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The Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence against Women in South Africa: A Call for Action

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Andrew Enaifoghe

Public Administration and Governance
University of Zululand X1001, KwaDlangezwa 3886,
KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
andrewenaifoghe@gmail.com

Melita Dlelana

Ethics: Research and Innovation
University of Zululand X1001, KwaDlangezwa 3886,
KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Durokifa Anuoluwapo Abosede

School of Public Management, Governance and Public Policy
University of Johannesburg



Nomaswazi P. Dlamini

Department of Politics & International Studies,
University of Zululand X1001, KwaDlangezwa 3886,
KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Abstract:

The prevalence of gender-based violence in South Africa is an intense and widespread problem that impacts almost every aspect of life. This call for states' intervention in the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) in the country. Reports show that intimate partner violence and sexual coercion are the most common forms of GBV globally, and these are the types of violence that are explored in this paper. GBV has serious consequences for women's health, such as homicides, suicides, AIDS-related deaths as well as physical injuries, chronic pain syndrome, gastrointestinal disorders, complications during pregnancy, miscarriage and low birth-weight of children. GBV also poses significant costs for the economies of both developed and developing countries alike, including low productivity and earnings, and low accumulation of human and social capital. Findings from literature show that violence can negatively affect women's physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health, and may increase the risk of acquiring HIV in some settings. The study called on the government to take imperative actions to address gender-based violence (GBV). It recommended the implementation of a more strategic plan having recognized the detrimental impact of GBV on the victims and the general society.

Keywords: *Development; Gendered Violence; Disparities; Women's Vulnerability*

Introduction

The rising incidence of gender-based violence against women in South Africa, calls for immediate action from the government and other organisations. The term gender-based violence is comprehensively characterized as the general term used to squarely capture violence against women and children. As a result of the normalizing of role desires, that are associated with every sexual orientation, the unequal power connections between the male and female, in a particular society (Bloom, 2008). Gender-based violence disproportionately affects women and girls, which is systemic, and deeply entrenched in institutions, cultures and traditions in Africa (Enaifoghe, 2019; Bloom, 2008). The current occurrence of gender-based violence worldwide is essential "due to systemic gender inequality in the contemporary society that disempowers women, girls, and other minorities groups in the society, and this stifles their voices so that their stories are not heard"

(Enaifoghe, 2019). As a result, women's natural human rights can be more easily taken away from them.

The cycle of "violence is perpetrated by lack of a functional justice system and a dearth of available resources" (Enaifoghe, 2019). There is also a lack of economic opportunities for women which leads to the survivor being dependent on the abuser. The government and people need to do something different but suitable for the African context, different approaches towards addressing the prevalence of this scourge, specifically femicide. The high rate of violence against women in South Africa can be attributed to the inherited policy of the past but the ills of apartheid have continued to haunt the country. This could be one of the key contributors to the high level of violent crime in South Africa (Enaifoghe, 2018). Despite the various efforts by governments and international organisations to put an end to GBV globally, the violence, which has serious psychological effects on its victims, remains the foremost human right violation, particularly in South Africa. This study looks at the prevalence of GBV in South Africa and contributes to the discourse on the need to address it in South Africa.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study that utilized a content data analysis method, which allows researchers to study and make sense of written documents available in public and/or private domains (Mogalakwe, 2006). The researchers determine the relevance of the documents that they consult based on their significance to the study, while the criteria for focusing on particular extracts should reflect the issues on which the researcher is seeking evidence. Data were primarily collected through secondary sources. The study adopted a qualitative research method based on a wide range of literature sources. This includes relevant articles, reports, books and internet sources. The search for information was streamlined from 2010 to 2020. However, exceptions were made to years before 2014 based on the information gotten and its relevance to the study. The paper sourced different literature on the subject and analysed them based on content and relevance to the study.

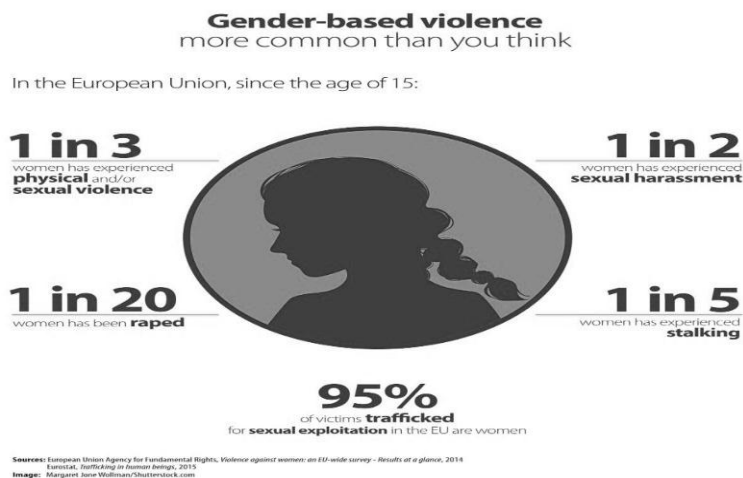
Conceptual Literature Consideration

This paper explored the key contributing factors to the prevalence of GBV in South Africa. It highlights the socio-cultural drivers of gender-based violence against women and children in South Africa while looking at the policy gaps and their poor implementation. Gender-based violence (GBV) can have devastating impacts on anyone, irrespective of their “geographical location, social-cultural, socio-economic background, race, religion, sexuality, gender or gender orientation and affiliation” (Enaifoghe, 2019). The scholar further articulated that “women and girls are seen to be the most affected group who stand the at risk the most with gender-based violence, though boys, men, and gender minorities also experience gender-based violence” (Enaifoghe, 2019). A scholar like Ott (2017), argued that “gender-based violence can have serious physical, mental, economic, and social repercussions”. The adverse effects of sexual violence against women include unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

