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TOWARDS EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE POLICIES IN MANKWENG TOWNSHIP

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Abstract. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) remains a pervasive and complex issue in South Africa, particularly affecting women and girls. This study delves into the heart of this problem by focusing on Mankweng Township, an area marked by diverse cultural influences and socioeconomic challenges. Drawing upon a combination of interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions, this research comprehensively examines GBV, its root causes, and the experiences of its victims and survivors. The findings illuminate a nuanced picture of GBV, transcending conventional narratives. While the study confirms the predominant role of men as perpetrators, it also recognises that not all men adhere to violent behaviours. Men, women, and members of the LGBTQ+ community in Mankweng Township face varying degrees of violence and discrimination, thus challenging stereotypical perceptions. Traditional customs and cultural norms are revealed as powerful factors perpetuating GBV. The practice of lobola, emphasising ownership of women, and the subjugation of women in relationships are particularly highlighted. However, the study also uncovers potential solutions within cultural and religious frameworks where churches can serve as safe spaces for dialogue and support. Importantly, the research spotlights the often-overlooked experiences of the LGBTQ+ community, who face a disproportionately high risk of GBV. The fear of judgment and discrimination stifles their ability to seek help and report incidents. This underscores the need for a more inclusive approach to GBV prevention and intervention programs. The study's recommendations highlight the importance of awareness programs, better resource distribution, and cultural re-evaluation. It emphasizes the need to involve men and boys actively in GBV prevention efforts, challenging harmful gender norms and behaviours. As explored in this study, the legislative framework provides a robust foundation for addressing GBV. However, the study also highlights the critical importance of effective implementation and enforcement of these laws.

Keywords: Gender-Based Violence; Policy; Policy Framework; Violence; Mankweng Township

1. Introduction

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) encompasses various forms of violence targeting individuals based on their gender, including domestic violence, physical violence, economic violence, sexual violence, emotional violence, femicide, and others. In South Africa, GBV predominantly affects women and children, leading to an urgent call for action from the government and relevant organizations to address the increasing incidences of gender-based violence against women (Enaifoghe et al., 2021). Limpopo Province is one of the regions in South Africa severely impacted by GBV, prompting the implementation of legal and policy intervention strategies such as the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) and its Amendment Act and the Domestic Violence and its Amendment Act (Managa et al., 2022). However, despite these policy frameworks, GBV persists in the

Mankweng township of Limpopo Province, necessitating a critical investigation into their failure to effectively combat GBV as intended (Phasha, 2021).

The South African constitution, specifically the Bill of Rights, emphasizes the protection of the right to life, which is considered non-derogable and highly valued. However, the cases of GBV in South Africa, as highlighted in Chapter Two of this study, show that many women lose their lives due to the stigma and impact of GBV. The deadly consequences encompass different outcomes, such as homicide, suicide, maternal mortality, and deaths related to AIDS (Sabri and Granger, 2018). The 2012 Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act was implemented as a public policy to improve the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation. However, studies have indicated that GBV, including sexual, physical, mental, and economic harm, has evolved into various criminal offences such as intimidations of violence, coercion, manipulation, intimate partner violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and so-called honour crimes that the Act aimed to prevent (Wanjiru, 2021).

In recent years, there has been an increasing concern about GBV against women and children, which has been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a shadow pandemic with deadly consequences for victims (Mongare et al., 2018). The 2011 Protection from Harassment Act aimed to provide effective solutions against harassment but did not significantly impact GBV levels, indicating the need for alternative solutions to address the underlying harassment cases that contribute to the increase in GBV (Dzinavane, 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic further worsened the impact of GBV in South Africa, with restrictions aimed at controlling the virus that created barriers for women and children to seek help and access services. This has also affected the capacity of gender-based violence services to provide support and the effectiveness of policy and practice responses to GBV (John et al., 2020; Mantler et al., 2022; Ndlovu et al., 2022).

Enaifoghe et al. (2021) and Graaff (2021) have extensively discussed the pervasive nature of GBV in South Africa, highlighting the country's exceptionally high rates of violence and gender-based violence compared to other nations. Various interventions, including legislative changes and women-focused reactive initiatives, have been implemented to address the increasing cases of GBV in the country (Dzinavane, 2016). Despite South Africa being a democratic country committed to human rights, GBV continues to persist. GBV is recognized as a human rights abuse, but societies, communities, and individuals often feel helpless in the face of GBV, even if they have experienced it first-hand or witnessed it within their families and localities (Thobejane, 2019). Public policies that forbid violence against women and enhance survivors' ability to access dedicated facilities, such as Women's Police Stations, have the potential to encourage manners among men that condemn violence against women (Cordova & Kras, 2021). However, patriarchal norms and societal expectations often discourage women from reporting assaults or violations involving their spouses or family members, further perpetuating the cycle of violence.

It is crucial to understand the drivers of GBV or intimate partner violence (IPV) as experienced by women and perpetuated by men to develop effective prevention programs (Gibbs et al., 2020). Additionally, it is essential to consider both generic factors, such as quality of life and well-being, and condition-specific aspects related to symptoms resulting from human rights abuses when examining the impact of GBV (Rahman et al., 2021). Overall, this research study provides a comprehensive background to the issue of GBV in Mankweng Township, South Africa, highlighting the shortcomings of existing policy frameworks and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It also emphasizes the need for alternative solutions and a deeper understanding of the drivers of GBV. Drawing from a qualitative methodology, the aim of this study is to investigate the implementation of a policy framework to tackle gender-based violence in Mankweng Township, South Africa. Therefore, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

- What are the underlying causes of gender-based violence in South Africa?
- Why have the public policy frameworks implemented been ineffective in addressing gender-based violence?
- What are the impacts of gender-based violence on individuals and the community?
- What interventions can be implemented to address gender-based violence in South Africa?

