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A critical review of Indigenous women's knowledge systems related to gender-based violence in the Global South

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A critical review of Indigenous women's knowledge systems related to gender-based violence in the Global South.

Supervisor: Professor Peace Kiguwa

Research Report submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for admission to the study towards the

degree of Masters in Social and Psychological Research, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Declaration

I, Sharon Manaka, declare that this research report: ‘ A critical review of Indigenous women’s knowledge systems related to gender-based violence in the Global South’ is my own original work. All sources used have been acknowledged in the report. The report is being submitted for the Masters in Social and Psychological Research degree in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

Signed: S. Manaka.

Date: 29 January 2025.

Abstract

The study was a critical review of research focused on developing countries that was concerned with women's indigenous knowledge resources and systems to understand and confront GBV, together with the importance and the role of community response to GBV, as documented in the literature. This was done by conducting a narrative and meta-analyses review of the literature focused on how communities respond to GBV, and how women use indigenous knowledges and practices to understand and deal with GBV. The study utilized indigenous knowledge systems approach to analyse the data. Owing to the nature of the phenomenon of interest, the study employed a qualitative research design. The gathered data was analysed using thematic analysis. The study found that Indigenous women are not helplessly going through GBV, they instead deploy various coping strategies as prescribe by their cultural beliefs. These coping strategies include involving family elders as mediators, finding comfort in prayer and God, finding solace in proverbs, and positive reframing of GBV experiences. As proactive as Indigenous women were found to be in dealing with their victimization, some of their strategies of dealing with GBV were found to be counterproductive. The study further found that the community's role in the fight against GBV is a critical and an irreplaceable one, especially because inequitable gender norms and beliefs are established and upheld within and by the community, therefore, within and by the community is where their disintegration should begin. Considering indigenous women's respect for culture, it is important that initiatives aimed at doing away with GBV are implemented in a manner that honours the cultural beliefs of those who are meant to be helped.

Keywords: Gender-based violence, women, community response, Indigenous knowledge.

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Dedication

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1 1
Introduction and Background 1
Statement of the problem 2
Rationale 4
Aims and Objectives 6
Research questions 7
Chapter 2 8
Theoretical framework 8
Indigenous Knowledge Systems Approach 8
Chapter 3 11
Overview of the Literature. 11
Chapter 4 18
Methodology 18
Research design 18
Research paradigm 19
The interpretivist paradigm 19
Critical research paradigm 20
Method 21
Data collecting: Corpus of analysed text 22
Data analysis 23
Chapter 5 24
Findings and Discussion 24
Chapter 6 95
Conclusion 95
Recommendations 96
Reflexivity 97
List of references 99

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

Gender-based violence is a pressing global issue that demands attention from all directions because it bears dire consequences (Bull et al., 2020; Tsapalas, 2021). Gender-based violence (GBV) is a term commonly used interchangeably with violence against women, as women are usually on the receiving end of this type of violence (Morrison & Orlando, 2005; Baldasare, 2012). According to Enaifoghe et al. (2021), GBV is conceptualized as "the general term used to squarely capture violence against women and children" (p. 118). The declaration of the elimination of violence against women of 1993 by The United Nations defines GBV as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (article. 1). GBV is a widespread and deeply entrenched issue, that encompasses different types of harm, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse, which are specifically targeted toward or disproportionately affect individuals based on their gender identity or expression (Thelma, 2024). Anyone from any gender can be a victim of GBV (Baldasare, 2012; Thomas et al., 2022; Mwedzi & Phipps, 2024), however, it is important to note that in most of the cases, women are victims and not perpetrators (Thelma, 2024).

The effects of GBV touch on every aspect of the victims' lives, depriving them of an opportunity to lead purposeful and good quality lives. GBV is directly linked to unequal power distribution between men and women (Tsapalas, 2021; Thelma, 2024). One perspective is that this stems from a cultural prescription that reinforces intimate violence through the embracement of male dominance and female marginalisation (Takyi & Mann, 2006). However, it is more accurate to consider that violence of any form intersects with a wide range of factors that include structural, social, cultural, material, and psychosocial influences (Boonzaier, 2008; Boonzaier, 2018).

The over-emphasis on patriarchal and systemic influences on gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, is that we tend not to engage sites of interrogation and resistance that do emerge in the context of violence. That is, because these sites of engagement do not

necessarily dismantle violence altogether or may not even be readily visible, we assume that these do not exist. One of such sites, I argue, is the role and importance of community responses to violence informed by indigenous knowledge and practice in responding to forms of gender-based violence. Furthermore, a critical African gender lens is an important one to consider in its attention to formations of gender and sexuality within these contexts. For example, research shows that women generally do actively construct and make sense of the myriad forms of violence in their lives (Beare & Boonzaier, 2020; Boonzaier & Van Schalkwyk, 2011; Boonzaier, 2018). Burnett (2015) argues for a contextual approach to understanding intimate violence in women's lives. By which she means that we must consider the different and intersecting local contextual influences that contribute to and sometimes reinforce violence. Focusing on matrilineal context, Burnett's study demonstrates the role of informal and formal transmission of intergenerational knowledge and practices in how women not only understand but also respond to the violence in their lives. Focusing on indigenous communities, her study demonstrates how women support each other through the sharing of their stories and strategies of response as a group. Of course, Boonzaier and colleagues' work equally shows how problematic social gendered constructs may also be transmitted intergenerationally in such a manner. For example, Chisale (2016) posits that during her marital counselling, older women provided counsel that embraces submission, patience, and perseverance in marriage, these are ideals of patriarchy. Contrary to this, her mother's counsel reiterated the importance of formal education and being conscious of one's rights as a woman. Formal education increases one's chances of securing employment, which then leads to economic freedom and abolishes the dependence on the husband. When women are aware of their rights, they are able to fight back when such rights are being infringed upon. The study aims to explore such conceptualization by paying attention to the intervention strategic agendas found in reports on GBV within communities and broader society as reported by key report studies on violence (CSVR, 2016; Sonke Gender Justice, 2016). With an emphasis on constructs and roles of community response in these reports that frame violence.

Statement of the problem

Despite global and local efforts to do away with GBV, it remains a pervasive issue, particularly in the Global South where patriarchal norms rooted in culture are deeply entrenched. Women from this region are not dealing only with structural and economic obstacles, but they are also silenced by cultural prescriptions that tend to favour men over women. Indigenous women are often portrayed as helpless beings who take GBV as it comes, overlooking the fact that they

deal with their victimization the only way they know how, by using cultural mechanisms. This gap highlights the urgent need to explore how indigenous women's lived experiences and traditional knowledge can contribute to more effective and culturally informed responses to GBV. Curbing this social ill is a time-sensitive matter as its effects run deep. The loss of one intimate partner's life in the hands of the other is a drastic repercussion of GBV (Morrison et al., 2005; Boy & Kulczycki, 2008; Moreroa & Rapanyane, 2021). GBV has been a scourge for innumerable years, although it is a global issue, the least-developed countries tend to experience the worst of it. Intimate violence affects people of all races, ages, and socioeconomic status (Tenkorang, 2018), even so, it is important to mention that women from developing countries are suffering extraordinarily in this regard (Sabri et al., 2023). This is because women of lower economic status, who are illiterate and from areas that are generally poverty-stricken and still hold culture and tradition in high regard, are susceptible to intimate violence (Scott et al., 2013). In agreement with this, Morrison & Orlando (2005) reported in their study that Zambian women who completed primary education are at a lower risk of experiencing GBV when compared to their counterparts without primary education. A significant number of intimate violence cases go unreported (Guedes et al., 2002; Palermo et al., 2013; Wilson, 2014), hence there is consensus among scholars that it is difficult to determine the prevalence of intimate violence (Moore, 2020). On the contrary, WHO (2019) found that out of the global population of women who have been in relationships, about 30% of these have a story to tell about intimate violence. However, not knowing the precise and relevant statistics of GBV should not deter us from giving GBV the necessary attention and urgency it deserves. Although GBV affects both men and women, it is worth mentioning that almost always, women are on the receiving end (Heise et al., 2002).

Moreroa & Rapanyane (2021) contend that there is a correlation between patriarchy and misogyny and the widespread gender inequality in South Africa. It is well documented that culture, and particularly patriarchy, plays an enormous role in the skyrocketing incidences of intimate violence (Takyi & Mann, 2006). Machismo, proportional to patriarchy, is a belief originating from Latin America where women are expected to live their lives serving and meeting the needs and desires of men, either as partners or wives (Wilson, 2014). Issues relating to intimate violence in marital relationships stem from the system of patriarchy, and the very same system maintains these issues while disguising itself as a solution. According to Saunders et al. (2022), "patriarchal norms contribute to the maintenance of GBV by creating societal barriers to helping and protecting survivors" (p. 10). Intentional exclusion of women in

conversations that concern them and including them on the basis that their viewpoints should be dictated by patriarchy is equivalent to silencing them. Women's sense of urgency in resolution of marital issues is undermined. Amid mounting intimate violence cases, and mechanisms to curb it, matrilineal knowledge is hardly consulted, and women's views cannot be said to be theirs if they are guided by the ideals of the system of patriarchy. Segalo (2012) posits that depriving people of a room to vocalize their perspectives and experiences as lived by them, is potentially taking away their voices. Counterproductive coping mechanisms such as internalising pain and suffering become a way of life. Women lived and continue to live their lives under the shadow of culture and patriarchy, and their children are raised in a like manner (Takyi & Mann, 2006). In gendered conservative contexts, sons are taught to be manly and dominant in their preparation as successors of their fathers, and daughters are taught to be feminine and submissive in preparation for marriage and motherhood. In this regard, Moreroa & Rapanyane (2021) recommend that it should be instilled in a boy child early in his life that cultural practices that oppress people of the opposite gender should not be upheld. Otherwise, an unequal distribution of power is the way of life children eventually become habituated to (Morrison & Orlando, 2005). The resocialisation of boys is one part of the solution, however, granting women access to structural and other systems that will assist in situations of intimate violence is important. Sometimes however, while these systems may exist, the value of informal networks of knowledge about these systems, how to access and not just about the act of violence itself is significant (Anyemedu et al., 2020). This is what constitutes networks of knowing that are part of matrilineal knowledge and practice.

Rationale

The soaring incidences of intimate violence command that this social and health issue be afforded the attention it demands. The need for intercession extends beyond the duties of the criminal justice system. The model of community-based intervention is based on this idea, it emphasizes that the active participation of community members or social networks is a key element of the intervention strategy and is closely linked to various community-oriented, non-criminal legal interventions for addressing gender-based violence, included here are approaches such as restorative justice, transformative justice, and community accountability (Kim, 2018). In line with this is the community mobilisation model on which the Diepsloot Community Mobilisation Programme for Sonke Change Trial Study that ran between October 2015 and March 2018 was based. This model postulates that apart from addressing issues in our individual lives, we should also engage in community-level actions to establish a basis for

community members to enjoy their human rights and live without the experience of violence. The idea is to promote the notion that eradicating GBV is a collaborative responsibility. It is important to realise that community members who experience the effects of violence firsthand and coexist in shared homes and communal spaces with both victims and perpetrators of violence, have the capacity to be more deeply committed to the welfare of all individuals involved, this commitment extends to creating circumstances that could deter future harm (Bierria et al., 2011).

According to Fullwood (2002) as cited in Kim (2021) "The shift from individualized anti-violence services as the primary site of intervention toward community-level actors and institutions has been promoted by an emphasis on community members and community-based organizations as critical partners in intervention and prevention responses" (p. 225). Intervention on a community level facilitates the necessary dialogues where men as people who are usually perpetrators can also actively get involved as various ways to eliminate GBV are sought for, therefore, the idea that GBV is the responsibility of law enforcement agencies, together with perpetrators and survivors only is done away with. It was reported in LRS's *The story of Letsema: A Contribution to Reducing Gender Based Violence in the Vaal* (2018) that the creation of an arena where the community of Vaal acted collaboratively enabled a response that was creative, pertinent, and deeply connected to the experiences of those most impacted by violence, it further created a communal experience where individuals from diverse backgrounds, sexualities, and gender come together to heed to the call of acting against GBV in the Vaal. Condemning GBV at a community level can help reduce and eventually do away with the stigma attached to being a victim of this social ill, which can further help break the silence.

Narrative review helps in giving an overview of existing knowledge on a particular subject, and affords the researcher an opportunity to analyse and evaluate the entire body of literature without dictating the importance of objectivity (Sukhera, 2022). The use of this method in this study allowed for a wholistic perspective on the situation concerning community-based response to GBV in developing countries. Community-based response to GBV in developing countries is quite an expansive subject, owing to this, a precise and systematic search and summary of the literature on this subject is necessary. The analysis of literature from 2003 to 2023 has helped in the provision of the most updated information about the importance of and how communities collectively confront GBV. Developing countries have a distinctive social, cultural, political, and historical context, all of which influence the dynamics of GBV, a

narrative review will provide an insight of value into how these contextual factors decussate with each other. A narrative review will help identify gaps in existing literature, this will then set the stage for future research where unexplored dimensions of GBV will get to receive attention.

In terms of gendered dynamics, the study acknowledges that for the longest time, women are put out of action where cultural resolution of intimate violence in marital unions is concerned. This is particularly because in an event where a married couple seeks families' intervention, which by default is cultural, the entire family meeting is usually dictated by the principles of patriarchy. This makes it difficult for mediators to be objective and impartial, which then disadvantages the wife and maintains intimate violence. For instance, a precise and direct prescription is made by some cultural practices that forbid women's verbal participation in public or community meetings, even in decisions that bear direct effects on their lives (Ngoitiko, 2008). Women are stripped off their voices (Segalo, 2012; Segalo, 2015), they must follow without questioning, otherwise, they would be perceived as rebels against culture, which is a taboo. Essentially, women are not trusted enough to be allowed to be their autonomous selves. During family meetings that are meant to assist in the resolution of intimate violence within marriages, women may be present, but are always given back seats, in the case that they are allowed to speak, their uttered words are expected to be in support of culture and the patriarchal system. Contrary to this, Tzay and Francisco (2022) argue that indigenous women are the guardians of a rich repository of collective indigenous knowledge that has helped in the sustainment of communities from times immemorial as it is being passed down from one generation to the next.

Aims and Objectives

1. The study firstly aims to conduct a narrative and meta-analyses review of literature in the global south focused on community responses to GBV in the last 20 years. The 20 year period allowed for a more in-depth tracking of shifts in GBV profiling and policy response, offering insight into how GBV interventions, strategies and attitude have evolved over time.
2. Secondly, the study aims to explore a review of indigenous-centered women's knowledges and practices in understanding and confronting GBV in this literature.

Research questions

1. What does a narrative meta-analysis review of literature on GBV in the global south in the past 20 years reveal about construct about the importance and role of community responses to GBV?
2. What are the constructs and importance of indigenous knowledge systems and women's knowledges and practices in understanding and confronting intimate violence in this literature?

Chapter 2

Theoretical framework

Indigenous Knowledge Systems Approach

The definition of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) has varied across different academic perspectives, which has contributed to the challenge of operationalizing the concept in research (Banda & Banda, 2018; Goduka, 2012; Ubisi et al., 2019). Despite these various definitions, there is a broadly accepted view that they (IKS) are rooted in a shared understanding within a specific community, encompassing certain themes and spaces (Ubisi et al., 2019). IKS encompasses the diverse knowledge, skills, and technologies that have evolved among indigenous populations and communities within specific geographic regions, shaped by their unique cultural, social, and environmental contexts (Noyoo, 2007). According to Mapara (2009), IKS consists of the extensive and long-established knowledge held by indigenous people in specific geographic regions, upon which they have relied for generations. According to Chikaire et al. (2012) and du Toit (2005), IKS dates back to time immemorial. Mapira and Mazambara (2013) argue that IKS originate from the pre-colonial era, they are a significant aspect of Africa's heritage which was developed to tackle challenges that threatened survival. Despite enduring racial and colonial attacks from Western imperialism and disdain, IKS remained immortal (Mapara, 2009). The author further posits that IKS exhibit a diverse array of dimensions, such as agriculture, medicine, security, botany, zoology, craft skills, and linguistics. IKS are a type of knowledge that is domestically produced, and are rooted in the principle of sustainable way of life (Goduka, 2012). Mwinzi (2015) postulates that IKS embrace communalism and discourages individualism and rivalry. IKS features perennialism which is concerned with the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge (Mwinzi, 2015; Noyoo, 2007; Materer et al., 2001). It is passed down through complex but carefully developed systems, such as myths and stories (Chikaire et al., 2012; Goduka, 2012).

Despite their argued immortality, the literature argues that IKS have been pushed into the background by modern and western ways of knowing (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; du Toit, 2005), where foreign knowledges were imposed with no regard for their relevance or irrelevance, on indigenous people. Westerners perceived Indigenous knowledges as a product of trial and error, whereas their own knowledge system is viewed as inarguable owing to the rigorous experimentation involved (Eyong, 2007), and indeed, IKS also involved experiments, even though these experiments were not recorded in black and white (Chikaire et al., 2012;

Eyong, 2007; Goduka, 2012). Breidlid (2009) argues that knowledges from the west fail to recognise the interrelated nature of existence of indigenous people and nature together with its manifestations. Chikaire et al. (2012) posit that Indigenous knowledge includes spiritual connections, interactions with the natural world and its resources, relationships among people, and is expressed through language, cultural structures, values, institutions, and legal systems. The authors lament the potential extinction of IKS, particularly because its bearers who are the elders, meet their demise one after the other. Eyong (2007) and Goduka (2012) are also of the idea that IKS might cease to exist owing to factors such as the fourth industrial revolution, a firm grip of colonialism on Indigenous people, and the absence of its formalization in a written form. To prevent this anticipated extinction, Chikaire et al. (2012) suggest the safeguarding of knowledge created by indigenous people through intentional policy measures and institutional reform initiatives. du Toit (2005) posits that the evolution and adoption of technology in service and betterment of humanity are worth the celebration, however, for indigenous people, nature is integral to this celebration, as there can never be true celebration without it. This suggests that indigenous people should not forget their ways of knowing in their appreciation of western knowledges such as technology and its rapid advancements. To effectively apply IKS, Chikaire et al. (2012) argue that people should not gullibly perceive them as exclusively true, a certain level of questioning and critique should be present because just like other knowledge systems, IKS are not immune to errors. The authors contend that it is a misconception to assume that Indigenous Knowledge is inherently good. For example, this is seen in how Indigenous knowledges of dealing with issues of gendered violence have a well-documented track record of pushing women into the margins, and thus sustaining their victimization.

This study will utilize indigenous knowledge systems theoretical framework for reading indigenous women's narratives and meaning-making around intimate gendered violence. Mapira and Mazambara (2013) argue that IKS are viewed as a source of cultural esteem, self-worth, and potential remedies to persistent difficulties faced by communities. Violence against women is an example of the ongoing difficulties referred to here. Mapira and Mazambara (2013) postulate that the dawn of the post-colonial era has brought about the resurrection of attention and curiosity in IKS. This reiterates their relevance even in the present day (Breidlid, 2009). This relevance, particularly in the face of the scourge of violence against women despite efforts from both the government and NGOs to turn the situation around suggests that we should go back to the basics, and afford indigenous ways of knowing a fighting chance against gendered violence. One might argue that indigenous knowledge might be dated to be able to

tackle gendered violence as it exists under current circumstances. The literature suggests that IKS are not static relics of the past but are instead dynamic and adaptive, evolving in tandem with the ecological processes that have shaped them over time (Chikaire et al., 2012; Goduka, 2012; Lipe, 2013; Nel, 2005). Similarly, du Toit (2005) and Eyong (2007) argue that IKS exist in contexts that are subject to change over time, and are therefore shaped and reshaped with the passage of time to ensure applicability in the new context. One of the important features of the IKS theory is holisticism (Eyong, 2007; Goduka, 2012), which acknowledges the interconnectedness of aspects of indigenous women's existence. Here we are referring to political structure, economic nature, social fabric, cultural characteristics, and the eternal existence of the departed and their influence on the livings' lives (Mwinzi, 2015). Nel (2005) asserts that IKS do not only facilitate sustainable livelihoods within communities, but they also offer complementary and potentially superior alternatives to existing knowledge systems. Therefore, I argue that the theory is better poised to offer us an alternative perspective through which to analyse and make sense of violence as experienced on a personal level by indigenous women, and how communities come together to express enmity against gendered violence.

Chapter 3

Overview of the Literature.

Gender-based violence is a public health concern that affects individuals from all walks of life (Itimi et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2022). It does not discriminate by gender; however, it is important to note that more women than men are on the receiving end (Sabri et al., 2023; Sinko & Arnault, 2020; Thomas et al., 2022). Lencha et al. (2019) and WHO (2021) argue that as much as GBV is a global issue, women from low and middle-income countries carry the brunt of it, where 1 in 3 women experience GBV in the hands of a man they are either romantically involved with or not. WHO (2021) further warns that owing to cases that go unreported out of fear of stigma, these statistics could be underestimated. According to Mannell et al. (2018), GBV has detrimental effects on the mental health of its survivors. In this regard, it is of importance to mention that GBV does not only affect those who are on the frontline of the abuse, it also affects their loved ones, potentially disturbing the ideal family structure, where mothers are rendered incapable of being the parents their children do not only yearn for, but also need (Sloand et al., 2015). This emphasises just how deep the effects of GBV can potentially run. The Global South is poverty-stricken, and many communities from this part of the world are known to hold culture so dearly, this highlights that poverty and patriarchy are prominent factors contributing to the abuse of women in this region. For example, many women are denied opportunities that might bolster their economic independence, such as a chance to get an education (Mill & Anarfi, 2002). Young girls who are victims of child marriage are denied a chance to simply be children and do what children their age are supposed to be doing (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang, 2004), they are instead burdened with wifely and motherhood responsibilities, expectedly, these marriages are usually destined to be plagued with abuse. According to Mill and Anrfi (2002) and Shabaya and Konadu-Agyemang (2004), owing to poverty and the status of inferiority assigned to women, some parents opt to withdraw their girl children from school and subject them to nonconsensual conjugal unions.

Gender-based violence continues to plague nations around the world. This is despite continuous efforts from both the government and non-profit organisations, suggesting that these efforts are insufficient. Usually, GBV does not happen in complete isolation, too often than not, there is a family member, a friend or a community member aware of the perpetration of this crime, the notion that violence between two romantically involved individuals is a private matter which outsiders should refrain from meddling in does not only serve as a stumbling block against

help-seeking, it also compromises the effectiveness of community mobilisation efforts (Manell & Dadswell, 2017). Even so, Manell and Dadswell (2017) and Stern et al. (2022) suggest that mobilising communities could be a fruitful approach to lowering cases of GBV. It can be easy to look away when one witnesses the perpetration of GBV when it does not directly affect them or their loved ones, however, the burden of GBV is a community responsibility. In this regard, Kim (2005) argues that community accountability can be used to empower communities to support survivors of GBV on one hand while holding perpetrators responsible for their acts of violence on the other. Recognising the role communities can play in the battle against violence, Saja (2017) contends that to deal with GBV, there should be frequent community GBV campaigns. When communities are involved in this manner, the reservoir of potential, local and contextually relevant solutions is tabbed into (Melgar Alcantud et al., 2021; Turan et al., 2013). Preventing violence against women and girls at the community level focuses on establishing an environment that encourages equality and non-violence (Michau et al., 2014). The authors further argue that by mobilizing community members, leaders, and institutions, community-level GBV preventative efforts seek to build a strong foundation of support for promoting gender equality and ending violence.

