



Views On Gender-Based Violence And Femicide: Implications For Policy And Practice Interventions

Jacob Mofokeng¹ , Nozipho Simelane²

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Corresponding Author(s):

Jacob Mofokeng
Department, Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa.
Email: mofokengjt@tut.ac.za

Abstract: As an initial step toward developing a responsive and adequate service delivery to the victims of GBVF, this exploratory formative research was conducted to examine perspectives of GBVF among the South African Police Service (SAPS) and community members in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) policing area. A cross-sectional mixed-methods design was used for a bigger study, to evaluate a comprehensive case-management intervention in the KZN. This paper offers only the results of a quantitative method. Descriptive research was followed to present the opinions of the respondents. A self-administered survey design was deemed appropriate as the strategy enhances honesty in responses, especially when dealing with sensitive matters such as GBVF. The sampling strategy amounted to the purposive selection of two police stations as a sample (n=131). The findings highlighted that the SAPS is gradually making inroads towards responding to the scourge of GBVF in the policing area. Concerning the seemingly slow response to perceptions of, and response to, reported cases, the findings indicated that the SAPS has introduced the use of technology to promptly respond to assist the victims of GBVF. This study was conducted in one province and findings cannot be generalized to the other eight provinces. There is a need for a paradigm shift to address past structural inequities that have created a climate conducive to violence against women (VAW), especially in rural settings. Based on the findings, there is a need for the two stations to be installed with a victim-friendly room where victims of those crimes should be assisted.

Keywords: Community, femicide, gender-based violence, training, police, victim

1. Introduction

Globally, violence against women and children (VAWC) is a significant public health concern. The United Nations (UN) defines it as physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivations of liberty occurring in public or private life (Mofokeng & Tlou 2022, Nkwana & Mofokeng 2018). In South Africa, Gender-Based Violence And Femicide (GBVF) is a widespread problem of substantial concern. Social and economic conditions in the South African rural areas, exacerbated by a history of apartheid, have created a climate for violence against females (Nkwana & Mofokeng, 2018).

The study of rural service delivery towards victims of GBV and rural police practices in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province can provide insight into police behaviour in different communities. Many of the studies regarding police practices have been conducted in urban areas in South Africa. Policy formulation and implementation are vital to addressing GBV in both urban and rural policing areas. At the policy level, there have been many positive developments in the South African context. The South African Constitution, the Gender Commission, and the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998 (the DVA) are examples of significant policy attempts to address gender violence.

A couple of studies based on GBV have been undertaken in South Africa; however, scanning through the literature review provided no empirical evidence as to whether similar studies had already been conducted addressing the implementation of the DVA in rural or remote areas in South Africa, specifically in the Verulam and Inanda policing area.

Research related to rural policing practices and crime is limited; however, current trends indicate that crimes once deemed urban-specific are now becoming issues in rural communities (Malatji 2016, Mamosebo 2015). It can be argued that rural communities differ from urban communities regarding police practices and crime. In these areas, officers often work alone in vast geographic areas with limited numbers of human and logistical resources. The authors of this article argue that the legislation demanding adequate service delivery in terms of the legislative framework is not yet understood by either the SAPS officials or the community members in rural or remote areas; therefore, this study was conducted to close the gap.

The lack of understanding of the operational policies by the SAPS officials and the key role players towards the reduction of crime might lead to role conflict. The degree of participation and willingness to assist the local police in maintaining public

¹Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa. Email: mofokengjt@tut.ac.za

²Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa. Email: SimelaneNN@tut.ac.za

order depends largely on the public's attitude towards the police and vice versa. The emphasis on the dependency of women, especially in rural settings, patriarchal practices, and poverty suggests the need for progressive law enforcement agencies, non-government organizations (NGOs), and other relevant role-players to collaborate towards the reduction of GBVF and empowerment initiatives of victims in rural settings. The impact of poverty suggests the need to address the lack of economic opportunities for people within poorly resourced communities. Therefore, community and empowerment development are important interventions for both alleviating poverty and addressing gender violence.

1.1. Objectives

To gain insights into key stakeholders' views regarding the response of the SAPS towards GBVF in the rural settings of KZN, this study did not gather information firstly, on stakeholders, cooperation and capacity needs, activities and forms of engagements, the extent and quality of cooperation between stakeholders and secondly, comparative analysis between the nine provinces of South Africa on the prevalence of VAWG and the response of the SAPS. This study was of limited scope though it provided insights to understand the prevalence of VAWG and police response. The core objective of this study was not to collect data on (multi-stakeholder) cooperation concerning the prevention of VAWG in KZN. The consulted literature review and findings from this study, consequently, provide insights into the landscape of stakeholders and the dynamics of cooperation among stakeholders engaged in the field of prevention of VAWG. This study further offers indications on possible avenues to improve SAPS response to the implementation of relevant legislative frameworks in cooperation with relevant stakeholders in the field of VAWG prevention. The findings should serve as a knowledge base for law enforcement agencies with stakeholders engaged in prevention and should also provide a baseline for and inform policy and practice.

1.2. Overview of KwaZulu-Natal

KZN is located in the South-East of South Africa. This province borders the Indian Ocean, the Eastern Cape, Free State, and Mpumalanga provinces, as well as Lesotho, Swaziland, and Mozambique. It has 11 districts: Ugu, uMgungundlovu, uThukela, uMzinyathi, Amajuba, Zululand, uMkhanyakude, uThungulu, iLembe, Sisonke, and Durban Metro. In comparison to Gauteng province, KZN has the second-largest population of approximately 14.7 million people (25.4%) (StatsSA 2018). Of the 14.7 million people residing in this area, black South Africans make up the majority, followed by Indians, whites, and the coloured population. KZN is perceived as a largely rural area, with a high rate of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

1.3. Study Sites

The study sites were in the Verulam and Inanda policing districts of KZN. Both Verulam and Inanda policing areas are included in the 30 stations nationally reporting the highest incidences of crimes against women and children. Disused buildings and overgrown areas provide prime locations where the majority of rapes occur (in public spaces). Crimes against women and children, particularly GBV, have been linked to alcohol abuse. Incidences of sexual abuse are high at schools in all these areas. Based on a 2014 GBV indicator study conducted in KZN, women in this region experience violence perpetrated by men in both their private and public lives. 37% of women in KZN are said to have experienced some form of GBV in their lifetime, including partner and non-partner violence. Additionally, 43% of men admit to perpetrating some form of violence against women. A rapid assessment of the prevalence of GBV conducted by the Masiphephe Network in the City of Johannesburg (Gauteng Province), eThekweni Municipality (KZN), the City of Mbombela, and Emalahleni Local Municipality (Mpumalanga Province) (2019) showed serious challenges with clear and budgeted GBV prevention, response priorities, and programmes in the four municipality's Integrated Development Plans (IDPs). Adhoc GBV activities are inadequately budgeted. GBV responses are mostly eventful and mainly associated with the celebration of calendar events such as Women's Day and the annual 16 Days of Activism Campaign for No Violence against Women and Children. These awareness activities do not address the root causes of GBVF (Masiphephe Network 2023).

