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Examining gendered perspectives of university students on interpersonal partner violence

by

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August 2025

A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Social and Psychological Research in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg 2025.

Declaration

I, Malesela Abraham Rasakanya, hereby declare that this research report titled: **"Examining Gendered Perspectives of University Students on Interpersonal Partner violence"** has been submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand for fulfilment of Master's degree of Social and Psychological Research. This research report is my own work and all sources cited in this research report were acknowledged and referenced accordingly. I further confirm that this research report has not been submitted for any degree at any University.

Signature: Rasakanya Malesela Abraham. Date: August 2025

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ABSTRACT

Interpersonal partner violence (IPV) is the most significant form of violence affecting individuals across all spheres of society. IPV is a form of human rights violation and a major public concern which worsens challenges to health and social development. It is a disturbing issue within higher institutions of learning in South Africa; this is brought by the alarming cases of abuse among university students. The aim of the study was to examine the gendered perspectives of university students on Interpersonal partner violence at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. The study employed a qualitative approach that used exploratory research design. Twelve participants between the ages of 23-40 years were recruited to participate in this study. For data collection, two focus group discussions were conducted using two self-tailored vignettes. The focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher manually. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data set grounded on theoretical frameworks, namely Intersectionality and Ecological model. The themes that emerged from the study highlight understanding IPV, lack of trust in law enforcement, institution and friends, and support system for victims of abuse. Other themes include mental health and academic performance, intergenerational transmission of violence, and traditional masculinity and power dynamics. This study recommends comprehensive support services for students who experience IPV, which include counselling, advocacy, and therapeutic interventions for students with history or exposure to IPV. These support services should be sensitive to gender and meet the needs of students. Recommending implementation of awareness campaigns that challenges the discourse around IPV, and which foster reporting and disclosure for IPV survivors.

Keywords: Gender-based violence, Interpersonal partner violence, University students, Intersectionality, Ecological model.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1. Introduction and background of the study

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a global gender crime considered as a severe violation of Human Rights. The United Nations General Assembly made a declaration in 1993 on the "Elimination of violence against Women" (United Nations, 1993). However, the global burden of violence against women remains alarming. Globally, over a quarter (27%) of women aged 15-49 years who have been in a relationship reported that they have experienced some forms of physical and sexual violence by their intimate partners (World Health Organisation, 2021). Intimate partner violence refers to any form of violent behaviour, such as psychological, sexual, or psychological abuse and includes acts of physical aggression, coercion or stalking perpetuated by the actual or ex-intimate partner (Ross et al., 2022; Sian Oram et al., 2022).

A severe violation of human rights, IPV comprises of human, societal, and economic cost and is increasingly recognized as a global public health issue (Walby 2004, white et al., 2024). Furthermore, IPV is recognised on the global level, it is documented in empirical research, policies and interventions at the global level. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal number five, reiterates on the elimination of all forms of violence against women (Lee et al., 2016). Therefore, IPV occurs to all spheres of society which requires a multiple approach from all entities globally.

Moreover, countries worldwide including South Africa have implemented rigorous national laws, policies and strategies to reduce and eliminate IPV acts. This involves the basic Bill of Rights of the constitution stipulating that every citizen has the right to safety and freedom from all forms of violence (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). The National Strategic Plan on Gender-based Violence was implemented outlining the need to amend existing policies and better implementation (Robert, 2014). Additionally, in its efforts

to eliminate GBV, the South African government has laws aimed at strengthening measures to end GBV in society, including the Domestic Violence Amendment Act 116 of 1998 (Singo, 2023; Domestic Violence Act, 1998). The new definition of domestic violence incorporates IPV broadly, which refers to physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, economic abuse and harassment, coercive behaviours, and any other controlling or abusive behaviours towards a complainant, where such behaviours cause imminent inspires the reasonable belief that harm may be caused to the safety, health or wellbeing of the complainant or related person (Domestic Violence Act, 1998).

