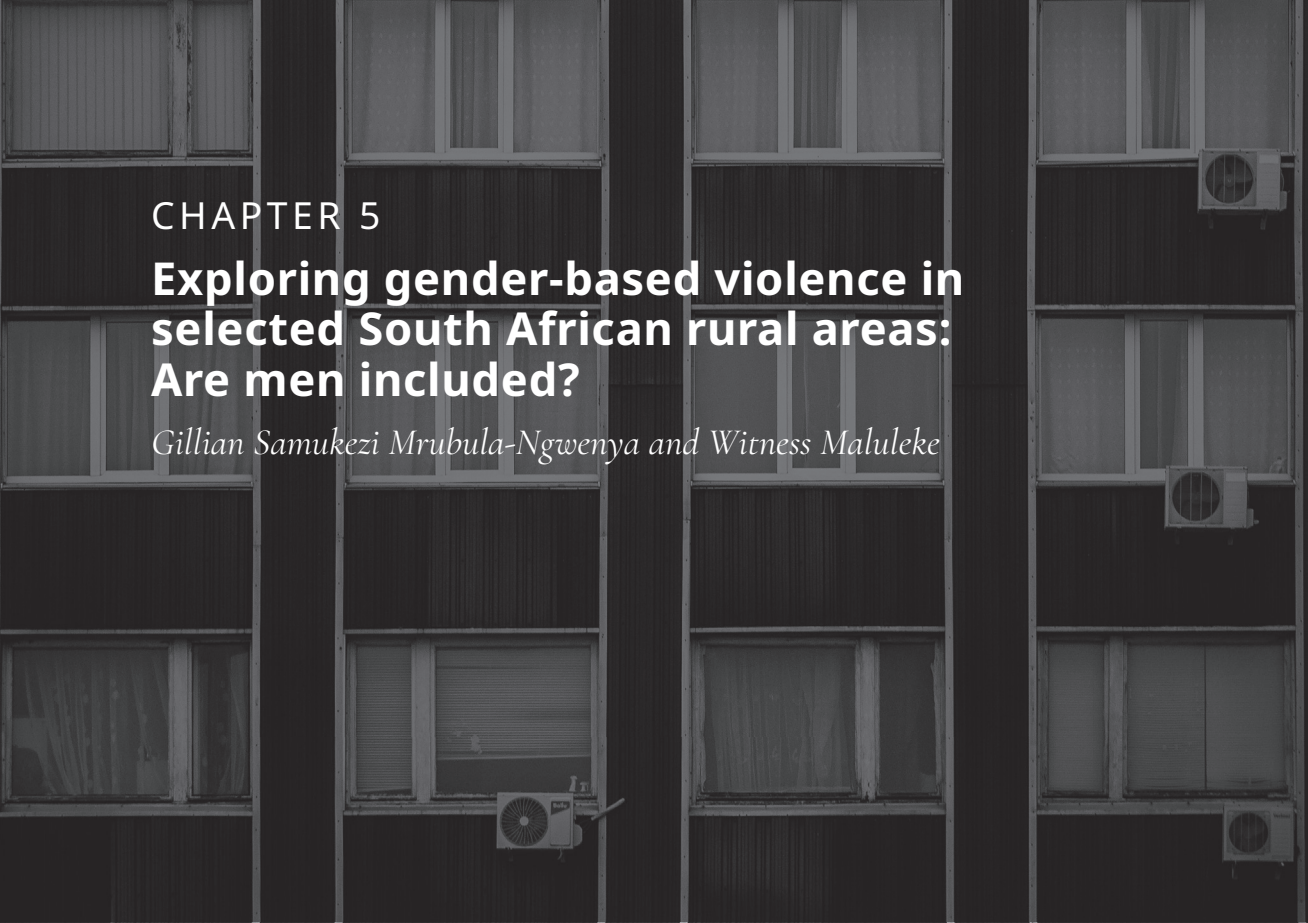




## CHAPTER 5

# **Exploring gender-based violence in selected South African rural areas: Are men included?**

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### **Introduction**

According to Plan-International (n.d.), gender-based violence (GBV) is a term used to describe violence directed at an individual based on their gender. This violence includes verbal, emotional, sexual, physical, psychological, and economic abuse. Although both men and women experience GBV, most of the violence is inflicted on women and girls and perpetrated by men. The phrases ‘violence against women’ and ‘GBV’ are often used interchangeably, as the statistics show that violent acts are primarily committed against women or girls, as well as against members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA+) community. However, using the term ‘gender-based’ reflects the unequal power relationships between the genders that are entrenched in all societies and that allow for violence against women to become the norm.