Inanda is considered a presidential police station due to the number of resources used in the police station; therefore, the number of reported cases in the area is motivated by visible policing and the functioning of the police station services. Based on the above figure, two of eThekweni Municipality's police precincts: Umlazi, Verulam, and Inanda are amongst the top 3 of 10 precincts in South Africa with the highest number of reported murder crimes in 2018. Umlazi was in the lead with a total of 223, while Inanda recorded a total number of 203 reported murders, thus contributing a total of 426 to the total number of national murder-related crimes for the year 2018 from just two precincts. This data, however, includes various murder cases, without secluding and specifying the exact gender and age of the victims (Masiphephe Network 2019).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Camarasa and Heim (2007:4) posit that feminist theories and the feminist movements have vehemently demonstrated that knowledge cannot be considered neutral or objective. According to Jassal (2021) as cited by Alo (2018:140), a conceptual framework is used to display the connections in a study. Ecological thinking has influenced the field of violence prevention for several decades, most notably in recognizing the intricacies underlying IPV, DV, and GBV (Heise 1998). In general, iterations refer to micro-, meso-, and macro-factors that

are often labelled as some combination of ‘individual,’ ‘interpersonal,’ ‘relationship,’ ‘family,’ ‘community,’ ‘social,’ or ‘societal,’ and sometimes ‘global’ (Maternowska & Potts 2017:1).

Thus, the concepts and themes in this study have been put together to build an integrated conceptual framework (Figure 1). This conceptualization for this study is driven by the concepts of the ecological model, which seeks to understand GBV from a broad perspective (Alo 2018, Heise 1998, Maternowska & Potts 2017) and concepts of communication, which help in the understanding of communication/media processes and the context within which communication takes place (Alo 2018, Cardey 2010). Separate methods and results sections, followed by a discussion section, for papers reporting original empirical work (Jassal 2021, 2020).

According to Jassal (2021, 2020), these types of interventions rest on the assumption that female officers will be more responsive to female complainants and that women, in turn, will be more likely to approach other women in the police. These interventions, however, have rarely been rigorously tested, and the limited evidence that exists suggests at best-mixed success.

2.2. Understanding gender-based violence and femicide

GBVF is a public health crisis, and it is termed another pandemic second to none. The prevalence and impact of GBVF are among the most prevalent societal challenges and human rights violations worldwide (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative [CHRI] 2015, Jassal 2021, 2020, World Health Organisation [WHO] 2021). GBV is a large and growing problem worldwide, exacerbated by conditions created by the pandemic. A substantial inhibition to confronting GBVF is that a substantial margin of cases is neither recounted to, nor recorded by, the SAPS for various reasons. It is public information that victims of GBV fear stigmatization and victimization by the criminal justice system (CJS). A lack of trust in and the poor responsiveness of the police also play a large role (Sonke Gender Justice and Health-E News 2017). The SAPS, for their part, are often contemptuous of victims’ plight and inflict pain on the victims through their degrading remarks, providing uncondusive situations despite the victims taking their time and efforts to come to the Community Service Centres (CSCs) to register their cases. Research indicates that the lack of capacity and resource constraints, as well as political pressure to keep recorded rates of VAWC low, add insults to the victims of GBV (CHRI 2015, Jassal 2021, 2020).

GBV is violence against another person because of their gender. It can be physical, emotional, sexual, verbal, psychological, economic, or cultural. While GBV is largely experienced as violence, it can affect all people, including men, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI) persons (Sonke Gender Justice and Health-E News 2017). Mofokeng and Tlou (2022) posit that the lack of categorization of the GBV phenomenon by the SAPS leads to its misunderstanding, as it is perceived differently by many. Vetten (2021) concurs that attempts by researchers to collect secondary data to indicate the impact of lockdown on victims of GBV, as well as the extent of the problem through the use of statistics, are “thus limited in their ability to illuminate the problem of violence during the lockdown... any errors that may have been made in the categorization and analysis of the original data. These confirmed the addends to be correct but the sums wrong.”

It is important to note that although GBV, domestic violence (DV), and intimate partner violence (IPV) are often used interchangeably, there are subtle differences between them (Uzobo & Ayinmoro 2021). The United Nations (UN) defines GBV as “any act of gender-based violence that 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 2022). The earlier version of the definition by the UN General Assembly (1994) defines GBV as any act against women that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, economic, or psychological harm or suffering, which includes threats of such acts as coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. It affects women throughout their life cycle (before birth to elder abuse) and is often exacerbated by cultural, economic, ideological, technological, political, religious, social, and environmental factors.

The National Strategic Plan (NSP) on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) (2020:22) posits that “GBV includes physical, economic, sexual, and psychological abuse as well as rape, sexual harassment, and trafficking of women for sex, and sexual exploitation. Economic abuse, whereby financial resources are controlled and withheld, has a significant impact on the lives of women and children, often leaving them with no choice but to remain in abusive relationships. Furthermore, when women leave abusive relationships, financial abuse often continues through the withholding of child maintenance.”

DV is termed as “any incident of threatening behavior, violence (psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional), or abuse between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality” (Karystianis, Adily, Schofield, Greenberg, Jorm, Nenadic & Butler, 2019). DV impacts the will of individuals, affecting their daily functioning, psychological health, and identity (Mazars, Mofolo, Jewkes & Shamu 2013). Moreover, IPV is defined as “abuse or aggression that occurs in a romantic relationship” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2021). DV remains one of the global public health concerns (Nkwana & Mofokeng, 2018, Sabri, Hartley, Saha, Murray, Glass & Campbell 2020) and a priority, given the prevalence and incidence of violence in several countries (WHO 2013).

Femicide, also known as female homicide, is generally understood to involve the intentional murder of women because they are women, but broader definitions include any killing of women or girls. In South Africa, it is defined as the killing of a female person or perceived female person on the basis of gender identity, whether

committed within a domestic relationship, interpersonal relationship, or by any other person, or whether perpetrated or tolerated by the State or its agents. Private intimate femicide is defined as the murder of women by intimate partners, i.e., “a current or former husband or boyfriend, same-sex partner, or a rejected would-be lover” (Abrahams, Matthews, Martin, Lombard & Jewkes 2013 as cited in GBVF (2020:10).

2.3. Legislative framework

The levels of impunity in South Africa, the inadequate resourcing of an effective response to GBVF, and the degree to which political, faith, community, and business leadership has historically not adequately responded to the issue are all key factors that have led to the current crisis. GBVF has not received attention and action proportionate to its prevalence, partly due to the absence of leadership and political support, which also influences the allocation of resources for an appropriate response. The Diagnostic Review (2016), as cited in GBVF (2020:32), highlighted a lack of alignment and related resourcing in the overall conceptual and planning frameworks as a key weakness in the state’s programming responses to VAWC, as well as poor accountability processes and mechanisms.

The state and South African society, more broadly, have not adequately held perpetrators and men overall accountable for individual acts of gender-based violence and for a wider social context that has seen rising levels of misogyny, and the objectification and brutalization of women’s bodies (GBVF 2020). Various legal frameworks have been put in place to promote and enforce gender equality, such as the Constitution, Promotion of Equality and Unfair Discrimination Act No. 4 of 2000; Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998; Labour Relations Act No. 66 of 1995; DVA; the Maintenance Act No. 99 of 1998; Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act No. 32 of 2007; Protection from Harassment Act No. 17 of 2011; Children’s Act No. 38 of 2005; Older Persons Act No. 13 of 2006; and the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act No. 7 of 2013. These laws give expression to the constitutional rights to equality, human dignity, life, and freedom and security of the person. But one of the key problems lies in the lack of effective implementation of these laws, policies, and commitments. A related component has been institutional factors that impact effective implementation, viz. the lack of a comprehensive and optimally resourced national strategy that coordinates all efforts, brings key stakeholders together, and guides the implementation of effective service provision that addresses challenges (GBVF 2020).

