



## Unpacking the Nuances Behind One-Sided Gendered Violence: A Case Study of The King Sabata Dalindyebo Local Municipality, Eastern Cape, South Africa

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### ABSTRACT

South Africa grapples with a pervasive GBV crisis evident in femicide, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault statistics. Gender-based violence is defined as the human-rights violation that occurs globally, in both developing and developed countries, irrespective of culture, socio-economic class or religion and it varies in frequency, forms and extent from country to country. While GBV has long been acknowledged as a pervasive issue impacting women in South Africa, recent research reveals a less recognised aspect men also experience significant abuse, often concealed by silence and stigma. In South Africa, a country with high rates of violence, this study explores the intricate interactions between cultural norms, societal expectations, and the frequency of gender-based violence against men. The Person-In-Environment theory was used in semi-structured interviews with 12 participants as part of the study's qualitative methodology. The study revealed that GBV against men is a significant yet often invisible problem. They further revealed how societal norms such as toxic masculinity, silence surrounding male vulnerability and cultural justifications contributed the occurrence and under-reporting of GBV against men as well as discouraged them from seeking help. Additionally, the findings shed light on the specific barriers men encounter in accessing support services, highlighting the need for gender-inclusive interventions.

### KEYWORDS

Gender-based violence; men; societal norms; culture.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Gender-based violence refers to acts of violence directed at an individual based on their gender, encompassing verbal, non-verbal, physical, and sexual harassment (Lang et al., 2021). Modise (2023) defines it as any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Zinyemba and Hlongwana (2022) also defined GBV as violence against women while there is also an infringement of men's rights. This encompasses a wide range of experiences, including physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse. Evidently, GBV has long been recognised as a pervasive issue affecting individuals worldwide, with a predominant focus on violence against women (Klugman, 2017). Perryman and Appleton (2016) opine that the understanding of GBV has often been understood and portrayed women as victims and men as perpetrators, with substantial attention given to violence against women. However, Peretz and Vidmar (2021) argue that emerging research suggests men also experience GBV, which challenges conventional perceptions.

Recent studies show a rise in cases of GBV against men that are recorded. However, underreporting continues because of the stigma attached to GBV against men, according to Keratiloe et al. (2022). Ironically, Morris and Ratajczak (2019) highlight how cultural and societal norms impact how people perceive gendered individuals and how they affect behaviours connected to gender-based violence. In order to better understand the complex dynamics of GBV against men, this study attempts to unpack the nuances behind one-sidedness of gendered violence. This is due to that discussions surrounding GBV have primarily centred on women as victims, leaving an important dimension of the issue of GBV against men largely unexplored (Keratiloe et al., 2022). While the prevalence of violence against women is undeniable, recent studies have started to shed light on the experiences of men facing gender-based violence (Thobejane et al., 2018). Therefore, this recognition of violence against men challenges the pre-existing stereotypes and confronts societal norms that have perpetuated a narrow understanding of gender roles and power dynamics.

Societal norms play a crucial role in shaping behaviours, expectations, and power structures within communities (Markel et al., 2016). The expectation for men to conform to rigid ideals of masculinity, including being unemotional, strong, and physical dominance, creates an environment where male victims of gender-based violence may be silenced or stigmatised (Luthada & Netshandama, 2019). Tshilongo (2023) defines masculinity as what it means to be a man. Thobejane et al. (2018) argue that notions like "men do not cry" reinforce the perception of a strong man who is not susceptible to GBV. Consequently, these expectations hinder men from disclosing their experiences as it may be seen as a sign of weakness. Additionally, culture as a complex system of shared beliefs and practices, further influences the manifestation of GBV against men (Rimjhim & Dandapat, 2022). These cultural norms may unintentionally condone or normalize abusive behaviours, hindering acknowledgment and reporting of GBV cases against men.