GBV reinforces gender inequality and remains a deep-rooted problem in South Africa. According to the SAPS crime statistics report for the period 2019/2020, more than 146 sexual offences were committed every day, equating

to a total of 53,293 sexual offences, the majority being rape (South African Police Service, 2020). These are only the reported cases. The Medical Research Council of South Africa has estimated that only 2% of rapes in South Africa are reported. (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002). The same report stated that 2,695 women were murdered during this period, which means that in South Africa, a woman is murdered every three hours. Femicide, the intentional killing of a female because of her gender, is often by partners or ex-partners, and is five times higher in South Africa than the global average. About 51% of women in South Africa stated they have experienced GBV, according to the Africa Health Organisation, with 76% of the men saying they have perpetrated GBV at some stage in their lives (Plan-International, n.d.).

In terms of policy roll-out, South Africa has made significant progress towards gender equality in the post-apartheid era, placing it among the top 10 countries globally that have successfully implemented reforms to improve women's legal rights (World Bank Group, 2020). South Africa has extremely high levels of violence, affecting both men and women. Interpersonal violence was among the leading causes of years of life lost in South Africa in both 2010 (number 10 among causes) and 2015 (number 8), and among the top 10 leading causes of life lost in six of nine provinces in 2015 (Massyn et al., 2016). However, violence against women and GBV takes specific forms, including the high prevalence of intimate femicide, sexual offences, and rape, which point to a need to consider GBV, its drivers and its effects as separate and distinct from the broader culture of violence (Smout et al., 2022, p. 49). Moreover, "Boys and men are as vulnerable to physical and sexual violence and health problems arising from patriarchal norms are neglected" (Ratele, 2014, p. 36). In alignment with this objective, this chapter argues that as we continue to advance gender empowerment and gender equality agendas, it is essential to ensure that the experiences and narratives of men as victims of gender-based violence are not overlooked or silenced. Accordingly, this chapter presents uncoded accounts that illuminate these often-underrepresented experiences.

Understandably, legislation such as the Domestic Violence Act [DVA] (No. 116 of 1998) is in place to protect women against violence. However, a provocative question to ask is: what about South African (rural) men? In this Act, several key integrated plans and strategies, such as laws against violence, marital rape, and human trafficking, have been effectively implemented in many nations, including South Africa (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2007). For example, the DVA of 1998 was initiated with a view to ensuring that women in South Africa are protected from violence. This was achieved by

ensuring adequate adherence to the law by law enforcement agencies (LEAs) to protect women as much as possible, according to the WHO (2007).

In 2022, South Africa's president, Honourable Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa, argued that South Africa's second pandemic, after COVID-19, is GBV. However, when narrating and finding solutions for this scourge, emphasis and focus have always been on women and children, and silent on men's voices as victims of GBV. By highlighting the incidence of GBV and intimate partner homicide perpetrated against rural men, the authors of this chapter are not trying to diminish the persistence and prevalence of violence perpetrated against women and children in South Africa. However, criminological studies on violence committed against rural men across South Africa are limited. This is alarming. Most of these victims often experience physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse. It is this lack of published scientific criminological studies and the silenced voices of victims of this violence that prompted the authors to undertake this study, which is based on the experiences of a prominent South African Police Service (SAPS) official with over ten years of service.

## **The South African context**

### **Gender-based violence**

South Africa is known for high levels of violence. Thobejane et al. (2018) explore the experiences of men who are victims of GBV, where women are perpetrators. Their findings indicate that men usually do not speak out about their experiences due to the stigma attached to the idea of them as victims of female-perpetrated domestic abuse. Furthermore, their data showed that male victims of domestic violence are reluctant to speak out about their ordeal due to fear of ridicule by some other people in society, such as their family members, peers, and police officials (Thobejane et al., 2018).

Conceptually, GBV relates to the assertion that it comes in different forms, namely physical, sexual, emotional, verbal and psychological abuse, economic abuse, intimidation, harassment, as well as stalking. GBV can also manifest in the perpetrator damaging the property of the victim and aggressively forcing himself/herself into the house or residence of the victim. Domestic violence is a global phenomenon without national, economic, religious, geographic, and cultural boundaries (Thobejane et al., 2018). Thobejane et al. (2018) also state that violence committed by women against their male partners has been largely ignored for several reasons; one notable reason focuses on 'stereotypes' that are

fuelled by the perception that a man is strong, while women are perceived as submissive, weak, and obedient. Therefore, rural men are the least likely victims of domestic violence.

