priority in Kenya. In Tunisia, violence against women also increased significantly during the lockdown, from 4.4% to 14.8% on reported cases, with 96% of the cases experiencing psychological abuse (Sediri et al., 2020).

South Africa was not exempt from this trend during the COVID restrictions. Crime statistics reported by the South African Police Services for 2019/2020 showed figures of sexual offenses cases to be 53.293. These were only the reported cases meaning the actual cases could be higher. In a comprehensive paper, Gutura & Nunllall (2020) using the Frustration Aggression Theory, delved deep into the triggers of intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. To counter the shortcomings executed during COVID-19 and ensure countries are better prepared to support GBVF in the future, some implementable lessons have been learned from various countries. In the USA, the National Domestic Violence Hotline made it easier for victims to seek help by introducing online chat and text messaging as services (Godin, 2020). In Ecuador and Italy, domestic violence centres offered counselling services by phone and keep their emergency telephone and skype services open for the duration of the restrictions (John et al., 2020). In exploiting technology, women’s groups publish manuals and organise livestream workshops that guide how to protect oneself during a crisis, including how to access legal aid (John et al., 2020).

### Impact of drivers of GBVF on victims and family

Victims of sexual, physical and psychological violence are expected to report cases of violence to the authorities prior to the apprehension of perpetrators and to give victims the much-required help they need. However, despite experiencing emotional and physical trauma and injuries, most female victims do not seek outside medical care or assistance (Oparinde & Matsha, 2021). The reasons for not seeking such medical attention were that the victims believed that the injury did not require any medical attention or that they felt they could treat themselves. Other reasons included being unable to afford medical care, the fear of further mistreatment, fear of the perpetrator. At the same time, their partner was imprisoned, fear of their family, and the shame associated with GBV. (Matzopoulos et al., 2019). However, most female victims disclosed the abuse events to their family members, especially to female members of their family. Domestic violence incidents were also reported to the police and local authorities, religious leaders, male family members, friends, and neighbours by the victims. Nonetheless, some victims did not tell of their experiences and kept the abuse to themselves out of fear of being rejected by family and friends, fear of being stigmatised or because they believed they were the cause of the abuse. Male victims generally did not report or speak of the abuse as they felt it would violate the privacy of the family unit.

The most useful coping strategy when dealing with violence for both male and female victims is to speak with family members. However, for females, the most prevalent strategy for dealing with violence was talking to religious leaders and seeking religious counselling, followed by reporting to police and local authorities (Mtotywa et al., 2022b). Men and boys are being targeted as well. Mphatheni and Mlamla (2022) highlights that males who suffer from GBV receive less attention than females and that such cases go unnoticed. Because of the social stigma associated with male victims of domestic violence committed by women, few men will talk about their experiences (Thobejane et al., 2018). Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also have a common mission to meet a particular need in their society or community. They are neither formed nor controlled by the government (Mlambo et al., 2021). Such
NGOs have been perceived globally as more efficient and cost-effective service providers than governments, particularly in reaching the poor. In South African, numerous well-funded and non-funded GBV-focused NGOs operate to provide support and assistance to the vulnerable. There is evidence though that is some cases the victims as part of the coping strategies available to deal with domestic violence they preferred to forget about the incidents rather than engage with others.

**Moderating effect of GBVF policies and strategies**

It is only prudent for South Africa to implement robust and effective policies and strategies to combat GBV. The World Health Organisation as a global institution is the most significant player driving intervention to curb GBV. The UN Women (2020) division has a Respect Women: Preventing Violence Against Women framework with seven interrelated strategies to reduce GBV aimed at the behavioural stream. These involve (1) relationship skills strengthening, (2) empowerment of women, (3) ensuring services, (4) reducing poverty, (5) environments made safe, (6) child and adolescent abuse prevented and (7) transforming attitudes, beliefs and norms. From these strategies, tactical interventions are implemented and managed in affected areas around the globe. Governments, institutions, communities, and non-governmental organisations would implement these initiatives. The effectiveness of the United Nations can only be judged by the effectiveness of the implementors on the ground, who are also at the mercy of local government policies and the will of politicians.

In South Africa, the most accountable institution in the fight against GBV is the government as the policy maker and the most affected in financial expenditure. South Africa has advanced laws and policies such as the Domestic Violence Act, 116 of 1998 (DVA) and the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007 (Sexual Offences Act) (SOA) geared towards targeting gender-based violence and providing expression to the constitutional rights to equality, human dignity, life, freedom and security of the person. These South African laws appear aligned to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966 (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979 (CEDAW), and the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, 1981 (African Charter). However, despite these strong and widely accepted policies, the rate of GBV remains high in South Africa. This is attributed to the lack of political will to deal with this challenge, as the government response and implementation of GBV-related policies and legislation has been deficient. The Department of Social Development was tasked with managing the South African public and GBV is part of that mandate. In conjunction with government economic empowerment, the Department of Social Development (2021) white paper presented a strategy of family empowerment with guiding principle of human rights, family diversity and resilience, gender equity and community participation. The South African government has also implemented economic policies to boost the economy and create much-needed employment to youth and women through the national development plan.

