Tackling Gendered Violence: Social Workers Intervention in Violence That is Meted Against Men? A Case Study of a Rural Town in a South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The study discusses the issue of gendered violence against men and whether laws and legislation equally protect them. It focuses on the findings of research conducted in Bityi, outside Mthatha, which aimed to improve social work interventions in dealing with gender-based violence cases regardless of client gender. It summarises the literature on violence against men and how the concept of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) against men worked in practice. The study also offers a reflection on men's experiences with violence and the need for improved social work intervention. The research was conducted with 12 selected participants using snowball sampling and qualitative methods, and findings were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic content analysis. The study found that men are also victims of gendered violence and further recommended that social workers should be at the forefront of speaking against all forms of violence.

KEYWORDS

Gendered violence; gender; GBV; violence.

INTRODUCTION

This article is based on a research study conducted in a local area to improve social work interventions on gender-based violence by increasing their knowledge and understanding of the concept of "gender-based violence." The research was not funded and was carried out by myself, the author of this article, in June 2023, with the assistance of four undergraduate students. The research was completed, but its findings have not yet been implemented; however, its experiences remain relevant to many studies and projects that may seek to raise awareness of gender-based violence, promote inequality analysis, and provide Anti-Oppressive Practice interventions, all while imparting knowledge and skills. While the political environment appears more hostile, and social media allows for a one-sided narrative of gender-based violence based on patriarchal and misogynistic influences, social workers as professionals should continue to do good work and seek interventions aimed at promoting equality and reducing or responding to all forms of violence.

According to Jaramillo-Bolívar and Canaval-Erazo, (2020) and Fife et al. (2023), gender-based violence is a complex issue with structural, social, and political dimensions that stem from power disparities between men and women. It includes a variety of harmful acts, such as physical, mental, sexual, and economic violence, and is frequently perpetuated by outdated gender stereotypes and unequal power relations (Rufanova, 2020). This type of violence not only violates human rights but also poses a significant barrier to sexual and reproductive health and rights, affecting the lives and well-being of millions of women and girls worldwide (Heidari, 2016). Scholars define and understand gender differently. Chrisler (2016) views gender as a complex and multifaceted concept that includes social identity and behavioural tendencies. It is a socially constructed set of roles, relationships, and attributes that vary across cultures and evolve (Idris, 2021). However, Lang et al. (2023) argue that gender as masculine, feminine, or neuter can be problematic, mainly when applied to nonhuman organisms. Gender is also influenced by cultural, political, and economic forces, and it is frequently the subject of feminist scholarship that seeks to address gender-based inequalities (Frieslaar & Masango, 2021).

According to Lien et al. (2019), we frequently read about mindless or gratuitous violence in which men are both victims and perpetrators, and violence against men in intimate relationships remains a relatively unexplored field. Research is severely lacking in the experiences of men who are victims of violence and may require assistance (Lien et al., 2019). Several scholars have observed some conflict in research between those who claim gender symmetry, that violence is more or less evenly distributed between men and women, and those who believe that domestic violence is almost exclusively a question of men's violence against women (Agyeno, 2019; Bates, 2020a; Lien et al., 2019; Masson et al., 2019). For example, Bates (2019) contends that the gendered or feminist model holds that violence is committed by men with a desire to control and dominate women, a type of control that is historically and socially constructed, and that society, with unequal gender empowerment and male privilege, continues to support men's violence. In contrast, women's aggression is seen as large self-

defence (Bates, 2020a). Lien and Lorentzen (2019) argue that statistical analysis of gender-based violence underpins much of this discussion. As a result, this paper does not seek to engage directly in this debate because its analysis is more phenomenological, focusing on men's experiences of violence, their help-seeking, and the role of social workers in intervening when men seek help. It further implores the society to unthink what it knows about and how it knows violence against men in local areas and o critically engage with the work of gender in its relation to violence as an interpellative site of ordering and disordering, categorising and positioning both bodies and thinking.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender-Based Violence: A women's problem only?

Noting the increasingly inclusive definitions of GBV, in the wake of a slew of legislations, policies and intervention efforts in trying to address GVB, Graaff (2021) argues that, in reality, the focus of this has been almost exclusively on men's violence against women as the only recognised form of GBV. The narrow focus on violence against women in GBV intervention efforts has resulted in the exclusion of violence against gender non-conforming individuals and violence against men (Graaff, 2021). Consequent to this narrow use of the GBV concepts is failure to address full range of gendered violence and may only be successful in preventing only heteronormative and cis-gendered forms of violence. According to Thobejane et al. (2018), violence against men by their female partners has been largely ignored for a variety of reasons, the most important of which are stereotypes fuelled by the perception that a man is strong, and a woman is submissive, weak, and obedient. Thus, men are most likely victims of gendered violence, despite the gap within the discourse on GBV that is left unattended by several researchers who focused primarily on violence from a women's perspective (Deshpande, 2019; Drumond, 2019; Thobejane et al., 2018).