It can also lead to isolation and depression. Enaifoghe (2019), find that GBV can prevent survivors from realizing their economic potential, as a result of stigma, physical and psychological trauma caused by the violence. The exceptional South African issues of violence have over the years “nurtured a culture of violence” that has reproduced itself in every social and cultural structure ever since. This has helped to establish the landscape of gender violence in the country. Violence against women (VAW) as defined in the UN Declaration (1993) is an act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely that result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

The act of “violence against women encompasses but is not limited to the following: Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation” (Enaifoghe, 2019: 5). The factors which may have increased “women's vulnerability to some types of violence include age, disability, and poverty” (World Health Organization, 2016). Across all forms of violence and abuse, women are most at risk from men they know. In a patriarchal society, the social,

cultural and political structure regard men as better than and leaders of women. World Health Organization (2016), reported that women are often denied equal opportunities in different circles of life, including access to education, economic opportunities and political leadership and they are regarded as weaker vessels”. This, according to Enaifoghe (2018), contributes to gender inequality and gender abuse.



The study conducted by the European Institute for Gender Equality (2019), found that “gender-based violence is a phenomenon deeply rooted in gender inequality, and continues to be one of the most notable human rights violations within all societies”. Gender-based violence is any sort of violence that is directed against a person because of their gender, hence both women and men equally experience gender-based violence. However, the majority of victims are women and girls. Intimate-partner violence, rape or sexual assault, constrained prostitution, abuse, human trafficking, sexual abuse, child murder, disregard for human rights, coercion and pressure are the focal components of sexual violence.

Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution; Physical, sexual and

psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs (CEDAW, Recommendation No 19, 1993).

Ott (2017) described GBV to include “physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse, threats, coercion, and economic or educational deprivation”. There is no doubt that GBV is an issue faced by many people all over the world today and that women are disproportionately harmed by this act of violence. As a result of its damaging effect, hundreds of organizations focus on ending violence against women. According to the United Nation’s Population Fund, 1 in 3 women have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime (Ott, 2017) that does not include emotional, financial, or verbal abuse. Despite this act of violence being so prevalent, GBV is largely under-reported as a result of stigma and victims’ lack of access to resources and support systems.

The prevalence of gender-based violence worldwide is largely due to systemic gender inequality that disempowers women, girls, and other minorities, and stifles their voices so that their stories are not heard and their natural human rights can be more easily taken away (Ott, 2017).

The cycle of violence is further perpetuated by the lack of justice, dearth of required resources, and lack of economic opportunities, which lead to the survivor being dependent on their abuser. In the United States, “only six percent of rapists are likely to face incarceration and perpetrators of honour-killing around the world are rarely persecuted” (World Bank, 2019). This allows violent groups and individuals to continue abusing their power without fear of repercussion. The World Bank (2019) states that “gender-based violence (GBV) or violence against women and girls (VAWG), is a global pandemic that affects 1 in 3 women in their lifetime”. In the 2019 World Economic Forum report, nearly 3,000 women were killed in South Africa between 2017 and 2018, as recorded by the South African Police Service. That, therefore, puts the killing rate for adult women at nearly 15.2 per 100,000, fact-checking organisation Africa Check calculated.

The latest internationally comparable figures retrieved from the World Health Organization (2016) shows that the murder rate is 12.5 per 100,000 women and girls. This makes South Africa the fourth-worst position out of 183 countries. Violence against women is a problem that is far from unique to South Africa though. Globally, it is estimated that

more than a third of women in one way or the other have experienced some form of violence from a non-partner. What is more outrageous is the fact that some national studies suggest that close to 70% of women have experienced violence from an intimate partner. Within Africa, nearly half (45.6%) of women and girls over 15 are said to have experienced physical or sexual violence. Aside from physical power, GBV might include mental torture and coercion (risk of physical damage or being sacked) (Talbot & Quayle, 2010).

The effect of GBV is a significant human right infringement with real social and formative effects on the victims, their families, network, community and society (Talbot & Quayle, 2010). Jewkes et al. (2010) noted that on an individual level, gender-based violence can stimulate mental injury, and can have mental, social and physical ramifications for survivors. Men who have been assaulted have a long pull expanded danger of contracting HIV and are in danger of liquor abuse, depression, and suicide. On the other hand, women who have been assaulted are in danger of unwanted pregnancy, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

The Context of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa

There seems to be a high rate of gender-based violence against women, which is a huge concern for South Africa. The high rate places an overwhelming weight on the wellbeing and criminal equity frameworks and renders numerous survivors unfit to work in the public eye (Albertus, 2010). This general term, according to Bloom (2008: 14), is used to capture violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations associated with each gender, as well as the unequal power relationships between the genders within the context of a specific society. The main objective of this paper is to examine the prevalence of violence against women and girls in South Africa.