2. Literature Review

The theoretical literature serves as a cornerstone in this study, offering a comprehensive exploration of existing knowledge and research concerning the impact of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in South Africa. This section delves into relevant academic studies, reports, and publications to gain insights into the underlying factors contributing to GBV and its consequences, particularly for women in the country. The theoretical framework provides a conceptual lens through which to examine the development, implementation, and evaluation of policy frameworks aimed at combating GBV within the unique sociocultural context of Mankweng Township.

The study adopts several theoretical perspectives to elucidate the dynamics of GBV and inform policy interventions. These include:
- **Social Learning Theory**: Social learning theory posits that individuals acquire behaviours through observation and experience. Within the context of GBV, this theory suggests that exposure to violent behaviours during childhood or witnessing violence can shape later violent behaviour. Children learn from their environment and significant individuals in their lives, such as parents, peers, and teachers. Interventions aimed at addressing GBV must consider the influence of social learning and provide alternatives to violence as coping mechanisms (Mongare et al., 2018; Wanjiru, 2021).
- **Learned Helplessness Theory**: Learned helplessness theory suggests that individuals exposed to prolonged aversive stimuli may develop a sense of helplessness, leading to low self-esteem, renunciation, and a perception of loss of control. Within the context of GBV, this theory sheds light on the behaviours and characteristics of battered women, highlighting the complex factors that contribute to their decision-making processes. Understanding learned helplessness is crucial for designing interventions that empower victims and address the underlying causes of their helplessness (Cruz & Klinger, 2016; Wanjiru, 2021).
- **Gender Role Theory**: Gender role theory examines how societal expectations of behaviour for men and women influence judgments and behaviours. Traditional gender roles have historically confined women to domestic duties, reinforcing stereotypes about their capabilities and vulnerabilities. This theory emphasizes the importance of challenging gender norms and recognizing the diverse capabilities of individuals regardless of gender. Addressing gender role expectations is essential for promoting gender equality and preventing GBV (Rua et al., 2020; Dzinavane, 2016).

In South Africa, the legislative and policy landscape regarding Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is anchored in the Constitution of South Africa, Act No. 108 of 1996, which upholds fundamental principles of equality and human dignity. Specific provisions within the Constitution, such as Sections 9, 10, and 12, guarantee equal protection, human dignity, and freedom from violence for all individuals. Furthermore, several legislative acts have been enacted to address GBV comprehensively:

- **The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (Act No. 4 of 2000)** prohibits discrimination based on sex, gender, or sexual orientation, recognizing GBV as a form of prohibited discrimination.
- **The Employment Equity Act (Act No. 55 of 1998)** mandates fair treatment in employment policies and practices, reducing biased prejudice within the workplace.

- **The Code of Good Practice on the Handling of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace (2008)** emphasizes creating a work environment that respects employee dignity and safeguards against sexual harassment.
- **The Amendment of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses and Related Matters, Act No. 32 of 2007)** addresses sexual violence against adults and children, providing definitions for various sexual offences and establishing structures for effective implementation.
- **The Protection from Harassment Act (Act No. 17 of 2011)** offers civil solutions to shield individuals from harassing conduct, including digital forms of harassment.
- **South Africa's Domestic Violence Act (Act No. 116 of 1998)** comprehensively addresses various forms of family violence, extending protection to individuals in domestic relationships beyond romantic or sexual partners.
- These legislative measures establish a legal foundation for addressing GBV, reflecting South Africa's commitment to equality, dignity, and human rights. However, the effectiveness of implementation and enforcement remains a subject of ongoing research and advocacy.

The GBV policy framework must address socioeconomic, cultural, institutional, and community factors to effectively combat GBV:

- **Socioeconomic Factors**: Prioritizing economic empowerment programs for women, including skills training and access to employment opportunities, can reduce vulnerability to GBV by addressing poverty and inequality.
- **Cultural and Social Norms**: Gender-sensitive education programs should challenge patriarchal beliefs and stereotypes, promoting gender equality and mutual respect. Engaging with traditional and community leaders is essential to change harmful cultural norms.
- **Institutional Factors**: Strengthening the legal framework and ensuring effective enforcement of existing laws against GBV is crucial. Additionally, enhancing support services for GBV survivors, including shelters and trauma-informed counselling, is necessary.
- **Community Factors**: Community engagement and awareness programs can challenge social acceptance and silence surrounding GBV. Partnerships between government institutions, civil society organizations, and local community groups are vital for effective implementation.
- **Intersectionality**: Adopting an intersectional approach that recognizes the unique experiences of marginalized groups is essential. Collaboration with intersectional organizations and activists can inform policy decisions and improve service provision.

By addressing these underlying factors through a comprehensive policy framework, there is potential for significant progress in reducing GBV in Mankweng Township. However, success will depend on sufficient resources, political commitment, and ongoing evaluation and adaptation based on local context and needs.

3. Research and Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach that aligns with the research topic's specific context and limitations. Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter and the aim to delve deeply into individual perspectives, a qualitative approach is most appropriate (Graaff, 2017). The research focuses on conducting a single case study within Mankweng Township in South Africa, warranting an intensive exploration of a smaller sample size to uncover nuanced insights.