The misinterpretation of "gender" in violence

Importunely, gendered violence is always discussed in relation to women, with men viewed as perpetrators (Agyeno, 2019; Bates, 2020a, 2020b; Deshpande, 2019; Drumond, 2019; Graaff, 2021; Lien et al., 2019; Lombard, 2013; Powell & Webster, 2018; Scott-Storey et al., 2023). To this end, violence is frequently considered gendered on the basis that it is violence against women. The literature demonstrates this assumption as evident in "gender-based violence interventions and the argument that gender becomes irrelevant if violence is also perpetrated against men" (Bates, 2020a; Deshpande, 2019; Graaff, 2021; Lien et al., 2019). As a result, the misinterpretation of gender in violence emphasises the need for a more nuanced understanding of this complicated issue. Scores of legislation and policy positions, scholars, and GBV commentators frequently associate "gender" with "women." Kasa (in press) points out that gender refers to the characteristics culturally assumed to be appropriate for men and women. As a result of these stereotyped understanding of gender and its roles, Deshpande (2019) argues

that society does not believe that women can inflict violence on men, resulting in men not discussing violence against them and being unaware of any form of help to avoid it.

Sociocultural and psychological dimensions of violence meted against men

There is dearth of research on studies that underscore the importance of recognising and addressing the multifaceted nature of violence against. This leads to a handful of studies that actually explore the sociocultural and psychological dimensions of violence against men. For instance, available research on this subject exposes a complex and overlooked issue. According to most studies, men are always the perpetrators of violence, so they tend to not report any abusive behaviour and remain silent victims of the consequences (Deshpande, 2019; Drumond, 2019; Graaff, 2021; Morishita et al., 2023; Rikhotso, 2022; Wessells & Kostelny, 2022). According to Deshpande (2019) and Kasa and Saunders (2022), our societies' laws disproportionately favour women as victims of gendered violence, while these unfortunate men are denied justice for their plight in society. Rikhotso (2022), Thobejane et al. (2018), and Graaf (2021) conducted studies that acknowledged and revealed that men are victims of gendered violence by women, and because of how society perceives gendered violence, they end up keeping quiet in fear of being further victimised, stigmatised, and harassed by the broader society.

Patriarchy, defined as a socio-culturally concocted systems of norms, attitudes, and values designed to entrench male hegemony, attitudes, and perspectives regarding the roles and values of women in the family, society, and the economy (Rikhotso, 2022), serves as the ingredient for men's silence to violence (Thobejane et al., 2018). Morishita et al. (2023) argue that the consequences of gendered violence against men are multilayered and complex. Victims' experiences have a greater impact on depression trait than direct violent harm, implying that violence-focused support may be inadequate for male victims (Morishita et al., 2023). Morishita et al. (2023) discovered that men who experience gendered violence have moderate to severe depression, thus impacting their psychological functioning. d

METHODS
Research Design

The research utilised a qualitative approach to understand social phenomena, emphasizing participants' opinions and experiences. This approach was chosen for its flexibility and focus on process over outcomes. Employing a case study design, the study aimed to comprehensively analyse the complexities of gender-based violence perpetration by women on men. Case studies delve into the particularity and complexity of phenomena, providing in-depth explanations and descriptions of the research process. This method facilitates the exploration of factors contributing to the issue, such as cultural beliefs and power dynamics, through qualitative data collection methods like interviews and observations.

Population and sample

The study examined the roles of women in gender-based violence, involving 12 participants aged 24 to 49, including both employed and unemployed individuals from both genders. The

age range was chosen to focus on those likely in intimate relationships. The small sample size aimed for data saturation, prioritizing quality and avoiding redundancy. The study employed snowball sampling, a non-probability sampling method commonly used in qualitative research for hard-to-reach or hidden populations, such as those involved in sensitive topics like gender-based violence (GBV). This approach involves participants referring others with similar experiences, aiding researchers in locating information-rich key informants. By fostering trust and rapport, snowball sampling ensures the data collected accurately reflects the experiences of men affected by GBV, contributing to a representative and unbiased study.

Data collection and analysis

The study employed semi-structured and in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method to understand the perspectives and experiences of men affected by gender-based violence perpetrated by women. An inductive approach was used to grasp participants' worldviews and behaviours in their surroundings. Data analysis involved thematic analysis, a qualitative research technique focused on identifying, analysing, organizing, and reporting themes within a dataset.