Plan-International (n.d.) adds that there are several reasons why perpetrators resort to gender-based violence, and there is no easy way to address it. GBV may occur in societies where discriminatory social, cultural, or religious laws, norms, beliefs and practices give men power and control over women. In communities where general violence is the norm or where violent behaviour is seen as a sign of masculinity, it will reflect higher incidences of GBV. On an individual level, growing up in a home where violence is the norm or where there is no male role model or a negative male role model may influence later behaviour (Hurd et al., 2009). Research has shown that poverty, unemployment, and substance abuse increase the risk of violence against women (Hurd et al., 2008). GBV includes sexual harassment, rape, or sexual violence; stalking; physical, emotional, and economic abuse; and child abuse. Each form of violence is not exclusive – various incidences of GBV can occur at the same time and reinforce each other.

Subsequently, there is growing evidence showing that there is increasing violence against men perpetrated by women; the focus has been on violence against women. Therefore, it is crucial to note that domestic violence affects both women and men. Thus, for equality to be achieved, we need to focus on their issues collectively without any bias, as domestic violence is a daily occurrence. Women are reportedly the victims, largely because they are more likely to report it, while men do not do so, owing to the patriarchal nature of most societies (Thobejane et al., 2018).

Disturbingly,

men may also be reluctant or unwilling to talk about being victimised, considering that this is irreconcilable with their masculinity, particularly in societies where men are discouraged from talking about their emotions. However, that does not mean that men are not victims of domestic violence in their private lives. In response, female-to-male domestic violence is a catastrophe that has always existed but has never been given the attention it deserves, as domestic violence is perpetrated against women. In the same vein, violence against men has been trivialised as it is influenced by social and gender stereotypes that define men as heads of households, who are supposed to be strong defenders of families and other dependents and breadwinners as well. (Thobejane, et al. 2018, 5)

The GBV in South Africa conflicts with women's issues. The authors seek to problematise this notion of GBV as only affecting women and children. The rural men, as evident in the literature, are victims of GBV.

### **Silenced voices: Men as victims of gender-based violence**

Rural men are always considered perpetrators of GBV and rarely as victims. As a result, while it is true that most GBV occurs against women, it is not true that women are the only victims, and those men are the only perpetrators. Women can be perpetrators of this violence against men just as men can. The difference, however, is that the rate at which women perpetrate this violence is low compared to that of men. It is the bias in research that has led to the framing of GBV as solely perpetrated by men against women, portraying the latter as only victims (Devaraj, 2018). He further argued that women are violent towards men; this was confirmed by both men and women recruited to participate in the cited study. There are varying reasons why women are violent towards men. Devaraj (2018) highlights that these reasons are aligned with poor financial support, infidelity, excessive drinking, non-involvement in household chores, suspicions and jealousy, late arrival of husbands, dependence of husbands on their wives, and a lack of a source of income.

These deliberations confirm that the patriarchal model of society supports the idea that IPV is a gender issue perpetrated by men towards women. In general, men are stronger than women. Therefore, they seem less vulnerable to violence perpetrated by an intimate partner, particularly in heterosexual relationships. Women are considered the most important victims of this type of interpersonal violence, while men are more likely to be victims of violence perpetrated by a stranger or an acquaintance. Meanwhile, several studies on IPV found equivalent rates of assault perpetrated by men and women (Carmo et al., 2011). Equally, Devaraj (2018) shares that domestic violence against males is an elusive and serious problem. It can include assaults such as pushing, grabbing, slapping, shoving, and hitting, which are classified as minor assaults, and more serious assaults such as rape and even murder.

Devaraj (2018) reports that men who are victims of domestic violence tend to keep their feelings deep inside, leading to a preponderance of feelings of guilt and shame. This may lead to the development of psychological problems such as substance abuse and even suicidal ideation or attempts at suicide if not identified early. When men become victims of domestic violence, they usually find it hard to seek help. They are ashamed to admit they are vulnerable and fear no one will believe them because of

the societal framing that a man needs to be strong; a man is the head of the house (Devaraj, 2018).

Male victims often remain silent about domestic violence, believing it's a personal matter they can resolve without involving authorities. Battered men think that they will not be taken seriously if they report their victimisation to the authorities because of the misconception that domestic violence only happens to women and not men (Devaraj, 2018). Gathogo (2012) argues that domestic violence against men manifests itself in a variety of ways. Sometimes, it begins with the woman displaying disrespectful behaviour towards the man in front of their children, who may take the mother's side, particularly when they are first incited against their father. In such cases, adolescent children may participate in attacks against their fathers.