According to Pikoli (2020: 1), the national Gender-Based Violence Command Centre attested to the increase in numbers, saying they were experiencing triple the usual number of calls. This is a worrying trend that has been identified and reported globally. The recent GBV statistics increased to alarming 2,320 complaints during the first week of the global lockdown. This figure amounts to 37% higher than the weekly average of 87,290 domestic violence cases reported to the police during 2019, according to the South African Minister of Police Bheki Cele (Pikoli,

2020). Looking at these figures and contextualizing them to the South African lockdown, it is difficult to share the minister's hopeful sentiments knowing the increased likelihood of GBV during this time. Bloom (2008) and Jewkes et al. (2010) highlight the fact that females are more likely to be victims than males.

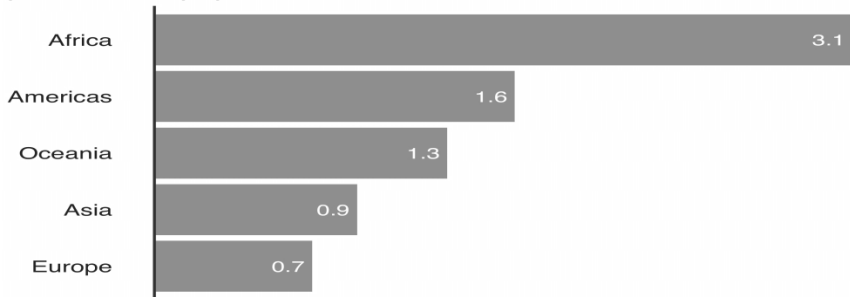
The UN Population Fund opined that “the primary targets of GBV as victims are women and adolescent girls are at high risk of GBV, they also suffer exacerbated consequences as compared with what men endure” (UNPFA, 2014). As a result of “gender discrimination and their lower socio-economic status, women have fewer options and fewer resources at their disposal to avoid or escape abusive situations and to seek justice”. Women also “suffer the consequences on their sexual and reproductive health’, including forced and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions and resulting deaths, traumatic fistula, and higher risks of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV” (UNPFA, 2014). According to the UN,

Gender-based violence is any act of gender-based violence is that which results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (UN, 1993).

South Africa was ranked fourth (the highest in Africa) in making progress in terms of gender equality and women's rights by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's 2012 Social Institutions and Gender Index (Stats SA, 2015). Stats SA (2015) showed “South Africa to be second with 45% in Africa after Rwanda in terms of female representatives in parliament”.

Women in Africa are most at risk

Rate of women killed by partner or family member per 100,000 population



Source: UNODC 2018

BBC

These achievements are in line with “Goal 3 of the UN Millennium Development Goals, which advocates gender equality and the empowerment of women” (Enaifoghe, 2019: 6).

The Beijing Declaration made it clear that gender-based violence (GBV) is a major obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace as violence impairs women’s ability to enjoy basic human rights and freedoms as enshrined in various policies and conventions, such as the 1995 Beijing Declaration (UN, 1995).

South Africa has made great strides in uplifting women in the Republic. Despite the progress made so far, GBV against women is still at an unacceptably high level. This paper argues that there are contributing factors—cultural, economic, and social—to the high proportion of GBV in South Africa. The expectancies related to various genders differ from one society to another over time. The patriarchal power structure in many societies view male leadership as the norm, and men hold the majority of power. The social and political system that treats men as superior to women is regarded as patriarchal. Sultana (2011) avers that patriarchy is prevalent in states where “women cannot protect their bodies, meet their basic needs, participate fully in society and men perpetrate violence against women with impunity”.

The Effect of Apartheid Legacy on the Social and Cultural Driver of VAW

In South Africa, the sexual assault and murder of young girls is a prevalent issue. The historical-cultural antecedent in South Africa, the damaging influence that apartheid has had on many black African families, left the “children to grow up in broken homes and homes that are headed by women and single-parent families, this was caused by the demand for migrant labour system during apartheid regime”. The result of this is that many “children, predominantly those in the poorer class of South African society end growing up with what is known as an absent father or primary caregiver and are plagued by problems such as alcoholism” and subsequently violence. In moving away from the consequence of the apartheid regime, it can be argued that one of the root causes of the prevalence of VAW and other crimes in South Africa is the “subculture of violence and criminality”.

The subculture of violence and criminality: The perception of this subculture is that it is characterised by young men “invested in a criminal identity and engaged in criminal careers that involve active criminal lifestyles” (News24, 2017). Another feature of this subculture is how the local community idolize the common use and possession of weapons. The description of the commonly held norms and beliefs in many communities which see “violence as a necessary and justified means of resolving conflicts” or other problems within various communities needs to be addressed decisively, to put an end to crime and violence in the country. News24 (2017) reported a few cases in South Africa, including the following accounts, according to Amanda Gouws:

Valencia Farmer was 14 years old when she was brutally gang-raped and murdered. She was stabbed 53 times. That was in 1999 and her killer was only sentenced for the crime 17 years later (News24, 2017).

Sihle Sikoji was 19 years old and some men did not like the fact that she was a lesbian. So, they stabbed her to death with a spear. Anene Booysen was gang-raped and disembowelled in 2013(News24, 2017).

Less than a month later, athlete Oscar Pistorius shot and killed Reeva Steenkamp through a closed toilet door (News24, 2017). Another incident was reported that took place in May 2017:

Karabo Mokoena became the latest face of South Africa's gender-based violence epidemic. She was killed and her body burned beyond recognition, allegedly by her ex-boyfriend (News24, 2017).