Behaviours that foster gender inequality are usually deeply entrenched and sustained in a community as a unit, this is generally due to group cohesion which manifests through social pressure and conformity and shared beliefs and values, especially the ones that are related to culture. It is for this reason that community mobilisation is a good starting point for fighting GBV. Michau et al. (2014) posits that engagement on a community level fosters the necessary channels through which those with limited access to support services can be assisted. When communities mobilise against GBV, they stand a better chance of altering detrimental gender norms (Michau et al., 2014; Sabri et al., 2023). There is consensus among scholars that gender norms which usually afford women a second-tier status in society encourage their gender-motivated victimisation (Freccero et al., 2011; Michau et al., 2014; Saja, 2017; Sloand et al., 2015; Tanwir et al., 2019). The coming together of community members to stand up against GBV facilitates the necessary conversations where biased gender norms can be renegotiated. It also allows men and women to work together towards a common goal. The collaboration between men and women is more effective than when the two genders work separately (Greene & Levack, 2010; Müller & Shahrokh, 2016). Greene & Levack (2010) and Matope et al. (2013) stress that harmful gender and social norms are created and sustained by both men and women, therefore, genuine social transformation will be possible only when the two genders work hand

in hand for the same cause. Also, it is through the said conversations that men can learn about women's rights and the importance of gender equality, which Saja (2017) posits is detrimental to the success of community mobilisation efforts. The literature suggests that the detrimental gender and social norms have been successfully renegotiated through community mobilisation programmes, although it is also conceded that such programmes hardly impact every community member. Importantly, this suggests that these gender norms are not fixed like many of those who benefit from them tend to portray them to be. Ultimately, the role of community collective action against GBV is a critical one, especially because victims usually seek help through informal channels first such as a family member, friend or an esteemed member of the community before escalating the matter to law enforcement or social service providers, suggesting that victims prefer to exhaust their options within the community before those outside this unit can be let in (Menon & Allen, 2018). With this said, community members must be able to support victims and hold perpetrators accountable to avoid further victimisation such as victim-blaming. Community mobilisation is one of the methods for capacitating community members to do this. Communities' receptiveness to mobilisation efforts is an acknowledgement of the notion that ending GBV is a collaborative duty.

The literature argues that gender inequality which perpetuates gender-based violence emanates from a culture-endorsed patriarchal system (Hadi, 2019). This is because culture tends to hold men in higher regard than women, as seen in how husbands are given authority over their wives, fathers over their daughters, and brothers over their sisters (Almosaed, 2004; Barnett et al., 2016). GBV is the result of the abuse of this power (Ajayi et al., 2022; Sabri & Young, 2022; Saja, 2017), which men continue to enjoy despite repeatedly proving their inability to be entrusted with it. Violence-related behaviours and attitudes are usually fostered in a family environment as it is where gender norms and perceptions of women's and young girls' worth are initially introduced (Buqa, 2022; Michau et al., 2015; Matope et al., 2013). It is in the same home environment where women's perception of themselves is carefully and systematically moulded into what is considered culturally relevant, undermining their sense of agency and robbing them of their autonomy, authentic self-identity, and self-determination. Men are entrusted with the power to rule their families, and women are entrusted with the responsibility to protect the honour and dignity of their families through self-preservation (Hadi, 2019). This responsibility serves to control women's sexuality, and affords men the right to punish, usually through violence, those who deviate from the culturally prescribed standards of conduct for women (Almosaed, 2004; Baumeister & Twenge, 2002). This manner of "rectifying" the

situation always disregards the harm caused to the victim, and restoring the family's reputation takes precedence (Freccero et al., 2011). Similarly, abused Indigenous women wishing to leave their marriages are often talked out of it by family elders because divorce brings shame not only to the wife herself, but to her family too (Ajayi et al., 2022; Childress, 2017; Ndoromo & Banyanga, 2023; Sabri & Young, 2022). In an instance of this nature, the wife's safety and well-being are sacrificed for the family's reputation. Another factor that might cause family elders to take a negative stance on divorce is the payment of *lobola.* Culturally, the dissolution of marriage warrants the demand of the return of *lobola* by the husband's family, which the wife's family usually had already spent at the time of the divorce, and might never be able to secure considering poverty levels in the Global South (Moono, 2019; Ndlovu et al., 2024; Sedziafa, 2017). Therefore, when family elders encourage the wife to persevere they opt for an easy way out of the situation, saving their skin at the expense of their daughter, yet again. Akurugu et al. (2022) posit that the payment of bride price intensifies the biased treatment of women that is rooted in cultural norms. Hence, some scholars agree that the payment of lobola carries an unpleasant connotation, as it reduces women to the status of their husbands' property and grants men a socially and culturally justified authority over them (Moono, 2019). *Lobola* does not only serve to officialise the relationship, but it also renders the marriage sacred, and symbolizes a commitment to building mutual relationships between the families and communities involved (Sebunya & Kisitu, 2016), hence the decision to leave the marriage cannot be unilateral.

In many cultures, girls are raised in a manner meant to prepare them for motherhood and marriage while boys are raised in a way intended to prepare them for leadership and to succeed their fathers. This is an alternate explanation of why some women have internalised abuse, they were trained from a young age that violence is an appropriate option for dealing with disagreements. In this regard, Takyi & Mann (2006) posit that Women have lived under circumstances plagued by violence and abuse for time immemorial due to patriarchy, and history continues to repeat itself as their daughters are raised in a similar manner. Sabri & Young (2022) warn of the repercussions of internalised patriarchal ideals and their resultant violence and abuse, such as staying in an abusive marriage. The authors found that there are women who ridicule those who contradict cultural norms set for married women, because a life dictated by these norms is the only one they know. Similarly, Barnett et al. (2016) also found that some women dissociate from those who divorced their husbands against their parents' advice, as they are not only considered a bad influence but also believed to jeopardise the moral

order. The authors further noted that divorced women are often accused of disrupting the marriages of other couples. It appears that the stigma that divorced women are subjected to does not discriminate based on reasons for the divorce, as even those who divorce for valid reasons such as the experience of abuse are not spared (Barnett et al., 2016). Divorcees are usually singled out, targeted and isolated, sadly, many women fear these repercussions of divorce than they fear abuse itself (Childress, 2017). On top of enduring public shame, divorced women usually lose their children and matrimonial homes. The fear of having to leave their children behind is one of the reasons why some abused women opt to stay in abusive marriages (Rohn & Tenkorang, 2024; Sabri & Young, 2022). Staying married due to financial dependence on the perpetrator also informed many women's decision to not divorce (Radzilani-Makutu & Chauke, 2019; Rohn & Tenkorang, 2024; Sabri & Young, 2022). Women are given the responsibility to see to it that their marriages do not fail (Barnett et al., 2016; Childress, 2017), in many cultures, the ability to stay married despite the circumstances is what defines real womanhood (Sabri & Young, 2022). This explains why even those women who were never married are also stigmatised (Ndoromo & Banyanga, 2023). It also absolves men of the responsibility to carry the weight of ensuring the success of their marriages. This is seen in the double standards inherent in norms that are meant to keep women's behaviour in check. For example, it is permissible for men to have multiple partners, however, the same behaviour is frowned upon when being committed by women.

In accordance with many cultures, abuse and violence between two married individuals is a private matter which should be contained in the family (Barnett et al., 2016; Childress, 2017; Gatimu, 2018; Rohn & Tenkorang, 2024). The family, particularly the elders, are the first responders in matters of marital disputes (Moore, 2020; Ferraro, 1991). Reporting intimate violence to law enforcement is not only seen as a violation of cultural mechanisms for addressing such issues but also as a significant betrayal of family sanctity (Moreroa & Rapanyane, 2021). This renders the family system airtight, preventing outsiders who could help, such as law enforcement agencies, social workers, and psychologists from offering their services. This serves to deter women from exploring other avenues for assistance beyond the family, forcing them to continue suffering in silence (Sedziafa et al., 2017). The literature argues that some men believe that it is within their right to use physical force to reprimand their wives when they (men) feel like there is a need (Matope et al., 2013; Ndoromo & Banyanga, 2023; Sabri & Young, 2022). Paradoxically, there are abused women who believe that their experiences of violence are a given part of marriage (Chibesa, 2017). Portraying violence and

abuse as a normal part of marriage is a patriarchal tactic of silencing women (Barnett et al., 2016), it tends to underplay the seriousness of GBV and the severity of its repercussions. Some women believe that they are deserving of the abuse as they believe they must have done something to provoke their husbands (Sabri & Young, 2022), because culture insinuates that men are all-knowing, their wives cannot fault them even when they are wrong, which pardons their violent actions by default. Women equating violence and abuse to love is an extreme repercussion of internalised patriarchal ideals. In this regard, Makondo (2024) argues that a culturally rooted belief holds that men beat their wives out of love. Beyond being renowned for the promotion of abuse and violence, indeed, culture has a beautiful side. In this regard, Mukuka (2022) speaks of a ritual known as *imbusa* in which both men and women participate. In this ritual, husbands and wives are taught about an assortment of egalitarian principles that are meant to govern their marriages. Even older women are no longer rigid in their thinking in terms of how culture should be practised. With reference to this, in their study, Moeti et al. (2017) found that most participants, married Tswana women from Botswana, expressed the view that traditional premarital counselling should be adapted to reflect contemporary realities. Participants highlighted that, in its current form, the practice disproportionately favours men, which is incongruous with the modern era where women are increasingly striving for independence. The understanding among husbands that they hold an equal status as their wives has the potential to mitigate gender-based violence (GBV).

A usual tactic that men use to dismiss their wives' sentiments and complaints about their behaviour is to place the emphasis on biblical scriptures, particularly (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Ephesians. 5:22-24) which states "**22** Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and in himself its Saviour. **24** Now as the church submits to Chrisy, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands." In the same breath, (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Ephesians 5:28) says "**28** In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself." One would then wonder why husbands claim to love their wives on the one hand, while on the other they make them live under violent circumstances, for one does not hurt or destroy what they claim to love and care for. The expectation that women should behave in a way that aligns with the teachings of the bible, but there is an accommodation for exceptions where men are concerned is indicative of double standards and hypocrisy. Ndlovu et al. (2024) lament the fluidity of the interpretation of bible scriptures. The authors argue that these verses are prone to being interpreted out of context,

losing their intended meaning in the process. Theological literature argues that men have for the longest time weaponised the bible to serve their selfish needs, such as preventing women from leaving abusive relationships because the bible preaches that God hates divorce.

The literature suggests that GBV is a complex social issue, facilitated by culture, with the problem rising particularly in how men and women are differently socialized and perceived. Patriarchal norms and gendered expectations continue to shape interpersonal relationships, often authorizing the exercise of control, dominance and violence against women within intimate settings. The literature suggests that patriarchy was a carefully crafted system for the purpose of controlling women and every aspect of their existence. This is seen in how most of women do not know a life without submission, forced or voluntary, to a male figure, either as a husband, father or brother, causing many of them to internalise violence. The precision with which patriarchy was built is also evident in how women have been conditioned to turn against other women who are perceived to be rebelling against its principles. The literature further stresses that cultural traditions and beliefs, while important to community identity and cohesion, are frequently manipulated to justify the subjugation of women, discouraging them from speaking out or leaving abusive marriages. This manipulation of culture creates a hostile environment in which silence, endurance, and suffering are seen as virtues for women, while male entitlement remains unchallenged. As a result, many women navigate their lives under the weight of normalized violence, with limited access to justice or support. In addition to culture, religion also emerges in the literature as a significant force shaping gender roles and reinforcing women's subordination. Religious teachings and interpretations, especially when filtered through patriarchal lenses, often emphasize female submission, male supremacy, and the sanctity of marriage at all costs. Communities play a central role in either perpetuating or challenging GBV, they are not neutral spaces, they are often where harmful gender norms are taught, enforced, and policed through everyday interactions, silencing, and stigma. The literature highlights that community-based interventions, when grounded in trust, shared values, and locally produced knowledge, can be powerful agents of change. Community-led dialogues, safe spaces for women and girls, and the inclusion of men and boys in gender-transformative programming have shown promise in shifting attitudes and disrupting cycles of violence.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Research design

The research design deemed most relevant for this study as dictated by the nature of the phenomenon of interest and the research questions the study sought to answer was a qualitative research design. Qualitative research affords the researcher an opportunity to understand the basal beliefs and values that participants affix to the phenomenon of interest. Damico & Simmons-Mackie (2003) suggest that there are multiple definitions of the term "qualitative research", which contributes to the difficulty of obtaining a definition that is both direct and succinct. Even so, the authors define qualitative research as a systematic, context-sensitive approach that seeks to collect authentic data and develop interpretive understandings of social phenomena in their natural settings. Yilmaz (2013) has a similar lamentation about the definition of qualitative research as Damico & Simmons-Mackie (2003). Having said that, the author defines qualitative research as a flexible, open-ended process that allows for the discovery of new insights through the inductive study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations, and processes in their natural, real-world settings, with the aim of revealing the descriptive meanings that individuals attach to their experiences of the world. In line with Yilmaz's definition, De Vos et al. (2005) and Taylor et al. (2016) argue that qualitative research is concerned with perceptions, experiences, and meanings narrated from the frame of reference of participants. In qualitative research, meaning is not an objective, pre-determined thing, it is however something that people actively construct through their social interactions and lived experiences within the broader world (Merriam, 2002; Jackson et al., 2007). Merriam (2002) posits that qualitative research design views reality as a complex and dynamic phenomenon with an assortment of coexisting understandings and interpretations. The author further argues that the researcher is not a passive instrument of collecting data, he/she is instead an active participant who helps mould the research and its outcomes.

This study employed a qualitative research design because of the fact that on the one hand, the study was interested in community-level actions aimed at eradicating GBV, while on the other hand, it was interested in indigenous women's narratives and accounts of how they make sense

of and deal with gender-based violence through the lens of indigenous knowledge systems. This study acknowledges the subjectivity in these accounts and narratives, it values and recognizes them as valid. Furthermore, it acknowledges that meanings, experiences, and opinions related to the sense-making of GBV by indigenous women cannot be adequately captured with the use of standardized data collection procedures that are assumed to be objective owing to their restrictive nature. Indeed, meanings, experiences, and opinions cannot be expected to be objective because they are specific to the individual. Therefore, they coexist with subjectivity. By using a qualitative research design, this study was able to study the phenomenon of interest from a holistic perspective, looking into how GBV is linked to broader social and cultural factors.

Research paradigm

The study was guided by two research paradigms: interpretivist paradigm, and the critical research paradigm. These are discussed below.

The interpretivist paradigm

The study is located within the interpretivist research paradigm. Bailey (2018) posits that interpretivism does not subscribe to the notion of universal truths and laws that guide human behaviour. In line with this, interpretivism asserts that meaning, and experiences are contextual (Gichuru, 2017; Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). It further suggests that reality is constructed through social interactions, where people's experiences, consciousness, language, and the meanings they attribute to their lives shape their understanding of the world around them (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013; Femi-Ajao, 2016). The paradigm recognizes that subjectivity is an inescapable part of human existence (Elshafie, 2013; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022), it further acknowledges that participants' narratives are laden with value (Haddadi et al., 2017), and that the researcher is not a detached data collection instrument (Merriam, 2002; Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013; Dammak, 2015; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). Furthermore, it embraces the notion of multiple realities, and requires the researcher to see these realities through the eyes of research participants (Saunders et al., 2003; Elshafie, 2013; Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). The paradigm seeks to understand and see the world through the eyes of research participants (Taylor et al., 2016).

GBV is an issue interwoven with other social issues that are unique to the developing countries' context, such as economic circumstances and culture. The distinctiveness of developing

countries' context reiterates the rejection of the universal truth. The researcher viewed the experiences and sense-making of GBV by indigenous women through the relativist lens, where there is an acknowledgment of the notion that the concepts of truth, morality, and ethics are context-dependent, as their meanings and applications are shaped by the cultural, social, and historical contexts in which they exist, and they are not fixed or absolute. The researcher further assumed an empathetic attitude, which did not only nurture the ability to see the world through the eyes of Indigenous women from developing countries, but also made room for subjectivity, and how they (indigenous women) socially construct and make sense of their experiences of GBV.

Critical research paradigm

The critical research paradigm has its roots in critical theory, which is a synthesis of ideas from various influential thinkers, including Marx, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Erich Fromm, Habermas, Freire, and Foucault (Elshafie, 2013). The author argues that the critical research paradigm seeks to not only produce knowledge, but to bring about change through action in the lives of the oppressed. The paradigm is of the notion that the transformation of the political, social, economic, and cultural contexts is the beginning of true liberation for the people (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013; Dammak, 2015). It is a form of retaliation towards oppressive social structures. It places the utmost significance on examining the challenges and struggles experienced by disadvantaged and oppressed groups in society, including but not limited to, subjugation, control, repression, isolation, and cultural dominance (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). It endeavours to bring about an equilibrium in the society by embracing the principles of social equality (Khazanchi & Munkvold, 2002; Asghar, 2013). The critical research paradigm is particularly focused on analysing the power relations that exist within society and how various elements, including race, class, gender, education, economy, religion, and other social institutions, interact to form and maintain the social system (Asghar, 2013). It concerns itself with exposing the injustices inflicted on the marginalized, so to make room for emancipation (Asghar, 2013). The paradigm embraces subjectivity (Asghar, 2013; Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). Proponents of the critical research paradigm vehemently refute the positivist assertion that research can be conducted in a value-free manner (Khazanchi & Munkvold, 2002; Fazlıoğulları, 2012; Hussain et al., 2013). Scholars working within this framework firmly believe that research can never be truly objective or devoid of underlying values and biases. The ontological perspective adopted by critical theorists rejects the notion of a world made up of facts that exist separately from the observer, however, they appreciate relativism (Khazanchi

& Munkvold, 2002). They conceptualize reality as a fluid, socially constructed phenomenon, shaped by the interplay of political, cultural, social, and economic factors. Critical research paradigm exercises ideology critique. This seeks to expose how prevailing societal ideologies and discourses shape and constrain our perceptions of reality (Asghar, 2013), this process of exposing commonly reveals how these dominant frameworks serve to sustain existing power structures and systemic inequalities.

The critical research paradigm presented a vital lens for this study. Its rejection of value-free and objective inquiry, and the acknowledgment of the notion that all knowledge is socially constructed and subjective, accepts indigenous women's narratives and experiences of GBV as valid. The deployment of the paradigm did not only allow for the affirmation of community action against GBV, but it also enabled the centering of women's and indigenous knowledge as a means of retaliation towards GBV with the aim of dismantling biased oppression and power structure to facilitate emancipation. Furthermore, it was an acknowledgment of the fact that dominant discourses and narratives about GBV have commonly misrepresented and/or marginalized the perspectives of indigenous women, and their ways of knowing and confronting GBV. Critical research paradigm helped to illuminate the rich and diverse knowledge systems that indigenous women lived by for centuries. It embraced alternative conceptualization that surfaces from the lived experiences of those most affected by GBV.

Method

The study adopted the narrative review method. A narrative review is defined by Rother (2007) as a research method that endeavours to provide a theoretical and contextual overview of a specific topic or theme, offering descriptions and discussions about the current state of knowledge in that area (Rother, 2007; Hodgkinson & Ford, 2014). The use of narrative review in this study will provide a comprehensive and holistic picture of how women and communities at large confront and respond to GBV to achieve an environment where violence is not rampant. According to Sukhera (2022) narrative review is an adaptable and user-friendly method, aiming to deliver a comprehensible and pertinent compilation of varied sources in the literature, it is also valuable in laying the groundwork for upcoming research because it provides an analysis of the existing literature, identifies research gaps, and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of previous studies, furthermore, it serves a purpose in investigating areas with limited prior research and in offering untapped perspectives or innovative thinking in fields that have been

extensively and rigorously studied. Even so, a narrative review has its own shortcomings. The flexibility of narrative review renders it unsystematic, therefore coming to conclusions that are value-laden about the phenomenon of interest (Cipriani & Geddes, 2003; Rother, 2007; Hodgkinson & Ford, 2014; Pae, 2015). Sukhera (2022) is of the idea that narrative review "does not offer an evidence-based synthesis for focused questions, nor does it offer definitive guideline statements" (p. 416). The author further suggests that conclusions and interpretations made based on narrative review are liable to be criticized, and will differ from one author to another or one context to the next.

Data collecting: Corpus of analysed text

After securing ethical clearance from the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), the author began the process of collecting articles and reports that fit the criteria of my study. Keywords and index terms served as a guide for determining the relevance of articles for inclusion. The following databases were searched: Google scholar, PubMed, PsychINFO databases, Web of Science and Scopus. Reference lists and citations were manually searched to identify further studies. Searches were limited to peer-reviewed full-text articles and published reports on GBV that were published during this period. The further criterion for inclusion was that articles had to be written in English, and must have been published between January 1, 2003, and June 30, 2023.

The following search terms served as useful guide: Terms to capture gender-based violence and its associated categories such as:

(Gender-based violence") OR ("Violence against women") OR ("spousal abuse") OR ("intimate partner violence") OR ("sexual harassment") OR ("sexual violence") OR ("Violence against women").

The terms that captured knowledge systems include:

["Community response"] OR [Indigenous knowledge] OR ["Women's knowledge"] OR ["Women's oral narratives"] OR ["Women's sense-making"] OR ["African-Centered Knowledge"].

Data analysis

Owing to the nature of the phenomenon of interest, the researcher decided on thematic analysis as a method of choice to analyse data. According to Smith (2015) as cited in Lehmann et al. (2019), "thematic analysis is an interpretative approach to qualitative research based on categorizing data into particular themes, with the aim of grasping the complexity of meanings of the phenomenon under study" (para. 6). Willig & Rogers (2017) posit that thematic analysis is a highly flexible data analysis technique, it is compatible with most theoretical frameworks and most types of data. Braun & Clarke (2006) posit that the ability of thematic analysis to logically arrange and summarize enormous body of data, to spotlight commonalities and dissimilarities across data , and to produce unforeseen useful information, makes it a powerful qualitative data analysis method.

Thematic analysis follows six logically arranged phases as suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006):

1. Familiarising oneself with data - at this stage I immerse myself in the data by means of intentionally and repeatedly going through it.
2. Generating initial codes - at this stage I was able to identify outstanding and interesting features of the data.
3. Searching for themes - at this stage I analysed codes so to see how various codes could be clustered to form themes.
4. Reviewing themes - here I reviewed themes so that I could merge those that are too similar to form a single theme, while others were discarded as they are not really themes.
5. Defining and naming themes - at this point, I defined and refined themes that themes that were kept for analysis, and then analysed the data within them.
6. Producing the report -at this stage I have fully worked out themes, and I have done the final analysis of the data and reporting of the study.