The study's focus was on a specific target population within the context of Mankweng Township, directly aligning with the research topic of the implementation of the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) policy framework. The targeted population consisted of women aged between eighteen and thirty-six years old, men aged between

nineteen and forty-three years old, and members of the LGBTQ+ community aged between eighteen and twenty-eight years old. The selection of these age groups was intentional, aiming to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives spanning different life stages. Participants below the age of eighteen were excluded due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the potential impact it could have on their emotional well-being.

The study's location was Mankweng Township itself, which was chosen due to its direct relevance to the research topic. By conducting the research within Mankweng Township, the study sought to gain insights into the experiences, opinions, and perceptions of those who live, work, and study within this specific community context. This study employed a purposive sampling method, specifically drawing from the approach outlined by Kanjiri et al. (2021). The rationale behind choosing this sampling method was its alignment with the research goal, which aimed to comprehensively explore the reasons behind the failure of the implemented gender-based violence policy framework in Mankweng Township. The purposive sampling technique provided the flexibility to select participants based on their capacity to comprehend and address the research questions effectively.

To ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned unique code numbers, such as Participant 001, to safeguard their identities. The selection of these specific participants was driven by the study's geographic focus on Mankweng Township. Given that the research questions centred on this locale, residents, the University of Limpopo students, and local institution staff were deemed particularly relevant as they might have encountered or observed instances of gender-based violence within the township. Their insights and perspectives carried considerable significance in shedding light on the study's concerns.
The sampling process adhered to two distinct criteria:

- All participants aged 18 and above were eligible for inclusion.
- Both undergraduate and postgraduate students were included based on their familiarity with the research topic.
- Staff members from the Mankweng police department and Mankweng hospital and personnel from the University of Limpopo were included.
- A diverse range of educational backgrounds, encompassing both educated and less educated individuals, were considered.
- Participants from various employment statuses, including both employed and unemployed individuals, were included.
- All gender identities, including women, men, and members of the LGBTQ+ community, were represented.
- Individuals below the age of eighteen were excluded from participation.
- Those who expressed discomfort or distress regarding the research topic and its contents were excluded.
- Individuals who declined to participate in the study were excluded.

The application of purposive sampling ensured that the chosen participants offered insightful and contextually relevant perspectives on the failure of implementing the gender-based violence policy framework within Mankweng Township.

The data collection process was an exhaustive endeavour, employing an array of tools to gather substantial insights essential for addressing the intricate challenges posed by the failed policy framework aimed at dealing with GBV. The instruments used to collect data are as follows:

One-on-one interviews emerged as a pivotal data collection instrument. Employing a semi-structured approach, the researcher engaged participants in candid conversations, unearthing their perspectives on the deeply entrenched GBV issue. This approach aimed to strike a balance between uniformity and the freedom to provide expansive insights. The choice of semi-structured interviews, as opposed to unstructured ones, was guided by the

researcher's intention to respect participant comfort levels, steering clear of overwhelming attention that might compromise their openness.

The rationale for this approach aligns with Graaff's observation (2017) that the opinions of participants regarding interventions had often been relegated or underestimated. The study seeks to offer a platform for every voice to be heard, irrespective of societal standing, underlining the collective effort required to combat the perils of GBV. This individualized interaction allowed participants to share experiences, opinions, and concealed sentiments with the researcher, often more comfortably than with their close circles, due to the perceived impartiality and confidentiality of the researcher.

Guiding the interviews was an approach that extended beyond mere questioning, demonstrating empathy and compassion. This approach fostered a responsive dialogue, where participants felt understood and acknowledged rather than interrogated. By embracing semi-structured interviews, participants were empowered to independently articulate their perceptions regarding GBV, unveiling insights not solely reliant on learned opinions.

The questionnaire, a non-intrusive tool, was effectively employed to gather data. Ensuring participant comfort, the researcher distributed questionnaires that were to be completed over seven days. This approach granted participants the flexibility to respond at their convenience, effectively balancing their busy schedules. The method, bolstered by participants' signed consent forms, maintained ethical standards and autonomy.

Crafted for different scenarios, the questionnaire's content varied. One version was intended for one-on-one interviews, guiding participants to address the questions orally. Another was designed for focus group discussions, stimulating open dialogues by presenting the questions for communal deliberation. Lastly, a questionnaire was provided for independent completion, facilitating private responses in line with participants' preferences.

The essence of data preservation and security led to the inclusion of documentation as a robust tool. Information gathered from the case study, interviews, and questionnaires were meticulously converted into soft copy documents and stored in a secure, researcher-accessible location. This practice safeguards against data loss and assures the information's safety for future inquiries.

Acknowledging the diversity of participants and their constraints, virtual interviews emerged as a viable solution. Leveraging platforms like Google Meet and Zoom, or even telephonic communication, these virtual engagements enabled the researcher to engage with participants who couldn't attend face-to-face interviews. This approach reflects the researcher's commitment to inclusivity and flexibility, ensuring diverse perspectives were captured.

4. Results' Interpretation and Discussion of Findings

This chapter delves into the qualitative data, its presentation, analysis, interpretation, and discussion. Robust empirical research hinges upon the meticulous examination and profound comprehension of data, which ultimately culminate in the study's findings and implications (Graaff, 2021). Therefore, this chapter offers an in-depth exploration of the data gleaned from semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted in Mankweng Township, with the choice of environment being guided by the participants themselves. The researcher employed semi-structured interviews as the primary means to collect information from the participants in alignment with the research's aims and objectives (Mkhonto, 2022). This chapter not only draws conclusions from the data but also connects these findings to the broader issues of gender-based violence expounded upon in chapters two, three, and four (Dzinavane, 2016).

Please refer to Table A below for a breakdown of demographic details for each participant, including their assigned code, age group, education level, spoken language, marital status, gender (if provided), and employment status.