Despite increasing awareness and efforts to address GBV, there is a significant gap in understanding the influence of societal norms and culture on GBV against men. While existing research predominantly focuses on GBV against women, there is a lack of comprehensive investigation into the multifaceted dynamics that contribute to and perpetuate of violence against men within the framework of prevailing societal norms and cultural contexts. This invisibility stems from a complex interplay of societal norms, culture, and lack of awareness, leading to societal expectations of masculinity which often portray men as strong and unemotional which discourages them from seeking help or reporting GBV experiences. Additionally, the dominant narrative often frames GBV as exclusively directed towards women, trivialising men's experiences. Therefore, this leads to inadequate legal and social support for male victims. Therefore, this study seeks to delve into the complex interplay between societal norms, cultural influences on the prevalence of GBV against men. By doing so, it aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of GBV against men, fostering a conversation that goes beyond traditional gender narratives and addresses the multifaceted nature of GBV against men within societies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **The Overview of Gender Based-Violence**

Gender Based Violence (GBV) is a prevalent and widespread issue on South Africa, permeating communities, cultures, and religions (Govender, 2023). The term "gender-based violence" has been extensively defined by various scholars and organisations (Kasa & Saunders, 2022; United Nations, 1995). It constitutes a violation of human rights that occurs globally, affecting both developed and developing countries, irrespective of culture, socioeconomic status, or religion, and the frequency, forms and extent of GBV vary from country to country (Kasa & Saunders, 2022).

Bvindi (2018) posits that GBV can manifest in various ways, including psychological, physical, and/or sexual abuse, with long-term consequences for the victim's physical and psychosocial well-being. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2013) globally, estimated 1 in 3(30%) women have been victims of either physical or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. South Africa gained notoriety as the "rape capital of the world", with 10,818 rape cases in the first quarter of 2022, with the Eastern Cape being the leading province with GBV cases exceedingly twice the national rate (Gouws, 2022). According to Thobejane et al., (2018) GBV emerges from expectations associated with gender and unequal power relationships between genders within the context of a specific society. As such, males do not report due to the expectations and gender norms of most societies.

### **Gender as a social construct**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2019), gender refers to socially established qualities of women, men, girls, and boys, encompassing conventions, habits, and roles associated with being a woman or man. This socio-cultural construct frequently generates inequities between the sexes in socially and culturally ascribed roles (Rwafa, 2016). Lindqvist et al. (2020) argue that gender dictates individuals' self-perception, interactions, actions, and the distribution of power and resources in society. Ellemers (2018) notes that individuals and communities interpret, feel, and express gender in diverse ways, influencing roles, expectations, relationships, and institutionalization in society.

Gender roles, as defined by Drattell (2021) prescribe how individuals should act, talk, dress, groom, and conduct themselves based on their sex. Women are often expected to adopt feminine attire and be courteous and caring, while men are urged to be powerful, assertive, and stoic (Dietrich et al., 2021). These societal expectations serve as internalized mechanisms through which men and women regulate themselves. Furthermore, Baugher and Gazmararian (2015) asserted that gender roles have been associated with inequality that mostly lead to violence.

Gender role socialisation, according to Fry et al. (2019) imparts learned behaviours based on social expectations tied to gender identities. As such, Bastan and Dulek (2023) states that these societal expectations are highly influential over individual behaviour in a broad variety of contexts, including violence.

Violence is defined by Jacquin (2023) as a bodily act intended to cause harm. Exposure to violence, as noted by Bvindi (2018) is linked to a higher risk of mental health disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. Rivara et al. (2019) argue that violence, in its various forms, impacts the health and stability of targets, perpetrators, and their communities. The WHO (2019) states that violence contributes significantly to the global ailment burden and diminishes social cohesion.

Moreover, violence against women by their partners, identified as a global crisis by WHO (2013) is well-documented. Many scholars have reported that one in three women globally has experienced physical or sexual violence from their partners (Ostadtaghizade et al., 2023; Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). Govender (2023) suggests that the rate of women being killed by intimate partners in South Africa is five times higher than the global average. However, Machado et al. (2016) argue that abuse potential and victimization are not gender-specific, highlighting the underrepresentation of violence against men in the scholarly literature (Mlambo & Thusi, 2023).

Several authors have shed light on GBV perpetrated by women (Di Napoli et al., 2019; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021; Thobejane et al., 2018). Selowa et al., 2022 trace women's violence against men back to the 1970s, emphasizing that GBV against men is increasing at an alarming rate. According to Fono and Kasa (2024) observed that men in Limpopo, South Africa, reported various GBV or domestic experiences, ranging from isolated incidents to patterns of severe

violence, intimidation, and control by their partners. Peretz and Vidmar (2021) contend that GBV against males is a rapidly expanding field of study, encompassing sexual victimization, domestic violence, and hate crimes. Apperley (2015) challenges the misconception that males are not vulnerable to maintain societal understanding of the contexts in which GBV incidents occur. Apperley (2015) further argues that addressing sexual violence against both females and males is crucial to eliminating stigma and fostering a comprehensive societal response.