2.4. Overview of previous research on GBV in rural areas

Since the democratic dispensation, South Africa has seen a rise in greater awareness regarding the prevalence of GBV, with increases observed in both rural and urban settings. GBV in rural areas of South Africa presents a significant gap in access to services and prevention strategies. Rural health systems in South Africa, particularly in KZN, face challenges such as reliance on NGOs with limited resources, weak management skills, and high attrition rates among health personnel (Boyce 2011). For this study, Boyce (2011) argues that rural areas lack access to GBV/HIV services due to challenges, weak management, insufficient capacity, and a shortage of health personnel. Initiatives involving rural youth and teachers in community dialogues through participatory videos have shown promise in addressing GBV (de Lange & Mitchell 2014). Limited research conducted in rural settings, addressing the prevalence of GBV in South Africa, has been more focused on factors associated with GBV.

Previous research indicated that GBV is a serious and pervasive problem in South Africa. A study by Bob et al. (2022) posited that rural areas in South Africa often lack psychosocial support agencies, shelters, and adequate services, including police stations where abuse can be reported. In addition, the long distances to police stations compound women’s challenges in rural areas by making it difficult for women to access formal support services (Conroy, 2014).

Furthermore, the interlinking of cultural norms with various disadvantages such as limited social support facilities, long distances, poverty, and entrenched patriarchy amplifies the impact of GBV (Fidan & Bui, 2016). Rural households and communities are not exempt in terms of the occurrences of this malady in society. In fact, the discussion underscores that rural areas have a combination of vulnerability factors that create the ‘perfect storm’ for GBV. The need to develop a multipronged approach of intervention is a top priority in South Africa to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target of 2030 to eliminate all forms of violence. Socio-behavioral change communication interventions at individual and community levels need to be introduced, and interventions need to address the prevention of child and family abuse and increase women’s feelings of empowerment to prevent GBV in South Africa.

In rural contexts, as this paper notes, females are extremely vulnerable in relation to access to education (and quality, which is a major consideration in the South African context), limited and tenuous (if at all) access to and ownership of assets (including land), which often need to be negotiated with men (husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons) over a woman’s lifetime. Job opportunities are also limited. For school learners, mothers’ status in relation to these aspects is critically important since they become better empowered to protect themselves and their daughters. There is limited research that looks specifically at GBV in rural homes and communities. Bosilong and Mbecke (2019), however, indicate that VAWC is more prevalent in poorer households. Rural areas have higher rates of poverty and culturally, patriarchy is more entrenched, which could create more risk factors for women and girls in rural areas. Spatial planning and lack of services and infrastructure (including water and sanitation, energy, street lighting, etc.) make housing and communal environments risky for women and girls. Despite the data and research limitations, there is no doubt that rural households and communities are not immune to GBV.

Additionally, a study evaluating comprehensive intimate partner violence (IPV) care in a rural sub-district highlighted barriers like unaffordable costs and health system constraints, emphasizing the need for a multifaceted approach to addressing GBV in rural areas (Rees, Zweigenthal & Joyner, 2014). The findings by Rees et al. (2014) highlighted that the high burden of IPV is poorly recognized and managed in rural areas. There was also a lack of standardized protocols for identifying and managing IPV. Progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in low-income rural villages in South Africa revealed disparities in poverty levels, unemployment rates, and access to information, underscoring the urgent need to address GBV at the local level (Jassal 2021, 2020). Other previous research linked GBV to other social issues (Jewkes, Gevers, Chirwa, Mahlangu, Shamu, Shai & Lombard 2019; Mosavel, Ahmed & Simon 2012).

Socio-economic factors such as poverty, rape, unemployment, and substance abuse are also identified as key factors aggravating GBV (Chirwa 2012, Mosavel et al. 2012, Skidmore & Bell 2020). Patriarchal culture, gender norms, and religious cultural effects are some of the key drivers of the prevalence of GBV in South Africa (Conroy 2014, Mofokeng & Simelane 2024, Ndlovu 2013, Nkwana & Mofokeng 2016, Ratele 2008). The construction of masculinity and social norms play a role in shaping attitudes and beliefs around GBV (Barr 2019, Khosa-Nkatini & Mofokeng 2023, Langa 2012, Mataba 2016). Additionally, unequal power relationships between genders and the portrayal of men as more powerful and aggressive contribute to GBV (Mofokeng, Mofokeng & Simelane 2024). Sociocultural factors such as language use, customs, belief systems, and gender inequality exacerbate gender-based abuse (Conroy 2014, Nkwana & Mofokeng 2016, Moolman 2016, Niala 2011, Ratele 2008). Psychosocial risk and protective factors associated with the perpetration of gender-based violence (Mngoma, Fergus, Jeeves & Jolly 2016), lack of economic independence among women as a driver of VAW (Goldblatt 2019, Nkwana & Mofokeng 2018), and the impact of GBV on women (Nkomo 2014) are also significant contributors.

2.5. Current study

Previous consulted research on GBV in the South African setting, as noted above, provides a step forward in improving GBV prevention and response; nevertheless, converting these findings into practical action on the ground is a process that requires a paradigm shift. While elements related to GBV are, in principle, important to consider when developing policy, in practice, the SAPS and other stakeholders continue to face challenges in implementing the statutory framework.

The novelty of this study is that two important gaps were identified in current data: multi-stakeholder engagement to understand their views on SAPS responsiveness to GBVF, and the implementation of the legislative framework. Both forms of data are required to have a thorough knowledge of the problem of policing GBVF in rural areas, to guide policy, and to establish evidence-based interventions. This study provides a comprehensive approach to building the required tools and procedures to collect this missing data.

Approaching GBV challenges in rural settings via the lens of innovation provides the opportunity to discover new solutions and employ new ideas, and partnerships to drive them. Policing innovations can be more inclusive, providing services to a broader spectrum of individuals. Critically, creative practices do not have to be groundbreaking; they can also include ideas that have already been established as excellent practices elsewhere but are distinctive to a certain setting or method of implementation. As a result of this same novelty, innovative practices also carry with them a certain degree of intrinsic risk and uncertainty in their implementation. However, successful innovative practices should ultimately be able to show a demonstrable impact, as evidenced by clear data generated through rigorous monitoring and evaluation.

Addressing the GBV legislative implementation remains a research gap in rural South Africa and thus demands a holistic strategy that considers communities, SAPS, civic organizations, and other relevant community structures. To properly execute GBV laws and fight violence against women, law enforcement and other stakeholders must understand and follow GBV-related statutory requirements. Their implementation is dependent on how much information civic organizations, NGOs, and others have regarding the performance of the SAPS towards GBVF and how frequently they update their expertise. This study seeks to fill a knowledge gap.

Without adequate GBV law implementation, women and girls in rural regions remain susceptible to violence, since they lack legal safeguards and support networks to properly address abuse. The lack of empirical understanding on the performance of the SAPS towards servicing the survivors can normalize GBV in rural areas, prolonging cycles of abuse and impeding efforts to reform societal norms. Communities in rural areas may experience difficulties in getting justice for GBV occurrences owing to weak legislation, leading to impunity for offenders and a lack of restitution for survivors. Failure to implement GBV law jeopardizes women's and girls' rights to safety and equality, promoting power relations that marginalize women and girls and limit their capacity to seek assistance and protection. The failure to effectively apply GBV legislation can have far-reaching psychological consequences for survivors in rural areas, leaving them feeling helpless, fearful, and traumatized without proper legal redress or protection.