Recent research on the experiences of young women survivors of IPV in Gauteng, South Africa, has indicated that IPV is a social and public health issue that disproportionately affects young women (Masemola, 2021). Despite the implementation of various laws and policies, South Africa continues to grapple with high rates of IPV. National survey data confirm that IPV remains prevalent among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), with 13.1% reporting lifetime experiences of physical IPV, particularly among those in low socio-economic households and urban settings, where it is associated with heightened psychological distress (Mthembu et al., 2021). Qualitative research among university women in Limpopo further reveals that socio-cultural norms, economic dependency, and limited awareness of available support services perpetuate the normalisation of IPV (Ross et al., 2022). Beyond its social impact, IPV has significant health consequences, with young women who have experienced physical or sexual IPV being at greater risk of developing hypertension and other chronic health conditions (De Wet-Billings & Godongwana, 2021). Taken together, these studies illustrate that IPV is not only pervasive among young women in South Africa but also deeply embedded within intersecting socio-economic, cultural, and health-related contexts.

Moreover, as IPV occurs across all social strata, locations, and cultural backgrounds, estimates of prevalence differ according to demographic characteristics. Research shows highest prevalence is among young adults ages of 18-24 years as compared with other age groups (Ahmed et al., 2025). To assert the severity of IPV within higher education in South Africa there are incidences that show that IPV is prevalent. For example, the case of a female student at Cape Peninsula University of Technology who was grievously assaulted by her male partner and the incident that occurred at a private student residence in Belhar, Cape Town (Botterill, 2024). Moreover, a female student at Ramokhopha Capricorn TVET College in Limpopo province was brutally attacked and killed by her boyfriend at her private residence near the campus (Tshilonga, 2023). There are less cases of males reporting IPV, as empirical findings indicate that when women perpetuate violence against men, it is not seen as abuse by men (Scott-Storey et al., 2023). Research has found that men often find it difficult to disclose and seek help for IPV due to fear of gender-bias, shame, or being perceived as the initiator of violence (Scott-storey et al., 2023). Additionally, research involving 258 men who had experienced IPV by their female partners, Walker et al., (2019) revealed that law enforcement officers showed gender-biases, by accusing male victims of being the main perpetrators of the violence and threatening to arrest.

The aim of the study was to investigate gendered perspectives surrounding intimate partner violence (IPV), amongst students at the University of the Witwatersrand, in Gauteng province. The study was mainly focusing on students' perceptions regarding the phenomenon of IPV. This study allowed both male and female students to share their perceptions regarding IPV and examining the nature of IPV within the higher institutions of learning in South Africa. These different perceptions intensively allowed the researcher to gather and understand the dynamics of IPV among university students. Most students (78.8%) in South Africa who have been in relationships for the past three months, reported high rates of IPV during that period

(Russell et al., 2014). However, while statistics on IPV offer valuable insights into its prevalence among university students, adopting a gendered perspective is essential to unpack the social dynamics that shape and sustain such violence. Experiences of IPV differ across genders; women are disproportionately affected by severe forms of abuse, while societal constructions of masculinity influence both survivors' and perpetrators' behaviours, shaping how IPV is experienced and reported. This study employs a gendered lens to examine how gender dynamics and cultural expectations inform university students' perceptions and responses to IPV. Moreover, adopting this perspective enriches both the existing literature and theoretical frameworks, enhancing the study's contribution toward fostering greater gender awareness and sensitivity. and intervention of IPV in South Africa, specifically within university settings.

1.2. Research Aim

The core aim of the study was to investigate gendered perspectives surrounding intimate partner violence (IPV) amongst university students at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

1.3. Research objectives

- To examine the perspectives on the nature of intimate partner violence experienced by university students.
- To identify the socio-cultural factors influencing perceptions and responses to intimate partner violence among university students.
- To examine gender-specific coping mechanisms employed by university students, in response to intimate partner violence.

1.4. Research Question

What are the perspectives of university students on interpersonal partner violence at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg?

1.5. Definitions of the key concepts

Interpersonal partner violence-refers to behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, and includes acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological aggression, and controlling behaviours by current or former intimate partner, whether or not partner is a spouse (Miller et al., 2019; Ross et al., 2022 & White et al., 2024).

Gender-based violence-refers to any sort of violence that is inflicted against a person because of their gender, involving physical, sexual, verbal, psychological, emotional, coercion or educational deprivation, and both women and men equally experience gender-based violence. However, majority of victims are women and girls (Ott, 2017 & Enalifoghe et al., 2021).