Chapter 5

Findings and Discussion

This chapter details the study's findings and interpretation of these findings. The chapter will be divided into two sections, each focusing on answering the two research questions of the study. The first section's focal point is to lay out the role of community mobilization efforts in the eradication of GBV as documented in the literature from the past 20 years. Three themes from this literature emerged, these are: *the eradication of GBV is a collective responsibility, Renegotiating/challenging harmful gender norms can lead to a change in attitudes and behaviours perpetuating violence, and available service for GBV victims.* The second section's focus will be on delineating how Indigenous women make sense of and confront GBV utilising indigenous props as the literature from 20 years back suggests. Five themes from this literature emerged, namely: *finding comfort in God and prayer, enduring in silence, family intervention/mediation, finding solace in idioms, and positive reframing.*

The role of community mobilization is dealing with GBV as documented in the literature.

Theme i: the eradication of GBV is a collective responsibility.

GBV is a social issue that affects both men and women in one way or the other, therefore, it only makes sense for both parties to lend a helping hand in battling it. It is easy to fall into the trap of believing that GBV is a women's problem, and it should therefore be dealt with by women. However, Flood (2019) argues that men are as responsible for ending GVB just as women are, hence the focus on the involvement of men and boys in efforts to end GBV has been mounting (Peacock & Barker, 2014). Flood (2019) posits that not all men are violent, and indeed, some men are more than willing to do their part to end this social ill because they comprehend the severity of its consequences. Think of boys who lost their mothers to GBV, men whose partners have faced sexual harassment at work, or fathers whose daughters are survivors of unconsented sexual intercourse, these scenarios assert that many men are personally impacted by violence than we realise (Katz, 2006). Therefore, the impact of GBV committed by men extends far beyond the actual victims of the crime. The role of men in the fight against GBV is irreplaceable, this is particularly because the traditional efforts of ending violence that exclude men seem to intervene only after GBV has already occurred, such as the provision of medical and counselling services, legal support and the provision of shelter (Graaff

& Heinecken, 2017). Without undermining them as supportive measures, the authors argue that programmes of this nature are merely scratching the surface in their efforts to end GVB. This is particularly because instead of dealing with GBV from the roots, these programmes deal with the effects. Programmes that focus on women only are fruitful when they are structured to play a complementary role to those programmes that include men as well (de Vylder, 2004).

The steadily rising GBV statistics suggest that efforts to deal with this social ill from the government and NGOs are falling short, hence the appeal to men to carry their share of the load. Part of their doing so is to engage in self-introspection and assume accountability on a personal level. They should police themselves so to see the errors of their ways, and adopt behaviour that embraces gender equality (Flood, 2019), with the awareness of the fact that failure to do so affirms Flood's words that say, "If men are not part of the solution, they are part of the problem" (p. 104). Ideally, all men and boys should take it upon themselves to play a role no other can play better than them, de Vylder (2004) suggests that programmes that include men and boys in the fight against GBV should focus on all men and boys, not just those who perpetrate violence. Ultimately, eradication of GBV does not benefit only those who are on the receiving end. The end of GBV will be the dawn of longer life expectancy and improved quality of life for both men and women (de Vylder, 2004; Flood, 2019). Flood (2011) is confident that men's support can be won if they are made aware of what they stand to gain if they choose to behave in a gender-equitable manner. The author goes on to posit that an interest in a future where GBV and patriarchy are issues of the past can be ignited among men. The forever-rising stats of GBV command a fundamental change in how things were previously done. A good starting point would be men giving up patriarchal ideals and hegemonic masculinities. A participant in Graaff and Heinecken (2017) shared the sentiments that abusing women has become antiqued. There is also a need for the resocialization of young boys, so that they grow up to know that women are neither above nor below them, they are instead their equals, and how they (boys) treat them should live up to that. Men should be motivated to adopt principles of gender equality and egalitarianism in their relations with women (Peacock & Barker, 2017).

The analysed literature has affirmed that indeed, men's role in the fight to end violence is a critical one. For example, Mirghani et al. (2017) argues that:

> "*Men have an important role to play in preventing SGBV, and gender transformative tools are key in challenging deep-seated beliefs held by men, as well as power structures which facilitate men's abuse of women*."

Here, Mirghani and colleagues illuminate the crucial juncture of masculinity, gender norms, and power relations in society in responding to violence. Men are beyond capable of confronting and addressing damaging behaviours and stereotypes in their social circles, making room for positive and gender-equitable relationships. By assuming an active role in the endorsement of efforts to end GBV, men can play a key role in the disintegration of gender and social norms that tolerate violence and inequality against women. Harmful gender norms that are rooted in tradition and culture tend to place women on the receiving end, while putting men on the other end in abusive relationships. Even so, this dynamic can be altered if men are involved in GBV prevention efforts as allies. In agreement, Michau (2007) contends that:

> *"if programmes include men as part and parcel of the community mobilisation, there is less resistance and less finger-pointing. Men become stakeholders right from the beginning and work alongside women to create benefits for all."*

Approaching GBV from this angle does not only promotes collaboration, but it also contributes to redefining societal norms relating to masculinity and gender roles. The inclusion of men in GBV prevention efforts is by far the most promising initiative, it can minimize the pushback from male community members who might otherwise view such programmes as a threat to their culturally prescribed roles and privileges that come with these roles, or they might think that they are being attacked and blamed for societal problems. The inclusion of men can help them thinks of themselves as a part of the solution, as opposed to thinking of themselves as villains.

The assertion that involving men in GBV prevention efforts is by far the most promising approach is not made in a vacuum, it is based on research. In confirmation of this, Gaynor & Cronin (2016) point out that:

> "*In some cases, these men were previously engaged in domestic violence incidents, but through their engagement in the UWAMA programme, they are reported to have now stopped these harmful practices and now advocate against violence in the home.*"

There is room for positive change and successful rehabilitation of abusers through the implementation of targeted programmes. The UMAMA programme has caused an important

shift, where men who previously abused women are now the ones speaking against GBV. The fact that there are men who manage to change their ways as they are able to see and acknowledge the harm caused by hegemonic masculinity unto women, stresses the notion that harmful masculinities often supported by culture are not as rigid as those who benefit from them would love to make everyone believe they are. GBV prevention programmes that isolate men are hardly scraping the surface in terms of the progress needed to achieve a GBV-free environment, this is not to invalidate women-only efforts, but we must also be able to affirm that women-only programmes can only do so much. In doing so, we will also get to acknowledge that additional support from men and boys is both crucial and necessary. In accordance with this, Michau (2012) claims that:

> "*Reaching all layers of a community requires that male and female community members are equally involved.*"

Here, Michau highlights the importance of collective action, and the recognition that if we are to ultimately come out of this predicament victorious, men and women need to work together. In this way, different understandings, perspectives and potential solutions will come to the fore, bettering the chances of solving the issue at hand. A sense of community cohesion is nurtured when men and women tackle community challenges together, and this will make men realise that GBV is not a women's issue, instead, it is a community issue that affects everyone, be it directly or indirectly. The working together of men and women in engaging and acting collectively to address social issues that affect them is a good start of the creation of an environment in which equitable power dynamics are a way of life.

Some men are indeed committed to ending violence, and are therefore heeding to the call for activism. A male GBV activist in Hatcher et al. (2020) said:

> "*Since I joined Sonke, I have got a full experience, each and every thing. I even go and give pamphlets. I tell everyone, "I am going to report you because that thing you are doing is not good for me - someone is going to arrest you*."

The participant has gained knowledge, and skills which have empowered him to advocate for the right of the marginalized voices. He is actively involved in community efforts to educate and empower, this is essential for fostering a collective action against GBV. The phrase "I am going to report you" indicates a refusal to accept violence, and an understanding that GBV is a community issue, as opposed to perceiving it as a problem of only those who are affected by it.

Women are now seemingly conceding and warming up to the notion of letting men into their spaces. Waterman et al. (2021) state that in their study:

> "*Participants also suggested that it was very important for men to be involved in GBV prevention*." For instance, one participant asked, "*Why is the responsibility falling on women? What responsibility are men taking?*"

Here, men's moral and ethical responsibility in the battle against GBV is underscored, and if women are willing to collaborate with them, there is no reason good enough to sit back and fold hands while things are falling apart in communities they call home. Women bearing the brunt of the fight against GBV should be a thing of the past, this will further assist in doing away with victim-blaming narratives because women's struggle stemming from GBV would have been acknowledged by both women themselves and men. In agreement, Michau (2007) states that:

> "*A community-based approach presents the problem of violence against women as the community's responsibility, not as individual women's problems. Men are a part of the community and addressing them in isolation has limited impact (just as addressing women in isolation has limited impact).*"

The author emphasizes the significance of an inclusive community-wide approach in confronting GBV. GBV programmes that focus on men without the involvement of women might fail to make them understand how their actions affect women, their suggested solutions might be misaligned with those of women. In the same way, women's programmes that make no place for men may reinforce harmful gender norms, where there is an 'us and them' way of viewing things. Women might also miss out on the opportunity to have men who believe in gender equality as allies. These issues might negatively affect the effectiveness of such programmes. Failure to recognize and acknowledge that we can only live in an equitable and egalitarian society if men and women come together asserts that women should continue to manage and be concerned about their safety on the one hand, while fighting for their rights on the other.

Gender-based violence usually happens behind closed doors, but this does not mean that it happens in isolation. Too often than not there is a witness, this witness is usually a family member, friend or neighbour. Perpetration of GBV is not a crime against the actual victim only, it is a crime against the entire community, and it should be dealt with as such (Giustina, 2008). The author argues that if we are to eradicate GBV, community response should be prioritized

instead of solely relying on the criminal justice system. Without belittling the criminal justice system's efforts, the author acknowledges that it cannot successfully carry the load of GBV alone. Friends, family and neighbours are the building blocks of a community, therefore, their efforts in ending GBV are equally important, especially because they are usually the first line of response, or because victims are most comfortable disclosing their abuse to them before seeking formal help. Horn et al. (2021) found in their study that in the protection of the abused woman, neighbours would usually step in when they overhear that GBV is happening. Participants in their study attest that neighbours offered their help when it was needed the most, they supported them (victims) physically when they intervened, and went a step further to support them emotionally. Family, especially the parents and siblings of the husband are first to be consulted by the daughter-in-law when GBV happens (Kohli et al., 2015; Mogotsi et al., 2015; Muparadzi, 2020; Horn et al., 2021). The support offered by the family of the husband is however contingent on the wife's willingness to reconcile with her husband (Horn et al., 2021). The authors highlighted that friends of victims also act as an emotional support system. All these underscores the importance of GBV response on a community level.

Kabiro & M'arimi (2023) assert that for the battle against GBV to be effective, and make lasting changes, it is important that stakeholders collaborate and work towards a common goal. Schools can come on board by incorporating GBV prevention into the curriculum (Nzeh Atracta et al., 2022; Waterman et al., 2021). Traditional leaders also play a significant role in addressing the issue of GBV in their respective communities (Hodzi, 2024). The authors found in their study that traditional leaders who participated hold a stern stance against GBV, they support victims by offering counselling and advice. They also empower women by giving them a piece of land, especially in cases where they lost their matrimonial home due to choosing to leave an abusive husband. Havronska et al. (2021) contend that authorities are hard at work as well, they attempt to curb GBV in three-tiered phases, these are prevention, response, and elimination. It is important to mention that the fruitfulness of these efforts is dependent on the authorities treating the community as a partner, and collaborating with it. Media plays an enormous role in influencing people's perceptions and behaviour, therefore it can play an invaluable role by portraying content that disapproves of GBV (Russo & Pirlott, 2006). When all is said and done, the collaboration of stakeholders is crucial to see the battle against GBV through. In recognition of the notion that GBV is a community issue, Michau (2007) asserts that:

> "*This means working not just with individual women and men, but with their friends and family, the institutions they rely on for services and support, the media which inform them, the opinion leaders who shape public opinion, and the government officials who design and implement policy and legislation.*"

This emphasises the importance of a thorough and multi-layered approach to responding to violence, where everyone assumes his/her responsibilities towards achieving a common goal of creating a GBV-free environment. Friends and family, as "first responders" in situations of GBV, play an important role in affirming victims' experiences, offering emotional support, and referring them when necessary. An environment that is conducive to change is created when the root causes of GBV are addressed through the engagement of various stakeholders. Media can either uphold or defy harmful gender norms by influencing public discourse around GBV. Michau (2007) reiterates the importance of an approach that does not only focus on individual perpetrators and victims. According to her:

> "*Working to prevent violence requires changing the core dynamics within relationships as well as in the broader community. It means inspiring the community to promote equality and mutual respect in intimate relationships, and not accepting the subordination of women.*"

Dealing with GBV on a community level, where discussions about the importance of egalitarian principles are had will help foster an environment that is welcoming to equitable relationships. Once this is achieved, mutual respect will automatically follow. Ideally, if everyone acknowledged that GBV is an issue, and that it bears dire consequences for victims, it would have been easy to eradicate it. However, it is unfortunate that things are not straight cut and simple like that, emphasizing how multifaceted GBV is. As disheartening as this may be, Michau (2007) suggests that:

> "W*hile everyone in a community cannot be reached or convinced, if enough people from different walks of life are actively supportive of women's right to live free of violence, the climate in the community can shift from tolerating to rejecting VAW*."

Dismantling gender norms and cultural beliefs that perpetuate violence against women is a mammoth task that requires ongoing efforts and engagement. It is important to note that these efforts are not always well-received by everyone, especially those who believe gender equity will take away privileges endorsed by patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity, which they have by default merely because they are men. However, the involvement of the community's cross-

section, and leveraging the participation of community members held in high regard, such as teachers, religious leaders, and elders who will speak against GBV in their respective fields of impact, can help change the social dynamics.

Theme ii: Renegotiating/challenging harmful gender norms can lead to a change in attitudes and behaviours perpetuating violence.

Multiple factors contribute to the ever-rising statistics of GBV perpetration, however, amongst these factors, gender norms rooted in patriarchy as endorsed by culture seem to have the strongest association with this social ill, they encourage attitudes and behaviours that sustain violence. Gender norms are societal prescriptions about how people should behave based on their gender (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020). These prescriptions usually dictate that men should be aggressive, emotionally retrained and assertive, while women are expected to be compliant, caring and passive. Harmful gender norms tend to give men authority over women, this deprives women of a sense of agency on the one hand, while providing a favourable environment for the perpetration of GBV on the other. Therefore, if community mobilisation efforts are to bear fruits, they should include the alteration of harmful gender norms as an area of focus of preventative programmes (Casey et al., 2018). In agreement with Casey and colleagues, Chatterji et al. (2020) posit that community action against GBV can help change gender norms that perpetuate violence against women. The literature suggests that endeavours in the fight against GBV are now focusing their efforts on shifting gender norms (Fulu et al., 2014; Perrin et al., 2019; Piedalue et al., 2020). Daruwalla et al. (2015) contend that challenging gender norms through community mobilization makes room for challenging biased gender practices and beliefs, and promotes the adoption of attitudes that embrace gender equity. Fulu et al. (2014) argue that attitudinal change on an individual level barely scratches the surface in its attempt to eliminate GBV. Fulu and colleagues claim that challenging norms that are conducive to gender inequality is a promising approach to ending GBV. This approach has opened channels of communication that avoid vilifying one group of people while honouring the other (Piedalue et al., 2020). This will prevent a further divide between men and women, where GBV is perceived through a binary lens that perpetuates violence itself. Settergran et al. (2018) evaluated the effectiveness of a community programme aimed at changing gender norms, the intervention was proven to promote gender equity in the long run, validating the claims made above. Pulerwitz et al. (2015) carried out a study of a similar nature and found that the intervention was effective, where there was a strong association between lowered

reports of violence and a positive change in gender norms. Alteration of harmful gender norms is critical to ending violence against women. It will empower and give women their autonomy where enduring violence in silence out of fear of stigma is not an option, where they can refuse to have sex without being guilt-tripped or battered, and where they can have a say over issues that directly or indirectly affect them.

Community programmes have proven to yield positive results in terms of changing gender and social norms in an attempt to do away with violence. For example, Grabe et al. (2014) posit that:

> "*one woman described how some MWEDO members were now able to participate in community-level decision-making as a result of their status as landowners: Now [that women are landowners], we have our representatives in some governmental meetings. We have some members . . . we are now at least holding something now that we are able to own.*"

In many cultures, the insubordinate position of women prevents them from owning land because that is a privilege reserved for men only. When women own land, they get the long yearned for emancipation and liberty. Land ownership is not merely about acquiring a tangible asset, it also serves as a stream of income, as women can plant crops and sell them, thus giving them economic independence and elevating their social status in the community. The participant suggests that their elevated status gives them a say in issues they normally would not. Traditionally, men are providers and women are homemakers and nurturers. When women obtain land, this changes, putting the domination of men in jeopardy. Similarly, women's involvement in decision-making processes can bring about a significant change in power dynamics. Tradition prescribes that the making of decisions is a task solely carried out by men, which often sustains gender inequality. Now, the inclusion of women in these processes causes a disruption of the existing social and gender norms and fosters a culture of respect for women, and inclusivity. This can lead to the adoption of practices and policies that embrace equality and prioritise the well-being of the whole community, not just of a certain group of people.

With men being socialised to be providers and women to be homemakers, it has been ingrained in their minds that these culturally prescribed responsibilities are rigid and should never overlap. Affirming this, a male participant in a study by Kyegombe et al. (2014) as he reflects on his transition from rejecting to embracing the sharing of household chores said:

"*I had a big problem accepting certain things, for instance helping my wife at home with household work. I never believed in such things before ... but they [SASA!] advised me to try and make sure we understand each other and things changed ... they are good changes because you know, whenever you are two people ... there should be agreement and you should be able to relate well, but if you don't relate well and everyone does their own things alone, it means there cannot be any development in the family.*"

These culturally prescribed norms absolve men of performing domestic duties even when they are capable or there is a need, for example, when the wife is sick. One of the reasons why many men are against doing domestic work is because they find it to be emasculating and compromising to their ability to assert authority in their households. However, the SASA! community mobilization programme has proved that these gender norms are not as fixed as they are often portrayed to be. Through this programme, the participant was able to realize that embracing principles of gender equality is for the benefit of the whole family as a unit. The phrase "reaching an agreement and relating to each other", underscores the importance of communication as it can mitigate potential disagreements and GBV perpetration before they happen. The participant further acknowledges that there needs to be synergy between partners for the betterment of the family, if partners pull in different directions, it is the family unit that suffers. Herath et al. (2018) found comparable results, they stated that:

"*It was also noted that these women made efforts to share household work with their husbands following the intervention according to their accounts*."

This statement signifies a significant behaviour change caused by a community intervention. It also subverts the traditional and gender norms that unfairly divide the roles and responsibilities of men and women, where women are almost always disproportionately burdened. From a traditional standpoint, a woman would not dare ask her husband to assist with household duties, this would in fact likely warrant him beating her. Therefore, for women in the intervention to be able to negotiate terms of how domestic duties should be shared does not only signify a significant shift in gender norms but also suggests that these women are empowered. Correspondingly, a woman participant in this study said:

"*Earlier I had to stay all the time in the kitchen. But now I have managed to divide work between my husband and me. When I am doing children's work he cuts the vegetables.*"

A significant shift in household dynamics has occurred, where the participant does not feel confined to domestic duties as she can collaborate with her husband to manage household responsibilities. This signifies a transformative change in their union.

Similarly, Mirghani et al. (2017) postulate that:

> "*Women reported increased cooperation on household responsibilities by their husbands as well as a positive change in husbands' attitudes toward violence*."

This suggests that there has been a significant shift in gender dynamics and attitudes in terms of whose responsibility it is to see to it that household duties and responsibilities are fulfilled, this was facilitated by a community programme, and these results signify its efficacy. The sharing of household duties signifies that there is a sense of working together between husbands and wives, this can reduce frustration, thus significantly reducing or doing away with the perpetration of GBV.

According to culture, a man is the head of the house, drawing on this norm, many men make unilateral decisions about everything that concerns their families, including finances. It is this lack of women's involvement in such decisions that encourages women to also choose to keep to themselves about how they spend the money they personally earn. Affirming this, a participant in Kyegombe et al. (2014) said:

> "*As you know, women do not want to touch their money, they want to keep it for their personal use but they taught us in the [SASA!] activity that even when you have a husband it is good to support each other. They taught us that if your husband does not have money, then you should support him ... when my husband does not have money I support him and it is not bad to, for example, buy bed sheets for your home. It does not make any sense to wait for your husband to buy bed sheets when you also have money .... In the past I would keep my money and I never wanted to touch it, but when we were taught, I agreed with what they taught us and now I am different*."

The participant's initial reluctance to use her money for the benefit of the whole family emphasizes the traditional gender norms that usually prescribe household gender roles. These gender norms discourage women from assuming an active role in financial decision-making, perpetuating a lack of teamwork among partners as financial resources are usually perceived through an individualistic rather than a communal perspective. Through the SASA! community programme, the participant's view of money has changed. She has also learned the significance

of reciprocal support within a marriage, where there is an understanding of the fact that it does not matter who brought the money because ultimately she and her husband have an equal say over how it is spent. The participant's recognition of the significance of providing financial support to her husband when there is a need signifies a move towards an approach that embraces cooperation in the management of household finances. The participant realised that the responsibility for the well-being of their family does not rest only on her husband, but also on herself. This perspective can foster a home environment that upholds equitable gender norms, thus improving the overall quality of life for the whole family.

In the same study that was carried out by Kyegombe et al. (2014), a male participant also echoed a similar sentiment, he said:

> "*I don't hide anything from her ...it was SASA! that taught us all that ... They tell us that it is good for each one of you to inform the other about your income. You have to let them know how much you earn and together you decide how to use that money. You discuss what to buy, how much to save and you don't use another's money without their consent because you have power. You have to agree and if one of the parties does not want [to] then you don't force her.*"

The participant emphasizes that the SASA! programme has taught him the importance of transparency about household finances and mutual respect. He underscores the significance of engaging in open discussions between partners about handling money. It is through these discussions that a sense of partnership is nurtured, where both partners' input and feelings are valued. When couples are transparent about how they spend and save money, they can set financial goals and priorities that are in sync, this will remove confusion and misunderstandings, which usually translate into violence, and will promote peace and harmony in their relationship. The participant's acknowledgement of the fact that he does not have to force his partner to disclose her spending emphasises respect for autonomy and a sense of agency. This then undermines the harmful gender and cultural norm that vest all the power of household decision-making in men, it signifies respect for the wife, and reinforces gender-equitable behaviour. Similarly, a participant in Gaynor & Cronin (2016) said:

> "*They have money in the family. Instead of the husband saying 'I'm going to have the full control over the money', it's not now the situation. The situation is now 'here is the money, we have 70,000 Kwacha'. It is a roundtable discussion within the couple, 'how are we going to use the money*."

The participant highlights a significant change in how decisions that concern money are made, with a notable shift from a patriarchal approach where the husband bears sole control over the household finances, to an approach that facilitates an open discussion and joint decision-making. This change is essential for nurturing a sense of joint responsibility and partnership in a relationship. The sense of joint responsibility can help the couple to thrive in other aspects of the relationship, for example, it can contribute to a reduction of financial stress, enhance communication and create a supportive environment which is not prone to conflict and violence. Engaging in a roundtable provides an opportunity for partners to exchange perspectives and ensure that their priorities are aligned so that they can make decisions that are in the best interests of the whole family. The participant's words reflect a change in gender norms, where the benefits of gender equality are finally seen.