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

A cross-sectional research design was used to guide the study among respondents. A cross-sectional research design was chosen because it allows studies to collect data to make inferences about a population of interest at one point in time (Jassal 2021, 2020). A cross-sectional research design makes snapshots of the populations about

which they gather data. Besides, this design was chosen because it allows studies to collect data from many different individuals at a single point in time. In this case, data were collected from two local Community Service Centres (CSCs) in KZN using a quantitative research approach, which is the process of collecting and analyzing numerical data (Creswell 2014). A quantitative research approach can be used to find patterns and averages, make predictions, test causal relationships, and generalize results to wider populations. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 131 respondents from 2 CSCs in KZN province: Verulam and Inanda. The stakeholders invited to participate in the study were selected through a comprehensive consultation process. For this purpose, the stakeholders were selected based on their perceived importance for the field of VAWG prevention by other stakeholders and not regarding their mandate.

In the first step, a list of stakeholders was compiled who were frequently named as important in academic literature as well as further studies and strategy documents on gender-based violence in Inanda and Verulam. In the second step, exploratory interviews were conducted with those stakeholders perceived as most important in the sector to identify further important actors in the field. All identified stakeholders were then invited to the first stakeholder workshops. At the workshop, which took place in March 2019, two CSCs (commonly referred to as police stations), community members, Community Policing Forums (CPFs), civil society organizations, and faith-based organizations (FBOs) participated. Further, these stakeholders were invited to suggest additional actors for the study which would be relevant to strengthen the expected outcomes of the project. This consultation process not only yielded valuable qualitative insights into the field but also provided the basis for the subsequent conduct of the survey (Odoh & Chinedum 2014:18). The survey design provided the authors with a means to detect traits, trends, and associations, as well as opinions, from which inferences about the views of the SAPS and community members' perceptions of, and response to, reported cases of GBVF in the selected areas of KZN Province could be drawn. Therefore, survey research is beneficial for measuring various variables (Bhattacharjee 2012:73). More specifically, a cross-sectional survey was deemed the most appropriate design. Surveys that are cross-sectional allow the researcher to describe a single entity in its entirety within a specific time frame (Dantzer & Hunter 2012:85).

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

A self-administered survey design was deemed appropriate as the strategy enhances honesty in responses, especially when dealing with sensitive matters such as GBVF. Fifteen (15) items were used to determine the views of respondents using a 5-point Likert scale. A 5-point Likert scale was selected to assess the respondent's level of agreement for each item. According to some research, negatively worded items can negatively affect research surveys (Barnette 2000, Dalal & Carter 2014). With the assistance of the Station Commanders at the identified police stations, the questionnaire was handed out to police officials and the rest of the questionnaire was distributed to the community members, CPFs, civil society organizations, and FBOs during workshops. The questionnaire was designed in such a manner that the anonymity of respondents was assured. The Station Commanders' assistance (as field workers) was needed in instances where there were queries from the respondents about concepts or terms that were not clear to the respondents. In formulating the statements contained in the questionnaire, attention was given to the following aspects:

- Brief and clear formulation of sentences with vocabulary and style at the level respondents could understand.
- Short questions relevant to the process of investigation.
- Avoidance of leading questions.
- Focusing on only one thought in each question (De Vos, Delpont, Fouche & Strydom 2011).

Data analysis entails the coding, reduction, and presentation of information in tables, figures, or discussions (Creswell 2013, Creswell & Hirose 2019). The purpose of data analysis is to convert the gathered data into a form that allows for the research problem to be studied and tested, and for conclusions to be drawn from the data (Bhattacharjee 2012:119). Quantitative data analysis does not automatically provide a researcher with answers to their research question but rather needs to be interpreted to draw conclusions (De Vos et al. 2011:249). Prior to analysis, the data collected in the study was coded and computerized. The coding was necessary as the program that was used to analyze the data required it to be presented in numerical form (De Vos et al. 2011:253). The codes from Excel were subsequently imported into a program used for data analysis, namely the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (IBM Corp 2017). The most popularly used statistical package for the social sciences, the SPSS, uses statistical formulas to carry out computations (Bhattacharjee 2012). The analyzed quantitative data of the survey was then validated through a second stakeholder workshop which was conducted in July 2019.

3.3. Results and Analysis

Statement 1: GBVF is a serious offence

Most respondents from Verulam (64%) strongly agreed that GBVF is a serious offence compared with Inanda (36%). The officials from Inanda (36%) seemed to be unaware of the extent of GBVF and its impact. Despite the frequent downplaying of its impact with the refrain "It is just a private matter," it is still heard far too frequently. The steps that police and the CJS should take to tackle the issue of DV will limit success or adequate response unless this complacency is tackled head-on. A change in attitude is clearly needed. The difference in agreement between officials of Verulam and Inanda (64% versus 36%) regarding this statement is significant. A larger

proportion of women than men agreed that GBV is a serious issue (67%, compared with 33%). The socio-demographic data also reveal that officers between 26 and 46 years of age were more likely to regard sexual violence as serious, suggesting that social attitudes towards this problem have been slowly shifting. This means that older respondents (who had longer to study) were less likely to regard it as serious. Therefore, one hundred and thirty-one (n=131; 89.7%) respondents viewed sexual violence as serious; this falls in the 36-60 age groups. Although the variable of education was not tested in this study, the researcher believes that the more people study, the more likely they are to regard sexual violence as serious. Those who witnessed DV might be more likely to see it as serious. From their experience, they would regard it as violent, serious, and destructive, ruining lives, breaking up families, and having a lasting impact.

Statement 2: Men are the main perpetrators of domestic violence (DV).

An overwhelming response of 78% from the respondents agreed (Verulam 42% and Inanda 36%) with the statement, whereas 22% disagreed. It is indeed encouraging to note that most of the respondents knew and were aware that the perpetrators of this crime are usually men, and the victims are usually women and children. The researcher believes that violence in a domestic environment is usually perpetrated by males who account for a significant portion of DV. A growing body of research confirms the prevalence of physical violence in all parts of the world, with estimates of 50% of women from country to country experiencing DV (Heise, Pitangy & Germaine, 1994). Respondents in this study indicated patriarchal beliefs as one of the factors contributing to GBVF among men as perpetrators. Patriarchal domination is a social system in which males hold primary and predominant roles in political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property (Campbell 2010, Nkwana & Mofokeng 2018).

It is argued that in traditional societies, especially in South Africa, rural communities or families have relied upon community-based support mechanisms to resolve issues of conflict, hence the African idiom "It takes the whole village to raise a child." The authors believe that the local community needs to be mobilized to oppose DV, IPV, and GBVF in its midst. Actions taken by local people may include greater surveillance of DV, IPV, and GBVF situations, offering support for victim-survivors, and challenging men to stop the violence. Complacency needs to be replaced with active intervention and education. Community information and education programs regarding the nature and unacceptability of DV, IPV, and GBVF should be developed. Such programs must address cultural behaviors that uphold male aggression, such as beating, punishment, and abuse of women as acceptable. Traditional cultural practices, such as 'Ukuthwala,' a form of abduction that involves abducting a girl or a young woman by a man and his friends with the intention of compelling the girl's family to endorse marriage negotiations, which violate women's integrity need to be re-examined and challenged.