Considering that the culture does not allow an African man to scream if a woman or a child ever beats him, the silent man may eventually be battered to death. Other forms of men battering include slapping; pouring hot water when asleep or pouring hot water over an innocent man; cutting a man's genitals; verbal insults; insults before children; slashing; pouring petrol over him and setting him on fire; whips; throwing chairs, benches, stools, utensils and other objects in the house at the man, especially after serious disagreements in the house (Gathogo, 2012).

An important question is how to include men in fights against gender inequalities, marginalisation, and GBV? Ratele (2014, p. 36) advises:

One way to engage men is to borrow from Mfecane (2013), for gender work to get over blaming all males. Masculinities researchers might want to insert in the larger South African women and gender project an appreciation of how capitalism, West–Rest geopolitical relations, poverty, unemployment, economic inequalities, race ideologies, corruption, poor governance, epidemics like the Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and tuberculosis, cultural marginalisation, among other social, economic, and health issues, impact on boys and men (alongside and in relation to women and girls).

“Progressive work on feminist theory and masculinities theory must therefore take up the challenge and provide a less solipsistic and more economically, politically, culturally educated understanding of men's and boys' lives in relation to women's and girls” (Ratele, 2014, p. 33). It is necessary to engage feminist and intersectional activists as well as state ministries and policymakers, regarding

the need for inclusive programmes and policies that realise that men, just as women and children, are victims of GBV (Ratele, 2014, p. 34). Ratele's (2014) assertion highlights the need for both feminist theory and masculinities studies to move beyond narrow, inward-looking analyses of gender. By calling for approaches that are "less solipsistic," he challenges scholars to avoid treating gendered experiences in isolation. Instead, he argues for a more comprehensive understanding of how men's and boys' lives are shaped by broader economic, political, and cultural forces and how these are intertwined with the experiences of women and girls. This perspective encourages a relational and contextually informed analysis of gender, one that recognises intersecting structures of power, privilege, vulnerability, and inequality. Engaging with Ratele's argument means acknowledging that transformative gender scholarship must account for complexity, avoid simplistic binaries, and critically examine how societal conditions shape gendered realities across different groups.

## **South African masculinities**

Fernández-Álvarez (2014, p. 50) states that more men suffer distress through trying to follow and take on impossible patterns of virility. In other words, patriarchal culture is not a problem for women alone. The great paradox of the patriarchal culture is that harmful forms of masculinity in a society dominated by men are prejudicial not just for women but also for men themselves. That is, the tyranny of the model also affects men. "Masculinity is always, or potentially always, in crisis, in the sense that it is always open to challenge, always anxiously seeking to reinforce itself, always having to adapt, but never what it claims to be" (Fernández-Álvarez, 2014, p. 53). Hence, helping men to shed the load of so many centuries of oppressive masculinity and assisting them to find other ways of being men in the world, distancing them from the obscene exercise of power and violence, bringing them closer to the world of affection and emotions, and of the ethics of caring, is the most urgent and unavoidable task if we want to build a world in which no one is subject to oppression or scorn because of sexual or cultural origin (Fernández-Álvarez, 2014).

Ratele (2014, p. 33) states that "South African research on men, boys and masculinities appears to be underachieving." He asserts that the little work that has been done on men and masculinities has not been strategic in shaping gender relations in South Africa. Most gender research has been focused on women and girls, even though it is evident that "men and boys are as gendered as women and girls" (Ratele, 2014, p. 31). Subsequently, they sought ways to change gender

power relations in South Africa. “We appear to be in need of tradition-sensitive, culturally intelligent studies and activism on men in their remote locations from their marginalised worlds” (Ratele, 2014, p. 31). Ratele (2014) is supported by Majola et al. (2023), who make a clarion call that societies need to recognise violence against men as a social problem that requires urgent attention.

Unfortunately, mainstream feminist scholars’ commentary on the role of black African men in fighting for social justice suggests that gender activist work and feminist South African studies on black masculinities pathologise black males. Ironically, progressive feminist and gender scholars have noted that research on boys and men “has inadvertently tended to demonise boys and men, constructing them as inherently problematic” (Ratele, 2014, p. 31). Ratele (2014) engages in conversation with Mfecane (2013), as they both critique how black African men have been portrayed as victims of social injustices by feminist scholars.