Table A. Breakdown of demographic details for each participant

Participant Code	Age Group	Education Level	Language Spoken	Marital Status	Gender (Optional)	Employment Status
Participant 001	23	Honours	Sepedi	Single	LGBTQ+	Unemployed
Participant 002	32	Diploma	Venda	Single	Male	Security Personnel
Participant 003	29	Bachelor	Sepedi	Single	Female	Administrative Assistant
Participant 004	25	Masters	Sepedi	Single	Male	Assistant Lecturer
Participant 005	38	Higher Certificate	Tsonga	Divorced	Male	Shop Retailer
Participant 006	20	Undergraduate	Venda	Single	Female	Unemployed
Participant 007	43	Diploma	Sepedi	Married	Male	Police Officer
Participant 008	35	Bachelor	Sepedi	Divorced	Female	Receptionist
Participant 009	27	Honours	Venda	Single	Female	Security Personnel
Participant 0010	23	Bachelor	Sepedi	Single	LGBTQ+	Entrepreneur
Participant 0011	30	Grade 10	Sepedi	Single	Female	Unemployed
Participant 0012	33	Doctorate	Tsonga	Married	Male	Lecturer
Participant 0013	24	Honours	Swati	Single	Male	Lab Assistant
Participant 0014	21	Undergraduate	Venda	Single	Female	Unemployed
Participant 0015	22	Undergraduate	Swati	Single	Female	Unemployed
Participant 0016	34	Doctorate	Sepedi	Single	Male	Lecturer
Participant 0017	29	Diploma	Sepedi	Single	Female	Store manager
Participant 0018	26	Masters	Tsonga	Single	Male	Assistant Lecturer
Participant 0019	27	Diploma	Sepedi	Single	Female	Unemployed
Participant 0020	36	Bachelor	Sepedi	Married	Female	Nurse
Participant 0021	24	Undergraduate	Swati	Single	Male	Entrepreneur
Participant 0022	35	Bachelor	Venda	Divorced	Female	Cashier
Participant 0023	33	Bachelor	Venda	Married	Female	Cashier
Participant 0024	19	Undergraduate	Sepedi	Single	Male	Unemployed
Participant 0025	28	Diploma	Swati	Single	Female	Secretary
Participant 0026	29	Bachelor	Venda	Single	Female	Finance Manager
Participant 0027	20	Undergraduate	Swati	Single	Female	Unemployed
Participant 0028	18	Undergraduate	Sepedi	Single	Female	Unemployed
Participant 0029	24	Honours	Sepedi	Single	Female	Peer Counsellor
Participant 0030	26	PGCE	Swati	Single	Male	Language Consultant
Participant 0031	23	Undergraduate	Tsonga	Single	Female	Unemployed
Participant 0032	27	Honours	Venda	Single	Male	Lab Assistant
Participant 0033	18	Undergraduate	Sepedi	Single	LGBTQ+	Unemployed
Participant 0034	28	Masters	Sepedi	Single	LGBTQ+	Accountant

This participant information sets the stage for the subsequent analysis and discussion of the research findings, all of which directly align with the research topic's aim, objectives, and research questions (Graaff, 2021).

Before venturing into data collection, a series of essential procedures were meticulously followed to uphold the research's integrity and ethical standards. The study commenced by seeking approval from the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC), ensuring that the research posed no harm or risk to its participants. The University of Limpopo granted an ethics clearance certificate, authorizing the data collection process. Data collection unfolded between the first week of October 2023, spanning day and night dedication by the researcher to deliver a comprehensive data analysis after data gathering.

During the data collection phase, participants were segregated into three categories: one-on-one interviews, focus group discussions, and virtual (online) interviews. Twelve participants participated in one-on-one interviews, typically lasting 15-30 minutes, while thirteen opted for virtual interviews, averaging 30-45 minutes each. Nine participants engaged in a focus group discussion, which extended for approximately 60-90 minutes. Questionnaires distributed to participants in those three categories took four days to a week to be returned. Audio

recording was employed in some interviews with the consent of the participants. Every participant was presented with a confidentiality and consent form before participating in interviews, focus group discussions or filling out the questionnaires. It's crucial to emphasize that all participants willingly chose to participate, and no form of coercion or inducement was employed.

In this qualitative study, thematic analysis was employed to analyse the semi-structured interview data collected from participants. The thematic analysis allowed for a systematic exploration of the key themes and patterns emerging from the data.

The initial coding process involved assigning labels or codes to relevant portions of the data. These codes served as concise summaries of the participants' responses regarding the implementation of the gender-based violence (GBV) policy framework in Mankweng Township. Codes were then scrutinized and grouped to develop overarching themes and sub-themes.

The iterative process of thematic analysis resulted in the identification of several key themes:

Staying in Abusive Relationships: Participants discussed enduring abusive relationships for extended periods, highlighting coping mechanisms and challenges faced.

- *Coping Mechanisms:* Participants employed various coping strategies, including seeking support from family and faith-based practices.

Some participants found strength through supportive relationships. One participant shared her experience, stating, *"To be honest, I was never going to make it without my brother-in-law, who was a very stubborn person. He would tell me that I was giving power to my abuser by not fighting to be better. So, one day, I think I shocked him when I asked him and my sister to accompany me to file a case of domestic violence. Since then, he has been the person I have spoken to more than my sister because he was my best friend before my brother-in-law. He became my unofficial therapist."* - Participant 0023

- *Challenges Faced: Financial dependency, traditional customs, and victim-blaming culture emerged as significant challenges within abusive relationships.*

Financial dependency emerged as a significant challenge. Participant 0022 emphasized this aspect, stating, *"Religion teaches women to obey their husbands if they provide for you, and it does not account for when that same husband treats you like a doormat…Sigh… We are expected to endure any kind of torture they throw our way."* This participant took back her freedom into her own hands as her coping strategy by starting yoga to feel calm and collected when previously she was not allowed to.