Culture is not static, and newer forms of cultural norms need to be developed that respect women and promote their dignity and safety. Community elders and religious leaders have the responsibility to demonstrate leadership in this area. For example, religious leaders should be encouraged to re-examine doctrines and cultural practices that lead to the subordination of women and violation of their rights. Local council bodies, such as the 'traditional courts' system in KZN and other provinces in South Africa, should play a strong role in creating a culture of non-violence, by setting up sanctions, negotiating appropriate local cultural responses to prevent violence, and monitoring respect for, and implementation of, the sanctions that are in place. The implications for the SAPS are that local police stations are particularly well-positioned to aid victim-survivors, but very often their own prejudices, lack of training, and reluctance to intervene hinder them in dealing with DV. Training and sensitization of police at all levels must be instituted, and guidelines must be developed to monitor police response. Police must be held accountable for their own behavior towards victim-survivors to prevent secondary victimization of women at their hands.

Statement 3: Women and children, specifically girls, are the main victims of GBV.

Responding to this statement, most of the respondents, almost eighty percent (79.9%), agreed, whereas twenty percent (20.1%) disagreed. The response to Statement 3 correlates with those from Statement 2, indicating that men are the main perpetrators of DV. It is also encouraging to note that respondents were of the view that most victims of GBV are women and children, more specifically girls, as women and girls are considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of violence and sexual abuse. Women and girls may experience GBV regardless of culture, religion, class, age, sexuality, disability, or lifestyle. The authors believe that while both men and women may experience incidents of inter-personal violence, women and girls are considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of violence. An effective CJS must command the respect and support of society. One key component of obtaining such support is how it treats the victims of crime, especially contact crimes such as DV. The implications for the SAPS and the courts are that, in many cases, the only contact a female member of society has with the CJS is unfortunately when she is a victim of violence. It is important that the measures taken must be perceived to be adequate, whether they are in the form of legislation or administrative measures, to protect and take care of victims' needs.

Statement 4: The Constitution is more protective of perpetrators of GBV.

Responding to this statement, most of the respondents, albeit with a slight margin (55%), agreed, whereas (45%) disagreed with the statement that the Constitution is more protective of perpetrators of GBV. The responses confirm the popular belief that the Constitution protects the criminal and not the victim, leading to public

dissatisfaction with the status quo and the perception that South Africa's current legal dispensation seems to be failing victims of crime, in this instance women and children. It is an unfortunate irony that constitutional rights created to protect the innocent are now perceived to shield the guilty. Faith in the CJS is routinely undermined by inequity and fear of victims not receiving adequate attention and justice. The implications for lawmakers are that the Constitution of South Africa, regarded as the most liberal in the world, has failed to deliver justice for victims of crime because under this new Constitution human rights are pursued in favor of the offender. What is regarded as human rights turns out to be offender rights within the CJS.

Statement 5: Cases of GBV are taking up a lot of the SAPS' time.

Responding to this statement, most of the respondents, eighty percent (80%), agreed, whereas twenty percent (20%) disagreed with the statement that GBV takes up a considerable amount of police time. Where attitudes or perceptions that DV, IPV, and GBV are taking up a lot of the SAPS members' time are so deep-rooted, even among those who apply the law, it becomes unrealistic to hope for change or the implementation of legislation alone to bring relief to the victims. The authors believe that, on average, the time taken to deal with GBV incidents is substantially greater than the time taken to deal with offences involving people who are not in a domestic relationship. From the responses, most respondents were of the view that the inclusion of DVA has substantially increased their workload and has been implemented without adequate consultation. The GBV incidents are perceived to be complex and time-consuming as highlighted by the findings of the focus group interviews in a bigger study conducted by the first author. The findings from the survey also proved that respondents might have experienced a variety of frustrations. It is possible that some felt hopeless and powerless to effect real change in the lives of DV, IPV, and GBV victims and were often disappointed when victims failed to provide a statement or attend court, making it difficult or impossible to prove an assault or breach of a protection order. Other frustrations might be that the police also find the administrative and legislative requirements associated with responding to GBV onerous. Determining the effectiveness of the police in either preventing or reducing DV is a complex task. In the absence of any benchmarks or standards against which to assess the level of success of police action or response time, it ultimately comes down to the judgment of policymakers to determine whether an alternative approach is needed to involve a wider pool of key stakeholders in dealing with this challenge. The implications for the police are that there is a clear need to maintain a focus on the needs of victims of DV when determining intervention by the police.

Statement 6: Women are also capable of GBV

It is interesting to note that most of the respondents, i.e., seventy-eight percent (78.4%) agreed, whereas twenty-two percent (21.6%) disagreed with the statement that women are also capable of GBV. It is the view of the researcher that it is difficult to come up with accurate figures of GBV for either gender because it is suspected that DV is hugely under-reported. However, it is believed that these figures are even more inaccurate when it comes to male victims of domestic abuse. Criticism has been leveled at feminist groups that they cannot adequately explain the victimization of men at the hands of a female partner. Regardless of the availability of exact statistics, the responses from this research prove that the high percentage (78.4%) indicates that men are also victims of domestic abuse, and that it is a significant problem. The implications for future policy formulation must reflect the fact that both women and men experience severe domestic abuse, albeit men to a far lesser extent than women. The survey findings suggest that domestic abuse has become a more prevalent phenomenon, and this demands a cohesive response from the government, and statutory and non-statutory bodies.

Statement 7: Police members are familiar with DVA legislation

It is interesting again that a slight majority, fifty-one percent (51%), agreed, whereas forty-nine percent (49%) disagreed with the statement that police members were familiar with DVA. The researcher found these findings surprising. From practical experience, given the fact that the European Union provided the funding to train 100% of the members stationed at both stations, it was unexpected for the findings of the study to have turned out as stated above. From the responses received, it is worth noting that the respondents provided inconsistent information, which suggests that some did not really know whether such a policy existed and/or if it existed at all but the people responsible for its implementation were not familiar with it. This undermines confidence that SAPS personnel are familiar with the policy and know how to use it in these complex and sensitive cases. It is therefore essential that all members should be afforded an opportunity to be exposed to DV training. Such training should be mandatory for the SAPS to ensure that the investigation of matters relating to family violence is as current and comprehensive as possible. It is also essential that public prosecutors should assist the SAPS by providing relevant lectures during this training to ensure that members are familiar with all aspects of the investigative and prosecution phases of family violence intervention. Policy and procedure would inform members on what to do, but training would help them learn how to do it. Unfortunately, only about half of the respondents (51%) agreed that they are familiar with DVA. The implications for the police are that members across the country require specialized training on DV for call centers and dispatchers, to improve response by the police. It is the view of the researcher that SAPS Training Colleges might be exposing new recruits to DV training, but in practice, the focus largely tends to be on recruits. In-service officers should also receive specialized in-depth DVA training to understand the dynamics of DV and how officers could use local resources to respond, and not just provide a review of standard operating procedures.

The knowledge and attitudes of respondents are important factors in providing an effective response. Training for all officers is an essential element to the successful implementation of the policy. Effective training is what turns written protocol into street policy. Prior to introducing the policy, training schedules should include at least five hours on DV dynamics, laws, procedures, and policies, so that officers will understand how to deliver an appropriate response. Any training given to line officers and detectives should also be given to the rest of the command staff. Another possible solution would be a concerted, long-term, public education program to change attitudes towards DV. It is hoped that, ultimately, a change of attitude together with the utilization of the powers available in the legislation will influence behavior itself. To some extent, it may also be possible to change attitudes through behavioral change, for example by adopting a policy of mandatory arrest which will reduce victimization on the side of the victims.