The effects of how men and women are traditionally socialized are extensive. In some women, it plants a seed of self-doubt where there is a consistent need for validation from men, or where they need to live under the shadow of men in order to feel complete. Some women do not believe that they can lead a meaningful life on their own. In this regard, a woman participant in Hatcher et al. (2020) said:

> "*[Sonke] has influenced me a lot. I used to think that I have to hide behind my fiance, and I had to hide behind men I had to be controlled by men. Since being here I know that I can do anything I put my mind to. Whatever I want to do, I can do it. I could just stand up and do whatever I want to do*."

The participant highlights a significant personal transformation shaped by the Sonke Gender Justice initiative, particularly in how she perceives her role in relationships and her sense of agency. She acknowledges that prior to her involvement with the Sonke Gender Justice initiative, she felt a need to 'hide behind men', highlighting a usual experience among women who have been conditioned to think that their value and capabilities are tied to their relationships with men. This is internalised patriarchy and is related to how young girls' behaviour is kept in check and restricted so that it adheres to set gender and social norms. These norms usually limit women's behaviour and ambitions while propelling those of men because they were never structured to serve women. For instance, there used to be a belief that young girls should stay home and learn to be homemakers while their male counterparts were extended educational opportunities. It is instances such as these that negatively affect women's self-confidence where they consistently second-guess their capabilities. The participant now

recognises her potential and abilities, she has found confidence in herself, which is an essential step in breaking through societal barriers that limit women. She is aware that she can pursue her own goals and desires without feeling a need for validation and/or guidance from male figures. Her transformation mirrors a broader movement towards questioning and redefining harmful gender norms, where healthy relationships that embrace principles of mutual respect and collaboration over principles of dominance and subordination are fostered.

Harmful gender norms put women in a subordinate position, which demands that they submit to their husbands. This submission comes with not having a say over issues and decisions that directly affect them. Communication about important aspects of the household on men's end is usually non-existent. Confirming this, a participant in John et al. (2022) said:

"*I've said before that our communication now is different unlike before when it was about I'm the man, I'll let you know only what you need to know, but now (hisses) I can say I know almost everything. So, now is better than before*."

The participant highlights that prior to the community mobilization programme, there was no transparency between herself and her partner, she was only told about things that her partner independently decided that she was worthy of knowing. The phrase "I will let you know only what you need to know", mirrors a patriarchal mentality, where access to information is skewed and the allocation of power is uneven as the flow of information that affects both parties is controlled by only one partner. It reinforces harmful gender norms related to power and control. However, the participant asserts that there has since been a notable change in communication dynamics within their relationship, emphasizing a shift from a conventional and hierarchical approach to an approach that embraces egalitarianism. This demonstrates that gender norms related to communication dynamics in her relationship have been redefined. In accord with John et al. (2022), a participant in Kyegombe et al. (2014) said:

> "*Truthfully speaking even in the area of respecting each other ... I see that he respects me ... I see that when I am talking to him ... he gives me time and he listens to what I am saying ... or he could even say that .... This is what I think ...but what do you think about it, you see that he respects you*."

The participant's statement emphasizes a significant change in communication dynamics and mutual respect in her relationship due to the effectiveness of a community intervention programme. It also indicates that her voice is no longer marginalized, she and her husband have adopted an egalitarian approach in their communication, where her feelings and opinions are

equally important and validated. Her autonomy and agency are also acknowledged and valued. These are conditions necessary to facilitate an environment in which violence is disapproved.

Women who were raised under the system of patriarchy hardly questioned gender and social norms, not always out of fear of being said to rebel against culture, but because the existing state of affairs is all they know. A participant in Kyegombe et al. (2014) affirmed this and said:

> "*I got to know that everyone has a right to make a decision. [Before SASA!] I thought that decisions were made by the household head but now I know that everybody matters, including the children in the home. It's important to ask everybody how they feel about something before making a decision*."

The participant's statement reflects a transformation in terms of how decisions are made, and by whom are these decisions made in the household. Her recognition that "everyone has a right to make a decision" denotes a crucial shift from gender norms that empower the head of the household, usually a man, to solely make decisions. This recognition is empowering and signifies that every family member's opinion matters. This can foster healthy and balanced family dynamics. The shift to multilateral decision-making defies cultural norms that too often than not, put men in a position of power and control. The sentence "It's important to ask everybody how they feel about something before making a decision", emphasizes the importance of open communication, which can foster mutual respect and understanding, and constructive conflict resolution. This then can significantly decrease the chances of misunderstandings that can quickly turn into violence.

The system of patriarchy was consciously structured in a manner that would purposefully disadvantage women. This system is sustained by promoting behaviours and attitudes that benefit men while harming women. These behaviours have been accepted as a normal way of life despite their generally known adverse effects. Therefore, to have a good fighting chance, GBV community mobilization programme should aim to challenge the status quo. Abeid et al. (2015) carried out a study of this nature. According to the authors,

> "*The intervention also focused on violence prevention through social norm change at the community level. There was a significant reduction in some indicators of violence acceptance, such as attitudes favouring male dominance, justification of men beating their partners, and rape myths*."

The intervention centered around preventing violence through changing social norms on a community level, emphasizing the crucial role that attitudes and behaviours in the community can play in sustaining or ending violence against women. The GBV preventative programme proved to be effective, as societal and gender norms of the rationalization of women battering and rape myths appeared to have decreased. This underscores the effectiveness of fighting GBV through the cultural and gender norm change approach. The results of the study signify a critical shift in gender norms, suggesting that these were successfully challenged and changed, which has led to the community being less understanding and tolerant towards GBV. In a study of a similar nature, Undie et al. (2016) found that:

> "*At endline, the proportion of men and women alike who agreed that it was normal for females and males in their community to be forced to have sex, and for females to get beaten up in their community, decreased significantly*."

The results of the study suggest that a shift in cultural and gender norms has occurred, this change mirrors the potency of the preventative programme. Culturally, a woman is never too tired or never not in the mood to have sex with her husband. When a woman is not able to engage in sexual intercourse for whatever reason, or simply does not feel like it, she is usually accused of adultery. The refusal of women to have sex is usually reason good enough to warrant wife battering. These norms were once portrayed as rigid and were accepted as the truth. Men's expectation of women to avail themselves for sex whenever it is suitable for them (men) denotes the imbalance of power, which strips away women's sexual autonomy and control over their own bodies. Participants' rejection of these norms indicates a critical transformation on a community level, where men recognize that women are human beings with a sense of agency, and therefore can decide for themselves if they want to have sex or not. This recognition can help create a space for gender equality, where men's sense of entitlement over their wives' bodies is done away with. In line with the findings by Undie et al. (2016) are the results from Peacock & Levack (2004). The authors found that:

> "*Before the workshop, only 57 percent of the men thought it was okay for a woman to refuse to have sex without a condom; three months after the workshop, 70 percent of the men thought it was okay for a woman to refuse to have sex without a condom*."

Usually, in marriages and established relationships, the use of a condom is equated to the absence of trust between partners. The one suggesting the use of a condom, especially if it is the woman, she is accused of cheating. The findings of the study signify that a shift has occurred

in attitudes about women's independence in sexual decision-making. This suggests that the community intervention yielded positive results. Women's ability to refuse to have sex without a condom is a vital aspect of sexual independence and consent. It undermines traditional and gender norms that tend to dictate that men have absolute power and control over sexual encounters in a relationship. This facilitates mutual respect and understanding between partners, and lowers the prevalence of GBV, contraction of STIs, and unwanted pregnancies. In the same study, Peacock & Levack (2004) found that:

> "*Before the workshop, 61 percent of the men disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that women who dress sexy want to be raped; three months after the workshop, 82 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.*"

There is a widespread stereotype and misconception that women usually get raped because they dress in a sexually provocative manner, this perpetuates victim-blaming and the lack of empathy for rape survivors. The results of the study denote that the community intervention was successful in changing men's attitudes and beliefs about the association between women's dress codes and the perpetration of sexual violence against them. The newly adopted attitudes will encourage women to report to the authorities, without reluctance and shame, when they encounter sexual violence. The new attitudes and beliefs are also vital for fostering an environment that empowers and supports survivors on the one hand, while holding perpetrators accountable on the other hand.

Deep-seated in the system of patriarchy, many men hold the belief that it is their right to have sex with their wives whenever they want, usually disregarding whether the wives want to have sex or not. Nicholson & Carty (2015) found in their study that:

> "*By endline, there was a statistically significant increase in the proportion of female and male respondents in Lunungwi (one of the ZTVA intervention villages) who strongly agreed with the notion that women had the agency to refuse to have sex with their partner*."

The statement suggests that the ZTVA was effective in shifting gender norms related to sex between partners. Women's ability to deny their partners sex is a significant aspect of their reproductive and sexual rights. It signifies that they have a sense of agency and control over their bodies. When women are disempowered in this regard, because of cultural norms, they are unable to refuse to have sex with their partners, let alone negotiate the terms of the sexual encounters. In accordance with Nicholson & Carty, (2015), Abramsky et al. (2014) found that:

> "*...more people in intervention communities reported attitudes supporting the acceptability of a woman refusing sex, statistically significant for both women (1.28, 1.07 to 1.52) and men (1.31, 1.00 to 1.70)*."

These results emphasize the effectiveness of the intervention in changing traditional norms surrounding sex. When women know that they can refuse to have sex, and men know that having sex is not just about them, the expectations of both parties where sex is concerned are known and managed, reducing the risk of forced sex, or even women battering over their refusal to have sex.

Men demanding sex is usually excused by the belief that men's sexual edges are beyond their control, therefore, when they want sex they should get it, or they might not be able to control what is to follow. This is a passive stereotype that sustains sexual violence and victim-blaming. In an attempt to alter this norm, Undie et al. (2016) found in their study that:

> "*The proportions of men and women reporting that they disagreed that men and boys were naturally unable to exercise sexual self-control increased significantly at endline*."

This increase emphasizes the efficacy of the community programme. The rejection of the notion of uncontrollable male sexual edges is significant for the promotion of equitable gender attitudes and the reduction of GBV perpetration. It further holds people accountable for their actions. Changing these attitudes is an essential component of the promotion of bodily integrity and consent.

Wagman et al. (2015) evaluated the effectiveness of the community programme aimed at reducing IPV. According to the authors,

> "*the proportions of women who experienced physical IPV, sexual IPV, and forced sex were significantly lower in the SHARE intervention group at the second follow-up than in the control group after adjustment for baseline IPV, age, education, and marital status.*"

The authors suggest that the SHARE community programme had a positive impact on the prevalence of physical and sexual intimate partner violence, where women are less accepting of violence and abuse. The intolerance of abusive behaviour is necessary to break the cycle of violence, and the silence surrounding it. It can also serve as a deterrent, and discourage men from committing acts of violence knowing that it is not condoned, thus reducing the statistics of IPV. When violence against women is frowned upon on a community level, women's

empowerment becomes a daily reality for many, dismantling long-standing patriarchal structures that sustain violence. Similarly, Glass et al. (2019) found the intervention their study was evaluating to successfully bring about a shift in detrimental cultural norms that perpetuate violence. According to the authors,

> "*Men and women participants in the intervention district had significantly greater improvement in change in harmful social norms for all three of the subscales: (1) response to sexual violence (b=−0.214, p=0.041); (2) protecting family honour (b=−0.558, p<0.001); and (3) husband's right to use violence (b=−0.309, p=0.003) than participants in the control district*."

Glass and colleagues postulate that participants of this particular community programme have seen a significant change in the adherence to gender and social norms. A reduction in the harmful norm of "response to sexual violence" is indicative of the acceptance of victim support, and a rejection of victim-blaming attitudes. Protecting the family's honour when abuse and violence are happening denotes that the family's reputation is prioritised over the victim and their wellbeing. A significant shift in the norm of "protecting family honour" suggests that the safety and well-being of victims is of importance compared to protecting the honour of the family. Women going through abuse are usually encouraged not to share their struggles with anyone outside of the family, including law enforcement agencies, because issues of abuse and violence are believed to be family affairs, and that they should therefore be dealt with as such. This tends to create an environment that is conducive to IPV, while prioritizing victims' wellbeing and health is empowering and encourages the family to support the victim. The belief in the notion that husbands have a right to use violence to discipline their wives reflects deep-seated patriarchal norms that justify men's use of excessive power and control through violence. A decrease in the acceptance of this norm denotes a critical shift towards acknowledging that violence is not an acceptable means of discipline within relationships. This change is important for the reduction of IPV and the promotion of gender equality. A participant in Gaynor & Cronin (2019) also said:

> "*It was very important because as I have been living here... there was a lot of violence that was happening to women but nothing was done. But since that workshop, people started teaching each other... Yes, I see a lot of men stopping beating their wives*."

The participant emphasizes the significant role played by the community programme in the reduction of GBV, seen in a change of behaviour. The statement "there was a lot of violence

that was happening to women, but nothing was done", denotes that for the longest time, GBV was accepted as a normal part of relationships and life altogether. This led to a culture of silence and lack of action. The participant notes men's positive change in behaviour. These words "Yes, I see a lot of men stopping beating their wives", indicate that the community intervention was successful in its efforts to fight GBV. Men's attitudes towards violence were successfully influenced.

Gender roles are put in place to dictate behavioural expectations from men and women. Usually, the inability of women to meet their husbands' expectations, such as preparing food on time, warrants discipline through violence, emphasizing entrenched gender inequality as husbands get away with not performing their gender roles and expectations, such as providing for the family. A participant in Peacock & Levack (2004) said:

> "*Before the workshop, I thought that a man was the head of the house and that women could not work in the mines and do heavy-duty work but should take care of the family. Now I do believe that we are all equal and women can do whatever they want to do. But when I talk to my friends about this, they say I am crazy.*"

The participant's beliefs placed men in a position of power and authority, while reducing women to mere servants. However, there has been a profound shift in his beliefs about gender roles, this shift was facilitated by community intervention. Participant's recognition that "we are all equal", and that women can pursue any career path, including heavy-duty mining work signify a significant change in attitudes, promoting equitable gender norms. This change in attitudes signifies acknowledgement of women's rights and capabilities, and aligns with the call for equality, which stresses that men and women should have equal access to opportunities. The participant's promotion of gender equitable attitudes is however met with backlash by his peers, affirming that, indeed, it is not an easy task to do away with beliefs and cultural norms that reinforce gender roles. Nonetheless, such a shift is necessary for the promotion of an environment in which women can prosper and contribute across all fields, including those typically dominated by men.

A shift towards equitable gender norms facilitates an environment that neither tolerates nor enables violence against women. Men's willingness to abandon gender norms that sustain GBV can translate into a change in behaviour, and an adoption of equitable gender norms. Gibbs et al. (2020) evaluated the efficacy of community programmes aiming to do exactly that. The authors found that:

> "*Young men participating in Stepping Stones and Creating Futures showed a consistent patterning of less self-reported violence perpetration with significant reductions in physical, severe, and economic IPV and trends toward less self-reported sexual IPV and nonpartner sexual violence perpetration at endline*."

These programmes focused on altering attitudes and behaviours that encourage violence against women, thus empowering men to frown upon IPV to promote healthy relationships that are free from violence. The results of the study suggest that these programmes were effective in their efforts to end violence. This is encouraging as it mirrors a growing awareness and non-acceptance of men's harmful sexual behaviours. These interventions encourage young men to embrace equality and healthier attitudes about relationships. By adopting equitable gender behaviour, and challenging the normalisation of IPV, young men can contribute to a shift in traditional norms, and then mutual respect and the absence of violence would be a way of life. Kyegombe et al. (2014) found that:

> "*Reduced acceptance of violence against women was also noted by several male participants, particularly those who had themselves used violence against their partner prior to their involvement with SASA!*."

This statement signifies a meaningful change in men's attitudes following their participation in the SASA! community intervention programme. Men's rejection of GBV is a significant component of empowering women to act against their abusers, thus doing away with the culture of silence. It also denotes that men are beginning to recognise the effects of their actions, and are holding themselves accountable, hence a change in behaviour.

Cultural and gender norms tend to excuse GBV, and make women believe that they are the problem, and that they probably deserve it. Therefore, it is not surprising that there are women who justify abuse that is perpetrated against them. They look for reasons to rationalise and explain why their partner had to use violence against them, usually because they are economically dependent on their husband, and accept violent behaviour because they do not want to risk losing the financial support. Gupta et al. (2013) discovered that:

> "*The combined intervention also significantly reduced economic abuse and altered attitudes regarding the justification and acceptance of IPV among all women in the study*."

The simultaneous reduction of economic abuse and intolerance of IPV among women denotes the potency of the combined community intervention, beyond that, it signifies the interrelatedness of economic abuse and IPV. Women's economic empowerment lowers the acceptance of IPV. Women might have the courage to leave abusive relationships if they can fend for themselves. They may also be able to negotiate the terms of the relationship, fostering an environment that embraces mutual respect and gender equality, thus leading to a reduction in the perpetration of IPV.

Most women from earlier generations of women have internalised patriarchal principles and discriminative gender norms and have always known them to be a way of life. This is because they grew up in an environment that normalised patriarchy and its dictation of skewed distribution of power. In relation to this, a participant in Le Port et al.(2022) said:

> "*For example, for us married women, we cannot go back but we can still protect our children against certain practices such as child marriage*."

After the community intervention, older women realized the effects of the only way of living they have always known, which is the system of patriarchy. There is a sense of lamentation in the participant's words, stemming from the realisation that she and other women did not have to go through what they went through. There is also a sense of responsibility towards ensuring that their daughters never have to go through similar experiences. This indicates a shift from unconsciously and passively assimilating cultural norms to assuming an active role in bringing change in their families and communities. Realising that the system of patriarchy was to their detriment is an indication of empowerment, empowerment not only for themselves, but also for advocating for their children's rights.

Men, especially those who are married, have a tendency of wanting to control their wives' behaviour. The literature suggests that this controlling issue emanates from the payment of a bride price , as it tends to reduce women to the status of a property that the husbands now own (Thelma, 2024). This takes away women's sense of agency and autonomy, as they have to consistently report their plans and actions to their husbands. Alangea et al. (2020) found that:

> "*At post-intervention, women in the intervention communities recorded significant reductions in partner controlling behaviour compared to those in the control arm (DID = −2.66, 95% CI: −3.30–−1.02, p = 0.002)*."

A decrease in controlling behaviour denotes the efficacy of the programme, it also fosters an environment that is conducive to women's empowerment and equitable gender norms. Controlling behaviour can negatively affect women's self-esteem, where they second-guess the decisions they independently make because they are so used to having their husbands making decisions on their behalf.

Men's lack of fear of using violence against women could partly be because they (men) know that the incidents will not get reported because the culture of silence was entrenched because issues of violence, especially between married couples, are usually perceived as classified family affairs that outsiders should not know about. This discouraged women from reporting their abusers to law enforcement agencies on the one hand, and sustained violence and abuse on the other. A participant in Turan et al. (2013) said:

> "*It's not the same, because now men fear beating women or doing such violence because they know they may be arrested or there may be steps taken for them if they do that*."

This suggests that the community intervention empowered women to know that violence and abuse are unacceptable and should be reported, and because men are scared of the possibility of being jailed, they have stopped abusing their partners. Possible jail time is serving as an effective deterrent in this case, which is crucial for altering behaviours and reducing IPV incidents.

Theme iii: Available service for GBV victims.

GBV consequences affect women in various ways, therefore, being a victim of GBV usually renders women vulnerable and in need of one form of support or the other. For some, having access to support is a matter of life and death. In the recognition of this extreme effect of GBV, two partners (TVEP and Malawi Police Station) in the implementation of a Comprehensive Response to GBV offered temporary shelters to victims (Keesbury & Askew, 2010). The absence of such support would compel women to continue living with their abusers. Although such housing support is not meant to be permanent, at most, it buys survivors some time to seek alternative dwellings while their lives are out of danger (Makunka, 2015). The majority of women who are abused are financially dependent on their abusers, this makes it exceptionally difficult to just leave. Proper planning is necessary in this regard, and in the absence of enough time to plan, these women find themselves in dire need of someone to house

them and provide basic needs such as food and toiletries while they are trying to recoup, health wise, psychologically, and financially (Makunka, 2015).

According to Gray (2021), the severity of the impacts of GBV on survivors' psychological wellbeing can be countered by access to social support. The author further posits that when women come together in a form of community mobilization intervention, they foster a sense of togetherness, which positively impacts on their sense of self and self-esteem. It is also affirming for some to know that there are many other women in a similar predicament, which undermines the belief that women are a problem as they force their husbands to use violence because of their behaviour. Makunka (2015) assessed a community intervention programme and found that among the services that victims could access through this programme is confidential psychosocial counselling. Being a victim of GBV, especially for extended periods of time, undermines some women's capabilities to independently regulating emotions of shame, guilt, and depression, that often accompany victimization. Therefore, services that deal with this aspect of GBV are a necessity. Kohli et al. (2012) argue that FORAL, a Congolese NGO that implemented a health-based community programme, acknowledges this, hence such services were offered, and victims referred when there is a need. Women's ability to access psychosocial services can be empowering, and provide a different perspective of life, where existence without the abuser is seen as a possibility, especially for those women who endured violence and abuse for an extended period, so much so they began to live under the shadow of their abusers. Abusers can sometimes be very calculative in their actions towards their victims, they usually isolate them, suggesting that in moments of need of social support following victimization, the victim has no one to turn to. This underscores the importance of community programmes in which women come together for a common cause, which is to do away with GBV. Grey (2021) contends that when victims of GBV come together, they are able to support each other and validate one another's feelings, which is somethings they lack from their husbands. Mburia-Mwalili et al. (2010) found that social support plays a significant role in lowering the likelihood of depression amongst women who experienced IPV. The authors further argue that women who have low social support are five times more likely to get depressed than women with high social support following IPV victimization. Similarly, Levendosky et al. (2004) contend that improved mental health outcomes, such as higher self-esteem and reduced depression positively linked with social support. Sabri et al. (2023) argue that enhancing social support for victims of GBV has shown to reduce victimization. Another strategy to address psychosocial needs of both the victim and her partner could be family

mediation, led by family elders and respected community members , to help the couple resolve its issues (Kohli et al., 2015). However, it is important to note that such an approach to resolving GBV issues tends to be biased, where the woman is often discouraged to report the matter to law enforcement agencies so to protect the honour of the family.

Having access to legal services following an incident of GBV is equally important to ensure the safety of the victim. In this regard, the Young Women Christian Association Anti-GBV (YWCA) Programme provide GBV victims with legal advice and referrals when necessary (Makunka, 2015). The Congolese Counter GBV Programme highlights the significance of the provision of legal support to victims of GBV, who are often do not know their rights pertaining to being GBV victimisation, and options available to them to pursue justice (IMA World Health, 2018). GBV perpetrators often evade punishment, and survivors are still facing considerable difficulties and barriers when trying to obtain justice. Stigma, humiliation, shame, fear of secondary victimization, trauma, the inaccessibility of legal service or the incompetence of the justice system are some of the difficulties and barriers that usually discourage victims from pursuing legal action against their abusers (Schopper, 2014). Notwithstanding this, the author further stresses that a key aspect of a comprehensive response to GBV is extending victims the opportunity to seek justice. Keesbury and Askew (2010) suggest the amalgamation of GBV services to ensure that victims access all the services in one facility. This is especially important for those victims who would easily get disheartened to seek help and justice due to lack of travelling funds. Some women opt to not seek legal assistance because they lack understanding of what their rights are in instances of GBV. Therefore, community interventions should teach women about their rights, to do away with the idea that family is the only recourse available to help resolve GBV issues. In this regard, Grabe et al. (2014) state that:

> "*For example, as one woman shared regarding MWEDO's community mobilization efforts: "We now know that the government is there so if the elders or our relatives won't save us we know where to go for our rights*."