Another incident and murder were reported in Cape Town on the 24th of August 2019;

Uyinene Mrwetyana, a 19-year-old University of Cape Town student was tortured, raped, and bludgeoned with a scale when she went to fetch a parcel at the Claremont Post Office in Cape Town and murdered on the 24th of August 2019 in the suburb of Claremont, Cape Town South Africa.

In the same timeframe, we heard the news of South African female boxing champion, Leighandre "Baby Lee" Jegels, being shot to death by her boyfriend.

The truth is that for a very long time people are going to remember these horrible cases that end up on newspapers' front pages. These women's stories come with a flare-up of societal outrage, protest and collective introspection. Then South Africans live in hope for a while, believing that this time something might change. But nothing does in a country marked by unusually high levels of rape and femicide (News24, 2017). Having noted the above, it is amazing that there is little fluctuation or inconsistencies in the above statistics, concerning violence against women in South Africa, which are reported annually by the South African Police Services (SAPS). What does this mean? Without political will, "a change in the sensationalism and narratives around the reporting of gender-based violence and men's greater involvement as allies with women when it comes to gender-based violence, nothing will change" (Sultana, 2011: 4).

Coovadia, et al. (2009), revealed that "feminists are of the view that victims of intimate violence are less likely to define their victimizations as criminal acts, and as such women and men come to view violence by intimates as less serious than violence by strangers". This is even though stranger violence could be less serious.

Victims view intimate relationships as private and legal, intervention into them are seen as an accusation of failure, a source of embarrassment and shame, and as a cause of breakdowns in those relationships.

Feminists explain that “its acceptance reinforces offenders in their use of violence in intimate settings, and victims in their reluctance to invoke the law against intimates who attack them” (Newburn & Shiner, 2006). It is the same processes that work to discourage victims of intimate violence from seeking legal protection that is played out within, and structured by dominant relations, and those of subordination. Besides, when victims do seek legal help, it is either deemed an appropriate response, or it is because they experience frequent and/or serious violence. The violence against women in South Africa, particularly, the difficulties victims face when seeking legal protection in case of intimate violence are exacerbated by apartheid and the fragmentation that goes with its bureaucracy (Langa, 2012). According to Langa (2012), the use of violence by the apartheid state and in the struggle against apartheid further reinforces its policies, which were used as legitimate forms and expressions of opposition.

Violence against women plays a key role in maintaining women's subordinate position and control over women by men. Siegel & Forero (2012) argue that the denial and fear of being ostracized often prevent women from reaching out for help. These factors, therefore, limit a woman's capacity to act individually when violated or assaulted by a man. In the cases of sexual violence, in particular, gender-based violence places a limit on a woman's ability to defend herself from contracting HIV, unwanted pregnancy, and unwanted sexual engagement with a stranger or even relative, and many other unwanted things. In this manner, therefore, women's rights are not fully exercised. Violence against women is by all accounts a solid obstacle to embracing counteractive action measures and has grave ramifications like HIV/AIDS in young people specifically (Ratele, 2013).

In the discourse of gender-based violence, there is a wide range of violence. These types of violence can be viewed to be gendered in nature on account of how gendered control disparities are entrenched in the general public. According to the World Health Organisation (2005), GBV can be physical, sexual, emotional, financial or structural, and can be perpetrated by intimate partners, acquaintances, strangers and

institutions. Most of the interpersonal acts of violence are committed by men against women, and the man perpetrating the violence is often known by the woman. Albertus (2010: 6) argues that GBV is “disproportionately directed against women and girls”. It was found that only one of every two women assault survivors report being assaulted to the police (Stats SA, 2015).

The Medical Research Council (MRC) found that one out of nine women has been assaulted. The observed assault to be under-reported even though their discoveries vary with regards to the degree of such under-detailing. The report by the UNAIDS (2019) shows that 19 million of the 35 million people living with HIV today do not know that they have the virus. According to the Global HIV/AIDS statistics on women (UNSAID, 2019), around 6000 young women aged 15–24 years become infected with HIV every week.

In sub-Saharan Africa, four in five new infections among adolescents aged 15–19 years are in girls. Young women aged 15–24 years are twice as likely to be living with HIV as men. More than one third (35%) of women around the world have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at some time in their lives.

The UNSAID (2019) avers that, in some regions, “women who have experienced physical or sexual intimate partner violence are 1.5 times more likely to acquire HIV than women who have not experienced such violence”. A study conducted by “the Medical Research Council (MRC) in three Provinces of South Africa showed that 1 in 4 women in the general population has experienced physical violence at some point in their life” (Jewkes et al., 2000: 8). Similarly, a study conducted in 2013 on gender-based violence in four provinces in South Africa (Gauteng, Limpopo, Western Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal) reported that all the participants had experienced some form of violence. These include “emotional, economic, physical or sexual abuse at least once in their lifetime both within and outside their intimate relationships” (Machisa, et al 2011: 11).

A large proportion of men in Gauteng (78%); Limpopo (48%); Western Cape (35%); and Kwa-Zulu Natal (41%) all admitted to having committed some form of violence against women in their lifetime (Machisa, et al 2011).

Furthermore, “a national study on female homicide concluded that a woman is killed every six hours by their intimate partner” (Mathews et al., 2011: 4). According to the World Health Organization, “South Africa has one of the highest rates of violence against women in the world” (WHO, 2005).