Qualitative approach- refers to the systematic inquiry into social phenomena, involves participants perceptions, experiences, feelings, attitude and knowledge (Austin & Sutton, 2014 & Teherami et al., 2015).

Exploratory design-according to Dudoysky (2011 as cited in Orina et al., 2015) exploratory design refers to a type of research that is conducted for a phenomenon which has not been clearly defined.

1.6. Organisation of the chapters

This research report comprises of five chapters. The **first chapter** presents the introduction, background, and problem statement, along with definitions of key concepts and the rationale

for the study. These elements collectively contribute to theory development, policy formulation, and the practical understanding of gendered perspectives among university students.

The **second chapter** of this report is the literature review and comprehensively provides the body of knowledge that is available on IPV. In addition, the second chapter provides a brief description of theoretical frameworks that are used to guide this study.

The **third chapter** is the methods employed to execute the study. It outlines the research questions, primary aim, objectives of the study, research approach, population, sampling procedure, research instrument and pre-testing. In addition, this chapter discusses data collection procedures, data analysis strategies to identify themes, trustworthiness, ethical considerations and reflexivity.

The **fourth chapter** is presentation and discussion of research findings. This chapter was intended to answer the primary aim and objectives of the study. The **fifth chapter** provides a comprehensive summary of findings of the research, limitations and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive literature review, examining the broader concept of IPV and the differing perceptions of males and females regarding it. It also reviews the prevalence of IPV globally, across Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, and within the South African university context. The chapter will review the precipitants of IPV which include the practice of lobola, alcohol abuse, transmission and normalisation of abuse, masculinity, and information communication technology and its role in the facilitation of IPV. Moreover, the chapter reviews the socioeconomic issues associated with IPV, the challenges of reporting such incidents, the mental health problems arising from IPV experiences, and the coping mechanisms employed in response to it.

2.2. Conceptualization of IPV

Gender-based violence is a major public health and human rights violation throughout the World (Graaff, 2021). Gender-based violence involves any behaviour such as physical force, coercion or life-threatening deprivation, directed towards any woman that results in physical, psychological harm, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, and that perpetuates female subordination (Abrahams et al., 2014; Mokgathe & Meneo, 2014; Sanjel, 2013). Furthermore, within the South African context GBV refers to unequal power between male and females in an intimate relationship and is the most prevalent form of violence experienced in South Africa by females regardless of class, race, and age (Ross et al., 2022).

IPV is a subtype of domestic violence which violates human rights and undermines the dignity of an individual (Guli & Geda, 2021). Different scholars comprehend IPV as any act within intimate relationships that includes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to those in

the relationship (Abrahams et al., 2009; Barnyard et al., 2020; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2014; Walker & Gavin, 2011; Yonfa et al., 2021; Zinyemba & Hlongwane, 2022). Oram et al. (2022) define IPV as any behaviour perpetrated by the current spouse or former partner characterised by emotional abuse, controlling, and coercive behaviours. IPV is considered as type of violence act experienced predominantly by women in South Africa and globally, is linked to physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health complications. It accounts for many intimate partner violence homicide and suicide cases (Oram et al., 2022). Understanding IPV from the legal perspective of the Republic of South Africa involves the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998, which defines behaviours that constitute domestic violence. These include physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, as well as other forms such as emotional and verbal abuse, intimidation, stalking, and any controlling behaviours directed toward the complainant (Domestic Violence Act, 1998).

The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention conceptualize IPV as threats or intentional use of sexual violence, physical violence, or both with the aim to cause injury, death, disability, emotional abuse or psychological abuse, coercive tactics (Breiding et al., 2016). The World Health Organisation (WHO) posits that IPV is behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, and psychological abuse and controlling behaviours (WHO, 2024). In addition, Stover and Lent (2014) contend that IPV comprises of violence in a physical, sexual and psychological form, as well stalking by the current or previous intimate partner, such partner may be boyfriend or girlfriend, sexual partner, and spouse. The following section unpacks types of abuse compounded within the context of IPV, involving physical, sexual, and psychological abuse.