Traditionally, issues of violence are supposed to begin and end within the family to avoid humiliating the family name. Therefore, by default, family elder will preside over the matter, where too often than not, the priority to ensure that the family name is not shamed. In cases like this, the notion of restorative justice is usually abused, because elders tend to excuse the husbands' behaviour or blame the wives for their own victimisation. The participant's statement suggests that empowerment has taken place. It further reflects that she is now aware of her

rights and resources available to her should these rights be violated. By acknowledging that "the government is there" she recognizes the existence of formal course of action outside of formal traditional structures. This enhances a sense of agency, women can take proactive steps in pursuing justice for their victimization, it changes their perspective from relying on family elders to recognize and assert their human rights. Also, when women know that there are other avenues outside of family intervention, they will less likely stay silent about being abused. The participant's statement also indicates that she has trust in the government's ability to protect her if her family elders will not. If women believe that government agencies can help and protect them, then they are more likely to report incidences of violence and abuse. Grabe et al. (2014) further claimed that:

> "*Another woman similarly explained how her understanding of women's human rights created opportunities for action: "[Men think] it's right to beat a woman . . . . But now I think it's not. If I will be beaten, I go to the government offices and tell them.*"

This statement signifies that the MWEDO community intervention was successful in bringing awareness about women's rights, and empowering them to fight for these rights. Patriarchy grooms women to believe that they do not have right. The participant's assertion that she now thinks it is wrong to batter women signifies a critical alteration in her understanding of women's rights, it further indicates a possession of willpower to pursue justice and hold GBV perpetrators to account. Women's refusal to accept violence can lead to significant and broader changes in community attitudes, thus undermining the acceptance of violence as a norm.

Kyegombe et al. (2014) found that:

> "*A few participants also described their increased willingness to talk to the couple and 'counsel them about peace in their' homes. For these participants, this was especially important because it gave them confidence that they had not only prevented immediate danger to the woman involved, but that she would be safer after they left*."

This signifies a change in community dynamics concerning GBV and resolution of conflict. According to many cultures, GBV between couples, especially if they are married, is perceived as a private family matter, resulting in silence and lack of action, even when there is clear indication of abuse or violence happening. Participants' willingness to intervene when they are aware of a violence happening between couples suggest that there is now a recognition of the fact that GBV is not only a problem of the victims, but it also affects the community, and therefore the community as a whole should play an active role in preventing it. Participants

belief that their intervention prevents looming danger and ensures ongoing safety for victims indicates a sense of agency, which is a necessary component in dedication to addressing gender-based violence. The author further found that:

> "*For a few participants, exposure to SASA! was also important for improving the advice that they gave to women who were experiencing violence, especially where previously they had blamed them for the violence they were experiencing or told them 'to do as their husband said' in order to avoid the violence that they were experiencing*."

Culturally, women would normally advice each other to obey their husbands and abide by their rules to avoid angering them and the violence that might accompany this anger. This not only undermines women's sense of agency, but it also perpetuates the cycles of violence by neglecting to hold GBV perpetrators accountable for their actions. It also sustains victim-blaming attitudes, where women are held responsible for their own victimization. Exposure to the SASA! programme made participants realise the shortcomings of what they initially believed is normal and right. Therefore, they will now be able to give out advice that is unbiased, constructive and supportive. Another participant is Kyegombe et al. (2014) said:

> "*I went to the women's representative in the community, she also works with SASA! I explained to her that I had persevered for two years ... I always felt ashamed to speak out, that he was beating me but I told her. By the time I told her it was too much for me. I had even lost the peace I had, the man was beating me regardless of day or night ... now this lady summoned him and we sat, even my brother was there. They counselled him and the nabakyala [women's representative] told him about the SASA! activities and that you are supposed to talk to your fellow adult and not beat them ... then my husband started changing*

The statement highlights the participant's prolonged suffering, marked by feelings of isolation and shame. Her initial hesitance to speak about her GBV victimization experiences signifies the stigma and shame related to GBV, which usually causes victims to internalise blame and feel helpless. The participant's decision to speak to a SASA! representative is indicative of a critical moment in her GBV experiences. It signifies breaking the silence, which is necessary for challenging social norms. It also encourages community support, which indicates that GBV is now perceived as a community problem, not only an individual survivor's matter to deal with. It further indicates that there are community mechanisms put in place to support GBV victims.

GBV activists presence in the community can also prevent potential GBV perpetration from happening. A volunteer in Hatcher et al. (2020) said:

> "*Ever since I joined Sonke I can see I can say Sonke is improving people's lives. When we are going down the street you will meet so many people with many problems and then when we refer them some will help some will refer them to the office, some will refer to the social workers*."

The statement reflects the transformative impact of the Sonke Gender Justice community mobilization efforts. The participant takes pride in his ability to bring a positive change in the community. The presence of ambassadors of this community intervention has created pathways through which community members can access support service which they may have not known existed initially. By linking community members to GBV service providers, the ambassadors empower individuals to seek assistance in cases of violence, thus doing away with the culture of silence. It also fosters collectivism, where community members can rely on each other in times of need. A participant in Makario et al. (2023) also said:

> "*The GBV cases are intensely high and if reported at our organization, the survivors are handled very carefully following the guidelines, counselling, and referrals made*."

The participant highlights the pervasiveness of GBV in their community, but also emphasizes that their organization is hands-on in mitigating the effects of this social ill by ensuring that victims access the necessary services. The phrase "survivors are handled very carefully" suggests a trauma-informed approach to dealing with survivors of GBV, where a safe and non-judgemental environment is created to make survivors feel safe, heard and understood. The ever-rising cases of abuse and violence suggest that the community community's intervention efforts are falling short, as there still seems to be tolerance and acceptance of GBV.

It is promising when youth is actively involved in GBV eradication efforts. This is particularly true because today's youth will be tomorrow's adults, and their participation could help break the vicious cycle of embracement of patriarchy, misogyny, hegemonic masculinity, and all the norms that are perpetuated by these systems and beliefs. Mirghani et al. (2017) found that:

> "*Anti-violence activities led by the youth activists include SGBV awareness creation; providing psychosocial support to survivors; promoting immediate reporting of*

violence using music, dance and drama (MDD); and prevention efforts (e.g., through self-defense lessons."

Youth activism plays a significant role in curbing GBV, they bring different perspectives and possible solutions into the battle ground. They are more strong-willed and have access to tools that the older generation did not have, such as social media and other digital platforms to help spread the anti-GBV message further than in their immediate community. Music, dance and drama can engage the audience on an emotional level, providing a powerful platform for addressing sensitive issues such as GBV. The ability of these artistic forms of expression to resonate deeply with individuals will make the message even more impactful. Self-defence classes can equip women with skills to protect themselves from potential violence, thus contributing further to preventative efforts.

Some men are only able to feel like real men only when they assert their culturally given position of power and authority, and the abuse of this power through abuse and violence has been rampant for innumerable years. However, in trying to change the narrative, a participant in Gaynor & Cronin (2016) said:

"*If you are a Real Man, you should not beat your wife. If you try to beat her, we have Women's Forum, here we have Real Men. If they happened to hear that you are beating your wife you will be severely dealt with. Through that they have seen a tremendous change*."

The phrase "Real Men" is used to advocate for a positive, and aspirational form of masculinity that rejects violence and promotes respect for women. By presenting the rejection of violence as a characteristic of "Real Men", the community initiative motivates men to embrace behaviours that promote equitable gender norms and mutual respect in relationships, countering biased beliefs linked to masculinity. The participant's statement indicates that the "Women's Forum" serves as a structure in place specifically to hold men accountable for their violent actions. Affirming that men who commit violence will be severely dealt with serves as a warning and deterrent. It is meant to instil fear of the consequences of violent behaviour against women despite being sternly warned. Public condemnation of violence such as this fosters a community in which GBV is intolerable and thus rejected. Issuing out a warning against GBV appeared to be an effective method of GBV reduction in this specific case.

Dealing with GBV through cultural mechanisms does not bear fruits as gender norms that sustain GBV stem from culture. A participant in Turan et al. (2013) appeared to have gained hope in this regard, she said:

> "*At least they know there are people somewhere who are out for women. At least there is somewhere where women can file their cases when they are battered, so at least there is a change, they are getting to know that they should do the right thing at the right time, it is not like those days when they use to beat us*."

This statement denotes a significant shift in awareness, empowerment and support for GBV victims. The phrase "they know there are people somewhere who are out for women" suggests that bringing awareness about organisations and individuals who are advocating against GBV has been fruitful as women now know where to go for assistance when dealing with GBV. Women are more inclined to reach out for help when they are aware that support systems exist. The phrase "it is not like those days when they used to beat us" signifies not only an acknowledgement, but also a lamentation for past injustices. This contention further denotes an acknowledgement of the progress made in the fight against GBV, suggesting that with collective efforts, GBV can become an issue of the past.

Culturally, married women do not have a claim over their own children and matrimonial home. Therefore, usually when they decide to end the marriage or separate from their husband, they walk out of the marriage with nothing but their clothes if they are lucky. If in such a case the woman does not have an income, she then becomes homeless, especially because some women fear returning to their biological families out of fear of stigma and bringing shame to the family name. There, it is of paramount importance for community programmes to cater for such instances. Turan et al. (2013) claim that:

> "*One participant in a focus group explained how they leveraged space in the chief's home as a way to provide a woman safety while she decided on her next move*."

Utilizing the chief's home for accommodating homeless victims is a resourceful strategy to dealing with GBV, it also demonstrates that community leaders are playing an active role in assisting and protecting vulnerable women. The provision of a shelter in such circumstances can reduce immediate danger victims are faced with, thus buying them time to gather their thoughts, so that decisions they make about their predicaments are informed.

Indigenous women's knowledges and practices in understanding and making sense of GBV as documented in the literature.

Theme i: Finding comfort in God and Prayer.

"[26]My flesh and heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Psalm 73:26), "[16]Rejoice always, [17]pray without ceasing, [18]give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Thessalonians 5:16 – 18). It is bible verses of this nature that encourages those who believe in the word to turn to God and prayer in trying times and when all fails (Pertek, 2024). Prayer serves as a powerful tool in confronting and overcoming tribulations, and can facilitate healing in survivors of GBV (Resane & Mudimeli, 2023). Indigenous women who experience GBV tend to feel alone and at their wits end, especially when they feel like the justice system has failed them, and the family elders also cannot find a resolution. They then perceive God as their refuge, and choose to rely on him to make their circumstances better. On the one hand, some pray to God to help their partners understand the effects of their deeds and ultimately change and be good husbands, while on the other hand some are praying for strength to eventually be able to leave the abusive relationships (Landman & Mudimeli, 2022). The authors further posit that some women in their study prayed to God so that he can give them strength to be the women their husbands want them to be. This signifies the deeply entrenched and internalised patriarchal ideals, these women do not fault their husbands for using violence against them, instead, they are of the idea that they get abused because they are not living up to the standards of their (husbands') ideal wives, connoting that they are deserving of the abuse. GBV 's repercussions extend beyond broken teeth, black eyes, torn muscles, and fractured bones, it also affects survivors state of emotions, therefore, survivors may pray to achieve a state of emotional equilibrium as prayer is believed to possess therapeutic properties for those who are belittled, disdained and powerless (Resane & Mudimeli, 2022).

Abused women who believe in God and His capabilities to answer prayers draw strength and a sense of purpose from engaging in the activity of praying. Through praying, they are able to experience the power and presence of God. Participants in Pertek (2022) and Smigelsky et al. (2017) claim that going through difficult and trying times of dealing with GBV only fortified their relationship with God. This signifies that some abused women are committed to God and prayer, and their faith stands strong even under circumstances that would warrant their doubt of God's existence and the effectiveness of prayer. It also suggests that women are able to

understand the meaning behind their sufferings related to GBV, reassess their past, and develop resilience, all these they do through praying and their belief in God's existence (Pertek, 2024). The author further argues that women in his study believed that their experiences of GBV were part of God's ultimate plans about their lives, He is all-knowing, and makes no mistakes. These women used scriptures to find reasons they claim made them understand why they were subjected to gender-based violence. God's intervention in abusive relationships makes women believe in a future that does not know violence, they believe that they only need to be patient to see that future arrive. However, not all women were patient enough to wait for that future to arrive. Pertek (2022) claim that even the strongest believers who thought their trust in God is set in stone tend to question God and His will when He takes too long to come through for them

Some indigenous women hold tightly and dearly to the notion that God is in control at all times (Smigelsky et al., 2017), and that everything happens for a reason. However, it is important to note that this idea can be a double-sided sword, it can give abused women a sense of comfort, while it also encourages them to keep holding on to marriages that are destined for divorce due to the abuse and violence amongst other reasons. Participants in Pertek (2024) perceived God as the higher power that bore sovereignty over their lives. This could make abused women believe that their struggles with GBV are a part of their life journey as God saw fit. This can take away their sense of agency to explore different avenues of assistance. In this regard, instead of looking for help, a participant in Landman & Mudimeli (2022) kept persevering just like she believed a good woman should, and praying to God to bring happiness and peace in her marriage and home, instead of proactively seeking help to bring the violence to an end. Pertek et al. (2023) warns of the risk that region and its ideals pose for abused women as it embraces and fortifies the already existing systems of patriarchy, providing an environment conducive to abuse and violence, furthermore, it can also be counterproductive for healing and health. This is especially concerning for those women who believe that God and prayer are the only way out of their circumstances. Some scripture of the Bible or the Quran always paint a picture of a woman as a second-class citizen, some posit that a woman was created from a man's rib, suggesting that women would not exist if it was not for the initial existence of men. Some claim that women were created to be men's helpers. Interpretation of such scriptures is subjective, and some men intentionally choose to interpret them to favour them, while disadvantaging women (Pertek et al., 2023). The Bible also condemns divorce (Nzeh-Atracter et al., 2022), putting abused women who believe in it in a very compromising position, where

they either have to live up to God's words, or prioritize their health. In this regard, the authors further claim that when consulted for intervention, some pastors in Christian churches tend to encourage women to persevere and remain in abusive marriages and hold onto the hope that change will ultimately happen. However, Pertek (2024) found in his study that some participants opted for a different understanding of such scripture and reinterpreted them in a manner that disarms patriarchal structures, and a future that knows no violence could be imagined.

Ting & Panchanadeswaran (2016) claim that participants in their study:

> "*...found comfort in prayer and believed that God was with them and brought them strength*."

This highlights the interwoven relationship between the experience of GBV, resilience and spirituality. Prayer was an important source of comfort and an emotional refuge, The belief that "God was with them" suggests that despite not being able to see God with their naked eye, extended them a sense of companionship, which can help reduce a sense of being alone and a state of hopelessness. In the darkest and trying times of GBV, this can make women feel supported. It also can empower them spiritually and enhance their ability to deal with the encounter of this unfavourable life situation, and nurture a sense of hope for a better future. Similarly, a participant in Ting (2010) said:

> "*I prayed; I felt comfort in praying. At night I read the Bible where it said, 'that I will be with you, as you travel, when you are suffering, I am with you.' So that was comforting me, that God was with me.*"

Praying gives people in general, and abused women in particular, a chance to pour out their sadness, fears, and frustration without fear of judgement. This can be therapeutic, offering a sense of relief for their heavy hearts, and thus providing comfort. Believing that God is present in her sufferings can ease emotions of despair and isolation, and help her to face her circumstances with courage, knowing that God is with her.

Ting & Panchanadeswaran (2016) found that:

> "*As part of their own spiritual relationship with God, some women also reported believing that God had a plan and hence were more accepting of their destiny and had a hopeful outlook*."

One might wonder why some abused women still believe in God and prayer when their situations are only getting worse. It is important to note that for some women, the sustenance of a spiritual relationship with God gives them a framework through which to make sense of and understand their experiences. The belief that "God had a plan" can help women find meaning in the suffering they have to endure. This can offer them a lens of hope instead of one of despair, to view their circumstances, which can be of significance to their emotional well-being. The acceptance of their destiny signifies that these abused women surrendered to their circumstances, this acceptance can ease emotions of shame and guilt that GBV survivors often must deal with, making room for healing and self-restoration rather than self-blame. However, this can also be disempowering in the sense that when women believe they are destined for abuse and violence, their sense of agency to proactively deal with their circumstances diminishes. They choose to sit out the situation, instead of doing something about it. Believing in the divine plan can give abused women a positive outlook, encouraging then to persevere through the abuse because they believe better days are yet to come. Also trusting in God's plan, a participant in Sarpong (2015) said:

> "*My religion, that's...the only thing...the hope I have.... I feel like He [God] is there.... He is doing something, but he is doing it in His right time. It's not the time I want it.... Maybe God has a plan for that because nothing happen with no reason.... I tell myself everything have a reason.... If it's not me I trust God, I won't go [leave abusive situation].... I won't get out in this situation that I have*."

This statement is reflective of a complex interplay between hope, resilience and faith when faced with adversity. The participant emphasizes that her religion "the only thing" giving her hope in her endurance of violence and abuse. Her assertion that "nothing happens with no reason" can allow her to make meaning of her circumstances, which can better position her to cope with the abuse. The phrase "He is doing something, but he is doing it in His right time" emphasizes the participant's patience and belief that although she does not know when, but God will ultimately take her out of her situation. This also has unfavourable implications, as it may encourage women to not explore other options of assistance as they are trusting in divine timing. There are many cases of women who eventually met their demise before God could change their partners' hearts.

Attesting to the power of prayer, a participant in Sigalla et al. (2018) said:

> "*There is hope in prayers, I tell you. Satan is very strong in interfering with God's plan between the two of you in your relationship. Loving parents should hold you in their prayers and my mother is very good in praying. Once I tell her to pray for me, she knows I am in trouble and she starts praying. I can tell you that prayers work and my husband comes home the next day changed. Then I believe that the prayers have helped*."

This participant's statement reflects the intertwined nature of family support, faith and relationship dynamics in the context of gender-based violence. She claims that "there is hope in prayer" suggesting that she finds solace, comfort and the belief that God will come through for her when she prays. However, her belief that her husband's abuse is the manifestation of Satan's malicious plan against her marriage signifies her inability to hold her him accountable for his acts of violence and abuse, which is likely to perpetuate these unfavourable living conditions. The participant believes that "prayer works" as her husband's action of violence change after hers and her family's prayer about her situation. As much as this can be good, it can also suggest that the participant and her husband do not talk about their fights, they get swept under a rug just because the husband has shown behavioural change. This can be counterproductive as he does not get to acknowledge his actions and their effects, and eventually apologise so that they indeed start on a clean slate. Her mother's prayers reflects that she has a support system besides relying on God and prayer, it also signifies an intergenerational nature of faith and spiritual practices, and denotes an understanding and validation of her emotional distress due to the abuse.

Some abused women tend to alternate between believing that God sees their struggle and that He will come to their rescue, and question His will, especially when they have been patient for too long. In this regard, a participant in Ting & Panchanadeswaran (2016) said:

> "*Okay, first of all, I am a strong believer. I believe in God. It was terrible, but I believe there is good coming. . . . Yes, I question God, "Why?" But before I got married and I said to God, if you make this a good marriage, I will thank you. . . . After that, when things started right away, I asked the Lord, "Why?" because I asked you for a good man, and I asked for a sign if he was not before I got married, but He didn't give me a sign so I married him, and I asked God, "Why did you give me this man, he is not a good man; what did I do to deserve this? . . . I was angry, too, because it got worse . . .*

But I think God has a plan. I don't know what the plan is, but women, we have suffered through time."

The participant claims to be a "strong believer" on the one hand, and asks God "why did You give me this man" on the other. This suggests that even the strongest believers get disappointed by God's will in their lives. It can also mean that her wishes for her lifer were not aligned with God's. Nonetheless, she navigates her struggles of violence through prayer, but expresses a sense of uncertainty in God's plan, this lack of certainty could be stemming from the fact that God disappointed her already by giving her a husband she believes she does not deserve. The phrase "but women, we have suffered through time" signifies the participant's acknowledgement that her experiences of violence and abuse are connected to a broader pattern of challenges faced by women over time, she does not view her struggles in isolation, instead, she perceived them as a part of a shared history of women's suffering and hardships, and resilience across generations.

There is thin line between finding comfort and courage to hold on to one's marriage, and actually internalising violence, and thus enabling the abuse. In this regard, Sarpong (2015) states that:

"*Lily's religious values also impacted her experience in significant ways. On one hand, religion kept her bound to her abusers praying and hoping for change in the abusive situation. On the other hand, religion provided a release for her anger and strength to move on*."

The statement reflects a complex and sometimes contradictory roles that religious beliefs can play in the lives of women experiencing gender-based violence. Like many victims of GBV, Lily has turned to her religious belief system to seek comfort and improvements in her relationship with her partner, the literature warns that this can easily cause the victims to be deeply emotionally invested in their failing relationships, as they may feel like the suffering caused by the abuse and violence are a part of the divine plan. This might lead to a lack of accountability and persistent abuse because the abuser is never punished. Holding onto the notion that enduring hardships related to abuse in a relationship will eventually make the perpetrator notice the effects of his actions and encourage them to ultimately change for the better usually does nothing but trap the victim in an abusive relationship. The victim keeps chasing "what could be" while neglecting "what it is", fostering an environment that is conducive to abuse. Lily could be remaining in her abusive relationship simply because she

wants to honour her vows, and because she knows that the bible condemns divorce. This reiterates the claims made in the literature that religion has tendencies of reinforcing patriarchal structures. Despite the negative effects of religious values in this context, in prayer, Lily has found comfort, refuge and strength to keep believing in her marriage. This can nurture the belief that the suffering is for a greater purpose, and thus foster resilience. In relation to the bible and divorce, a participant in Bammeke & Eshiet (2018) shares the sentiments and in their own words said:

> "*According to Bible standards, there is no divorce in marriage once you're in, its till death do us part and that has been my guide; and that one day, no matter what, God will change him*."

The participant's statement mirrors the deeply entrenched convictions about the sacredness of marriage as outlined by Biblical principles. The phrase "till death do us part" embodies the traditional belief that marriage is a lifelong commitment. In Christianity, marriage is often perceived as a covenant between the wedded and God. This emphasizes the weight this relationship carries, and that it should not be broken that easily. This is often reiterated and solidified by this scripture, "**6**So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no man separate." (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Metthew 19: 6). This could give an alternative explanation as to why women who are believers of biblical teachings would rather persevere instead of "separating what God has put together." The participant asserts that under no circumstances she is going to leave her husband because she is holding tightly onto the hope that God will change and redeem him. This is a usual coping mechanism for abused religious women. Unfortunately, it can be a counterproductive way of coping with abuse as it does not hold men responsible for their acts of abuse and violence, nor does it facilitate a dialog between the abused and the perpetrator so that the latter can notice the impacts of their behaviour. Similarly, a participant in Davhana-Mselesele et al. (2009) said:

> "*I relied on the book of Malachi from the Bible which stated that divorce is against God's Will*."