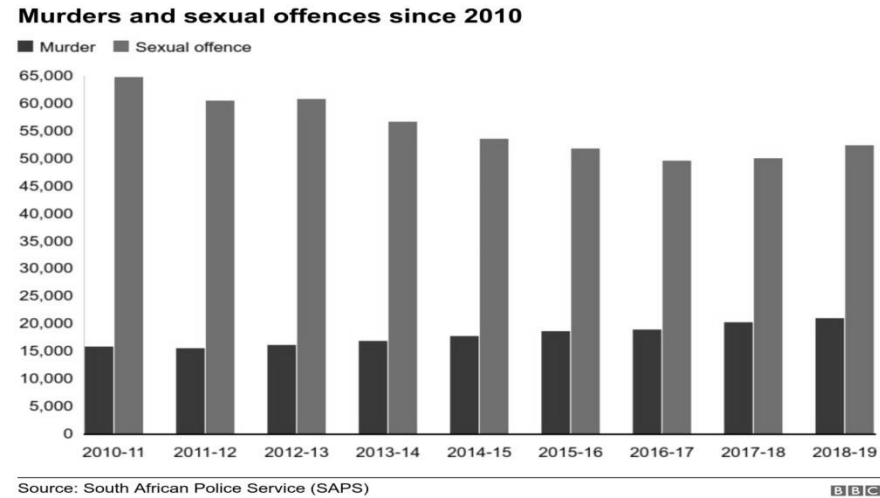
South Africa has recently been named as having the highest level of adult per capita alcohol consumption in Africa in the Global status report on alcohol and health 2014.

This somewhat contributes to “the increased high levels of both Gender-Based Violence and HIV infection, alcohol abuse and further violence against women, risky sexual behaviours such as inconsistent condom usage, forced sexual intercourse or rape and multiple sexual partners” (WHO (2005: 3). “The most recent UNAIDS country data show that South Africa has an estimated 6,800,000 people living with HIV and an adult (15 to 49) prevalence rate of 18.9% making it one of the countries with the highest rates of infection in the world” (UNFPA, 2013). Nevertheless, “the victims of gender-based violence include men, women, and children, however, there is consensus that women and children are disproportionately affected and hence bear the greater burden of such assaults” (Enaifoghe, 2019). Studies “in the general adult male population estimate rape perpetration rates of between 28-37%, while 7-9% has engaged in multiple perpetrator rape” (Prince, 2014). Between 2013 and 2014, “about 62 649 sexual offence cases were reported to the South African Police Services (SAPS)”. Relatives of victims or intimates committed 34.6% of all rapes, casual acquaintances 26.1% while 24.4% of all victims did not know their attackers.

United Nations reports, “over 64% of rapes occurred either at or near home” (UNAIDS, 2019). The statistical report remained consistently high with very little sign of the numbers decreasing significantly. Human rights organisations estimate that only 1 in 9 cases of sexual violence are reported to SAPS (Stöckl, et al., 2013), while the National Institute for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation (NICRO) affirms that: “only one in twenty rape cases are reported to the SAPS, while the Medical Research Council and Gender links argued that only 1 in 25 women reported the rape to the police and 0.3% reported domestic violence” (Mager, 2004). The Medical Research Council (2010: 21) suggests that “SAPS’ statistics are a gross underestimation of the actual

burden of sexual violence in South Africa”. This problem of “under-reporting is exacerbated when the perpetrator is known to the victim, as an intimate partner, family member, friend or neighbour, teacher or another community leader”. Underreporting is also common among vulnerable groups of people, according to Pankhurst, (2008: 301), including “illegal immigrants, orphans and other vulnerable children, refugees, sexual minorities (LGBTI) and people living with disabilities”.

The socio-cultural barriers to reporting GBV in South Africa include “a lack of faith in the criminal justice system and secondary trauma sometimes suffered by survivors at the hands of the SAPS and health services” (Mager, 2004). Besides, the sensitivity and stigmatised nature with the issues of sexual crimes and “the privatisation of domestic violence as a family matter contribute to this prevalence”. An SAMRC (2018), the study confirmed “sexual violence as a common feature in the murders of women and children”.



The statistics on assault cases between 2018 and 2019 show that “there were more or less 500 000 incidences of assault experienced by 0.7% of individuals aged 16 or above”.

The most likely victims of assault were males and the young. About 50% of victims of assault reported these incidences to the

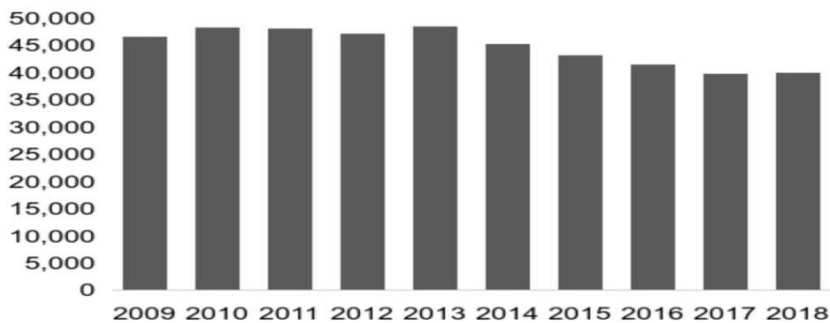
police. This amounted to about 140 000 individuals who reported the assault to the police (Stats SA, 2019).