2.2.1. Physical abuse

Physical abuse refers to the intentional use of physical force to inflict pain, injury or death through physical use towards the victim (Mutinta, 2020; Stover & Lent, 2014). Physical violence involves acts such as beating, biting, throwing objects, burning, slapping, using weapons such as knife, choking, pulling of hair, pushing against walls and scratching (Makhubela et al., 2018; Stover & Lent 2014). A qualitative study conducted at the University of Venda in Limpopo, on university women's perspectives on IPV, revealed that female students had experienced physical abuse from their male partners and consequently remain vulnerable to intimate partner violence (Ross et al., 2022). Similarly, a study conducted at the University of Limpopo, on knowledge of students at higher learning institutions on Intimate Partner Violence, showed that IPV occurs when two individuals who are involved in relationship experience challenges that result in one being physically abused or being inflicted with pain by the other (Makhubele et al., 2018). Therefore, one can argue that physical abuse is the most visible form of abuse due to its nature and intensity.

2.2.2. Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse refers to any sexual behaviour, that involves unwanted contact or sexual intercourse that occurs without other the person's consent (Banyard et al., 2020; Mutinta, 2022). Sexual abuse includes acts such penetrating the victim by force, unwanted touches, and forceful sexual acts facilitated by aggression towards the victim (stover & Lent, 2014). It has been found that the most important characteristic of sexual violence is the lack of consent by the victim who is in position to give such consent (Stover & Lent, 2014). Stover and Lent (2014) argued that there are certain conditions that hinder the victim in giving the consent in relationships and involves individual age, disability, vulnerability and lack of consciousness (Stover & Lent, 2014). This is supported by a study on female students as victims of sexual

abuse at institutions of higher learning in KwaZulu-Natal South Africa. The study showed that incapacitated sexual abuse is more common on campuses than one involving threats or physical force (Makhaye et al., 2023). The same study revealed contributing factors towards sexual abuse such as alcohol or drug abuse and underreporting to authorities due to fear and lack of trust institutional support (Makhaye et al., 2023).

2.2.3. Psychological abuse

Psychological violence refers to the use of different acts with the intention to humiliate and control another individual in a private or public space (Gilchrist et al., 2023; Mutinta, 2020). Psychological violence is a form of GBV that involves an intentional harm that can impair one's psychological integrity through coercion or threats and occurs concurrently with other forms of violence, such as sexual, physical and economic violence (Costa, 2023). Furthermore, psychological abuse involves stalking, coercive control, emotional abuse and harassment (Costa, 2023). It has been found that psychological abuse is very difficult to identify because it is less criminalised or reported and it has detrimental effects on the victim due to exposure of experiencing multiple forms of violence concurrently (Martin-Fernandez, Gracia, Lila, 2019 & Costa, 2023).

2.3. Different perceptions of males and females on IPV

Interpersonal partner violence was previously conceptualized primarily as a societal problem that is perpetuated by males to females; however, recent research has demonstrated that IPV is more sophisticated and multidimensional, defying simplistic explanations (Caldwell et al., 2012). Research has shown that women do commit equal or even higher rates of physical aggression towards their intimate partners as compared to men, supporting gender symmetry theory (Galdwell et al., 2012). However, feminist theory, which examines IPV as a gender problem, argues that females experience more psychological problems, sexual victimization, and stalking from their current or former partners than men (Oram, 2022). Reports from the

law enforcement indicate that 75% of domestic violence perpetrators are males (Snyder & McCurley, 2008). Approximately three females compared to one male, are the victims of intimate partner violence (Domestic Violence Centre, 2011). In South Africa, IPV prevalence is significantly higher among women, with females making up most reported victims. Data on male victims is much lower, but still not (Crime Stats SA, 2022).

Furthermore, research on perpetrator–survivor accounts of IPV among university students shows that both male and female students perpetrate abuse, particularly physical and emotional abuse within intimate relationships (Oyedeni & Rabothata, 2023). Therefore, it can be deduced that both genders experience IPV equally. For example, research on male victims of GBV findings indicates that males reported sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. However, stigma and a sense of disbelief silences their voices (Morgan & Coetzee, 2017). Research on IPV among university students has revealed that both heterosexual men and women report experiences of victimization (Fapohunda et al., 2021). The same study also found that LGBTQ and gender-nonconforming students experience significantly higher levels of violence. In Gauteng Province, Nekhavhambe (2021) documented various forms of abuse experienced by male victims at the hands of female partners. Similarly, research on female students' perspectives showed that they recognize IPV and acknowledge that both genders can be victims (Ross et al., 2012). Taken together, the literature indicates that IPV victimization affects people of all genders.