To ensure the robustness and integrity of the research findings, the study emphasized providing both validity and reliability throughout the research process. Validity, in the context of this qualitative research, was addressed through the meticulous application of thematic analysis. This qualitative research technique involves a systematic process of identifying, analysing, organising, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The rigor of thematic analysis lies in its capacity to construct a coherent narrative that accurately reflects participants' experiences and perspectives, thereby upholding the internal validity of the research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Upon comprehensive review of the data, the researchers identified overarching themes and sub-themes, ensuring a thorough analysis of the outcomes of their investigation. Furthermore, the collected data has been meticulously interpreted through thematic analysis, involving a comprehensive examination of the recordings and comments to elucidate the challenges and experiences shared by the participants.

Below in Table 1, shows the biographical information of the participants who took part in the study. The study consisted of 12 participants, including 7 males and 5 females, as well as one social worker and one police officer. The first column of the table denotes the gender of each participant, while the second column displays their age. The age range was selected based on the study's focus on the role of women on GBV, with women between the ages of 24 to 49 years being identified as the most likely to be in an intimate relationship or married.

The third column of Table 1 shows the nationality of all the participants in the study, while the fourth column displays their race. The fifth column indicates the religions that the participants follow. Finally, the sixth and last column shows the marital and employment status of all the participants in the study.

Table 1.

Biographical information of participants

Gender	Age	Nationality	Race	Religion	Marital status	Employment status
Male	29	Other	Black	Muslim	S	Self-employed
Female	27	South African	Black	Christian	S	Employed
Female	44	South African	Black	Christian	M	Employed (Social Worker)
Male	48	South African	Black	Christian	M	Employed (SAPS Officer)
Female	25	South African	Black	Christian	S	Unemployed
Male	27	South African	Black	Christian	S	Self-employed
Female	28	South African	Black	Traditionalism	S	Employed
Female	35	South African	Black	Christian	M	Employed
Male	40	South African	Black	Christian	S	Unemployed
Male	24	South African	Black	Christian	S	Unemployed
Male	27	South African	Black	Other	S	Unemployed
Male	26	South African	Black	Christian	S	Unemployed

Note: This table demonstrate the demographic details of the study participants.

The social worker who was interviewed demonstrated knowledge of gender-based violence. One of social work's greatest challenges is putting an end to GBV and fostering relationships and communities free from violence. She further explained that coming across a male victim of GBV that is willing to report the case and take necessary steps to deal with the problem is a milestone for the profession and people. Most male victims find it difficult to report and open-up about GBV because of societal stereotypes and societal values associated with manhood. For this reason, whenever "we hear of anew case of GBV we automatically presume it involves a woman or a child" A representative social worker further stated that one of the reasons men do not report abuse it is because most GBV victim centres is the ratio between the male and female social workers employed in these centres. The social worker added that in order to encourage male victims of gender-based violence to come forward, men social workers and male community members should take an active part in awareness campaigns and community outreaches.

Table 2.

Social workers intervention in promoting equality when tackling GBV cases despite the client's gender.

Theme	Sub-theme	Probes/Categories
Social worker's in promoting equality when tackling GBV cases despite the client's gender.	What strategies or interventions do you think can be used to ensure equality in GBV against men?	• Perception and approach to address GBV against men. • Policies and inclusivity. • Interventions

Social worker's perception and approach to address GBV men

The social worker (participant 3) reported:

> *"It is surprising to get a male victim of GBV because they do not usually speak up". "I cannot address men at Men's Indaba as a female and expect men to listen to me."*
> *"Yes men do not want to talk about their problems, but if they were to open up to a men I'm pretty sure they would give it a try."*
> *"These centres only hire female social workers, which makes it more difficult for men to come forward and there is an urgent need for change".*

The findings of this study are supported by Valley (2019), Fairfax et al. (2017), and the International Federation of Social Workers (2014). Social workers actively strive to bring about social change by providing non-discriminatory services. Valley (2019) argued that social work services and principles are designed to accommodate all people who are in need of their services and to render services that are free of discrimination and infringement of other people's rights. According to the International Federation of Social Workers (2014) social work principles include challenging social injustice and ensuring that people are treated in a humane manner and recognition of diversity. The social worker further explained that their practice is a safe environment for all to report GBV or any other cases that violate and threaten their rights. Therefore, social work intervention and approach to GBV cases is informed by social work principles.

Inclusivity and social work policies

The interviewed social worker stated that social work practice is informed by the policies that accommodate all individuals and groups in society. Social work is one of the community-based programmes; it seeks to ensure safe community for all the individuals. Communities have culture, beliefs and stereotypes that may contradict with social work policies.