Statement 8: The police are doing all that they can to curb the escalation of GBVF

Most respondents, seventy-three percent (73%), agreed, whereas twenty-seven percent (27%) disagreed with the statement that the police are doing all that they can to curb the escalation of GBVF. The interpretations by the researcher based on the responses are that although arrest is an essential tool for officers to use in GBVF cases, arrest alone will not deter future incidents of violence. This might be the case in this study where respondents view arrest as the only effective mechanism to fix the problem of domestic abuse. There might equally be best practices that could be incorporated in the manual and the model policy to assist or describe several means for police officers to assist victims. These include giving information and offering support, referring victims to shelters, and assisting in safety planning. The role of the SAPS is only one aspect of a community-wide response system to deal with DV effectively. It is essential that the SAPS join up with other criminal justice departments, social services, and victim advocate agencies to combat DV, IPV, and GBVF effectively. There are areas of excellence, for instance in other provinces in South Africa where key stakeholders or role players have established task teams that involve all the agencies and organizations that interact with DV, IPV, and GBV victims. The task team concept provides a framework in which the response to DV, IPV, and GBVF can be greatly improved since it brings the CJS and the community together.

The collaboration of police officers, judges, prosecutors, probation officers, doctors, magistrates, victim advocates, and the victims themselves could assist to reduce DV to a minimal level. GBV stubbornly remains a frequent call for police however, and the implications for the local police are that efforts to further reduce it require general and specific information about the nature of the problem. Both police stations should combine the basic facts with a more specific understanding of the local problem. Analyzing the local problem carefully will enable both stations to design a more effective response strategy. However, the researcher has another view, namely that it could also be argued that a 'one size fits all' police response is an inappropriate response to DV because of the sundry expectations of victims and the different types of perpetrators. Upon arriving at a DV incident police official are often confronted with a heated and complex situation. Regardless of the situation, they must make a range of decisions about what the appropriate action should be. Rather than being forced to limit their use of discretion in these situations, they must be supported and trained in the use of possible alternatives. The CJS must have the flexibility to be able to respond with a range of strategies that women can use to address their needs and that of their families. The concerted effort made by the CJS to respond to DV has dramatically improved the policing of this type of violence. However, even a perfect response is not going to solve this complex social problem.

Statement 9: More is being done at SAPS stations for GBV complainants than for victims of other crimes

It is interesting to note that more than half of the respondents, i.e. sixty-five percent (65.0%) disagreed, compared with thirty-five percent (35.0%) who agreed with the statement that more is being done at SAPS stations for GBV complainants than for other crimes. It is not clear from the responses whether the respondents were of the view that GBV calls should be treated with the same priority for service as other life-threatening calls. Perhaps the respondents believed, frankly speaking, police regard GBV as a low priority crime. Not surprisingly, elsewhere much of feminist-inspired research is critical of the way police handle GBV cases. Earlier in this study, the findings also highlighted the fact that due to competing priorities and challenges to adequately respond to crime, and according to some of the focus group participants as well, it appeared that to a certain extent the police assigned a low priority to GBV calls and rarely responded to them. Furthermore, even when the violence would have justified such action, they seldom made arrests or used other sanctions. Not surprisingly, this research indicated that women who did contact police were invariably disillusioned or were even further traumatized by the inappropriate or uninformed police responses (Hoyle 1998). The researcher is of the opinion that, while the importance of the role of police in managing GBV cannot be minimized, police are generally the first and frequently the only department to intervene in incidents of GBV. There are increasing concerns that a coercive criminal justice response is an extremely blunt instrument for dealing with complex social problems. The implications for the police are that there is a need for the SAPS to understand firstly, the heterogeneous nature of GBV perpetrators, and secondly, to develop a response system that is sensitive to victims' needs. Both have substantial implications, not only for policing but also with respect of how the public understands and conceptualizes DV.

Statement 10: The Constitution does protect victims' rights

It is interesting to note that, in responding to this statement, most respondents, i.e., 56% agreed albeit with a slight margin, whereas 44% disagreed with the statement that the Constitution protects victims' rights. The views of the respondents correlate with those in statement 4 (the Constitution rather protects the perpetrators than the victims

of crime). The responses paint a bleak picture of despondency based on what the rights of the victims are as prescribed by the Constitution and the reality of inadequate response to service the victims. This perceived 'gap' or lack of response to protect the victims thus compelled respondents to argue that perpetrators have more rights than victims. Not all people who don't commit crimes are able to enjoy many of the things that criminals get for free. In South Africa, the Service Charter for Victims of Crime in South Africa (also referred to as the Victims' Charter) is an important instrument for promoting justice for victims of crime. The Victims' Charter complies with the spirit of the South African Constitution 1996.

These pieces of legislation offer some hope for victims' rights. Although strong laws protecting the rights of victims such as the Constitution make a difference, in many instances and based on the perception of respondents, victims' needs are not fully met even where there is legal protection. The implications are that the CJS should attend to the interests of victims of crime. This means that the victim should not simply be viewed as an instrument enabling the police and prosecutor to procure convictions. Rather than dealing with the victim as a tool, which can be used in the process of reporting the crime and later as a witness, he or she should be considered as the injured party, as a human being with rights of their own that should be structurally considered at all stages of the criminal investigation and eventual trial. The general direction of victims' reforms means that the victim has a right to be treated fairly, and respectfully, and will have to be paid compensation or restitution for the damages resulting from the criminal offence.

Statement 11: Police prefer to deal with other crimes rather than GBV

It is interesting to note that in response to this statement, most of the respondents, 66% agreed, whereas 34% disagreed with the statement that the police prefer to deal with other crimes rather than GBV. This finding suggests that ongoing education and training of police officers are critical in continuing to address the response to GBV. It is possible that the respondents view DV as an interpersonal problem, and their response to DV is different when compared with other general or violent crimes, which may help, in part, to explain their response to DV. Several studies suggest that police officers have complex attitudes towards DV and that situational factors may influence officer response to a DV situation (Rigakos 1997, Robinson & Chandek 2000). For example, studies have shown that officers report that decisions about how to handle DV cases rely on signs of injury, witnessing an act of violence, previous reports from the household, involvement of substances, and characteristics of the neighbourhood from which the call was made (Buzawa & Buzawa 2003).

Statement 12: In general, women also commit GBV

An overwhelming majority of the respondents, i.e., 81%, agreed, whereas 19% disagreed with the statement that in general, women also commit GBV. The findings of this statement correlate with those of Statement 6 above, where the majority of the respondents, i.e., 78.4% agreed with the statement that women are also capable of committing GBV. Extensive research has shown that women commit partner violence at similar or higher rates than males (Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd & Sebastian 1991). However, a limitation of gender proportion identified by many critics is that female aggression might be in self-defence; less commonly said, but possible, is that some men might similarly display aggressive behavior against their partners in response to female-initiated aggression. Contrary to the self-defence argument, several authors have reported that many women who use violence reported striking the first blow. Most commonly, the assumption seems to be that men under-report their use of abuse against their partners and over-report their own victimization experiences. While women are more commonly victimized, men are also abused, especially verbally and emotionally, although sometimes even physically as well. The bottom line is that abusive behavior is never acceptable, whether coming from a man, a woman, a teenager, or an older adult. Every person deserves to feel valued, respected, and safe.