The participant drew strength to hold on to her marriage despite the abuse from Malachi 2:16 which states that "**16**For I hate divorce, says the LORD the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So, take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless." However, it appears that there is a verse that also attests that God does in fact allow for divorce under certain circumstance, such as sexual immorality (see Metthew 5:32). Men

who are abusive usually also cheat on their wives, therefore, using Melachi 2:6 and similar scriptures to discourage women from divorcing their abusive and cheating husbands is unfair.

Usually, women who believe in their marriages will explore various avenues in efforts to save their marriages when faced with challenges and adversity. Too aften than not, women who are religious will request mediation from their minister. Gloria in Sarpong (2015) did exactly that. She said:

> "*We contact our church pastor and the church was trying to help him [abuser], like with the counseling...to help him manage his anger...and he did not accept it.... I prayed a lot, and then sometimes I will sing a lot.... I read Bible for the church. I try to...live according to how the Bible wants me to live.... I think this is what kept my sanity, otherwise I would have lost my mind.... After I gave my life to God, there is nothing else that was important to me.... My relationship with God became my priority. I appreciate having God in my life...because that is what helped me through a lot of things*."

The statement reflects an interplay between faith, spiritual community support and the difficulties of navigating an abusive relationship. The participants unwavering singing and praying served as a coping mechanism. This facilitated an emotional release, which help to keep her sanity in check. The participants efforts to access marital counselling for herself and her husband reflect her not only her wish to salvage her marriage, but her commitment to honouring her vows as well, unfortunately these efforts were met with resistance from her husband, suggesting that their situation does not bother him, hence he shies away from potential assistance. Gloria's commitment to live by the prescriptions of the biblical teachings nurtured her sense of identity and purpose. This is not only empowering, it also positively affects resilience, thus enabling her to navigate her troubled situation more effectively. The phrase "I gave my life to God" denotes a crucial moment where the participant now prioritised her spiritual growth over everything else. This could suggest that she has retreated from trying to show her husbands that she cares about their union, this is also seen in her assertion that her priority is nurturing her relationship with God. Angie, a participant in Sarpong (2015) has seen the effect of prayer in her life. In her own words she said:

> *"I just pray every time and all I was going through I was explaining to God every day, and I was crying talking to God.... Even back home, my mom and sisters and father...they've been praying for me too. They've been telling me go to the church, go pray. I never listened to them, but the time I went to pray for myself, I see the glory of*

God. Religion is good...because when you finish...to pray, it's like everything is done already. You sleep like something never happened to you."

The statement demonstrates interrelations between emotional healing, spirituality, family support and personal struggles in the context of GBV victimization. Angie's acts of crying as she talks to God through prayer highlight cathartic release, where she is able to express her feelings of confusion, frustration and pain. Venting in this manner can facilitate the confrontation and processing of emotions, which can help one to let go of the stress that has been accumulating over time. The statement "because when you finish to pray, it's like everything is done already", suggests that praying provides emotional relief, it further indicates that Angie is entrusting her problems to God. Initially, she resisted to pray, but ultimately gave in to her family's advice to pray. This is a sign that Angie exercised her sense of agency in her spiritual journey and healing. Knowing that her family is also praying for her situation to get better can help her feel validated, a sense of solidarity and emotional support.

If GBV eradication efforts are to prevail, men need to be held accountable. A participant in Ting & Panchanadeswaran (2016) said,

"*God did not put me in this situation. My husband, he puts me in the situation. Other men, they put women in this situation. God, God is fair. Men are the ones who want power. They put us down. God will see it and punish them*."

The participant asserts that her circumstances of experiencing GBV is not part of God's plan, contradicting the notion held by other women that a sequence of events in their lives is predetermined by God, suggesting that the abuse they are suffering has always been a part of God's plan. This usually compromises their sense of agency, because they do not want to disrupt God's plan. Instead of speaking up and looking for help, they would rather wait it out. The participant's statement seeks to hold men accountable for their action, and claims that men are power-hungry. Of course, they are bound to be power-hungry because they are seeking to exercise authority over women. Unfortunately, this very same power causes and maintains GBV. There is also a belief in God's just judgement, and ultimately vengeance for those who were wronged. Humans believe that the universe will give you back what you put into it. Therefore, when one is wronged, either by being a GBV victim, or in any other way, they tend to find comfort and solace in the belief that the perpetrator will be dealt with by God or karma. Similarly, another participant in the study said,

> "*I said [to him] that God knows the truth and God will pay you back . . . I believe in God. I believe that God will bring justice one day to this man for what he has done to me . . . God will punish him. I told him that, and he said to shut up. He did not want to hear about God*."

The participant's assertion that "God knows the truth" and will "bring justice" signifies her reliance on her faith as a means of coping with her situation of GBV and that her husband will pay the price God deems worthy of the abuse he is putting her through. Believing in divine justice strengthens a moral framework within which people can make sense of their experiences, it lets them see their suffering as a part of a bigger narrative, where those who do wrong are always eventually held to account. The statement "he said to shut up" signifies one of the usual patterns in abusive relationships, where the abuser almost always attempts to silence or belittle the victim. The participant reiterates her belief in divine justice for her suffering. There is a general belief that God fights for those who cannot fight for themselves, in this case, the participant seemingly cannot fight back her abuser, hence she is resorting to God whom she believes is just, to fight this battle for her. A participant in Razdilani-Makutu & Chauke (2019) also believes that praying to God for justice will ultimately avenge her abusive partner. In her own words she said, "*I pray for this situation and believe that things will change one day*." Praying can help one cope with life's hardships. However, in the context of GBV, prayer alone might not be enough, for change to occur, one would need to proactive seek help from multiple sources, such as the police, the family, and friends. The day dearly hoped for, where God answers the prayer might not come, or might come only after the abuse has caused maximum damage on the victim. Another participant in Ting (2010) said,

> "*Yes, I had to believe in God. "Oh God, you are might and you are great. You are the God who cannot fail to know everything. You hear my prayers; your eyes are sharp and see everywhere. You know where I am, how I am suffering." I believe that God will take care for me, that God has a reason for having me suffer, and I believe that God is just, that God will punish my husband for what he did to me. Someday I will get justice and he [her husband] will get his punishment*."

Prayer can serve as a means for abused women to vent, and provide a sense of comfort amidst troubling situations. The participant acknowledges her suffering, however, she is not proactively seeking assistance as she awaits God's mercy. There seems to be a belief that God is putting her through this difficult time for s good course, and something bigger and better is

coming, just like with the book of Job in the bible, where Job is said to have endured unimaginable trials, tests and tribulations and God blessed him abundantly for his patience and rock-solid belief in Him even amidst circumstances that many would have begun to doubt His existence. There is a strong belief that He is a fair God, and all the no wrongdoing will go unpunished. GBV is wrong, and women who rely on their faith to cope believe that their husbands will ultimately be punished for their deeds. This tends to undermine abused women's sense of agency, they are suffering in the present moment, but would rather await help that is not guaranteed to come, or that might come but only after it is too late.

Fatusi & Alasite (2006) carried out a study that looked into women's experiences and men's perspectives of IPV, they found that "*In terms of possible ways of reducing the incidence of IPV within the Nigerian society, 73.1 percent of respondents were of the opinion that stronger emphasis on religious principle will reduce the incidence of IPV*." Religion promotes principles of love, compassion, and respect. Participants are of the notion that if these principles are upheld in relationships and marriages, GBV would not be as rampant as it is, because why would a husband abuse his wife if he loves and respects her? One does not hurt those they claim to love, no matter the circumstances, instead, they support and protect them from harm.

Theme ii: Enduring in silence.

The culture of silence surrounding GBV victimization appears to be a global issue, but it is even worse in cultures that care more about the honour of the family than they do about the health and wellbeing of the victim. Cultures of this nature are rampant in Africa (Resane & Mudimeli, 2023). Dickson et al. (2023) found that 60.7% of women in Sub-Saharan Africa chose to not let anyone know about their victimisation. In instances of sexual violence, instead of reporting the crime to law enforcement agencies, the victim's family would accept compensation from the perpetrator for reasons of cleansing the family name, and then the matter gets closed and is never spoken about again. The manner of dealing with incest is similar. A participant in Tomm-Bonde et al. (2021) claims that a 40 years old cousin of hers raped his niece who was the 7 years old because he believed the myth that having sex with a virgin cures HIV/AIDS, upon finding out about the incident, family's elders resolved that the cousin should compensate the mother of the niece, and then the matter was brought to rest without seeking healthcare or justice for the young victim. Even at their own or others' expense, people choose to not say a word (Tomm-Bonde et al., 2021). Shame and stigma are usually factors that deter people from reporting or speaking out about GBV victimisation (Thelma, 2024; Nzeh Atracta

et al., 2022; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018; Yohani & Okeke-Ihejirika, 2018). Fear of losing financial support from their abusive but financially available partners is another reason why some women would rather suffer in silence. In a study by Lince-Deroche et al. (2018), focus group participants argued that it is better for women and their daughters to have food on the table and other necessities as opposed to reporting men in their lives who provide all these things on the one hand, but also sexually violate them on the other.

Some women choose to not report the abuse when there are no obvious bruises and signs to prove that abuse has really occurred, usually it is victims of emotional and economic abuse who would feel discouraged to talk because abuse of this nature is not easily proved like physical or sexual abuse (Dickson et al., 2023). Other traditions excuse wife battering because a woman is seen as her husband's possession following the payment of *lobola*, and there is a belief that a man may do as he wishes with what he owns, this can deter the wife from reporting the abuse because cultural norms have made her to believe that there is nothing wrong with what her husband is doing to her (Thelma, 2024). The payment of lobola gives the husband the right uses his discretion to determine if the wife's actions are worth punishment, which almost always comes in a form of violence (Lorist et al., 2022). Women have lost confidence in the effectiveness of the criminal justice system to successfully resolve cases of GBV (Thelma, 2024; Quiroga et al., 2023). This is because there are media claims that there are incidences where when women report their husbands' abuse to the police, they are told that such are civil cases that should be resolved by and within the family as they (the police) only deal with criminal cases (Lorist et al., 2022). This suggests that the criminal justice system gets involved only after the situation has gotten worse instead of extinguishing it in its early stages. Some men who commit rape will convince their victim that they have compromised their purity and chastity, thus planting a seed of shame in them, which can discourage victims from talking about the violence (Murray, 2017). In some culture, there is reluctance to engage in conversations about sexuality, while in others it is a taboo to talk about sex (Hanong, 2006). Belonging to such a culture can make it difficult for one to speak when they have been sexually violated. Therefore, sex and sexuality should be spoken about like any other issue of importance in life to do away with the shame that has been attached to them.

In some cultures, young girls are socialised and raised to be good wives in the future, in a way that insinuates that the ultimate goal of women in life is marriage (Mbiti, 1988 as cited in Phiri & Nadar, 2009), also making it look like real womanhood is achieved only after marriage (Lorist et al., 2022). This is emphasised in traditional marital counselling where young brides

are given a lecture about the expected behaviour of a wife by older married women (Kaunda, 2021). The author contends that during this marital counselling, the bride is forbidden from asking questions as that would signify disrespect and conceit. The wife is then advised to not air her family's dirty laundry for everyone to see, and to conceal her husband's shortcomings, even if it is his abusive actions. She is told to not question her husband's instructions and decisions. Proverbs and idioms are also used in this context. For example, a participant in Phiri & Ndar (2009) argues that in Zulu culture, the wife cannot ask the husband to use a condom despite knowing of his adulterous ways, instead, she "should go into the fire with her eyes wide open" because the husband paid the bride price, and the wife should without questions abide by his rules. This robs women of their agency and bodily integrity on the one hand, while putting their health at risk on the other. Similarly, a Zambian proverb that says "*ubuchende bwamwaume tabutoba ing'anda*" is preached during traditional premarital counselling, it means that men's infidelity is not an act worth ending a marital union for, encouraging women not to question their husbands' infidelity, thus promoting silence. "*Mepipi kamoka e ya na*" is a Sepedi proverb that means "all households have their own problems". It also encourages silence and insinuates that just because every marriage and household has its own problems, then one might as well just stay in their troubled marriage with issues they are familiar with and might have already found a way to manoeuvre around. "*Chiri mumwoyo chiri muninga*" is a Zimbabwean proverb used in the context of marital challenges that means "What is in the heart is a concealed secret", suggesting that women should never speak out about issues that bother them in their marriages (Chirongoma et al., 2023, p. 344). Dickson et al. (2023) posit that women who rationalise violence due to internalising patriarchal principles or those who have suffered gendered violence for many years tend to remain silent when abused. This could be because those who have suffered for too long have lost hope of getting help, and those who justify it genuinely believe that it is a normal way of life, hence they support it.

As detrimental as it may be said to be, other women choose to not talk about their victimization because they are trying to forget about it (Yohani & Okeke-Ihejirika, 2018), suggesting that they are using suppression to cope. The authors claim that some women do not speak about their victimization as they fear for their lives or revictimization. Other women silently suffer the abuse in the hands of their husbands because they do not want to divorce or get divorced due to the stigma attached to the idea of being a divorcee (Thelma, 2024). Divorced women who return to their parents' home are usually said to bring shame to their family name, their dignity is also compromised (Lorist et al., 2022). Thelma (2024) argues that the fear of this

shame and stigma make provision for an environment that is conducive to violence and silence. Women's decision to stay silent about their experiences of violence out of fear of stigmatisation poses as a hinderance to reaping positive outcome, either by getting justice or receiving support (Lundgren & Adams, 2014; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2018). The silence surrounding GBV suggests that either people are willing to accept it as a norm, or they are willing to disregard its extensive impact (Oparinde & Matsha, 2021). The authors go on to argue that if the silence continues, then men's acts of violence will also continue to go undisputed. Doing away with the culture of silence is a significant aspect of fighting GBV (Dzinavane, 2016).

Corroborating the claims made in the literature, a participant in Leburu-Masigo (2019) said,

> "*We grow up with the knowledge that violence between two intimately connected adults is a private matter. Our parents suffered in silence and here we have grown into the women we are. There is a saying in the Setswana culture: Ga gona ntlo e e sa neleng [there is no household devoid of challenges]. After all, no human being is perfect and as a result, we are not the first lot to suffer violence*."

The participant's statement reflects deeply entrenched patriarchal attitude, highlighting the dangers of socialization of boys and girls that is guided by the principles of patriarchy. They grow up to be adults who believe it is okay to perpetrate or endure violence, and raise their own kids in a like manner, perpetuating the vicious cycle of abuse and violence as it is being passed from one generation to the next. Just like many abused women, the participant is conditioned to believe that issues that arise in a relationship are a private matter to be dealt with by the two people involved. This conditioning fosters the culture of silence as she does not recognise that abuse is unacceptable or worth the input and assistance from outsiders. The notion that just because earlier generations of women endured violence in secret, then the generation living in contemporary times should follow suit can have dire consequences, as those living in the contemporary context might not be so lucky, statistics are supportive of this. Media reports suggests that more and more women lose their lives in the hands of their lovers. The proverb "*Ga gona ntlo e e sa neleng*" insinuates that violence should be accepted as a norm because everyone is going through it, this can be misleading because not everyone is an abuser and not everyone is stuck in an abusive relationship, it can also dishearten women who actually need help and are willing to speak about their experiences of violence. Statements of this nature justify violence and impedes accountability. Proverbs and their intended meaning leave a lasting effect on those who believe in them. Kohli et al. (2015) said:

"*Another participant stressed that women should "place water in their mouths" as a way of describing the need to remain quiet when their husbands are angry and abusive*."

Internalised patriarchy can be dangerous and undermining towards efforts of ending violence. Abused women with this issue fail to notice and acknowledge that they are being victimised as violence in their understanding is a normal way of life. Of course, remaining silent can deescalate a situation that can potentially end in violence, however, it reinforces tolerance of abusive and violent acts. The proverb "women should place water in their mouth" signifies cultural reinforcement of silence surrounding issues of GBV. The silence hinders abused women's proactive action in seeking assistance, and maintains GBV. The silence serves as a positive reinforcement to perpetrators, hence abused women who choose to be silent are stuck in a cycle of abuse in their partners hands. In accordance with Kohli et al. (2015), Chipo, a participant in Chadambuka (2020) said:

"*What I would do when he comes back in the evening is that I would make sure that I maintain silence and do not provoke him. If he provokes me I would make sure that I remain calm and do not answer back. That way it minimised abuse a lot*."

By choosing calmness and silence, the participant aims to deescalate the potential conflict which is likely to end violently. The silence and calmness serve as both a coping mechanism and a survival strategy where the victim treads carefully by not provoking her husband around a situation perceived to be volatile. This highlights the imbalanced power dynamics inherent in relationships plagued with abuse and violence. There is a sense of fear in the participant's statement, such fear can create an atmosphere of intimidation, causing the victim to constantly keep her behaviour in check in efforts to avoid triggering the abuser. Keeping her behaviour in check might seem helpful, however, it is important to note that abusers often do not need a reason to abuse, hence many would resort to violence over issues that can easily be fixed over a conversation. The silence and the modified behaviour can act as enablers for the abusive partner's behaviour, hence victims should directly and outright condemn the behaviour.

It is older women's cultural duty to ensure that their daughters are ready for marriage when they are of age. In this regard, Davhana-Mselesele et al. (2009) said:

"*During initiation schools, girls are trained to take care of their future husbands. They are also trained to endure all hardships without sharing their experiences with other people*."

The process of initiation is a rite of passage that ushers girls into womanhood. They are taught about submission, and taking care of a home, husband and children. Culturally, this is what being a good wife mean. Their worth is defined and measured in relation to their ability to serve and satisfy their wifely and motherly duties. This reinforces cultural and gender norms, which are notorious for providing a fertile ground for the perpetration of GBV. Being taught at such a young age about submission and silence can make married women believe that they are deserving of the abuse, especially if they have indeed made mistakes. A participant in Davhana-Mselesele et al. (2009) also said:

> "*At first I did not want to report my husband as I was told before I got married that I should not tell anybody if my husband beats me for he will be disciplining me*."

The notion that husbands' abuse against their wives is a form of discipline signifies a deep-rooted cultural norm that sustains GBV. Because of this notion, GBV can easily be justified. Perceiving abusive behaviour as discipline instead of acknowledging it as violence can discourage women from reporting it, and encourage men to continue acting violently. Making women believe that spousal violence is proportional to discipline can make them internalize the idea that it is their duty to manage their husbands' actions, making them feel guilty when violence occurs. Because family elders expect women to endure violence in silence, women abiding by these expectations are usually isolated, with non-existent support system, which can worsen the effects of GBV.

In a classic sense, marriage is believed to be a lifetime union, where parties to the contract are expected to remain in it under all circumstances. A participant in Bammeke & Eshiet (2018) asserts that:

> "*My mother usually says marriage is for better for worse; not just when the going is good. You remain there because of your children. It is better to stay in a troubled home than in a broken home. That's what keeps me going. When I think about the children and the future I want for them, I just have to remain and let things be*."

The phrase "marriage is for better for worse" emphasizes the permanency of a marital union, where women are expected to endure the injustices inflected upon them. This fosters the belief that staying through the abuse and violence signifies virtue and loyalty, but why must one remain loyal to what brings her harm? It further takes away women's agency to leave marriages that no longer serve them. Women are expected to be loyal and stay for the children, even if this happens at the expense of their mental and physical health, disregarding the fact that

mothers need to be healthy, both mentally and physically, so that they can better take care of their children. Indeed, one cannot pour from an empty cup. Children deserve happy mothers and healthy and warm homes, anything on the opposite end of the spectrum perpetuates unhealthy family dynamics, which will ultimately harm the children.

Some women are silent not because they believe that it is okay to not talk about GBV, but because they feel a need to conform, usually due to group cohesion as they do not want to be odd ones. Gambia, a participant in Ting and Panchanadeswaran (2016) said:

> "*Maybe a man will abuse you but you cannot take it to heart. You can't cry about it. You have to accept it or die. You can't focus on it. You have to work hard and forget it. It is not you. It is him and he is not a good man. . . . I believe, as far as you are faithful, being good, not doing anything bad to others, there will be justice one day*."

In this statement, social norms that embraces resilience over expression of emotions are prioritised, insinuating that pain and suffering are a normal and expected part of marriage. The phrase "You can't focus on it" and "You have to work hard to forget it" encourage the use of suppression as a coping mechanism, which is an unhealthy manner of dealing with troublesome issues. Gambia's words are carrying heavy emotions, and she believes that ultimately women who endure violence and abuse will get their justice. But for justice too be serves, women should do away with the culture of silence.

Some abused women opt to not talk about their experiences because their dignity and social image are of paramount importance to them. It is easier for them to pretend to be okay than it is to speak up and seek help about their victimization. For example, a participant in Mannel et al. (2016) said:

> "*If you look closely you will find that many [women who experience violence] keep it in their hearts. There are times that it becomes too much for them, but they say that they will die with the secret. And when you see them walking you will never know what they are keeping inside. You can see your neighbours walking around, smiling and happy, but you don't know what happens at home. She might spend the whole night crying, but when she is about to go out she wipes away the tears and then comes out smiling so that no one will know she has been crying*."

The statement highlights the profound emotional struggles some GBV victims deal with on a daily basis. The willingness to keep the abuse a secret till one die signifies just how deeply

patriarchal principles are ingrained in some women, it also emphasizes that some women fear to be shame and stigmatized due to their predicament, this is especially the case as societal attitudes towards victims of GBV tend to be judgmental and unsympathetic. The shame is because victims tend to believe that the abuse reflects badly on them, particularly because in some cultures, married women's behaviour is seen a reflection of their parents' manner of child-rearing, hence when a daughter-in-law is said to be disrespectful, it is said that she must be returned to her parents so that they can teach her how a married woman should behave. Sometime women do not disclose their situation out of fear of retaliation from the abuser, where the abuse now becomes worse. Putting on a façade of happiness is an unhealthy coping mechanism, it prevents even those people who would be willing to help from helping because everyone believes the victim is happy. The dichotomy between victims' private and public lives as marked by feelings and behaviours that are on opposite ends of the spectrum begs questions related to authenticity and the pressure to comply with the societal expectations often prescribe how people should act in public settings. Mannel et al. (2016) corroborated their participant's statement by saying:

> "*Women are expected to keep their husband's secrets within the family. However, women also remained silent about abuse as a means of protecting their own status within their community*."

The expectation that women should conceal their husbands' violent tendencies reflect gender norms as prescribed by patriarchy. The secrecy about marital affair, even detrimental ones, is taught to women from a young age, and further solidifies during traditional premarital counselling. They are taught to protect their husbands' and family's reputation over their own happiness and health, therefore, they (women) are obliged to divulge information that might compromise their husbands' social image in order to preserve the honour of the family and to avoid being socially shunned upon. The silence can also be due to the fear of a loss of social standing and persecution due to failure to uphold gender and cultural norms. This persecution can come in a form of isolation, where other married women avoid engaging with the victim on friendship bases or otherwise, or other husbands forbidding their wives to engage with the victim as she is considered to be a bad influence. Women lose themselves trying to protect their abusive husbands. A participant in Mannel et al (2016) had similar sentiments. In her own words she said:

> "*In my life I don't like to go around saying my problems. I don't want anyone to look down on me. Till now no one knows that I don't live with my husband*."