### **Cultural norms and standards**

Social norms are rules of behaviour; they teach certain people how to manage various circumstances and govern their social behaviour without using the law. Young (2014) states that multiple approaches, such as a desire to coordinate and fear of being sanctioned, frequently maintain social norms.

Gender norms are embedded in societal norms, and they are the only one component of the gender system, which also includes gender roles, gender socialisation, and gendered power relations. Gender norms, according to this definition, are the social standards and expectations that keep the gender system maintained (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020). According to Kambouri and Evans (2019) gender roles are built on numerous expectations that different societies have of individuals based on their sex. Societies continue to believe that women are more caring than males. As a result, the standard view of the feminine gender role specifies that women should behave in caring ways (Heise et al., 2019). Kambouri and Evans (2019) further argued that men on the other hand, are expected to be leaders by established gender norms. As a result, the conventional concept of the masculine gender dictates that males should be the heads of their houses, strong, providing financial support and make critical family choices.

Furthermore, culture plays crucial role in determining gender norms, attitudes, and the expectations placed on people based on their sex or gender (Best & Puzio, 2019). Itulua-Abumere (2013) defined culture as a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about attitudes toward life. Culture is described by Spencer-Oatey (2012) as the information, beliefs, morality, laws, and customs that a person acquires while living in a society. In African culture, gender is defined in accordance with the social duties, roles, and purposes it serves (Nehemia & Lenkoe, 2023).

These roles stipulate that men should be strong, dominant, and assertive; on the other hand, women should be feminine and submissive (Drattell, 2021). Mshweshwe (2020) argued that the nature of gender violence in South Africa stems from the complex interplay of culture, patriarchy and toxic masculinity. Culture plays a huge role in the socialisation of gender roles in society, which essentially holds the view 'men do not cry' and 'men are strong', hence male victims of GBV are reluctant to report incidents of domestic violence or seek assistance for fear of being seen as weak and subjected to mockery (Thobejane et al., 2018; Thusi & Mlambo, 2023).

Furthermore, it has been considered a taboo for men to be victims of violence perpetrated by women; this is largely due to this embedded culture and beliefs in society, which

stipulate that a woman cannot violate a man as this contravenes the stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity (Sousa, 2022). This is similar to the findings of Cooper et al. (2020), which indicated that as a result of these societal and cultural norms, male victims of GBV do not fit within the framework of socially constructed masculinity, which perpetuates that men should be strong and tough, which contradicts male victims of GBV. As a result of the societal cultural base GBV against men remains largely invisible and underreported (Kalimaposo et al., 2022).

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This research study was underpinned by the Person-in-Environment theory. According to Tyler (2020), person-in-environment theory is defined as a framework of thought that emphasizes the importance of understanding an individual and their behaviour in the environment in which they live and behave. The person-in-environment theory evolved from the two theories, the ecological theory and the general systems theory (Fono & Kasa, 202). According to Mohinuddin (2021), the ecosystem views individuals and environments as constantly interacting with and adapting to one another in a series of interconnected transactional.

Furthermore, this approach takes a holistic view of individuals' and families' bio-psycho-social development within the cultural, historical, communal, and societal contexts in which they live (Yesudhas, 2015). According to Kondrat (2015), people's behaviour cannot be fully understood unless all aspects of that individual's surroundings are considered, including social, political, family, and economic variables. Person-in-environment effectively showed that behaviour is a function of the person associated with the environment (Horstman et al., 2015).

The person-in-environment approach is a central and core principle in social work practice (Alhuzail & Levinger, 2022). From this perspective, social workers focus on the interactions between individuals and systems in the social environment with the goal of enhancing their lives as well as promoting social justice through recognising and challenging the inequalities and social injustices that exist in the social institutions of society (Greene, 2017). Fundamentally, this approach provides with a more appropriate frame of reference for assessing an individual and their problem. Therefore, in addressing and understanding GBV against men, this theoretical lens equips the researchers with an understanding the multifaceted view of GBV by recognising the social, cultural, and environmental drivers of GBV. Subsequently, this will allow the social workers to take corrective measures to intervene.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach to gain pertinent information. According to Kasa (2021) the qualitative approach aims to help us comprehend the real world we live in and the rationale behind why things are the way they are. It is concerned with providing explanations regarding social phenomena. In addition, this approach was selected for several reasons, including its emphasis on the opinions and experiences of participants, its

consideration of people's interpretations, its flexibility, and its emphasis on the process rather than the outcomes.