Statement 13: GBV can occur in a marriage

An overwhelming majority of the respondents, 73% agreed, whereas 27% disagreed with the statement that GBV can occur in a marriage. As a result of these attitudes and knowledge levels, the respondents would remain reluctant to arrest perpetrators as DV is justifiable under some circumstances within the confines of marriage. The respondents were of the view that they accept that violence is effectively a normal response in certain situations within a marriage. The view of the researcher is that although GBV and abuse can happen to anyone, the problem is often overlooked, excused, or denied. This is especially true when the abuse is psychological rather than physical. Emotional abuse is often minimized, yet it can leave deep and lasting scars.

Statement 14: Police are prepared to go the extra mile to assist victims of GBV

It is encouraging to note that most of the respondents, i.e., 86% strongly agreed, whereas 14% disagreed that the police are prepared to go the extra mile to assist victims of GBV. The researcher believes that the role of the police in maintaining the flow of information and good communication after an incident has been reported would emerge as important to ensure that victims remain fully engaged in the criminal justice process. Indeed, providing information is a key issue for victims and witnesses throughout their experience with the CJS. As indicated above, 86% is encouraging as most of the respondents felt that police were prepared to go the extra mile for them when dealing with incidents, for example, collecting a disabled victim at home to give a statement at the police station. Officers who attended to the initial complaints regularly check up on victims, provide relevant contact details of support professionals, and lend emotional support when required. All these actions constitute going the extra mile. Personal visits from police officers to follow up on an incident shortly after reporting would also be appreciated

by victims of GBV in terms of reassurance and showing that the incident was being taken seriously. This without a doubt will build trust and a relationship with the wider public.

Statement 15: The burden of administration relating to GBVF involves too much work

Most respondents, 70%, agreed, whereas 30% disagreed with the statement that the administration burden relating to GBVF is too much work. The findings indicated that the respondents often feel frustrated with the excessive paperwork required for referrals, and many believed that the exercise was an excessive duplication of their routine paperwork. While recognizing the need for the information to be recorded, the fact that it must also be entered into various database systems that are utilized meant that officers spent large amounts of time entering the same data into different systems. Police work is often stressful and responding to DV calls might often be viewed with frustration. Frustration can emanate from the behaviour of victims, the operation of the criminal courts, their departmental operations and informal policies, and the complexities of applying the law. The primary source of these frustrations might be dealing with too much paperwork.

4. Discussion

This study provided an important learning opportunity to recognize the work that has been done in relation to policing VAWC and to reflect on future priorities in this field. Violence against women and girls is a global issue that has vast health and social consequences at the individual, family, community, and societal levels (Watts & Zimmerman 2002). The findings of this study highlighted that societal acceptance of GBV is widespread in South Africa. Overall, respondents had a relatively high awareness of what constitutes GBV, the response of the CJS, and identified a range of violent behaviours prevalent in rural settings. The findings highlighted that 65% of respondents disagreed, compared with 35% who agreed that more is being done at SAPS stations for GBV to respond adequately to complaints compared with other registered crimes. Respondents described many types of GBV that are acceptable within the social and cultural norms of their communities. While this does not imply that individuals condone these acts, the normative environment suggests that violent behaviours are common and largely accepted as a part of relationships, marriage, or the social roles occupied by men and women. It is also important to note that there was no clear consensus within or across gender lines about which types of GBV to include under which category of acceptability.

For this study, the findings also highlighted that a bigger proportion of women than men agreed that GBV is a serious issue (67%, compared with 33%). Similarly, most of the respondents, 66% agreed, whereas 34% disagreed with the statement that the police prefer to deal with other crimes rather than GBV. The impact of GBVF can cause communities, especially survivors, to experience distrust, fear, and animosity towards the criminal justice system. Communities that experience threats to their livelihood tend to unite, while those affected by armed conflict tend to divide (Orner & Schnyder 2003). GBV is one of the most effective ways of terrorizing communities. There is no way to quantify the negative impact of systematic rape on a community (Wieskamp & Smith 2020). The impact is incredibly deep, complicated, and long-lasting, leaving legacies of shame, anger, distrust, disease, and division. Combatants who rape in war often explicitly link their acts of GBV to this broader social degradation. The findings of this study correlate with previous research that perpetrators sought to dominate women and their communities by deliberately undermining cultural values and community relationships, destroying the ties that hold society together (Orner & Schnyder 2003).

Often, rapes are perpetrated in public, deeply shaming both the woman and emasculating the males in her family and community at large. At times, men are forced to watch the rape of their wives or daughters. Violence affects not only the person who has been abused but also harms everyone else. GBV discourages respectful, healthy relationships in families, schools, public spaces, and even health centres. If people believe that men are more important than women and that women deserve to be beaten, shamed, and deprived of rights or resources, everyone suffers in some way from the injustice. Violence deprives children, families, and communities of healthy and fully functioning women who can participate and contribute. Women who are frightened or silenced cannot take an active role in improving their health and raising the status of women in the community (Mueller-Hirth 2017). GBV reinforces the harmful idea that masculinity means behaving violently. This encourages men to act in violent ways that can lead to more injuries and deaths. The ripple effect of this GBV can put forceful stress on cultural and community bonds.

As previously mentioned, in the rural settings of South Africa, many survivors, like their counterparts in peri-urban settings, are confronted with trauma and psychological challenges, including getting pregnant. Their desire to have abortions, despite its condemnation by their communities, caused social trauma. The status of women in the rural settings of South Africa, especially in KZN, deteriorated further as a result, especially when mixed with any accusations over the loss of sexual purity that a community or culture assesses against a rape survivor. Such a loss seems exactly the case in many instances for Muslim women who were raped in the Balkan Wars (Orner & Schnyder 2003, Scheff 2000). These feelings may lead them to be aggressive and abusive toward others, copying the violence they have seen. Nightmares and other fears, bed wetting, and emotional problems are common and may become long-term mental health problems (Oram, Khalifeh & Howard 2017). Some children become quiet and withdrawn because they fear saying or doing something that might provoke abuse, or because they are afraid to tell anyone what has happened to them. Research indicates that children in abusive families often grow and learn more slowly. They may have trouble paying attention in school and have more illnesses, such as stomach aches, headaches, and asthma. And too many children are injured and killed when violence is used against them.

The findings further suggest that GBVF is prevalent in KZN, where most respondents from Verulam (64%) strongly agreed that GBVF is a serious offence compared with Inanda (36%). For both stations, respondents reported a negative impact that was largely attributed to the CJS's lacklustre approach and the failure of the government to clearly deem GBV services as serious. Most respondents indicated that limitations related to staff, supplies, and funding impeded their ability to continue providing services. The findings corroborated the literature review that the levels of impunity in South Africa, the inadequate resourcing of an effective response to GBVF, and the degree to which political, faith, community, and business leadership have historically not adequately responded to the issue are all key factors that have led to the current crisis. GBVF has not received attention and action proportionate to its prevalence, and this is partly due to the absence of leadership and political support, which also influences the allocation of resources for an appropriate response (GBVF 2020). These findings reflect the de-prioritization of GBV services by SAPS when victims withdraw charges, as these are perceived as a waste of state resources. The SAPS members are there to provide protection, and if a victim changes her mind, then the SAPS members must understand why the victim has changed her mind. At these two CSCs, findings highlighted that GBV is endemic, and services were under-resourced, which will have devastating long-term consequences for women and girls.