**Application of the framework in gender-based violence and femicide studies**

Theoretical frameworks help scholars structure their study and explain social phenomena (Ukwoma & Ngulube, 2021). A conceptual framework is of crucial significance to investigate different aspects of the study, from understanding the levels of driver in comparison to other sites or areas, relationship between the drivers and other dependent variable as well as moderation effect of the policies and strategies (Crawford, 2020).

**Systems composite scores**

The systems composite score can be developed from the proposed framework. What is evident is that these drivers are not linear and can work in combination depending on circumstances to assess the system composite scores for the drivers of gender-based violence and femicide in the following proposition:

**P1: Microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem factors are drivers of GBVF.**

Individual systems composite scores, $SCS_I$, are based on the total number of indicators of the system and is shown in equation 1 as:

$$SCS_I = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} DGBKV_i}{n}$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)

where $DGBKV_i$ are the drivers of the gender-based violence, $n$ is the number of indicators.

**Significance of the actual levels and the benchmarks**

The significance of the actual levels and the benchmarks can be assessed with one sample t-test to determine if there is a substantial difference between the actual and the hypothesised mean. The one sample t-test can be calculated using the following equation:

$$t = \frac{X - \mu}{\sigma_X}$$  \hspace{1cm} (2)

where $X$ denotes the mean score of the sample, $\mu$ is the mean value and $\sigma_X$ indicates the standard error for the mean.
Relationship analysis

Different relationships can assessed surrounding GBVF to determine the association or predictive effects of the drivers. We summarise the impact of drivers of GBVF on victims and family in the following proposition:

**P2: Drivers of GBVF had an effect of victims and family or combating and elimination of GBVF**

\[ IAS_j = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \ldots + \beta_n X_n + \epsilon \]  

(3)

where \( X_1 \) to \( X_n \) are the explanatory variables wdrivers of GBVF, alpha is the constant, \( \beta_1 \) to \( \beta_n \) are the coefficients while \( \epsilon \) is the error term.

Moderation analysis

We summarise our discussion on the moderation effect of GBVF policies and strategies in the following proposition:

**P3: GBVF policies and strategies have a moderating effect on the relationship between state and the impact of GBVF on victim and family or combating and eliminating GBVF.**

The path model for a moderating effect, can also be expressed with the following formula:

\[ IAS_j = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 Z + \beta_3 XZ + \epsilon \]  

(4)

In the model, \( X_1 \) is the predictor variable, while \( Z \) is the moderating variable with \( \beta_1 \) and \( \beta_2 \) coefficients. In this regression, there is a new interaction variable, \( XZ \) with \( \beta_3 \) assesses the moderation effect e parameter estimate for the interaction term.

Conclusion

The occurrence of GBVF is worldwide, but its pervasiveness differs in different countries. The development, strength, structural, social and psychological realities and implementation of institutional policies, and a country’s reaction to uncontrollable elements such as pandemics all contribute to trends in each country. Using the integrated ecological framework, a multi-level approach, as a guide is critical to understanding the drivers of gender-based violence. This framework contrasts earlier theorists who attributed the source of violence to the influences of psychology, sociology and criminology or the ideological and political agents of feminist activists who placed the source of violence solely on patriarchy and male dominance. A single factor is inadequate to explain the phenomenon of GBV and therefore, we propose a framework grounded in the interplay between personal, situational and sociocultural factors.

This in-depth analysis of the study shows how complex GBVF is. Despite this governments, communities and all stakeholders must emphasise the importance of curbing this scourge, one of the most urgent socioeconomic problems confronting South Africa today. The disproportionately high impact of violence against women and girls is systemic and deeply ingrained in South African institutions, religions, customs, and traditions. This no discounting the violence experience by the LGBTQIA+ communities and men.

The limitation of the study is that it is still conceptual and needs to be validated with field work and amended where required. As such, it is suggested that this framework may have application within diagnosis of the main drivers and the impact on the victims and family of the GBVF.

Acknowledgement

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation, MMM and ML; methodology, MMM, ML, BTM, ZNN and RN; formal analysis, MMM, ML, BTM, ZNN and RN; investigation, MMM, ML, BTM, ZNN and RN; writing—original draft preparation, MMM; writing—review and editing, MMM, ML, BTM, ZNN and RN.

Funding: This research was funded by the Gauteng Department of Community Safety

Informed Consent Statement: This is a theoretical review paper with no human subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: This is a theoretical review paper with no field data.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
References


improvement in the HIV continuum in Sub-Saharan Africa. AIDS and Behavior. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-022-03793-4


327


Park, You-me (2016), The crucible of sexual violence: Militarized masculinities and the abjection of life in post-apartheid, neoliberal South Korea. Feminist Studies, 42(1), 17-40. https://doi.org/10.15767/feministstudies.42.1.17


**Publisher’s Note:** SSBFNET stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

© 2023 by the authors. Licensee SSBFNET, Istanbul, Turkey. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science (2147-4478) by SSBFNET is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.