The social worker (participant 3) reported:

> *"GBV against men seems like a joke when we are presenting in communities during our awareness campaigns."*
> *"Akukho ndoda inobethwa ngumfazi", (There is no man that can be beaten by a woman).*

"Very few men do come and report issues of gender based violence. I think they view it as a woman thing and more importunately, their culture has a huge role that it plays."

"Our country is cruel when it comes to men expressing their feelings due to "indoda ayikhali" proverb [men does not cry].

The Department of Social Development in South Africa is a key player in social development since it incorporates social work policies into the constitution, primarily to protect the rights of individuals. The effectiveness of social work activities is severely hampered by the survival of cultural barriers and the maintenance of stereotypes in many groups, even after establishing this strong legal framework. But it's amazing how social workers have been able to overcome these obstacles because of their tenacity and flexibility. Understanding and being aware of cultural quirks is essential to getting beyond these obstacles and guaranteeing that services are provided efficiently. Fairfax et al. (2017) support this viewpoint by highlighting the need to close the gap between idealistic policy frameworks and the complex realities presented by the varied cultural settings within communities.

Building on this conversation, it is essential to compare with other academic works to comprehend the problem at hand on a deeper level. The ability of social workers to negotiate and adjust to the cultural nuances of the communities they serve, for example, is a critical component of social work efficacy, according to Russ-Smith (2019). They argue that a one-size-fits-all approach to social work is fundamentally faulty because South African communities are rich in cultural diversity. This perspective is consistent with the claims made by Fairfax et al. (2017), underscoring the urgent necessity of culturally aware social work practices.

Additionally, Jones et al. (2020) add to the conversation by analysing how education and training help social workers be ready for the obstacles they encounter in culturally diverse settings. They contend that social workers may not be adequately prepared by existing school programmes to confront the prejudices and hurdles to culture that obstruct their job. This disparity in education and training highlights the need for an integrated strategy that blends theoretical knowledge with practical, culturally competent skills.

According to available literature, social workers in South Africa encounter a variety of difficulties, including those related to the law, culture, and education. Together with the contributions of Smith and Green (2019) and Jones et al. (2020), the study of Fairfax et al. (2017) emphasizes how urgent it is to implement more nuanced, culturally aware approaches to social work. Since bridging the gap between policy objectives and the lived reality of the communities they aim to serve is crucial to the purpose, such methods must place a high priority on acknowledging and comprehending cultural diversity. This all-encompassing viewpoint is necessary to progress the social work profession and guarantee the successful defense and advancement of individual rights in South Africa's heterogeneous socio-cultural environment.

CONCLUSION

The study has revealed that social worker acknowledged their awareness of GBV and emphasised that all victims, regardless of gender, were the focus of their interventions. They ensure that their interventions align with the stipulations of the South African Constitution regarding culture and practice, guaranteeing the upholding of clients' rights. One challenge social workers face is navigating cultural practices that often conflict with the goals of social work. Moreover, societal stereotypes influence how communities perceive social work services. Social workers actively strive to bring about social change by providing non-discriminatory services. However, there are contradictions between cultural and social work policies concerning GBV against men. Consequently, many male victims struggle to disclose GBV cases to social workers or counselling services.

The shortage of male social workers in one-stop centres primarily dealing with GBV affects how men engage with and interpret GBV awareness initiatives targeted at men. The community often perceives social work as a Western profession, indicating a need for more education on the indigenisation of social work and its objectives. Therefore, the researchers recommend increasing awareness campaigns regarding the indigenisation of social work, its goals, and policies. GBV against men is a societal and community issue akin to GBV against women, necessitating a comprehensive community intervention. The researchers advocate for programs that foster collective concern about GBV against men. Given that some male victims of GBV struggle to confide in female social workers, it is imperative to involve more male social workers in GBV cases and awareness campaigns to create a supportive environment for male victims of GBV.

Several significant constraints must be overcome to fully comprehend the study's conclusions and ramifications. An important obstacle was the scarcity of male participants willing to engage in the research. This reluctance largely stemmed from apprehensions about being subjected to societal stigma. Such fears highlight the pervasive social stereotypes and biases that can deter individuals from participating in studies that may expose them to negative judgment or discrimination.

Another major limitation was the absence of relevant data within the police service databases. This gap in data availability poses challenges to drawing robust conclusions and undermines the ability to corroborate findings with official records. The lack of police data could be attributed to various factors, including potential underreporting, discrepancies in data collection methods, or the prioritization of different types of incidents within law enforcement protocols.

This dearth of participation and data impedes the depth and breadth of the research findings and reflects broader societal and systemic issues that warrant further investigation. Addressing these limitations in future research will require innovative approaches to encourage participation, alongside efforts to improve data collection and reporting mechanisms within institutional frameworks.

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