2.4. Overview of IPV globally

Intimate partner violence is a worldwide phenomenon comprising of detrimental effects on both males and females through their different developmental stages. Global statistics estimates of intimate partner violence suggest that nearly 27% of ever-partnered women between the ages of 15-49 years have experienced physical, psychological, or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetime, and 13% reported IPV over the past years (Guli & Geda,

2021). According to the United Nations (2019), about 35 % of women globally have experienced various forms of violence in their lifetime. In addition, one third of women globally have been in a relationship that leads to experiences of physical or sexual violence. These experiences affect women and men in low-income and middle-income countries. Intimate partner violence prevalence sits at 32% in central Africa, 24 % sub-Saharan Africa, at 19 % in South Asia, and 4-6 % in Europe and the Americas (Guli & Geda, 2021).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) in collaboration with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), and the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), conducted secondary analysis from over 80 countries; the results indicated that 1 in 3 women, globally, have experienced physical and sexual violence from their intimate partners (Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). Furthermore, research conducted in other parts of the world revealed that a number of women experience violent acts widely, 37% from the Eastern Mediterranean, 37% in Southeast Asia, 29.8% in America, 36.6% in Africa, 44% in Sub-Saharan Africa (Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). The National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INEC 2011) indicates that 31% of women in Colombia have reported experiencing patrimonial violence from their intimate partner, and 7.6% experienced sexual violence, while 64% experienced IPV in form of psychological abuse from their intimate partner (Bott et al., 2012). However, it is recognized that during COVID-19 transmission, an increase of IPV cases were recorded in a survey and emergency globally (Gilchrist et al., 2023). Supporting this, a study on changes in IPV during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic found that between 13% and 65% of cohabiting or partnered women reported experiencing IPV during this period (Jetelina et al., 2021). It is clear that COVID-19 restrictions provided the perpetrators the opportunity to control movements of their partners. This contributed to the escalation of IPV (Gilchrist, 2023).

2.5. Overview of IPV in Africa and Sub-Saharan African

In the African context, cases of IPV are disproportionately high among women. Research conducted in Ghana found that half of married women are likely to experience physical intimate partner violence, compared to almost one-fifth of married men. In addition, 19% of married women reported experiencing violence compared to 10% of married men (Kishor & Bradley, 2020). To assert the above findings, Mthembu et al., (2021) and Ruiter (2021), revealed that IPV experienced by women in Africa is considered one of the highest rates globally. The Sub-Saharan African region is found to be the most affected region worldwide, with the recent estimates indicating the lifetime prevalence of IPV ranging from 19% to 66% among women between 15 to 24 years (Moreno et al., 2013; Stockl et al., 2014).

Data from demographic and health surveys conducted between 2010 and 2019 in 25 Sub-Saharan African countries — including Angola, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Rwanda, Mali, Uganda, Malawi, Congo, Gabon, and Zambia — show that IPV prevalence among adolescent and young girls ranged from 10.1% to 19%. The study also found a significant association between IPV and mental health–related problems (Akinkorah, 2021). Furthermore, similar studies conducted in Uganda and Zimbabwe on the prevalence of IPV, demonstrate that there is higher prevalence of IPV among women aged 15 to 24 years (Logie et al., 2019; Mukamana et al., 2020).

2.6. Overview of IPV in South Africa

IPV is a serious problem not just worldwide but even in South Africa it is considered as a devastating issue that affect women disproportionally. In South Africa one million women suffer from non-fatal abuse from their intimate partners (Makhubela, Shika & Malesa, 2018). The World health Organizations indicates that IPV is the common form of gender-based violence and is considered as the second contributor to mental illness in South Africa (WHO, 2013). The South African Medical Research Council and Gender Links (2012) conducted a

study on the prevalence of IPV in four provinces Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Limpopo. The findings from the study indicated that between one third and three quarters of women in all provinces reported experiencing extreme violence at least once in their lifetime, and Limpopo reporting the highest rates about 77%, Gauteng 51%, Western Cape 45%, and 36% in KwaZulu-Natal.