Failure of GBV Policy Framework: Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the GBV policy framework in addressing gender-based violence in Mankweng Township.

- *Legislative Frameworks:* Participants cited specific legislative acts such as the Domestic Violence Act and the Protection from Harassment Act, questioning their efficacy.

As one participant astutely pointed out, *"I can guarantee that many residents in Mankweng have never even heard of these policies. I only know about them because I'm pursuing a degree in public administration. Otherwise, I'd be fighting this battle blind."*- Participant 004

Participant 008 echoed these sentiments: *"If you ask me about this act, I will tell you that it is used by the government to make money instead of protecting the victims. I mean, why fine the offender instead of putting his ass in jail for a few years to learn not to disrespect or harass others?"*- Participant 008, suggesting that the act is used by the government to generate revenue rather than genuinely protecting victims.

Prevalent Types of GBV: Participants identified sexual assault, brutal murders, and physical abuse as the most prevalent types of GBV in Mankweng Township.

- *Impact on Victims:* The devastating effects of GBV on victims were highlighted, including psychological trauma and loss of life.

The effects of such violence ranged from emotional trauma to physical injuries. Participant 0014 shared a particularly poignant story of her friend's *ordeal: "I was just there at her house but afraid to defend my friend because I was a coward, and our friendship ended there because I never wanted to be seen with her in public because I thought he would do to me what he did to her...she looked at the floor."*- Participant 0014, emphasizing the consequences of domestic violence. Her account serves as a stark reminder of the profound impact such violence can have on individuals.

Participants recounted grappling with self-blame and shame following their ordeals. Participant 009 poignantly expressed, *"You know I started to blame myself after what happened. I can't believe I listened to the mentality that said if I did not wear my mini-skirt, I would not have been raped. To this day, I am the one dealing with the effects that rape left behind."* These emotions often led to diminished self-esteem and a sense of unworthiness.

Prevention Strategies: Participants discussed potential strategies for preventing GBV, including education and media campaigns.

- *Educational Initiatives:* Lack of education and victim-blaming culture were identified as barriers to prevention efforts.

Participant 0018 summed it up, saying, *"Education is the key to many of South Africa's challenges. It equips individuals with the knowledge and awareness needed to tackle issues like GBV. While success can be achieved without formal education, an educated populace is better equipped to understand and address real issues like GBV."*

Participant 0032 emphasized the transformative power of support: *"Supporting those who have experienced GBV can make all the difference. When I encouraged my friend to reclaim her power, I was initially furious at her for contemplating giving up. However, I assured her of my unwavering support. This gave her the courage to seek counselling and support, knowing that there was hope for her future. It even fuelled her determination to see her perpetrator brought to justice."*

Table B. Summary of Themes and Sub-themes

Theme	Sub-theme
Staying in Abusive Relationships	Coping Mechanisms, Challenges Faced
Failure of GBV Policy Framework	Legislative Frameworks
Prevalent Types of GBV	Impact on Victims
Prevention Strategies	Educational Initiatives

The thematic analysis revealed the multifaceted nature of GBV in Mankweng Township, highlighting the complex interplay of social, cultural, and economic factors. Addressing GBV requires a holistic approach that encompasses legislative reform, community education, and support for survivors. By understanding the nuanced experiences and perspectives of individuals affected by GBV, policymakers and practitioners can develop more effective interventions to combat this pervasive issue.

5. Findings

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive approach to understanding Gender-Based Violence (GBV) within the unique sociocultural context of Mankweng Township. Unlike previous studies that often generalise GBV issues across broader regions, this research provides localised insights, highlighting the specific cultural norms, socioeconomic challenges, and community dynamics perpetuating GBV in Mankweng. Additionally, the study's focus on the LGBTQ+ community and the role of traditional customs and religious institutions in either perpetuating or combating GBV presents new dimensions for understanding and addressing this issue. The

recommendations provided are tailored to the local context, offering practical solutions that leverage existing cultural and religious frameworks to foster dialogue, support, and prevention efforts.

Male participants in the study disclosed their experiences with various forms of gender-based violence. However, it was noted that most men refrained from reporting such incidents to the police or discussing them with friends. One participant explained this reluctance, stating, *"In our culture, a man is considered weak if he goes to the police to report an abuse by a woman; they would laugh at you, and no one wants to be called weak"* (Participant 0016).

This study recognizes that men can also be victims of gender-based violence, underscoring the importance of involving them in initiatives to combat GBV. It aligns with Shaw's (2017) perspective that feminist theories should not exclude men but should provide a more comprehensive understanding of violence experienced by all genders. Shaw suggests that feminist theories can be applied to various gender identities, including men, women, transgender individuals, and genderqueer groups, ensuring inclusivity.

Male participants highlighted the continued influence of traditional customs in contemporary society. They acknowledged that these customs placed expectations on women to be submissive in households. One participant emphasized, *"Even today, if a woman is to be married, she is being prepared on how to take care of and obey her husband, but men are not taught how to take care of and respect women"* (Participant 004). This acknowledgement illustrates that men recognize the challenges women face and the importance of including them in initiatives to address GBV. This aligns with the study's agenda of fostering unity and breaking down traditional gender norms. Male participants conceded that culture often reinforced negative norms, such as the practice of lobola, which implied ownership of women, leading to the normalization of gender-based violence. They acknowledged that this cultural framework instilled submissive roles in women, often resulting in punishment, including physical and emotional abuse, for non-compliance. These cultural factors make addressing gender-based violence more complex, but some participants believed that religion and culture could be harnessed positively to reshape societal perceptions. They suggested that churches could serve as safe spaces for discussions about GBV and provide counselling for survivors. Additionally, participants advocated for an end to judgment against LGBTQ+ members within religious institutions, emphasizing the importance of respecting diverse identities and experiences.