Ratele (2014, p. 32) goes on to argue that “we do not have a shortage of research on men and HIV/AIDS. The problem is that the narrow activist agendas of feminist scholars drive them.” Researchers regard men chiefly as a ‘problem.’ They view African notions of masculinity as inherently dangerous. This has greatly impacted the types of interventions designed for men. International donors fund most of these. They target ‘African masculinity’ as an arena for intervention among men. Intervention practitioners tend to pathologise black sexuality by focusing solely on its negative aspects, like gender domination. Furthermore, these interventions have a strong aversion to African culture. They view culture simply as a barrier to the fight against AIDS and not part of the solution. A related problem is that research and intervention programmes have focused solely on black men. In South Africa, we know nothing about the sexual conduct of white heterosexual males, coloureds and Indians. Yet the leading academics and gender activists come from these communities. Lastly, these research and intervention efforts have been based on a superficial understanding of African notions of masculinity (Mfecane, 2013).

One of the proposals Mfecane (2013) makes is the need to gain better knowledge to get men involved in the fight against the disease. It is noted that South Africa has an abundance of research and interventions targeting men on HIV/AIDS (Ratele, 2014). Mfecane (2013) urges researchers to cease blaming AIDS on men and start appreciating how challenges facing South African men, such as “unemployment, poverty, marginalisation and peer pressure,” impact their masculinity, sexuality, attitudes towards AIDS interventions, health behaviours, and beliefs about Western healthcare (Mfecane, 2013, p. 140). So, concurring with Mfecane (2013), instead of blaming men and excluding them

in finding solutions for GBV, we need to try new strategies and tactics that are inclusive of men. Ratele (2014) further cautions us to note and be wary of gender transformation models that do not include men and that read men outside the concept of gender. “Although South Africa puts a great deal of effort towards addressing women’s and girls’ empowerment and gender equality, boys and men still appear to be considered as not quite central to gender transformation or are primarily positioned as perpetrators of violence against women and girls” (Ratele, 2014, p. 36).

## **Hegemonic masculinity theory**

A theoretical framework is the collection of interrelated concepts that guide research. To understand the incidence and men’s experiences of GBV in selected South African rural areas, the hegemonic masculinity theory was adopted in this chapter. According to Morell (1998), masculinity is a collective gender identity but not a natural attribute. Masculinity is informally created and unsolidified. There is not a universal masculinity but many masculinities. This statement suggests that masculinities are constructed when individuals respond to a given situation in different ways. Dolan (2002, p. 76) states that “the very notion that there are masculinities rather than a single masculinity acknowledges that there are many ways to be a man.” In plural terms, masculinities are defined in relation to each other. Connell (2001) discusses the practices and relations that construct the major patterns of masculinity. Connell (2001) develops the concept of multiple masculinities and examines the hierarchy and relations of power among these masculinities, demonstrating that a hegemonic masculinity dominates other masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity comprises a group which claims and sustains a leading position in social life. It is seen especially when men dominate not only women but also fellow men of different classes, races or sexual orientations. This form of masculinity is seen at the top levels of institutions, such as the national government, and it is often reinforced by violence (Connell, 2001).

Therefore, hegemonic masculinity theory can be defined as the configuration of gender practices that embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Demetriou, 2001, p. 340). More precisely, Kimmel (1997) and Fernández-Álvarez (2014) argue that masculinity is a set of constantly changing meanings, which are constructed through relationships with ourselves, with others, and with our world. What

would appear clear is that hegemonic masculinity is at the root of patriarchal tyranny and the injustices and violence to which so many women, as well as rural men, are subjected around the world. Furthermore, it has nothing to do with any supposed essence of masculinity that condemns men to be as they are and as they act. Rather, it is an outcome of a cultural link between traditional forms of masculinity and power (Fernández-Álvarez, 2014). The concept of hegemonic masculinity is part of a theoretical framework developed to analyse men's power. It proposes a multiplicity of masculinities and hierarchies of power, showing how men exercise power over women and other men (Carrigan et al., 2018; Connell, 2005; Hearn & Kimmel, 2006; Hearn, 2010). Reflecting on how it's been theorised, Ratele (2017) argues that masculinity as theorised by Western theorists does not represent/speak to black men, especially black South African men's realities. Ratele (2017) offers a decolonial understanding of masculinities in African men.