In alignment with the delineated research objectives, a case study methodology was deliberately chosen to comprehensively explore a confined constellation of events or states, along with their interrelations. According to Tomaszewski et al. (2020) the essence of a case study methodology lies in the detailed examination of the complex interactions and subtle nuances within a specific case or phenomenon, to decipher its fundamental processes and the distinctive conditions that might not be immediately obvious. Therefore, a case study facilitates a profound inquiry into a phenomenon, engendering a meticulous analysis, and culminates in the articulation of the methodology adopted to illuminate these facets, thereby effectively constituting a scholarly study (Crowe et al., 2011). Within this framework, the research design was strategically focused on shedding light on the experiences of men with gender-based violence and the collective import of their narratives.

### **Population and sample**

#### *Population*

The study selected a sample size of 12 participants from a diverse pool of individuals, both male and female, aged between 24 and 49, who are residents of the Mthatha community. Participation was limited to community members within this specified age range, as researchers believe that they have an understanding of what culture is and what are societal norms as they are in most instances allowed to be part of community members. The decision to focus on this age group was driven by the study's emphasis on investigating the influence of societal norms and culture on gender-based violence. It was anticipated that individuals aged 24 to 49 would provide valuable insights into these dynamics, given their likely exposure to and engagement with societal norms and cultural influences. This age restriction was implemented strategically to increase the likelihood of recruiting participants whose experiences and perspectives align with the study's objectives. The choice of a relatively small sample size was deliberate, considering factors such as achieving data saturation, prioritizing quality over quantity, and maintaining a balance between data richness and the avoidance of redundant information.

#### *Sampling methods and procedure*

The study used a non-probability sampling method. The sampling technique adopted by this study was snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique used in qualitative research when the population is hard to reach or hidden (Valerio et al., 2016). It is particularly useful when studying sensitive topics or when the members of the population are difficult to locate. This is the most prevalent method researchers employ to identify information-rich key informants. Shaheen et al. (2019) alluded that by asking respondents whom to talk to, the snowball size grows with more information-rich cases. Snowball sampling was particularly effective when researching sensitive topics such as GBV because it allowed participants to refer others with similar experiences and to create a sense of trust and rapport between participants and the researchers. For this study, this method was used to gather data

that accurately reflects the experiences of men who might have experienced GBV. Furthermore, the method was crucial in ensuring the research was representative and unbiased.

### **Data collection methods and analysis**

A semi-structured and in-depth interview was applied for this study's overall data collection process from 12 participants. An inductive approach was used in the study, which aims to comprehend the participant's worldview and accurately depict how they perceive, feel about, and behave in their surroundings (Makhubela & Ngoepe, 2018). Moreover, semi-structured interviews are less structured in nature, which gives freedom to the participants and researcher to explore necessary areas of interest in the subject matter. Consequently, the interviews provided a platform for meaningful interaction and in-depth discussion between the researcher and the participants, drawing heavily on the participants' personal experiences. These interviews were conducted in IsiXhosa, transcribed, and translated into English to ensure that the participants' meanings and perceptions were conveyed without distortion. The researcher scheduled the time and venue based on the availability of the participants, as the interviews were to be conducted face-to-face.

Furthermore, used a thematic analysis was used to analyse data. Braun and Clarke (2006) contend that thematic analysis is a qualitative research technique that may be applied to a wide range of epistemologies and research problems. It is a technique for detecting, analysing, organising, characterising, and reporting themes in a data set. The several phases of the thematic analysis as used in the current research are described in the following (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Subsequently, the study had to depend on the existing sources of information at its disposal, therefore data was gathered from various reputable sources, including Google, Google Scholar and academic articles focusing on instances of gender-based violence perpetrated by women against men.

### **Analysis, Interpretation, and Discussion of Findings**

The researchers have meticulously interpreted and analysed the results of their study. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, they have identified themes and sub-themes through a rigorous examination of the data. Furthermore, they have employed thematic analysis to interpret the data collected, carefully scrutinising the recordings and comments to uncover the challenges and experiences shared by the participants.