The number of recorded assault cases on women by the South African Police Services (SAPS) for the same period was “approximately 330 000, which is the lower estimate from GPSJS maybe because GPSJS excludes assault of children under the age of 16”. Other findings from research conducted on murder cases show that:

An estimated 12 000 murders were committed in 2018/19, affecting about 0, 07% of households in South Africa. All affected households reported incidences of murder to the police, there were 32 000 murders during the same period (Stats SA, 2019).

According to SAPS data, the main reason for “the huge gap between GPSJS estimates of murder and SAPS statistics is that GPSJS estimates are based on murders that are known to households” (Stats SA, 2019). The South African Police Services (SAPS) “handles murders which may not be known to households such as murders of homeless people, immigrants, temporary visitors and gang-related murders”.

Reported rapes in South Africa
Year ending March 2009 to 2018



Source: South African Police Service

BBC

There were about “580 000 incidences of street robbery in 2018/19, affecting round about 1% of the people aged 16 or older and males were more than twice as likely as females to be victims of street robbery” (Stats SA, 2019). Similarly, “people living in metropolitan areas were

more likely to be victims of street robbery than those living in non-metros”.

Western Cape had the highest (1,9%) percentage of people aged 16 and above who were victims of street robbery compared to other provinces. The weapons most commonly used for street robbery were knives (62%) and guns (37%) (Stats SA, 2019).

The perception of safety by everyone who lives in South Africa is vital, regardless of gender. The results show that “the percentage of people who felt safe walking alone in their areas during the day increased from 79% in 2017/18 to 83% in 2018/19, and those who felt safe walking alone in their areas during the night increased from 29% in 2017/18 to 35% in 2018/19”. Apparently, the finding from the Statistics South Africa shows that “males felt safer than females during the day and at night, and those in rural areas (24%) felt safer than those in urban areas (15%) and metros (8%) during the day, and about 45% of people in metros felt unsafe at night compared to urban (42%) and rural people (39%)” (Stats SA, 2019). Due to the prevalence of gender-based violence against women in South Africa, there is a need for a call to action.

The Call to Address Gender-Based Violence in South Africa

The action that will lead to a decline in violence against women and girls requires a community-based multi-pronged approach and sustained engagement with multiple stakeholders. The most operative initiatives to address the underlying risk factors for violence include the social norms concerning gender roles and the acceptability of violence. A significant number of women have experienced more than one sort of violence. A dominance survey that addresses the high rate of “violence against women in all its forms, may yield more information than 'single issue' surveys about the meaning and impact of violence in women's lives” Greenan (2004: 5). Attempts to document the experiences of marginalised groups of women must go beyond merely ensuring their 'inclusion', numerically speaking, in general, population studies.

In South Africa, “gender-based violence (GBV) is a profound and widespread problem that has a severe effect in impacting on almost every aspect of life” (Enaifoghe, 2019). However, in an attempt to eradicate violence against women and children and protect individual rights in

Africa, various organisations like member-countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have also “signed and ratified various international conventions”.

We are at a crossroads and the route we choose must be the one that rejects intimate partner violence, a route that rejects harassment of the LGBTQI community, we must reject gender-based violence in all its forms. (Hon. Minister Fikile Mbalula)

In February 2018, a woman who was protesting was kicked by a political leader (a man) of the South African ruling party “African National Congress (ANC) outside of the ANC headquarters at Luthuli House and in full view of the media” (South African Human Right Commission, 2018). Despite the various “campaigns and interventions initiated by the government and civil society organisations (CSOs) around GBV, there remain high levels of sexual assault, rape and femicide still occur in South Africa” (SAHRC, 2018). As previously stated by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC):

Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) has estimated that 21 per cent of women over the age of 18 years have experienced physical violence by a partner, while 6 per cent of women have experienced sexual violence by a partner (SAHRC, 2017).

However, it is commonly believed that these reported numbers are inaccurate since many cases of GBV go unreported in the country (Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust Prevalence, 2017).

The systemic failures of the South African criminal justice system to hold perpetrators accountable, suggest that in South Africa unequal power relationships and patriarchy continue to operate and maintain gender hierarchies through essentialised notions of gender and physical and/or sexual violence (Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust Prevalence, 2017).

The United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on “violence against women (Special rapporteur) in 2016 underlined in a report, that South Africa is still characterized by divisions based on race, class and gender, inherited from its violent apartheid past” (UN, 2016). Gender-based violence is a pandemic in South Africa that is deeply rooted in the

unequal power dynamics in gender relations, like “the patriarchy structure, homophobia, sexism, amongst other harmful discriminatory beliefs and practices”. Such “violence is reinforced by the widespread use of drugs and alcohol, which has become a social issue and the high level of unemployment rate” (StatsSA, 2017), and the “continued stereotyping of women in the media, further compounded by the HIV pandemic” (UN, 2017).