Notably, Mfecane (2020) advocates for a decolonised scholarship on African men and masculinities, drawing on the 'decolonial meaning of masculinity' in subsequent discussions. Connell (2016, p. 34) states that there is an "urgent need to decolonise the study of men and masculinities" because concepts of gender on which research and policy are based "have almost, without exception, been developed in the Global North." Although many authors regard their conceptions of gender as pertaining to Western culture, they claim that gender scholars in the Global South frequently engage in uncritical use of such ideas as a framework for their research" (Mfecane, 2020, p. 2). The 'Global South scholars' are urged to reposition themselves outside Northern gender scholarship for two principal reasons (Connell, 2014a; Connell, 2016).

A primary motivation is that Global North gender theories and concepts are tainted by the troubled history of gender in the North; hence, these ideas cannot be unthinkingly imported by the Global South, given the long history of colonial settlement in the South (Connell, 2016). During the colonial period, indigenous gender systems were disrupted violently and replaced by Western customs that encompassed patriarchal gender norms (Mfecane, 2020). By highlighting the violent disruption of indigenous gender systems, Mfecane draws attention to the colonial project as a cultural and epistemic takeover. Indigenous understandings of personhood, relationality, and gender diversity were systematically undermined, often through missionisation, state legislation, and the policing of family structures. Western customs, particularly those rooted in patriarchal Christian norms, were positioned as 'civilised,' while African gender systems were cast as inferior or deviant. This

reconfiguration continues to inform modern gender politics and the marginalisation of identities that fall outside Western binaries.

As such, when scholars approach black African men with a theory in hand, they are unable to hear African men's narratives truly, and they are also blind to the harsh circumstances to which African men are subjected daily. Northern theories and concepts thus need modification to foreground issues of immediate concern to African men (Ratele, 2017). Ratele's (2015) call for an intersectional approach to the study of African boys and men, one that foregrounds poverty, class, racism, and social marginalisation, aligns with Mfecane's (2018) caution against an overreliance on masculinity theories developed in the Global North. Together, their arguments underscore the importance of contextually grounded analyses that take into account the historical, cultural, and structural conditions shaping masculinities in African settings, rather than applying frameworks that may overlook local realities and lived experiences. He argues that "Northern gender theories offer inadequate accounts of African masculinities because of their being embedded in Western epistemologies." (Mfecane, 2018, p. 291).

To account for the complex lives of African men, scholars need to develop theories of masculinity that are grounded in African conceptions of reality. Such theories should treat masculinity as socially constructed and influenced by unseen elements of personhood, as encapsulated in traditional African thought (Mfecane, 2018, p. 291). Ratele (2014) and Mfecane (2020) argue that the Global North's definition of masculinity does not capture and account for the life experiences of African men. Historically, masculinity was theorised largely as a "structure of gender relations" which positioned women and homosexual males as inferior to heterosexual males in the Western gender order (Mfecane, 2018, p. 293).

Regarding Western theories, Mfecane (2020) emphasises that before deploying them elsewhere as research and intervention tools, researchers should consider two questions: (1) What are their politics? (2) What are their philosophical underpinnings? Ratele (2014) and Mfecane (2012, 2020) capture the decolonised meaning of masculinity that is propelling real lived experiences of black South African men. In this context, black men in selected rural areas of South Africa.

## Methods and materials

The researchers adopted a phenomenological research design supported by Creswell (2014), Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014), Flick (2014), and Mills and Birks (2014). Thus, this chapter used a qualitative approach, which is essential for gaining insights into the experiences and meaning of GBV from the participants'

viewpoints. Creswell (2014), Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014), Flick (2015), and Welman et al. (2005) emphasise that this research approach can be used to obtain empirical information from the participants regarding experiences, meanings and opinions of, in this instance, GBV in the selected South African rural areas, to establish whether men are included or otherwise.

The phenomenological research design refers to a strategic framework that guided the research questions in this chapter and the execution of the research strategy (Durrheim & Dixon, 2004). It is both descriptive and exploratory, yet concerned with understanding and interpreting the meanings attached to specific phenomena by participants (Liamputtong, 2013). This design was adopted to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the situation. Specifically, ten (10) participants were purposively selected, and all were subjected to semi-structured KIIs, conducted via e-mail. The following two questions informed the semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) and served as the core items in the interview schedule guide:

1. How do rural men experience violence?
2. How do rural men cope with this violence?

Phenomenological data analysis was employed to comprehensively analyse the intricacies and lived experiences described by the participants (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) and Critical Appraisal Skill Programme (CASP) were adopted to analyse the reviewed literature on this subject and ensure the trustworthiness of the empirical findings.