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



**Table 1.***Biographical Information of Participants*

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

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

Theme	Sub-theme	Probes
Investigating the influence of societal norms and culture on GBV.	Please explain how your culture or community shapes your perception of GBV against men.	Masculinity Influence Expectations

**Masculinity**

All male participants mentioned masculinity as the attribute or ability that makes them superior to women, which also implies that males do not cry or cannot be hurt, and that they must suppress all emotions in order to display their strength.

Some of the responses expressed by the participants were:

Participant 9: *“(Indoda ayikhali) meaning that ‘Men do not cry’.*

The study’s exploration of masculinity as a prevailing cultural norm influencing perceptions of GBV against men has revealed significant insights. Male participants emphasised traditional notions of masculinity, associating strength with emotional suppression and reluctance to admit vulnerability. Literature support these findings, highlighting the impact of culturally enforced masculinity on men’s hesitation to report GBV. In the African context, where

patriarchal ideals prevail, the perceived strength and power associated with men make acknowledging victimhood challenging.

Various scholars contend that cultural norms are pivotal in shaping gender roles, reinforcing the notion that men should be strong and resilient (Keratiloe et al.,2022; Thobejane et al.,2018; Thusi & Mlambo, 2023). Furthermore, the fear of deviating from traditional masculine norms, as highlighted in the findings, further contributes to the reluctance of male victims to report incidents, seeking assistance, or openly addressing their experiences.

### **Influence**

All participants stated that their culture and societal norms influenced how they define and interpret GBV. The notion of GBV was endorsed by societal norms that emphasised non-vulnerability as one of the main characteristics of men.

One of the male participants responded:

Participant 11: *“I grew up in a community where gender-based violence was understood as violence against women and children as a result I grew up thinking that men do not experience GBV.”*

The findings indicate a prevailing misconception on GBV by male participants, as exemplified by participant 11’s statement, reflecting a community understanding that largely associates GBV with violence against women and children. Cooper et al. (2013) findings align with the study, revealing that societal and cultural standards contribute to the marginalisation of all victims of GBV, as they often don’t conform to the socially constructed expectations that dictate that men should embody strength and toughness. This perpetuates a narrative that men do not experience GBV, as expressed by the participant’s upbringing.

### **Expectations**

Most participants stated that society had different expectations for each gender or social group. Those expectations motivate and impact their actions. They further explained that culturally men are expected to be the providers or breadwinners and if they do not live up to these expectations, they are deemed weak. The majority of male participants reported that their inability to support their partners due to unemployment was a significant contributing factor to their abuse which took the form of verbal and emotional abuse. They explained that men who exhibit behaviour that contradicts cultural ideals are regarded less of a man, and as a result, most men would go to any length to defend their status.

Some of the responses were:

Participant 12: *“Unemployment has stripped away my dignity as a man, and I less of a man because I cannot provide for my family”*

Participant 5: *“A man should be monied and must be able to maintain my lifestyle”*

Participant 6: *“(Amadoda ngokwe sintu ngabona bantu bomeleleyo, balwela iintsapho zawo). This saying means that males are the strongest individuals and are obliged to fight and protect their families”.*

The responses highlighted that men felt pressured to adhere to traditional roles and deviations led to diminished status. Mphatheni and Mlamla (2022) contends that culture dictates what it means to be male or female, and that GBV is aggravated in this context by the historical view that men are the superior gender. However, as times are evolving men no longer occupy the role of provider or breadwinner, so they display their frustrations on women or, even more so, become victims by their partners (Gouws, 2021).

Furthermore, the findings of a research conducted by Thobejane et al. (2018) revealed that women who hold high positions or financially stable than their male partners are most likely to be abusive towards their male partners whether verbally or even physically. Tur-Prats (2017) also observed that unemployment among males increases intimate partner violence, possibly because men fear losing their traditional breadwinner role.

### **DISCUSSION**

This research explores the complex processes of gender-based violence against men in particular, providing important insight into a comparatively neglected aspect of GBV. The research is based on qualitative interviews with men who have personally experienced gender-based violence in the Bityi area. The exclusive focus of the participant selection criteria on their actual experiences with GBV helped to bring to light the frequently suppressed stories of male victims of GBV. The study's emerging themes provide insight into the experiences of these people while also offering a critical analysis of the societal and cultural conceptions of victimhood and masculinity in the context of gender-based violence.