The female participants in the study voiced their concerns about the persisting gender-based violence in the 21st century, reflecting a mix of disappointment and sadness. They raised issues such as the objectification of women in the film industry, particularly in superhero movies that often depict female characters in skimpy outfits, emphasizing the sexualization of women. This concern aligns with findings by Aley and Hahn (2020), who conducted a study on gender roles in film content, revealing that male heroes are often portrayed as more powerful compared to their female counterparts. Nonetheless, some participants noted a positive shift in the industry, citing examples like the series 'WandaVision' and the male-led movie 'Doctor Strange,' where women were portrayed as powerful characters. One participant expressed pride in these portrayals, stating, *"Women are now getting more powerful roles, and I am feeling so proud right now"* (Participant 0027). This shift signifies a growing recognition of women's strength and potential, challenging traditional stereotypes that have long confined them to passive roles.

Women were asked to identify the triggers of gender-based violence, shedding light on the societal factors that contribute to this issue. Many participants attributed GBV to deeply ingrained beliefs in male dominance and female subservience, often cultivated within families that adhere to patriarchal norms. A participant shared her experience of divorcing her husband due to a polygamous marriage, highlighting a lack of attention and feelings of neglect. She emphasized the role of traditional customs in perpetuating gender-based violence, especially in polygamous unions.

The participants identified several triggers:
- Shame Culture: Many participants observed that one of the triggers of GBV was the culture of shame imposed on women who fell victim to violence. This culture often overshadowed government legislative efforts like the Domestic Violence Act and the Protection from Harassment Act, pointing to the need for a societal shift in mentality.
- Blame Game: Another trigger identified was the tendency to blame victims based on their clothing choices, state of intoxication, or perceived recklessness rather than holding perpetrators accountable. This victim-blaming often led to social ostracization and further perpetuated the culture of silence.
- Societal Treatment: The participants highlighted society's harsh treatment of women who sought to break free from traditional gender roles by becoming independent. Women who aspired to lead and make political or domestic decisions were often criticized and discouraged.
- Religious Influence: The role of the church in reinforcing the docile role of women was also recognized. Participants explained how religious institutions discouraged women from seeking help and made them feel embarrassed about airing their grievances, further trapping them in toxic relationships.
- Abusive Households: Growing up in abusive households was identified as a potential precursor to becoming either an abuser or a victim, perpetuating the cycle of violence.

These triggers underscore how deeply entrenched gender-based violence is within Mankweng Township, driven by cultural norms and societal attitudes. The participants also alluded to the Social Exchange Theory and its application in abusive relationships, emphasizing the role of self-interest and individual social rationality (Yin, 2018) in such dynamics.

The female participants shared the profound effects of gender-based violence on their lives. These effects often persisted long after the traumatic experiences, reshaping their identities and well-being. These consequences illuminated the partially similar diverse facets of gender-based violence, as reported by the participants of the (Dzinavane, 2016) study, the consequences highlighted include:

- Low Self-esteem and Confidence: Women who had experienced GBV commonly reported a loss of self-esteem and confidence. They often felt diminished and less attractive due to the emotional scars left by the abuse.
- Sexual and Reproductive Issues: Participants noted that GBV disproportionately affected women, resulting in unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and difficult decisions regarding termination. The psychological trauma from such experiences was immense, sometimes leading to suicidal thoughts.
- Impact on Productivity: Women who survived GBV faced challenges in their daily lives, including missing school or work due to injuries, legal proceedings, and emotional stress. These disruptions often hindered their personal and professional growth.

Members of the LGBTQ+ community, both men and women, face a disproportionately high risk of gender-based violence. Research conducted by Wirtz et al. (2018) revealed that healthcare providers often lack understanding and knowledge about the experiences of LGBTQ+ patients, further adding to their vulnerability. The fear of judgment and discrimination frequently prevents LGBTQ+ individuals from coming forward about their experiences, as emphasized by a participant's account of not revealing their sexual orientation to their Christian parents (Participant 0033)

"One day when we were casually talking, I just somehow inserted this topic to observe their reactions; I hate to say I was disappointed and saddened, so I did not tell them for fear of being disowned…he laughs…yes it also happens in the black communities they can disown your ass."- Participant 003

Studies have indicated that LGBTQ+ individuals experience higher levels of violence, leading to adverse mental health outcomes (Sherman et al., 2021). Additionally, the impact of poly-victimization within this community differs in presentation, duration, and severity (Sherman et al., 2021). It is imperative to address the stigma surrounding LGBTQ+ individuals in relationships and acknowledge the specific risks they face (Gamarel et al., 2020).

Participants shared their experiences of facing violence and discrimination due to their sexual orientation, with one recounting a disturbing incident where a lesbian was gang-raped and murdered, an event largely unreported in the media. The LGBTQ+ community often remains in the closet, fearing judgment and assault.

In conclusion, these findings offer a multifaceted view of gender-based violence in Mankweng Township, highlighting the pervasive influence of traditional customs, cultural practices, and societal norms. It underscores the necessity of including all segments of the community, particularly men, in initiatives to combat GBV and encourages rethinking cultural and religious influences to promote gender equality and reduce violence.