## Empirical study findings

While qualitatively employing the phenomenological data analysis procedures, this chapter was guided by two research questions. The responses of the 10 selected participants are mapped together to make sense of the posed questions. The main arguments are discussed and presented verbatim based on these questions and aligned to the semi-structured KIIs that were conducted.

### How do rural men experience violence?

The researchers submit that an abusive partner may kick, bite, punch, spit, throw things or destroy your possessions. This is supported by the expressions shared by one of the participants in verbatim:

*Most men account for not only physical abuse, but also emotional, financial and sexual abuse from their female counterparts. The most common abuse from females to their male partners is to prevent them from going to work or school, keep them away from their friends or family, contest how they spend their money on time, accuse them of being unfaithful, call them nicknames, and sometimes put them down or even hurt them.*

This further reduces the self-esteem of the rural male victim and makes them change their actions to try and prevent further abuse; for example, they stop calling friends or controlling the money of their abusive partners.

Another participant shared the following sentiments regarding how men experience violence:

*As a society, we need to change our mindset and take the abuse of men seriously. For instance, a woman hitting her partner is just as serious as a man striking his partner. Hence, changing lifestyles can bring emotional and psychological abuse to light. Talk to teens and young adults of all genders about it. The earlier we challenge or tackle these stereotypes, the better. It is prudent for people to talk to their family members and friends about their relationships. In addition, women should make sure their romantic partnerships are healthy and balanced.*

In interpretations, violence does not discriminate based on gender, race, or social structure. It can happen to anyone. For one participant, this facet of contemporary GBV elicited the following verbatim statement regarding the posed question: “Rural men also experience violence at the hands of their spouse; however, in the ‘olden days,’ this practice seldom occurred, as it was regarded as a taboo to do so in rural villages.”

Recreational abuse of alcohol is the primary cause of violence in South Africa, including rural areas. Although acts of violence do not occur daily, measures to deal with this violence, such as assault with intent to inflict grievous bodily harm (GBH), attempted murder, and armed robbery, are minimal. This assertion was supported by one participant: “rural men rely mostly on patriarchal culture-typical culture, which should be reviewed.” Another participant shared the following verbatim quotation regarding this observation: “Most rural men are unemployed, and as a result, their partners blame them for not contributing financially, leading to emotional abuse.”

In exploring the lived experiences of selected participant rural men, this study revealed that the GBV against rural men is often caused by jealousy, poverty,

unequal power relations, alcohol abuse and the love they have for their abusers. The findings were also confirmed by one participant who shared the following in verbatim: *“Indeed, rural men experience GBV due to the following reasons: the lack of money, believing that the abuse is normal, fear and the embarrassment of reporting their partners to the local SAPS.”*

In sum, from responses to the question ‘How do rural men experience violence?’ it was established that different forms of this scourge exist as the selected participants agreed that they had been victims (rural men) of five kinds of GBV, namely: (1) sexual abuse, (2) emotional/psychological abuse, (3) physical abuse, (4), cultural beliefs, (5) and substance abuse. The findings of this chapter further indicate that the most witnessed abuse relates to emotional/psychological abuse, which was experienced as difficult to explain to others in detail.

### How do rural men cope with this violence?

Overall, they do not often speak out due to the stigma of their compromised masculinity, which was corroborated by one of the participants who went on to explain how such matters are dealt with when intervention is sought:

*Rural men can be regarded as weak individuals if they report this crime or show any signs of weakness regarding what is happening to them domestically. Matters like this are usually handled by clan heads, not by individuals or courts, and a woman perpetrator could be expelled or sent away from her husband's home.*

Until the recent introduction of gender rights that empower women, much of tribal law has historically regarded women as inferior to men. Therefore, there is no collective expectation or perception of women as potentially threatening to men, thus mechanisms to deal with GBV against men (and women) are not institutionalised, as explained by one participant:

*usually GBV against rural men is a less policeable crime, as it normally happens inside homes. Early detection is unlikely, so police often react rather than being proactive. For example, think of IPV, which usually leads to murder.*

This is a direct contributor to the high prevalence of GBV against men, some of whom end up committing suicide in South Africa. One of the participants highlighted the following: *“Rural men usually do not report this kind of violence because they will be laughed at, turned away, and advised to solve it with their respective wives.”* It should be remembered that some homes have high walls, so

passersby might not notice. Some rural men might try to protect themselves against their partners. However, most blame comes to them as they are regarded as being stronger and inherently violent, which is often not the case, but because of the stigma attached, proving their innocence can be challenging.