In this case the reluctance to disclose marital issues reveals a broader theme about societal expectations. Culture and patriarchy have already taught the society that marital problems are a private matter, therefore, women who might want to disclose might have a fear for the anticipated backlash for deviating from what has been considered normal for generations. There is a Sepedi proverb that says "*mosadi o tshwara thipa ka bogaleng",* its direct translation means "a women must hold a knife by the sharp end". This proverb encourages women to persevere in difficult situations, and those who manage to persevere are deemed "real" women, while those who disclose abuse are seen as weak and immature. In a context where women are harshly judged by how well they are able to protect their husbands' reputation and family honour, victims are often deterred from disclosing in a desperate bid to be perceived as "good wives" or "good woman".

Ideally, GBV support services should be accessible to victims at all times, however, due to various reasons, that is not the case. This also has the potential to encourage victims to remain silence about their experiences. In this regard, Odero et al. (2014) said:

> "*Many participants said that most women preferred doing nothing when abused by partner. Staying silent about violence seemed more likely for women living in this setting, where very few services exist*."

The absence of shelters, legal services, and mental health services can put abused women in a state of despair. Victims may believe that-seeking efforts will ultimately bear no fruits due to the perceived inadequacy of available services. For example, women have little faith in the police to assist due to corruption, other communities do not have safe houses for abused women, those that have them often have to deal with long waiting lists due to limited capacity, and mental health services may be out of reach for many due to financial reasons. This can discourage women from taking action against their situations of abuse. This suggests that in efforts to curb GBV, governments should invest more money into ensuring the accessibility of necessary services to GBV victims. Knowing that they will never have to account for their actions, perpetrators might take advantage and continue to commit violence, making it more and more difficult for victims to break the silence.

Other women do not abide by the rigid rule of complete silent, they are of the idea that one should carefully choose what to disclose and what to not disclose. In this regard, a participant in Leburu-Masigo (2019) said:

> "*I think it depends on the type of violence that one is experiencing as well as the duration of the violence. There are certain things you disclose to outsiders, and those you keep silent about*."

According to this participant, a choice to disclose the abuse is significantly influenced by the type of abuse and for how long it has been going for. However, choosing to stay silent because the abuse is only happening for the first time can be a trap that leads to a vicious cycle, where the silence and the abuse itself exacerbate each other. In this case, the abuse ends up getting normalised, making it even more difficult to disclose. Usually, women will talk about the types of abuse that are considered less embarrassing and less painful. For example, it can be easier to talk about financial abuse that it is to talk about marital rape, this could be because victims believe that disclosing marital rape will bring shame to themselves, their husbands, and the family, especially because sex is a taboo subject in many cultures. Also, due to the difficulty to hide physical wounds, it is easier to report physical violence than it is to report emotional violence.

The severity of abuse is also often used as a measure to determine if the abuse is worthy of being reported, be it to family elders or the police. Sigalla et al. (2018) said:

> "*Thirteen women reported that a woman should be tolerant of minor forms of violence from her partner as they occur frequently in their relationship. Eight women used the famous saying in Tanzania that "even two glasses in the cupboard may fall over one another" to illustrate how common violence can be in their relationships*."

Usually, abusive behaviour starts small and then build up to actions that actually threaten the life of the victim. For example, the abuse can start off by verbal abuse, and then escalate to physical abuse when it happens again. Therefore, it is important that women condemn abuse the first time it happens, keeping quite when it happens the first time around will make it more difficult to speak when it happens again, and then again, until the victim feels trapped. The phrase "even two glasses in the cupboard may fall over one another" suggest that violence in relationships is inevitable, it also signifies the normalization of GBV. Related to this , Gloria, in Sarpong (2015) said:

> "*I just found a way to live with it [partner violence]. It [partner violence] became part of everyday life.... A lot of African women, they think because they came from where women were abused by the men and it was okay, then we should handle this because that is what our fathers were doing to our mothers.... They [African women] think this [abusive relationship] is a way of living...that it's okay to just go on [endure violence]...and somehow in our mind it [violence] became acceptable.... I failed as a wife. I failed to help my husband get over his anger*."

The phrase "I just found a way to live with it" signifies the desensitisation to violence, leading to its normalisation. Becoming less sensitive to violence lessens the perceived severity of abusive actions, thus diminishing victims' ability to seek help. GBV is an intergenerational societal issue, victims tend to find comfort in the notion that women from past generations successfully endured, this is a coping mechanism that maintains the status quo. Gloria's statement corroborates claims made in the literature that children who grow up in violent environment tend to become violent or violated themselves, reflecting generational trauma She has found it easier to accepted abuse as a normal part of marriage because she does not know what a healthy marriage looks like, if she does, then it appears to be out of reach for her. Married women are often advised to be their "husbands' peace of mind", therefore, when their husbands turn out violent they (wives) tend to believe that they failed to perform this duty, disregarding the fact that being a peaceful wife to a chaotic husband will not stop the abuse, and that they are not responsible for their husbands' behaviour. The normalisation of violence makes it easier for people to turn a blind eye on their detrimental situation, taking it lightly because they do not recognize its urgency. Confirming Gloria's claims, another participant in Sarpong (2015) said:

> "*I found ways to survive in every situation. Maybe, by keeping my mouth shut. Maybe, not forcing.... I never hit him back...otherwise he would have killed me longtime ago. When he is beating me, I don't talk back. I don't say anything.... I don't even scream for the neighbors to hear...and I think that is what...kept me safe otherwise he would have killed me*."

The statement reflects the belief that not fighting back will make the abuser realise his mistakes and feel sorry whereas in reality, almost always, the abuse never really ends, highlighting that silence is really an unproductive survival strategy. The phrase "otherwise he would have killed me a long time ago" underscores the severity of the situation. The participant's choice to ensure

that not even neighbours hear the commotion could be a desperate bid to avoid retaliation. This highlights how the participant modifies her behaviour in response to her partner's actions of violence, establishing a cycle in which fear produces responses that strengthens the inherently biased power dynamics at play.

Despite its detrimental effects, women continue to uphold culture, suggesting that the power of conditioning should never be underestimated. In this regard, Fatusi & Alasite (2006) said:

> "*This situation suggests that Nigerians still largely regard IPV as a private domestic affair, which should be addressed principally within a family setting. The preference for this approach is also likely to be a reflection of the tradition and culture, which regards the marriage as a family affair (which extends far beyond the couples themselves) and views the family as the final arbiter of marriage-related disputes in a strictly traditional setting. Thus, abused women may be wary of taking legal actions or seeking*."

In Nigeria, marriage is considered the joining of the families, not just the individual husband and wife. Based on this idea, when abuse happens between the couple, there is preference to deal with it internally as opposed to through legal and public channels because as issue of this nature is considered a private family matter. Seeking help through external channels is condemned, and thus stigmatized. It is perceived as a betrayal of one's marital vows and an embarrassment to the family name. This can potentially deter women who wish to seek legal recourse from reporting to law enforcement agencies. Attempting to resolve marital dispute in a rigidly traditional setting almost always disadvantages the wife. Patriarchy is a significant aspect of culture and tradition, and drawing on cultural knowledge to assist the fighting couple means employing the very same principles that caused the disagreements to extinguish the situation, thus maintaining the status quo. Usually, elders will advise the wife to patiently live through the abuse and abide by her husband's house rules so that he will not have a reason to raise his hand or voice on her. Traditional mediation in this context can make women blame themselves for the situation. In cases where the husband is obviously on the wrong, the punishment is usually not proportional to the abuse as the worst that can happen to him is to be instructed to pay a fine, and take with him his wife back to the same environment in which abuse has been happening. This is because family elders subscribe to the idea of restorative justice, the only difference is that men do not usually acknowledge their wrongs, and they hardly take any responsibility as well.

The literature argues that the payment of *lobola* exacerbates the perpetration of GBV. This reduces women to the status of a property that can simply be bought, based on this notion, after *lobola* payment, tit is said that the woman now belongs to her husband and his family. Corroborating this is a participant in Radzilani-Makutu & Chauke (2019) in saying:

> "*Culturally a woman has to belong to her husband's place, whatever happens one has to tolerate and appreciate that she is married*."

This statement emphasizes the idea that women's sole purpose of existence is marriage, seeing that some women would choose to be married and abused than be single and never have to deal with GBV. This is because in many cultures, a women's status is dependent on her marital status, where married women are afforded more respected when compared to unmarried women. Marriage is often perceived as a transfer of ownership of the bride from her biological family to her husband's family. This is where some abused women get the idea that they may not return to their biological family even if the marriage no longer serves their interests. The phrase "whatever happens one has to tolerate" emphasizes the perceived permanency of marriage, where nothing should warrant its dissolution. This can exacerbate the abuse as abusers know that no action of abuse and violence will be too big or too painful to make their wives leave the marriage. The belief that women belong to their husbands encourages them (women) to embrace their culturally given subordinate position and unconsciously assimilate this into their identities. Similarly to the preceding participant, another participant in Radzilani-Makutu & Chauke (2019) said"

> " *I just make sure that I show him how much I respect him and remain submissive. One day he will see that I am good and he will do things differently and appreciate my presence in his life*."

Submission is usually considered a sing of being a good women and wife, hence the participant submits even during abuse with hopes that the husband will see the goodness in her actions and change his ways, this can plant a seed of hope for "what could be". She believes that her worth, as perceived by her husband, is tied to her willingness to submit to and respect her husband. Culturally, amongst others, the wife's role is to maintain harmony in the household, and to support her husband. However, too often than not, maintaining this harmony comes at the expense of being silent even when the husband does things that are not at the best interest of the wife, such as cheating and resorting to violence when confronted about it. The belief that "showing him respect and remaining submissive" will change an abusive men can make wives

prioritise their husbands' needs over their own. For example, a wife can carry on having unprotected sex with her cheating husband because requesting the use of a condom will be perceived as disrespectful and domineering. The participant is of the notion that enduring GBV in silence is a sign of loyalty, this is a misguided notion because if that is the case, many women would not be experiencing abuse because they are submissive, just like culture has prescribed. Therefore, it is important that women understand that respect and submission will never make them immune to GBV because it is not about them, they are simply victims of unfortunate systems, patriarchy and culture. A participant in Kohli et al. (2015) shares the same sentiments as the latter participant in Radzilani-Makutu & Chauke (2019). She said:

> "*Many of the individual strategies that women described using within the household to prevent or reduce IPV involved the woman's use of placating behaviors including changing her own behavior, abiding by her husbands needs and orders (e.g., serving food at the correct time), remaining quiet and calm with children in home, demonstrating submission, and ignoring concerns about her own and/or family well-being*."

In many cultures, women are taught that they have to ensure that the home environment is serene because if not, their husband will go look for that serenity from other women outside their marriage. In a desperate bid to ensure that this does not happen, they tend to behave in ways that they believe will make their husbands happy, even if this happens at the expense of their own happiness. This reinforces patriarchal principles, and sustains GBV. The truth of the matter is, if women's submission and respect eliminate abuse, then women from earlier generations would not have been subjected to GBV as many of them held so dearly principles of patriarchy.

Coming to terms with one's situation of abuse can be disempowering. It does not only enable the continuation of the abuse, but it also robs women of a chance to live a life free from violence, where they can reach their potential and become productive members of the society. Another participant in Radzilani-Makutu & Makutu & Chauke (2019) said:

> "*I just accept that the situation is not that bad, so one can live with what is happening*."

The participant underplays the severity of the situation by saying that it is not that bad and normalises the abuse. The willingness to "live with what is happening" signifies the powerlessness of the participant, and her state of despair where turning the situation around is concerned. Many women believe abuse is only when there is physical violence involved,

therefore, verbal and economic abuse for example, may be considered to "not be bad" because there are no wounds to prove that they indeed are happening. Also, getting away with minor abusive actions, such as scolding or slapping will make a way for far worse abusive actions. Indeed, it is not bad until it is bad.

Men's position of power and superiority is perceived to suggest that they can make unilateral decisions that affect everyone in the family, completely undermining everyone's sense of urgency. Tabitha, a participant in Dwarumpudi et al . (2022) said:

> "*He used to beat me when I asked him where he had spent the night. I got used to the situation. So, when he was home, I did not say anything because doing so resulted in fights. Our communication was not like a real one. It was full of fear*."

According to culture, a wife should never question her husband, it is considered disrespect that warrants violence. During traditional marital counselling, brides are advised that their husbands will cheat because men are polygamous by nature, and they (brides) should focus on keeping him happy as opposed to questioning him about it. The wife is advised that if the husband did not sleep at home, when he returns in the morning, she should run him a hot bath, make him food, and carry on as if nothing happened. In Sepedi, there is a proverb that says "monna ke selepe re lala re adimisana ka yena", directly translated it means, a man is like an ex, women can borrow and use him amongst themselves. It proverbs of this nature that men tend to use to excuse their promiscuous behaviour. This renders efforts to curb HIV futile. Weaponizing culture in this sense undermines GBV activism. Women who endure GBV for too long eventually become desensitised to violence, blurring the lines between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The choice to not ask questions reinforces the imbalanced power dynamics. Communication marked with fear signifies the breakdown of healthy relational dynamics, where the victim cannot express her emotions and discuss important issues with her husband because of the superficial nature of the relationship. During traditional marital counselling, women are further advised to never deny their husbands sex because sex is their conjugal right. In this regard, Sarah, another participant in Dwarumpudi et al. (2022) said:

> "*As a wife, you just give him what he wants just for the sake of it even though you have already informed him that you are not in the mood. Since he keeps complaining, you just let him have his way*."

In many cultures, women are taught to put their husbands' emotions and needs before their own, making women feel compelled to abide by their husbands' demands even if it

compromises their wellbeing. For example, a married woman cannot claim to not be in the mood for sex, she should be ready for the activity whenever the husband wishes. This takes away victim's sense of agency, and self-determination over her body. The requirement to obtain consent before sex does not fall away simply because of marriage, hence the failure to obtain consent constitutes rape. Because of how women are socialised, many do not know that it is rape if their husbands continue to have sex with them even after they said they said they do not want to. The persistent complaining from the husband after his sexual advances were turned down signifies his authority where he knows that his wife will give in if he exerts a little more power.

Women try to be strategic in attempts to avoid violence and maintain harmony in the household, just like they were advised by elders. It is therefore ironical that all participants in scientific studies claim to be to epitome of a good women who know and respect culture, but they still experience abuse in their marriages. A participant in Ting (2010) said:

> *"I tried to cook his favorite African dishes for him. I kept the children quiet when he wanted to sleep, but it was no use, so I just stopped and let him do whatever he wants. It makes no difference [what I did], not at all*."

Women are socialised to believe that when marriages fail, it is their fault, this puts a huge responsibility on their shoulders to ensure that the marriage does not fall apart, forgetting that husbands also have a role to play. In most cases, the abuse is never about the wife not being good enough or disobedient, it is about men wanting to exercise their culturally given authority over their wives. For example, the participant fulfils all her wifely and motherly duties, but the abuse persists. The phrase "I just stopped" mirrors a sense of resignation and hopelessness at the realisation that nothing she does will ever be enough for her husband to treat her with respect.

Theme iii: Cultural intervention/mediation.

Culturally, when a man and a woman enter the marriage union, their families are also joined together. Therefore, when issues arise in this union, the rest of the two families are also affected, hence the family and clan leaders serve as frontline responders under such circumstances (Abdi, 2016; Ngonze, 2009; Lundgren & Adams, 2014; McCleary-Sills et al., 2013). GBV is believed to be a family affair that should be addressed by and within the family, interference

from outsiders, for example, the police, is frowned upon (Ngonze, 2009; Lundgren & Adams, 2014). When the wife is abused and feels a need to report it, she should first report it to her in-laws before her biological family, it is only after the in-laws have failed that she may report back at home, then a meeting will be arranged for mediation (Lorist et al., 2022; McCleary-Sills et al., 2013). This suggests that there is a procedure and a hierarchy in how cultural mediation works. Similarly, Lorist et al (2022) found that the uncles of the husband will be the first to intervene, it is only after their attempts are in vain that the wife's family will be contacted. Acting against the prescription that GBV should not be disclosed to outsiders is believed to bring bad luck into one's life, which may manifest through the sickness or death of one's child (Lorist et al., 2022). Similarly, Ngonze (2009) found that there is a belief that seeking help from anyone outside the family is humiliating. This belief can deter women from seeking help through formal channels. Cultural mediation is guided by the principles of culture and the belief in restorative justice, its main focus is to resuscitate consonance and maintain family unity in attempts to avoid divorce (Korsa, 2022; Mauney, 2015; McCleary-Sills et al., 2013). This is because divorcing is considered a shameful act which does not bring embarrassment to the divorcee only, but to the entire family as well. Women who insist on divorce often lose their conjugal home, and must leave behind their child. The husband and his family usually also demand their dowry back (Lorist et al., 2022). The authors further posit that this partly explains why the parents of the wife usually encourage her to persevere, especially in the light of strained economic circumstances, where it is either difficult or impossible to refund the husband and his family due to the money being spent on other things already.

A handful of participants in Lundgren & Adams (2014) expressed their firm belief in the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation as echoed by cultural mediation. Abdi (2016) found that most community members prefer for cultural mediation over formal channels of reporting GBV.

Comparably, Ngonze (2009) also found that most of the participants would rather go through cultural mediation as opposed to reporting to the police because on the one hand, it is what they are acquainted with, and on the other hand, they want to remain loyal to principles of their culture. Also, cultural mediation is easily accessible, swift, and comes with the possibility of compensation (Abdi, 2016), conversely, going the legal route means attending court for the trial several times before a verdict is reached, and the required transportation money for this affects accessibility, and there is no compensation involved (Swaine, 2003). Some women are of the idea that reporting GBV to the police does not help the situation, it instead worsens it as they might have to carry the financial burden of providing for the family should the husband be found guilty and incarcerated (Mauney, 2015). If the man is found guilty, he is fined and must compensate the victim and her to remove the shame his actions brought to her family. The compensation comes in the form of cattle, tobacco, and food items. The severity of the injuries from the abuse determines the form of compensation due to the victim and her family. If the woman is only bruised, the man pays with a goat, but if the injuries are severe, such as a broken bone or teeth, then the man is going to be instructed to pay with a cow (Lorist et al., 2022). However, when dealing with forms of abuse that are difficult to prove, such as emotional abuse, or where there are no witnesses, the perpetrator is vindicated (Ngonze, 2009).

Cultural mediation usually embraces principles of the system of patriarchy, the very same system that reinforces inequitable gender norms. This renders its (cultural mediation) impartiality questionable. Siddiqui (2014) argues that cultural mediation can be a harmful practice that puts women under significant risk as it intensifies the expectation that abused women should reunite with abusive and violent family members. It discourages divorce and promotes reconciliation for reasons already mentioned. Knowing that divorce will take away the financial support and bring shame is often enough to deter the abused wife from initiating the divorce, thus taking away her option of staying married willingly. The question usually

asked the wife is “What did you do for him to be this violent towards you?” This already insinuates that the wife is guilty of something, disregarding the fact that nothing excuses acting violently to the next person. By failing to prioritise the safety and human rights of the abused, as it is currently practised, cultural mediation perpetuates the belief that women are accountable for their victimisation, focusing on what they could have done wrong to deserve the violence (Mauney, 2015). Family elders usually advise the victims to persevere and reconcile with their husbands to avoid divorce, and to protect their family’s honour instead of helping them find a way out of the abusive environment (Siddique; 2014). The author further contends that women are often accused of not embodying womanhood as prescribed by culture, hence husbands resorted to violence to remind them of their wifely duties. Mauney (2015) laments that mediators in cultural mediation possess limited knowledge about how to deal with GBV cases, which often leads to secondary victimisation. The lack of confidentiality in cultural mediation can discourage women from reporting cases of abuse that are highly sensitive, such as spousal rape (Ngonze, 2009). The author further posits that mediators can fine perpetrators, but have no powers to ensure that the perpetrator ultimately compensates the victim. Due to fear of shame and stigma, a participant in Leburu-Masigo (2019) said:

> “*With rape inside marriage or with my intimate partner, I would never report it outside the confines of my family, though I am aware where to go to for help. I would rather start with a family conference comprising the elders. If this does not help, my next option would rather be to go to the church priest, or even the social workers – they are more private than being seen at a police station, where there is no privacy*.”

The statement emphasises the significant amount of shame attached to marital rape, this could be because of how sex is a shameless and taboo topic in many communities, making it difficult for survivors of sexual abuse to talk about their victimization. Therefore, when such an incident happens, it is resolved within the family and kept a secret to protect the honour of the family.

Reporting first to the family, and then to the church when the family fails emphasizes the hierarchal nature of cultural mediation, where the victim will move up the ladder of support systems based on which one is able to meet her needs in that moment. There is confidence in priests and social workers that they will not disclose the victims' issues to other people, this is especially the case for social workers as their provision of service is governed by SACSSP. Police officers are notorious for secondary victimization, many do not know how to empathetically help victims of sexual violence, often leading to secondary victimization, this can deter victims from reporting GBV even if they wanted to.

After the *lobola* has been paid, the parents-in-law acquire the role of primary parents to the daughter-in-law. Therefore, when she experiences GBV from her husband, she is expected to report to them first, if she reports to her biological parent or family members, it is then considered disobedience, which is frowned upon. Sigalla et al., (2018) said:

> "*It is usually only when such violence becomes frequent or severe enough to cause injury that women will opt to seek help from the natal family*."

Usually, the first few incidences of violence are reported to and dealt with by the in-laws, this is because according to culture, upon marrying the wife, they also take an oath to protect her as one of their own. This also emphasizes the hierarchy in the reporting of GBV. When the promised protection falls short, and the in-laws fail to bring the GBV to an end, the wife's biological family has to be involved to help extinguish the situation. The decision to not involve the wife's biological family from the beginning signifies the secrecy surrounding who should know about the victimisation, and at which point they should know. Waiting for violence to get worse before drastic action is taken, such as holding a family meeting, downplays the effects of abuse that happen occasionally, and does not result in injuries, such as verbal or economic abuse, or even physical abuse such as shoving around and slapping. It also suggests that these

forms of abuse (verbal, economic, slapping, and shoving around) should be persevered as women only feel justified in seeking assistance when the abuse has gotten severe. In accordance with Segalla et al. (2018), a participant in Odero et al. (2014) said:

> "*There are some little ones that we can finish on our own but if you are not able to handle them then you go to his parents...Anything beyond the parents would be taken to the extended family*."

The phrase "there are some little ones that we can finish on our own" implies that some incidences of abuse are considered trivial, this can make participant downplay their experiences of violence, and cause the overlap of boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, which will then perpetuate the violence. The participant's decision to report to her parents-in-law first suggests that she acknowledges their place in the family structure as prescribed by culture. Similarly, Lily, a participant in Sarpong (2015) said:

> "*The first person I told was his [abuser's] mother.... His mother said I should try to understand that he is under pressure.... I would call a friend or somebody to help intervene.... At first my friend...she told me to give him [abuser] benefit of the doubt*."