Accessing Policy Gap in Addressing Gender-Based Violence in South Africa

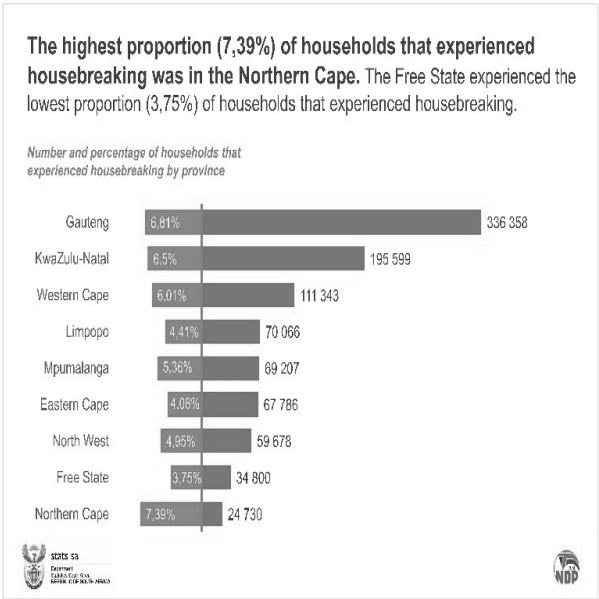
In a written submission to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), “the SAHRC welcomed the report of the Special Rapporteur as a valuable intervention in South Africa’s continued and relentless efforts to combat the scourge of GBV” (UN, 2016). It is true that “South Africa has advanced laws and policies that are related to gender-based violence and sexual-related violence, including 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)”. As stated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, Sections 9, 10, 11. These laws give expression to the constitutional rights to equality, human dignity, life, freedom and security of the person. “These human rights laws find further expression in international and regional human rights frameworks, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966 (ICCPR) (SAHRC, 2018).

There is also “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)” (SAHRC, 2018). Nevertheless, the prevalence of gender-based violence that presently plagues “the South African landscape, basically suggests that there is a lack of political will to deal with this challenge, as the government response and implementation of GBV-related policies and legislation has been deficient”. This observation is exacerbated by the fact that South Africa’s report to the UN CEDAW Committee that was due in February 2015, has to date not been submitted.

In addition to the issues surrounding gender-based violence and gender discrimination are socio-economic and social inequality, violence and the lack of accountability in the criminal justice system for victims of

gender-based violence in the country. However, the use of the ‘gender-based’ aspect is imperative as it highlights the fact that many forms of violence against women are rooted in power and social inequalities between women and men. Several research findings show the continued prevalence of gender-based violence against women and children around the world today. The term gender-based violence and violence against women are often interchangeably used as the widely acknowledged gender-based violence that is being inflicted on women and girls by men. There appears to be few reporting of sexual homicide and a decade later, sexual violence homicide incidents among women have increased from 16% in 1999 to 19% in 2009. “The prevalence of sexual homicides in South Africa, one in five (494 of 2670) women who were killed in 2009 died in the context of sexual violence. Similarly, for the same period, one in twelve (104 of 1277) child homicides had evidence of sexual violence as part of the murder”.

The study showed a higher rate of sexual homicides in female children as opposed to male children. Although “male children represented a 64.2% proportion of all children murdered over the period, female children were the majority among the child sexual homicide victims (8% male children and 92% female children)” (World Bank, 2019). research conducted shows that housebreaking in South Africa is the number one crime in the country. The results show that there were “about 1, 3 million incidences of housebreaking affecting 5, 8% of households in South Africa” (Stats SA, 2019).



According to research “the most likely victims of housebreaking were male-headed households, households in metros, Indian/Asian households followed by white households, very low and very high-income households, and households in Northern Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal” (Stats SA, 2019: 2). Approximately 48% of affected households reported incidences to the police (Stats SA, 2019: 2). According to World Bank report (2019: 2), the “numbers are staggering: 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence”.

Globally, 7% of women have been sexually assaulted by someone other than a partner. Globally, as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner. 200 million women have experienced female genital mutilation/cutting (World Bank report, 2019).

This issue as reported is not only seen to be “devastating for survivors of violence and their families but also entails significant social and economic

costs”. In some other countries, “Violence against women is estimated to cost countries up to 3.7% of their GDP – more than double what most governments spend on education” (World Bank report, 2019). The age profile of “the child victims showed that children between the ages of 13 and 18 represented more than 50% of child sexual homicide cases”.

The increase in sexual homicide cases in South Africa is an indictment of the gender inequality and social norms that continue to condone violence against women and children, it is even more unacceptable that despite an overall decrease in female homicides, sexual homicides has increased” (SAMRC, 2017).

Globally, sexual homicide has been described as a rare event in many countries such as the United States where under 1% of all homicides (male and female) are identified as sexual homicides. In the United Kingdom were 3.7% of those found guilty of homicide included a sexual violent component (Machisa, Jina, Gerard, Vetten, Loots, Swemmer, Meyersfeld, and Jewkes, 2017). However, reported cases of “sexual homicides are not rare events in South Africa with approximately 500 adult female cases and 104 children cases in 2009” (SAMRC, 2017). The SAMRC, in its efforts to unpack and

monitor the trends and prevalence of sexual violence against women and children in South Africa, has conducted some crucial studies – one of them being the Rape in Justice study published in 2017 (SAMRC, 2017).

There are very low conviction rates, which could have contributed to the culture of impunity among perpetrators of violence. This often deters many survivors from reporting. In the 2012/2013 financial year, out of 66387 sexual offences cases reported, only 4669 were convicted. This equates to only 7% of cases resulting in a conviction (SDGF, 2017). There remain substantial social challenges in apprehending perpetrators or offenders and effectively prosecuting sexual offence cases in South Africa. However, the exact prevalence of sexual violence in South Africa stays unknown due to improper records. As noted above, “the acts of sexual violence go unreported, not only to state institutions but even to the victim’s family and friends, many victims are afraid to talk about their experiences” (Enaifoghe, 2019: 9).