The Study's Research Gap and the Direction for Future Research

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a deeply concerning issue in South Africa, recognized globally as a human rights violation. It predominantly targets women and girls, and studies often identify men as the primary perpetrators. As Brankovic (2019) noted, GBV frequently involves the assertion of power and control over another person, as seen in cases of intimate partner violence.

However, this study illuminates a crucial perspective often overlooked: not all men are perpetrators of GBV, just as there are both good and bad individuals among women. Male participants in this study displayed a promising commitment to becoming better versions of men in this era. They acknowledged their responsibility in addressing men's violent behaviour and actions against women, expressing a desire not to harbour violence or consider it an appropriate disciplinary measure against women.

The LGBTQ+ participants in this study shed light on another facet of GBV. They articulated feeling marginalized in discussions about GBV, even though they are equally impacted by it. Wirtz et al. (2018) support this sentiment, highlighting the pronounced gendered power dynamics present in cases of violence against LGBTQ+ individuals. Yet, research, prevention, and response efforts for GBV among the LGBTQ+ population remain limited.

The research gap identified in this study is the scarcity of literature addressing GBV among men and the LGBTQ+ community. While there is a substantial body of literature focusing on why women and girls are the primary victims of GBV, other genders have been comparatively neglected. The male participants in this study expressed a genuine desire to be actively involved in initiatives aimed at combating GBV, and some have already taken steps by participating in programs such as the Men's Association Against Violence (MAAV) hosted by the University of Limpopo in May this year.

One notable example of research addressing GBV among men is the study conducted by Graaff (2017) titled "Masculinities and Gender-based Violence in South Africa: A Study of a Masculinities-focused Intervention Programme." This study delved into the link between masculinity and GBV in South Africa, offering valuable insights. It demonstrated that men can also experience violence and emphasized the importance of involving them in future GBV intervention and prevention programs.

Additionally, as Brankovic (2019) pointed out, in societies where patriarchal norms and inequality prevail, frustrated masculinity can manifest in violent behaviour, not because men inherently desire violence but because they have been conditioned to behave that way. Unveiling this dynamic is essential to understand and address GBV comprehensively.

Hence, there is a need for future research to explore GBV from the perspectives of men and the LGBTQ+ community. This research should aim to provide a more inclusive understanding of GBV, recognizing that all genders can be both victims and perpetrators. It can build upon the foundation laid by this study and scholars like Graaff (2017) to contribute to a more holistic approach to addressing GBV
Furthermore, future research can also be crucial in guiding policy frameworks and government initiatives.

Governments should prioritize addressing GBV across all genders and include them in prevention and intervention programs. By doing so, they can create more effective policies that address the root causes of GBV and provide support to all affected individuals.

6. Recommendations

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a significant challenge in Mankweng Township. Based on the comprehensive findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to address this pressing issue:
- Awareness of Gender-Based Violence Programs

Initiatives to combat GBV should prioritize raising awareness among the community members, particularly men and boys. Programs and campaigns should be designed to reach all population segments to ensure that everyone understands the gravity of GBV and the role they can play in preventing it. Raise awareness by developing community-driven awareness campaigns to educate residents about existing policies and resources available to combat GBV. Collaborate with local schools, community centres, and religious institutions to disseminate information effectively.

This recommendation aligns with the study's findings that men and boys expressed a genuine willingness to be part of the solution to GBV. By increasing awareness and education, we can engage men and boys in dialogue about GBV and encourage their active involvement in prevention efforts. This is vital for changing social norms and attitudes surrounding violence.
- Better Distribution of Resources for Gender-Based Violence Issues

Resources allocated for GBV issues should be distributed more effectively and equitably, considering the unique needs of different genders, including men and LGBTQ+ individuals. This includes funding for support services, prevention programs, and research efforts. Advocate for increased government commitment and funding towards the implementation of GBV policies. This should include rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure effectiveness.
The study revealed that GBV affects various genders, including men and LGBTQ+ individuals. Therefore, resource allocation should be more inclusive and tailored to address the specific challenges faced by these groups. This recommendation aims to ensure that resources are channelled where they are most needed.
- Rethinking Cultural and Religious Influences to Promote Gender Equality and Reduce Violence

Efforts should be made to reshape cultural and religious influences to promote gender equality and reduce violence. This can be achieved by fostering open and inclusive discussions within religious institutions, schools, and the broader community about GBV and gender equality. The cultural transformation could be achieved by launching community-based programs to challenge and transform traditional cultural norms and practices that perpetuate GBV. Engage community leaders and elders in these efforts.

Cultural and religious norms were identified as significant factors perpetuating GBV. To address this, creating safe spaces for dialogue within these institutions is essential. By challenging traditional beliefs that normalize violence, we can work towards cultural and religious environments that support gender equality and discourage violence.

- New Gender-Based Violence Policy Frameworks that Cater for All Genders Male, Female, and LGBTQ+ People

The government and policymakers should develop new GBV policy frameworks inclusive of all genders, including males and LGBTQ+ individuals. These frameworks should address the unique needs and vulnerabilities of each group. Current policy frameworks often focus predominantly on women and girls, leaving other genders marginalized. To create effective policies, it is essential to consider the experiences and challenges faced by all individuals affected by GBV. This recommendation aims to ensure that policies are comprehensive and equitable as encouraged by recommendation number 2.

- Prioritize Urgent Response to Gender-Based Violence Victims and Survivors

There should be a prioritization of urgent response mechanisms to assist GBV victims and survivors. This includes establishing rapid response teams, accessible crisis hotlines, and safe shelters for those in immediate danger. Victims and survivors of GBV often face critical situations that require immediate assistance. Establishing efficient response mechanisms can save lives and provide essential support during emergencies.