With reference to the above submission, one participant hinted that “*rural men, as victims of these acts, lack contemporary support such as counselling due to prevalent socio-economic conditions in these remote areas.*” The support and interventions from law enforcement agencies and other interested parties are scarce and often limited to rural areas, particularly those closer to suburban areas. There is a total lack of awareness campaigns on GBV against rural men in certain parts of rural South Africa. For instance, policing of GBV against rural men is hardly known in the remotest areas that often lack a dedicated police presence. An example offered by a participant is that of one station catering for up to 91 rural villages: “*The assigned SAPS officials do not cope because of backlogs of reported cases, manpower and limited resources from the one policing station catering for the ninety-one rural villages.*”

As identified in the findings of the first question, traditionally, rural men do not speak out and show their emotions, some of them tend to seek legal recourse to protect themselves from violence at home, including application for a protection order, while some of them do not believe in the judicial system at all, owing to masculinity and traditional beliefs. In this course, one participant revealed the following: “*I would rather not report any case perpetrated by women against me to them, as they often make a mockery of us; they laugh and label us as being weak.*” Some rural men do not believe in the judicial system; instead, they prefer the traditional system. Some men join the available civilian organisations where they share experiences regarding their matters, while others just resort to physical abuse, and it is also observed that the local SAPS members are less capacitated and less resourced to deal with GBV matters, as proven by the ratio of 1 police station to 91 villages.

The following emerged as key reasons for rural South African men’s underreporting of violations against them: love, the lack of money, embarrassment and fear, while believing that abuse is normal, and the reported lack and/or inadequacy of police interference. The majority of the participants confirmed that GBV against rural men should be prevented, combated and investigated properly in South African rural communities. However, there is a need for support groups and awareness campaigns in the community. The criminal justice system should be strengthened, and local SAPS capacity and training on how to approach male victims of GBV should be bolstered to

improve the efficacy of their interventions and investigations. In addition, educational talks for rural men should be conducted to offer lessons on speaking out when facing personal problems, which can encourage them to report related GBV cases against themselves or other rural men.

## Conclusion and recommendations

GBV rates against South African rural men are rife and have been increasing, as victims of this scourge are not taken seriously when reporting related cases to local SAPS officials or other relevant stakeholders. The study confirmed that lack of money and poverty are some of the major causes of this violence. As victims of GBV, rural men often fail to seek or access adequate support, and some of them do not report this crime to local police stations, while others turn to traditional tribunals for solutions. It was also evident that most of them seem to lack exposure to the issues of GBV as a crime that can occur against them. The lack of economic and employment opportunities was hinted at as hindering rural men from being empowered against this violence, and this should be urgently addressed.

The researchers recommend that local SAPS officials at the station level, especially those at the Community Service Centre (CSC), should receive rigorous training on how to approach cases of GBV against rural men appropriately; and that more police stations be established to increase manpower and improve service delivery. This should be taken seriously to decrease violence against rural men. The rural men should be able to identify the signs of this violence to be able to prevent it. Moreover, rural male victims of GBV should be encouraged to report cases to the local police station, and they must demand progress reports on their cases. Rural men continue to suffer due to the escalation and normalisation of violence in South Africa.

Further, rural men should be able to explain various forms of GBV against them, report them immediately and normalise speaking out. Rural communities should learn to address the problem of GBV and associated violence to take serious measures to end it. Moreover, there must be local support groups for men who experience violence in rural communities to help in detailing related consequences thereof. This should be supported by staging various awareness campaigns to alert rural men that GBV, IPV and various violent acts against them are criminal offences and should be punishable by law.

According to Mrubula-Ngwenya and Maluleke (2022, p. 102), the national government of South Africa should develop and implement strategies to combat sexual orientation-based challenges, including GBV against rural men,

to ensure their safety and protection against maltreatment and the related violence they face from women. The national government should also support rural men in starting small businesses to reduce total dependence on their partners, thereby reducing the risks of GBV and related effects (emotional, financial, psychological and physical abuse), amongst others. Mrubula-Ngwenya and Maluleke (2022, p. 108) advise promoting greater awareness of associated risks and negative actions against rural men.

It is further recommended that the local SAPS officials should prioritise the reported GBV cases against rural men and always take them seriously to decrease the prevalence of violence in rural communities. It is also presented that there should be an effective collaboration between the SAPS officials and rural community members to help reduce GBV against rural men. The criminal justice system should be transparent and efficient, and it must provide support and protection to rural men as victims of this crime. Rural male victims of this crime should be encouraged to report related cases to local police stations and demand regular progress updates.

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