Watts and Eagle (2002), noted that “many survivors of violence do not tell anyone about their experiences”. Women’s rights organisation have called the attention of various institutions to the need to accurately and comparably collect data on the extent and effect of gender violence. The essential factors causing large amounts of “sexual brutality against women in our modern human society, and contributing to the 'realization' of assault as a procedure to ultimately embarrass and undermine male resistance powers are the profoundly held male-centric convictions and solid man-centric social relations” (Wood, Lambert, & Jewkes, 2007).

Violence against Women (VAW) has been a serious social, cultural and economic problem in Bangladesh, where nearly two out of three women have experienced gender-based violence during their lifetime, and domestic violence is a common, though largely underreported, occurrence (SDGF, 2017).

The programme on VAW from 2010 to 2013 was set up “to contribute to the long term sustainable socio-economic development of rural Bangladesh through poverty alleviation in rural areas”. It was meant to support “the poor women under development programmes”. According to the SDGF (2017: 3), the “government of Bangladesh for instance alongside other organizations had inadequate systems for providing information on services and rights, nor were these systems enabled to collect prevalence data, record the number of cases filed or track the causal factors linked to violence against women (VAW)”. Consequently, the problem remained unaddressed. Nonetheless, women have become the objects of violence in the interim as their subjectivity has become denied (Copelon, 2002: 203). Without tending to the basic power elements and lopsided characteristics which are at the foundation of such viciousness, a feasible and 'positive' peace for the two genders cannot be set up (Gibson, 2011: 96). Besides, while sexual brutality is overflowing, women's capacity to partake in peacebuilding, compromise and advancement exercises is seriously undermined.

There are continuous financial and wellbeing results of being a survivor of gender viciousness, these include living with HIV, sexual contaminations and mutilations, and mental injury (Aroussi, 2011: 580). Most importantly, the disgrace and shame ascribed to women who confess to having been assaulted are otherwise debilitating. In this

manner, it is also imperative to challenge the cultural and social standards of the society, to manage the concern and respect for women and *ethicalness* as attached to sexual immaculateness. The failure to address these issue of gender-based violence entails a significant cost for the future. One of the “characteristics of gender-based violence is that it knows no social or economic boundaries and affects women and girls of all socio-economic backgrounds” (Enaifoghe, 2019). This issue needs to be urgently and holistically addressed in both developing and developed countries.

The Role of the Media in Reporting Violence, and the use of Terminology

The generalizations and of course the stereotyping of women as inherently peaceful and as naturally serene can likewise be harmful and reductive. The media play a critical role in creating awareness and reporting events to the general public, but “one of the problems is how violence against women is reported”. A study by Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre in 2011 found that “court proceedings got a lot of media coverage if they met a simple, grisly requirement: they should be brutal and shocking”. Brutality and violence “may capture people’s attention, but a lot of discussion around gender-based violence in South Africa for instance, is devoid of contextual analysis” (Gouws, 2019). Such comes with consequences. In the absence of interventions, women vent their frustrations and pain in Twitter hashtags like #MenAreTrash. These stigmatize all men as contributing to gender-based violence.

It ultimately creates the feeling that savagery is visited upon us like the plagues in the Holy Bible, without us realizing who is doing it or why. It then makes the culprits of brutality imperceptible. It likewise recommends that there's a fix, on the off chance that we simply hold up sufficiently. This sort of announcement energizes momentary reactions yet not quick dedicated activity and intercessions. When Anene Booysen's killer applied for bail, “the then Minister of Women, Youth and People with handicaps Lulu Xingwana yelled: “All rapists must rot in jail”. It is obvious from these comments that people see higher imprisonment rates as the answer for assault and femicide. Its individuals' often-rehashed cry of “rot in jail” this additionally recommends that restoration is not seen as a need (Gouws, 2019).

This is centred on individual culprits without endeavouring to comprehend the mind-boggling social conditions in South Africa that add to men's vicious conducts. These conditions incorporate frontier and politically racial segregation of apartheid history of ferocity, endemic destitution, substance and drugs abuse, profoundly held man-centric frames of mind about women's place in the public arena and the undermining from joblessness and unemployment when men measure their value through work.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, to overcome endemic violence against women, it was acknowledged that abuse and violence against women have been with us for the duration of recorded history and appear to be a universal phenomenon relating to women's general status in particular communities. When violence is referred to as endemic, it conveys the premise that it is widespread, common, and deeply entrenched in most societies. Moreover, there are basic reactions of a gendered retrospection to dealing with peacebuilding which undermine even a more extreme origination of its significance. The role of women in the social and economic development of a nation cannot be undermined in terms of gender balance, looking at the important varieties they bring to society.

This article noted that “violence can negatively affect women's physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health, and may increase the risk of acquiring HIV in some settings and men are more likely to perpetrate violence if they have low education”. It is recommended that ensuring gender equity is vital to resolving gender-based violence. The inclusion of women through gender balance at all levels of the government establishments would necessarily allow them to share in the responsibility in reducing the violence against women, as they will tell the story better.

This will somehow reduce the way men view women as sexual objects and thereby eradicate the belief by some men that women are property to be owned. This article is meant to re-orientate men and a society that categorizes women as sexual objects and violates them anytime an opportunity presents itself.

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