- Increase Support Services and Access to Justice for Victims and Survivors of GBV

Access to support services, including counselling, legal aid, and medical assistance, should be increased and made readily available to victims and survivors of GBV. This includes ensuring that justice is accessible through fair legal processes and is served. The study revealed the profound and lasting effects of GBV on victims and survivors. By expanding support services and improving access to justice, we can provide much-needed assistance and help individuals rebuild their lives after experiencing GBV.

Implement economic empowerment programs targeting women in Mankweng Township, providing them with opportunities for financial independence and self-sufficiency. These recommendations, rooted in the study's findings, emphasize the importance of inclusivity, awareness, and the active involvement of all community members, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, in the collective efforts to prevent and respond to GBV. This study not only serves as a crucial foundation for future research but also as a call to action in the ongoing battle to eradicate GBV, both within this region and beyond.

7. Limitations of the Study

While this study endeavoured to provide a comprehensive exploration of the implementation of the gender-based violence (GBV) policy framework in Mankweng Township, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the study's focus on a single case study limited the generalizability of the findings to other contexts (Rass, 2020). The unique socio-cultural and geographical characteristics of Mankweng Township have affected the transferability of the study's results to different regions.

Secondly, despite careful efforts to ensure the ethical conduct of the research, the sensitivity of the topic had potentially led to response bias or underreporting, as participants were hesitant to openly discuss their experiences or opinions on gender-based violence. Furthermore, the researcher's subjectivity and biases, though minimized through reflexive practices, could have influenced the interpretation of data (Garland-Thomson, 2020).
Additionally, the sample size, though selected purposefully to provide rich insights, did not fully capture the diversity of perspectives within Mankweng Township. The reliance on self-reported data, while valuable, could be subject to memory biases or varying levels of accuracy in participants' recollections (Cypress, 2017).

Building upon the findings and deductions of this study, several suggestions emerge to guide future research, policy development, and interventions aimed at addressing gender-based violence (GBV) (Table C).

Table C. Directions of further research

Suggestion	Explanation
• Inclusive Research:	Scholars should conduct more inclusive research that explores the experiences of GBV across genders, including women, men, and LGBTQ+ individuals. This approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to GBV and inform targeted interventions.
• Intersectional Analysis:	Future research should adopt an intersectional approach, considering how various factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and disability intersect with gender and sexual orientation to influence experiences of GBV. This nuanced perspective can guide more effective interventions.
• Comprehensive LGBTQ+ Studies:	Given the underrepresentation of LGBTQ+ experiences in GBV research, future studies should focus on the unique challenges faced by this community. This includes understanding the intersections of discrimination, violence, and mental health among LGBTQ+ individuals.
• Normative Change Initiatives:	Initiatives should be developed to challenge and change harmful cultural and religious norms that perpetuate GBV. These initiatives should involve community leaders, religious institutions, and grassroots organizations to promote gender equality and non-violence.
• Inclusive Policy Frameworks:	Policymakers should prioritize the development of gender-based violence policy frameworks that explicitly cater to the needs of all genders, including male, female, and LGBTQ+ individuals. These policies should provide resources, support, and protection for all victims and survivors.
• GBV Prevention Programs:	Universities and institutions should expand their GBV prevention programs to include men, boys, and LGBTQ+ members. Programs like the Men's Association Against Violence (MAAV) at the University of Limpopo should be promoted and supported to engage men and boys in combating GBV.
• Community-Based Support:	Initiatives should be established within communities to provide safe spaces for victims of GBV, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. These spaces should offer counselling, legal support, and resources for healing.
• Awareness Campaigns:	Public awareness campaigns should be launched to challenge stereotypes, raise awareness about GBV against all genders, and encourage reporting. These campaigns should include diverse voices and representations.
• Encourage Reporting:	Measures should be put in place to encourage victims to report GBV without fear of judgment or stigma. This may involve strengthening legal protections, offering anonymity, and increasing accessibility to reporting mechanisms.
• Longitudinal Studies:	Researchers should consider conducting longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of GBV on individuals and communities. This could provide valuable insights into the lasting impacts and recovery processes.

Incorporating these suggestions into future research, policy development, and interventions can contribute to a more inclusive, comprehensive, and effective approach to addressing gender-based violence in all its forms and among all segments of society.

6. Conclusions

This study has provided valuable insights into the intricate issue of gender-based violence within Mankweng Township. By successfully achieving its research objectives, the study has uncovered the root causes of GBV, identified the limitations of existing policy frameworks, elucidated the profound impacts on individuals and the community, and proposed interventions to combat this deeply entrenched problem. It is evident that addressing GBV necessitates a multifaceted approach that challenges deeply ingrained cultural norms, demands government commitment, and empowers individuals through education and economic opportunities (Graaff, 2017). By

implementing the aforementioned recommendations, Mankweng Township can take significant strides toward reducing GBV and fostering a safer, more equitable community for all its residents. This study underscores the significance of addressing the identified research gap through future research initiatives that explore gender-based violence (GBV) from the perspectives of men and the LGBTQ+ community. Such research endeavours are pivotal for fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to combatting GBV, not only in South Africa but on a global scale. Hence, the researcher strongly advocates for the active involvement of men and boys in GBV prevention programs. These programs should prioritize educating them about healthy masculinity, consent, and the importance of fostering respectful relationships. By positioning men as allies in the battle against GBV, these programs can challenge harmful gender norms and behaviours, offering a promising avenue to reduce GBV cases.

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