Reporting abuse to one's parents-in-law before natal parents is a sign of respect and loyalty to cultural principles of dealing with marital issues. The mother-in-law's attribution of her son's violent acts to being under pressure shifts the attention from the abuse, this can maintain the cycle of abuse. It also insinuates that the wife is being abused due to her lack of understanding that her husband is under pressure, leading to victim-blaming. Furthermore, it denotes that women have a cultural obligation to be tolerant towards their husbands' shortcomings, leading to the rationalisation of abusive behaviour. In this case, both a family member and a friend failed to validate Lily's feelings, this can lead to isolation as the two support structures in the closest proximity have failed to provide the necessary support. Bammeke & Eshiet (2018) also

found that most women reported the abuse within the family, however, parents-in-law were the first to hear about it. In his words he said:

> "*The response of most of the women was that they appealed to their husbands. When this failed to restore peace, they sought family intervention by reporting to family members predominantly husband's parents and siblings or their own parents and other relations*."

In many cultures, women are socialised to maintain harmony in their households, begging their husbands to change their abusive ways is a bid to achieve this harmony, which she was made to believe that she is solely responsible for. The inability to restore peace can cause self-blame, where the victim perceives herself as a failure because she could not live up to the expectation of what she was raised to ultimately become, being a good wife. The participant's statement also emphasizes the hierarchy in the reporting of GBV, where the biological parents are consulted only after the in-laws have failed to help resolve issues that lead to violence. Also underscoring the importance of reporting to parents-in-law before anywhere else is Kohli et al. (2015), they found that:

> "*Men and women participants looked to the husband's parents, his siblings, and the couples marital advisors to provide advice on overcoming conflict in the relationship and planning for a violence free future together*."

Turning to the parents-in-law for help when experiencing abuse is a cultural way of resolving GBV, the fact that men have the luxury of reporting to their parents as opposed to having to wait for the abuse to get worse before doing so like women are expected to emphasise the influence of patriarchy, especially because the literature attests that parents-in-law usually take their son's side.

Enduring violence signifies loyalty, therefore, one would expect that the male partner will honour this loyalty by a positive change in behaviour, however, that is not usually the case, too often than not, the abuse only gets worse. Confirming this, a participant in Sigalla et al. (2018) said:

> "*I tried to tolerate his actions until one day when he injured my finger. .. so severely that it was deformed. Then I decided to tell my mother. I called her and narrated the whole story from when it started to what was happening at that point.*"

This emphasizes the idea that violence and abuse are reported to the natal family only when the situation gets worse. Leading up to an incident that left the participant's finger deformed there was abuse, which she deemed not worthy for her biological parents to know about because it was not severe. She minimised the severity of the abuse as she believed that she could manage the situation without external intervention. Waiting for violence to get worse before action can be taken can be an ineffective way of dealing with it. Women can easily get habituated and desensitised to acts of violence, so much so that they cannot notice even when the abuse is getting worse. From a cultural perspective, women's tolerance of abuse is praised and seen as a sign of loyalty, hence many women suffer the violence in their husbands' hands before ultimately talking to other people about it.

GBV is a sensitive issue that the family tries, by all means, to conceal and solve without external influences. But when the family's efforts are in vain, those perceived to have much more influence are consulted. In this regard, Odero et al. (2014) said:

> "*[Women] would start from the home set up, then they would tell the parents-in-law. And then the closest people they can talk to are the village elders and the chief; then the health workers where they have gone for healthcare; then the police and other organizations if they are available there*."

The participant's statement emphasizes the hierarchical manner of reporting GBV so that the cultural mediation process can be kickstarted. Mentioning the family before the rest of the support system suggests that it is the first line of response in incidences of GBV, while mentioning the formal support system last could suggest that these are the last resort, consulted only when the traditional means have failed. Reporting to the family first could be an attempt to contain the situation before involving outsiders (village elders and the chief) due to the perceived shame attached to being a victim of GBV. It also emphasizes that many indigenous women are still loyal to traditional ways of doing things, hence tradition is given first preference. The involvement of village elders and the chief highlights that a sense of communalism is valued.

Abuse that does not result in injuries or death is usually referred back to the family for mediation by the police. Emphasizing this is a participant in Ogunlade et al. (2023), she said:

> "*Issues of family violence are resolved when a well-respected member of the family tries to intervene. Even, when you listen to news on radio or read newspapers, you find out that most of this law enforcement agencies still refer the couples back to the family or community for peaceful resolution most especially when children are involved*."

In many cultures, the family is perceived as an entity that should preside over matters of marital issues. The involvement of family members signifies the belief in communal responsibility to see to it that the marriage is mended. It also signifies the embracement of collectivist cultural values, where maintaining the collective's harmony takes precedence over personal concerns. This can compel women to overlook the abuse and violence, as they are led to believe that the family's happiness is more important than theirs, thus rendering them sacrificial. Law enforcement agencies' referral of the couple back to the family for mediation asserts that family elders are indeed the first line of response in cases of GBV. Women who insist on reporting

GBV to the police usually withdraw them due to the pressure from the family. An old lady who participated in a study by Ogunlade et al. (2023) said:

> "*Marriage is often considered as an issue between two families which is seen as things beyond two people in marriage. We rarely take cases of family violence to court. In fact, most times when they are taken to court, are usually withdrawn from the court based on family decision to settle it out-of-court*."

Marriage is perceived as a family affair where the honour of the family and communal ties is seen as more important than personal independence. Therefore, the involvement of law enforcement agencies in marital issues of Indigenous people is frowned upon as it is believed to bring shame to the family name. Women who defy family elders' advice that the incident be dealt with within the family usually experience backlash and pressure to call the case off in a bid to protect the reputation of the family, and to make a chance to employ traditional methods of resolving issues of this nature.

Unfortunately, not all men choose to change for the better following their family elders' intervention. St. Vil et al. (2017) found that Crystal's husband was one of these men. Lamenting the situation, she said:

> "*The people actually were around, his family members. We lived in, what's the word, a compound like, with several houses in the compound and we lived in one. People would see it. They would tell him about it, but he wouldn't listen to them. His cousin used to tell him that "if you don't behave, or you don't watch out, she is going to leave you." But I never did*."

Crystal's statement implies that verdicts reached through cultural mediation are not enforceable, hence her husband did not see a need to change his ways despite the family's intervention. She chose to stay despite her husband's failure to change, suggesting that she has

gotten used to the abuse, and is now trapped in this abusive marriage. Staying in an abusive relationship can make one fear change and the possibility of facing life without their abusive partner, this is usually because abusers use manipulative tactics to make victims believe that they (victims) cannot live without them (abusers).

Just like reporting it, GBV itself is also believed to bring shame to the family name. Therefore, if a husband is found guilty by cultural mediators, they are requested to cleanse the family of the wife with either a cow or a goat, depending on the severity of the damage caused by the abuse. Regarding this, a participant in Horn (2010) said:

> "*Traditionally the council of elders will be called and they can also judge. Also, they can also compensate you if they find that you are wrong. And they can also give you some warnings pertaining what you have done, and if you beat next time they can also tell you you will face different charges*."

The summoning of family elders to help resolve cases of GBV between married couples is an attempt to contain the situation before outsiders get to know about it, this is because GBV issues are perceived to negatively affect the reputation of a family. When found guilty, instead of giving the wife an option to leave the marriage, usually the husband is told to compensate the victim and her family to remove the shame he has brought upon them. Because the compensation is not really enforceable, many men continue to abuse their wives even after mediation. Piling up charges on the husband's names is not an effective method of ending violence, especially if family elders do not have powers to enforce the fined they prescribe.

Theme iv: Finding solace in proverbs.

According to Bishwakarma (2020), "A proverb is defined as a classical saying frequently used that express as generally bitter truth, morals, norms, values, and practical issues within society" (p. 103). They are embraced in many cultures and help with the intergenerational transmission of knowledge (Chikwelu, 2019; Gyna et al., 2020). Proverbs reflect culturally unique truths

that prescribe a way of life (Chikwelu, 2019; Moloko-Phiri, 2015). Patriarchy, deeply embedded in culture, uses every means available to reinforce gender inequality, language included. In this sense, men use proverbs to assert their position of superiority and to emphasize the inferiority they impose on women. In this regard, just like culture itself, Bishwakarma (2020) posits that proverbs too can be a double-edged sword. Indeed, men tend to weaponize them (proverbs) to serve their selfish agendas. They have a significant influence in determining women's role and place in the society. Most proverbs tend to embrace and hold men in high regard, while they undermine and view women under a negative light (Chikwelu, 2019). Proverbs about men encourages dominance and control, while those about women promote the ridicule and oppression of women. They also put the responsivity to ensure that the marriage does not end in divorce on women, while condoning and encouraging men's behaviour that jeopardises their marriages. Chikwelu (2019) and Montle & Mogoboya (2018) argue that proverbs enable and sustain gender inequality against women, hence Gyan et al. (2020) warns against the unquestionable acceptance of proverbs as they tend to unduly discriminate against women, however, the authors also argue that proverbs are portrayed as absolute truths and sacred, hence they should never be defied. Chikwelu (2019) also emphasizes that proverbs are often presented as rigid under all circumstance. Portraying proverbs as rigid is a calculated action, amongst other reasons, it is done to deter women from challenging their culturally prescribed roles. The author further asserts that usually, when women attempt to free themselves from the unjust prescription of culture, men employ proverbs as a tool to constantly ensure that women do not forget their place in the society. Women who dare question these proverbs are said to be rebelling against culture. To avoid the backlash, and to maintain harmony like they were socialised to, many women, especially from earlier generations, have assimilated what the proverbs say about them into their personalities (Chikwelu, 2019). Change is certain, therefore, it would only make sense for proverbs, just like with many other aspects of life, to be accommodative of this change so that they remain relevant even in the contemporary milieu.

In many cultures, traditional premarital counselling is a requirement. Its purpose is to instil and nurture the principles of endurance and resilience in marriage (Moloko-Phiri, 2015). This is where older married women come together to advice the bride on how she is supposed to carry herself to ensure that happiness dwells in her household, and to see to it that her marriage does not end in divorce. These older women tab into their collection of proverbs that subjugate women. "*Lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi*" is a famous Sepedi proverbs that is never left out in the

proceedings of traditional premarital counselling (Moloko-Phiri, 2015; Moloko-Phiri et al., 2016). According to the authors, the direct translation of the proverb is " A woman's grave is at her in-laws". The authors argue that this proverb encourages women to tightly hold on to their marriages despite challenges and tribulations. The proverb further suggests that the wife should not leave her conjugal or in-laws' home after her husband's passing (Masenya, 2010), for she too she too should die and be buried there as she belongs to her in-laws even after death (Mothoagae, 2015). Moloko-Phiri (2015) argues that this proverb deliberately disregards the tyranny that is most women's everyday reality, and sustains inequitable gender behaviour. This is because it actively takes away women's choice to walk out of abusive marriages. Unfortunately, some women remain loyal to culture, even when faced with adversity imposed on them by the very same culture they are loya to, hence they observe the teachings of gender discriminatory proverbs. Some do so out of fear of disappointing their elders.

Reiterating the significance of "*Lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi' proverb*", a participant in Gumani & Mudovhodzi (2013) said:

> "*Sepedi, there is a saying that 'Lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi' (which means that a woman is supposed to endure everything in a marriage, including problems until death), so when you get into marriage with that, already your worldview is based on that*."

This proverb is to the detriment of women. It encourages women to persevere and be patient with their marital challenges. It takes away women's option to dissolve their marriages in the cases that these marriages no longer serve them. Culturally, a real woman is the one who stays with her husband under circumstances that warrant the dissolution of the marriage. Those who endure till death are said to have died in honour, while those who leave when things get difficult are a disgrace to both their families and culture itself. Echoing the same sentiments, another participant in the same study said:

> "*There are also cultural beliefs, there is this saying that 'Vhuhadzi ndi nama ya tholo, vhu a kondeleliwa' (which means that marriage life has its difficulties which have to be endured), so a battered woman can say, 'I am a married woman, marriage comes first'. So, when an abused woman has that in mind, it makes it difficult for her to leave the abusive relationship. They also rationalize the abuse by saying that men are expected to beat up their wives*."

When women are told that life in marriage is difficult, especially by elders who are married as well, makes them believe that abuse and violence are an inherent part of marriage. This notion

tends to justify and condone abuse, making it look like an inevitable aspect of marriage. It also creates a barrier that prevents women to recognise actions that are abusive. The phrase "marriage comes first" emphasizes the idea that many indigenous communities believe in, that one becomes a real woman only after they are married. This attaches a very high value to marriage, hence many women would rather endure GBV than divorce because they believe that abuse will devalue them.

Theme v: Positive reframing.

The are many reasons that women give for staying in abusive relationships. Amongst these , is a belief in the notion that men beat their partner out of love. Amoakohene (2004) found in his study that women feared to report abuse to authorities because in their ethnic group, a man who beats his wife is said to do so because he loves her. Chamboko (2022) argues that misconstruing abuse and violence for love bears dire consequences for both the abuser and the victim In this regard, the author further contends that the belief that abuse is proportional to love may prevent the perpetrators from seeing that his acts of abuse are wrong and unacceptable, also, when women perceive abuse as a sign of affection, they tend to suffer in silence believing that it is for a good course. Related to the notion of equating abuse to love is "good beating", this is a term participants in Jakobsen (2014) used to describe men's use of violence against their partners, which they claim it is from a place of love. A participant in Jejeebhoy (2013) claims that a slap or two do not equate to abuse, they are in fact a sign of love meant to mould a woman into a good wife. It is ironic that abuse is perceived as a demonstration of love when there is also a general belief that one would not intentionally inflict pain on something or someone they love. Another participant in Kim & Motsei (2002) argues that a man will beat his partner after she has wronged him only if he still loves her, otherwise, he would just let her go, the beating restores the woman's dignity, the mistake that led to the abuse will not be hanging over her head as she would have paid for it, and her partner will forgive her. In fact, some women do not feel loved when their husbands do not beat them (Kim & Motsei, 2002). This demonstrates just how deep the ideals of the system of patriarchy can penetrate one's mind, where personal value is attached to victimization, leading to internalization of the abuse, thus giving men the idea that women take pleasure in punishment. Confirming this, a participant in Laisser et al. (2011) argue that some women instigate their husbands to beat them to derive a feeling of being loved and cared for.

There is a belief that violence between married people is a private family matter that sustains the presence of love in a marriage (Muche et al., 2017; Sjödin, 2019), thus bolstering the relationship itself (Odero et al., 2014) . A participant in Muche et al. (2017) argued that her husband has a right to beat her, for he will be disciplining her out of love. It is traditionally advisable for man to manage his wife's behaviour through violence if he still wishes to be with her (Odero et al., 2014). The idea is, if a man does not care for the relationship with his partner anymore, he will also do not care if she fulfils a traditional description of a good wife for she is not her burden to carry anymore (Sjödin, 2019). Men who do not abuse their wives are perceived to be feminine and are stigmatised by both men and women in the community, thus compelling men to use violence in order to reclaim or protect their dignity in the community, and to assert their positional in their homes. Some women married to unabusive men are of the notion that their husbands do not love them (Strebel et al., 2006).

Living in the present times, where violence is frowned upon due to the degenerating status of patriarchy as a response to global efforts to end GBV, earlier generations of women need to unlearn and relearn gender norms that will be beneficial to both men and women, younger girls need to be differently socialised, so that they grow up to understand that they must never have to be victimised all in the name of love, for love is not meant to intentionally inflict pain.

A participant in Ting (2010) said:

> "*I used to think that my husband, he's so controlling that I thought it was showing me he loved me. Sort of like we say to our children: "We're doing this and making you do this for your own good." I thought to myself, "This is a man who is concerned for me*."

Confusing violence for love makes women prone to emotional manipulation, where there is a consistent need for abuse to happen for them to be reassured of their partners' love. Equating possessiveness to affection can cause women to justify abusive behaviour, as they believe it demonstrates love and care. For example, the analogy of parents enforcing rules for they are for their children's own good can obscure the boundary lines between sincere care and manipulative control. Husbands' controlling behaviour that is presented as love can foster emotional dependence on their wives, which can manifest as a fear for abandonment, where women do not have confidence in their ability to live a meaningful life apart from their partners.

Women are socialised to believe that abuse is a normal part of marriage, which explains why some women do not care for reporting their victimisation, especially as it insinuates that all

women are going through the same experience, thus removing the agency and urgency of dealing with the matter. In this regard, another participant in Ting (2010) said:

> "*In my country, it is okay for men to discipline their wives. I told myself this was not abuse, this was "normal discipline." Other wives I know said the same thing, "oh yes, my husband hits me too; that's normal," so that is how we believed, and how we all survived*."

In many cultures, men are given the power and authority over their wives, this includes using violence as they see fit to ensure that wives understand and abide by their rules, where failure to do so warrants discipline, which almost always comes in a form of violence. The phrase "I told myself that this was not abuse" suggests that the participant has lost her ability to see and acknowledge abuse when it happens, just as she asserts that being disciplined by her husband is normal. This assertion signifies internalised abuse, which is usually a consequence of girls being raised to believe and bow to harmful patriarchal principles. This can make it difficult for the victim to differentiate between abuse and discipline. Discipline is intended to educate and guide, whereas abuse is driven by a desire to dominate and create fear. The phrase "so that is how we believed, and we all survived" insinuates that the acceptance of abuse as love is an unconscious coping mechanism, where the victim is attempting to make sense of her experience of GBV in a way that enables her to endure a cycle of violence and trauma.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The study sought to investigate how Indigenous women from low and middle-income countries confront GBV using culturally informed methods on the one hand, while on the other it was concerned with the importance of community response to GBV. The analysis of the literature spanning the past 20 years has highlighted that Indigenous women are not as helpless as they may be thought to be. They actively employ various coping mechanisms to cope with their victimisation. Needless to say, some of these coping mechanisms are not productive. Accepting abuse as an ordinary part of marital life, for example, is not an ideal way of dealing with GBV. With this said, it must be acknowledged that those who employ this not-so-ideal coping mechanism do not do so exclusively out of their own accord. Their decision is influenced by a myriad of factors, such as influence from family elders, respect for cultural norms, fear of stigmatization, and economic circumstances. Similarly, positive reframing as the literature attests, is not an ideal method of confronting GBV. Those who use this coping mechanism tend to overlook the consequences of their victimization, and avoid holding men responsible for their deeds. I argue that this provides a conducive environment for continued GBV perpetration, this is particularly because of lack of punishment or punishment that is not proportional the severity of the abuse, such as being ordered to pay a fine by family elders, which is also not enforceable. The results of the study put an emphasis on a firm grasp of culture on indigenous women. They also illuminate the severity of internalised patriarchy and victimization. The religious system and its ideals were found to exacerbate GBV. Just like culture, religion was found to be a critical cause of GBV, the two systems were elaborately designed to keep women in the margins, and they were structured to groom and mould women into what was believed to be ideal womanhood from an early age. Ironically, men get to dictate what real womanhood is to women. Indeed, there are women who leave their abusive husbands despite sanctions they face, reiterating the fact that indigenous women are not entirely helpless. The findings underline the critical role of culture and religious frameworks in shaping responses to GBV, providing insight of its kind into Indigenous women's agency and resistance.

The study found that GBV does not only affect the victims, it affects also those who are close to her such as children and parents. It is for this reason the literature argues that communities

should perceive GBV as a collective societal issue that requires collective efforts for its successful eradication. It was also illuminated that GBV perpetration does not exist in isolation. Instead, community members, usually those close to the victim either through familial or friendly relations know of the ordeal, and community mobilisation initiatives have come to the acknowledgement that the load of doing away with GBV is not only for victims to carry, as ultimately everyone is affected by it, perpetrators included. Harmful gender norms are established and nurtured in a family, these families are individual units of a larger community, therefore, the study found that the effective method of dismantling these norms is to condemn them on a community level, leveraging the law of cohesion to foster collective accountability and ensure that the community's interconnected nature supports the adoption of more equitable norms.

The study found that dismantling harmful gender norms on a community level has a potential of doing away with the stigma associated with being a victim of abuse which is known to hamper community mobilisation efforts. These norms, usually passed down from one generation to the next were found to sustain inequality and provide an environment that is conducive to GBV. Confrontation of these beliefs through advocacy, public discourse and mobilization efforts individuals and communities stand a better chance of reshaping them. Community mobilisation was found to empower men and women to interrogate and reject gender norms and beliefs. The study found that consistent promotion of equitable gender norms and mutual respect can trigger cultural shifts, where women can be seen as humans worthy of respect and life that knows no violence.

Recommendations

Programmes addressing GBV should incorporate religious support services, in recognition of the significant role played by faith and prayer in providing comfort and resilience for Indigenous women. Family intervention was found to be of value, but to the detriment of the victims in most cases, to remedy this, GBV programmes should integrate family centered approaches, equipping families with unbiased mediation techniques and conflict resolution skills to effectively support victims and hold perpetrators accountable. Policymakers should prioritise culturally informed policies that recognise and honour indigenous practices and resilience strategies with the aim of ensuring that interventions are in line with the values and principles of life of those they aim to be of service to. Community effort to end GBV should involve respected community members, traditional leaders, elders for endorsement,

particularly because they are usually custodians of culture. Their involvement can foster public discourse aimed at challenging harmful gender norms. GBV programmes can include economic empowerment for victims of GBV seeing that economic dependence on the perpetrator is one of the stumbling blocks for women to leave abusive partners. Centralising services that victims of GBV would typically need has the potential to increase reporting their victimization as it lowers the complexity of accessing support and ensures a structured and coordinated response among all the services providers, i.e., mental health, legal, medical and social services professionals. These service providers should also be trained in cultural competence to enable them to deliver effective and respectful support tailored to the uniqueness of Indigenous women's victimisation. Moreroa & Rapanyane (2021) recommend that it should be instilled in a boy child early in his life that cultural practices that oppress people of the opposite gender should not be upheld. Otherwise, an unequal distribution of power is the way of life children eventually become habituated to (Morrison & Orlando, 2005).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an important aspect of qualitative research. Jootun et al. (2009) posit that reflexivity "relates to the degree of influence that the researcher exerts, either intentionally or unintentionally on the findings" (p. 42). Qualitative research acknowledges that it is not possible for the researcher to exclude themselves from the data collection process. The researcher comes into the data collection process with their values and beliefs, the aim is not to tame them, however, the aim is to concede them and the effects they may potentially have on the data collection process and analysis. I believe that the type of data (secondary data) the study utilised, and the set inclusion and exclusion criteria mainly influenced the data collection process. Even so, I acknowledge that I may have still influenced the process. In this regard, I note that the ratio of studies from Africa against studies from other parts of the Global South is not balanced, with most studies from Africa. This might have been influenced by the fact that I am an African myself. I acknowledge that some of the values and beliefs about the phenomenon of interest that do not align with those documented in the literature; to keep this in check, I engaged in reflexivity by critically examining my own biases and assumptions.

When young, I was exposed to intimate violence between parents, although not first-hand experience, I acknowledge the burden of the memories of this experience, I also note that the experience has helped me to relate to the data, especially because my mother, as an indigenous woman herself, has employed some of the indigenous mechanism documented in the literature

for dealing with her victimization. I strongly identify with the Christian religion, which is renowned for not subscribing to most African cultural practices, Africans sometimes believe that the cause of intimate violence is witchcraft or evil spirits and seek help from traditional healers or ancestors. In this regard, I acknowledge that there was a disconnect in my comprehension of some of the indigenous methods of dealing with GBV documented in the literature. I attribute this limited comprehension to me being from a generation in which culture is no longer a critical part of one's existence, owing to processes such as the fourth industrial revolution. To counteract this disconnect in comprehension, I constantly endeavoured to see GBV and methods of confronting it through the eyes of those affected by it.

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