Findings also indicated that community-based prevention services are not adequately responsive due to limited resources by the local SAPS. These findings painted a bleak picture during and post-COVID-19 pandemic, with the majority reporting that GBV prevention activities remained limited or unavailable entirely (Khosa & Mofokeng 2023). Prevention activities were likely most impacted because GBV, DV, and IPV are deemed private matters where community or traditional leaders are considered the arbitrators, and victims typically rely on the outcome of the rulings by these leaders. Violence in the private context can take many forms, including physical assault, verbal assault, sexual assault, intimidation, psychological abuse, economic deprivation, harassment, and any other controlling behavior. The foregoing is true, especially with DV, IPV, and GBV, which are all forms of violence that usually occur behind closed doors when no one is looking. The knowledge that DV intrudes on the comfort of a home, directly encroaching on the natural feeling of safety within one's home, is on its own appalling. It is this characteristic of GBV that causes victims to suffer in silence and this only perpetuates the abuse rather than solving it, as "victims of domestic violence often suffer a range of abuses, compounding in severity or frequency over time and as the relationship begins to disintegrate" (Artz 2011:6). There is a need for GBV prevention programming that builds community awareness and transformation at these two CSCs. Artz (2011:4) citing several sources, points out that "studies that have reported on the rates of attrition in DV cases consistently find that out of the 'thousands of women' who initiate the process of obtaining protection orders in the US, less than half return to court to obtain final orders. Thus, it is critical to establish whether the fallout or 'attrition' of cases is a result of the failure of criminal justice to implement DV legislation, or of a seemingly unrelenting cycle of violence."

Overall, the findings show the need for the SAPS members to be conversant with the adequate implementation of the DVA. This includes clearly defining comprehensive GBV services as essential so that the SAPS, as well as the CPFs, can continue collaborating towards improving service delivery to the victims of GBV and ensuring that women and girls can access these services. Each local CSC also must create preparedness plans for how they will continue to provide GBV prevention and response services when physical accessibility and staff are limited. One limitation of this study is that many respondents did not complete the full survey, which resulted in decreasing sample sizes for later survey questions. In addition, the authors attempted to obtain a broad sample of GBV from both the CSCs; however, some of the targeted respondents, especially from the NGOs, were not easily accessible due to the difficult terrain where this study was conducted. These NGOs' active participation could have enhanced the findings of this study as they were expected to offer more robust representation and insight. The study used a purposive sample that may not have been representative of all relevant stakeholders, including the SAPS working in GBV prevention and response at the two CSCs. The primary downside to purposive sampling is that it is prone to researcher bias because researchers make subjective or generalized assumptions when choosing respondents during fieldwork. Despite these limitations, this research afforded rare insights into experiences of GBV in rural area settings, its consequences on health and well-being, and the use of GBV case-management services in KZN. This study aimed to understand the perspectives of GBVF among the SAPS and community members and the acceptability of GBV response services in a rural setting. The data collection process ultimately allowed the authors to capture some of the impacts of GBVF and victims' access to and use of GBV response services. The limitation of resources, as well as the perceived prevalence of entrenched patriarchal practices, had the unintended consequence of limiting GBV survivors' access to needed comprehensive care response services.

Women and girls experiencing GBV have complex needs both during and after experiences of violence. Threats to their health include injuries, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy complications, mental health problems, homicide, and suicide. They also often need legal advice, housing support, and help for their children, thus requiring a diverse range of services from the government and other providers. Different policy and service delivery spheres such as health, housing, justice, employment, and education need to work together seamlessly. Clear lines of communication must connect local service providers with national policymakers to enable better and more victim/survivor-centred service delivery. Such approaches could include regular stakeholder engagements or surveys to promote the co-creation of good policies.

5. Recommendations

There needs to be an immediate upward shift in the prioritisation of VAWG offences in policing.

- All victims should be treated with respect and dignity and interviewed by a trained police official in a victim-sensitive manner.
- Structures and funding should be put in place to make sure victims receive tailored and consistent support.
- Victims should be assisted in a victim-friendly or alternative room, where a statement will be taken in private providing victim support services.
- Victims will be referred/taken for medical examination by the healthcare professional to obtain medical evidence and complete a medical report, including seeing to the health of the victim.
- The investigation should be conducted by the Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Investigation Unit or a detective with relevant training.
- Victims of sexual offences, femicide and infanticide and their families should be referred to victim support services that are available within the precinct for legal, medical, social and psychological help.
- Victims should be proactively and continuously given feedback on the progress of their cases.
- There is a need for the introduction of a new statutory duty for partners to work together to protect women and girls.

6. Future research

Future research should investigate the impact of GBV prevention programmes on recidivism and also to uncover the impact of rehabilitation programmes on the perpetration of GBV in rural settings. Currently, there is not enough information on the effectiveness of court-ordered interventions among GBV perpetrators, thus future research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of court-ordered interventions among gender-based violence perpetrators. Future research can also focus on investigating the challenges experienced by men in attending gender-based violence intervention programmes. Furthermore, future research can also focus on investigating the challenges faced in the implementation of GBV intervention programmes that are targeting men in the South African context.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm previous research that law enforcement agencies are still grappling with adequate responsiveness to GBV. Research indicates that a massive impediment to tackling GBV is that a vast majority of incidents are neither reported to nor registered by law enforcement. While social stigma may be one reason that women under-report cases, a lack of trust in and the poor responsiveness of the police also plays a large role. The police, for their part, are often dismissive of women's concerns and face disincentives to register women's cases, including capacity and resource constraints as well as political pressure to keep recorded rates of violence against women low (CHRI 2020, Jassal 2021). Despite attempts by the police to respond to the challenges of GBVF, results from this study corroborate with the findings by CHRI (2020) and Jassal (2021) that some SAPS members remain reluctant to become involved with what they continue to see as a private family matter and are slow to take up their powers of arrest to bring offenders to book. There is also a lack of understanding by police about the GBVF legislation needs of victims. There is evidence that they retain ambivalent attitudes towards violence in the home and consequently tend to treat domestic assaults as qualitatively different from other kinds of crimes.

However, the difficulties inherent in police work are also not always understood. Policing GBVF remains a complex task which is surrounded by ambiguity about what is considered good, appropriate, or effective policing. The main ambiguity is that a large proportion of police work does not involve law enforcement directly, and there has always been a debate about whether the police function primarily as 'crime fighters' or social welfare agents (in the case of DV, the police have traditionally emphasized the latter). The results of the study conducted by Sukhtankar et al. (2022) suggest that gender-targeted police services, such as a specialized help desk housed within regular, mixed-gender police stations, can improve the responsiveness of police to women when combined with mainstream support and training. Sukhtankar et al. (2022) further suggest that this is true even in resource and capacity-constrained settings. Importantly, our results reveal that increasing gender representation within the police matters; female officers were at the forefront in stations with increased criminal case registration, and female officers also appeared to be most sensitive to help desk training. These findings are of critical importance in a context where many states have pledged to reserve 30% of new police jobs for women.

Thus, the police are also concerned about how to provide protection for victims without infringing on the rights and civil liberties of offenders. Despite new legislation, dilemmas remain about how to treat cases. Policy developers need to offer robust interventions through effective implementation of the DVA to prevent DV, GBVF, and IPV as a matter of urgency. This will be a form of recognition for victims of GBV that there is a coherent configuration of aspirations, social norms, and behaviours that is drawn on by all relevant stakeholders to reduce the scourge of GBVF in rural settings. Understanding the perspectives of respondents from rural settings would go a long way to inform policy and practice regarding how the SAPS should respond to the needs of the victims. This is discussed as drawing authority from 'tradition,' and so engaging traditional and religious leaders, as well as men and women throughout the community, in activities to challenge this is likely to be particularly fruitful.

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