One of the thematic revelations of the study was the profound impact of traditional masculinity on the perception and acknowledgement of GBV against men. This theme articulates how entrenched notions of masculinity, which valorise strength, stoicism, and emotional restraint, significantly impede the recognition of men as potential victims of GBV (Mbandlwa, 2020). Another theme expounded on the societal expectations vested in men as providers and protectors and how these roles further compound the complexity of GBV against men, influencing both its occurrence and the subsequent response or lack thereof.

A poignant aspect of the study is its attention to the barriers faced by men in reporting GBV. Direct quotes from participants illuminate the multifaceted challenges, including stigma and a societal milieu that perpetuates masculine stereotypes, thereby fostering an environment in which GBV against men is underreported and, consequently, marginalised. This underreporting is symptomatic of broader societal norms that privilege certain forms of masculinity while nullifying the vulnerabilities and victimhood experiences of men (Yagi et al., 2022).

Mbandlwa (2020) and other researchers have previously highlighted the dearth of scholarly attention devoted to men's experiences with gender-based violence. This is particularly problematic when it comes to how these experiences challenge traditional narratives surrounding masculinity and societal expectations. Corroborating this, the results of

Yagi et al. (2022) highlighted deeply ingrained notions of masculine power and control, further obscuring how male victims of GBV view themselves and are viewed by others. The new study expands on this conversation by showing how gender norms and cultural standards not only excuse but also support violent acts against men.

Mphatheni and Mlamla (2022) additionally add to the discourse by addressing the cultural foundations of GBV, clarifying how cultural norms and values legitimise violence and mute its male victims. This study supports the idea by providing evidence of the widespread culture of silence around male GBV victims. This quiet is supported by societal and cultural norms that demand stoic, unwavering masculinity, which makes it difficult to disclose and acknowledge such occurrences.

Thus, this study makes a significant contribution to the ongoing conversation about gender-based violence by shedding light on the experiences of male victims. This challenges traditional gender stereotypes and advocates for an inclusive approach to understanding and addressing GBV. The study questions societal and cultural norms that obscure the experiences of male GBV victims and argues for a more comprehensive understanding of GBV that encompasses all victims, regardless of gender. Through this scholarly inquiry, the study emphasizes the need for interventions that are inclusive and sensitive to the complexities surrounding GBV against men, urging for a shift in thinking that recognizes and addresses this widely neglected issue.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

During the interviews, the participants described their experiences of being a victim of gender-based violence in a society where males are expected to be strong and not show weakness or emotion in public. The participants disclosed that they were subjected to gender-based violence at the hands of women and that, as a result of cultural and societal standards, they had also been subjected to mockery, labels of weakness, ridicule, and secondary victimisation. It is undeniable that each participant's experience has a different impact, even though all of them have gone through the same experience.

This study revealed that gender-based violence (GBV) against males by women is a taboo issue in society. Men are often silenced due to fear of mockery from community, peers, and police officials. This issue is further exacerbated by toxic masculinity, which is characterized by male traits that negatively impact male victims. Moreover, findings revealed found that GBV against men is underreported due to victims often downplaying their experiences, which is often a coping mechanism used by men who experience GBV, as a common inclination. Therefore, in order to effectively tackle or address GBV against men, society as a whole needs to move towards eliminating gendered norms and cultural expectations that have been imposed on individuals based on their gender or sex, as they become a barrier to progress. Policies and legislation should target everyone who has been identified as a victim of GBV, regardless of

gender. Lastly, it is necessary to empower men through marches and awareness campaigns so they can gain the courage to speak up and seek help from professionals.

### Limitations

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018) define study limitations as possible shortcomings that frequently occur outside the investigator's control and are closely related to the methodology selected, financial constraints, or other unrelated issues. This study is limited to in-person interviews with participants, and it operates with the assumption that all narrative responses are candid, which places a great deal of reliance on the accuracy of the data that participants supply. One significant drawback is the result of timing constraints. The difficulty that arises from participants' reluctance to share their experiences, which they attribute to the delicate nature of the questions, takes time. The researcher must be given enough time to gather all the necessary data in order to lessen the effects of these temporal constraints.

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