Gender based violence occurs in all provinces in South Africa. It is reported that 5% of violence against women took place in Limpopo province in the 2018-19 fiscal year. (South African Police Services, 2019). Allen (2017) indicated that IPV is more prevalent in Limpopo province because of its geographical location and rural nature of the area. The province is rooted in traditional governance structures that influence cultural practices and norms, potentially supporting toxic masculinity and domestic violence. Furthermore, Gender Links in collaboration with the South African Medical Research Council, and the University of the Witwatersrand conducted a qualitative survey focusing on the prevalence of GBV in the Gauteng province. The findings showed that gender dynamics intersect with experiences of IPV, and women are predominantly identified as victims of IPV (Sikweyiya & Jewkes, 2012). Moreover, the population report that was conducted in Gauteng in 2011 on GBV directed to females, s revealed that 37% of women ever experienced intimate partner violence, and 46.2 % had experienced financial and emotional abuse from their intimate partners (The National Strategic Plan on GBV and femicide, 2011).

It is noticeable from the statistics and cases of IPV that South Africa is facing the epidemic of IPV in all spheres. For example, the National Retrospective Epidemiological Study on the mortality of women from IPV in South Africa, based on data collected from mortuaries, autopsies, and police databases, found that of the 3,797 recorded female homicides, 50.3% were attributable to intimate partner violence (Abrahams et al., 2009). Furthermore, it is evident that IPV is a major societal problem, with findings indicating that in South Africa every 8 hours

a woman is killed by their intimate partners (Banda, 2020). Another example is the alarming case of Karabo Mokwena who was killed by her partner and burnt beyond recognition (Geldenhuys, 2018). Again, during global the surge of COVID-19 an eight-month pregnant women Tshegofatso Pule was found shot and hung from a tree, and her boyfriend was incarcerated later (Geldenhuys, 2024). In yet another case, in March 2015, Nkululeko Hadebe, a well-known musician "Flabba" was fatally stabbed by his girlfriend at his home in Alexandra township, Johannesburg (ENCA News report 2015, as cited in Rowlands, 2021). Therefore, from the above cases one can argue that South Africa continues to battle with the devastating problem of IPV regardless of the victims' gender.

2.7. Overview of IPV in South African universities

IPV incidents have escalated to the extent that university students are both victims and perpetrators, with the problem being particularly prevalent within South Africa's higher education institutions. In Limpopo province's Vhembe district, the South African Police Services (SAPS) reported approximately 13,000 cases of sexual violence, murder, and domestic violence during 2018–2019. Some of these IPV cases were reported by students from the University of Venda, who had experienced forms of sexual violence on campus, including rape, unwanted touching, and forced sexual relationships (Malobola, 2019; Ross et al., 2022). From the literature it shows that sexual violence is predominantly experienced by female students and is considered a disturbing phenomenon within institutions of higher learning. For example, the partnership initiated by students and university staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal "Gender Based Violence Lobby Group", recommended that institutional culture should address the problem by responding to the sexual violence experienced by women broadly (Collins et al., 2009). Moreover, research conducted at the University of Limpopo reported that 28% of female students from all levels of studies had experienced sexual coercion,

and all female students are at risk of experiencing verbal coercion, attempted rape, and rape (Mokgatle & Menoe, 2014).

Research conducted at the University of Cape Town in response to communication about sexual violence on campus revealed that at higher institutions of learning in South Africa students are not exempted from the higher levels of violence that affected South African women more broadly (Boonzaier et al., 2019). In 2017, the Minister of higher education and training Naledi Pandor in the parliament, reported that there were 47 cases of rape and sexual violence on students on campus in South Africa (Nkosi, 2018; Moruri & Obioha, 2020). Furthermore, research shows that the University of Cape Town recorded the highest cases of rape with 9 cases, followed by the Walter Sisulu University with 7 cases (Boonzaier et al., 2019). A recent quantitative study on GBV among female students and implications for health intervention programmes in public universities in Eastern Cape, South Africa, showed that that students are prone to GBV and estimated that 36.1 % had experienced physical violence, 56.6 % experienced psychological violence, and 46.7 % had experienced sexual violence (Mutinta, 2022).

Moreover, the report of ministerial task team on Matters of Sexual Harassment and Gender-Based Violence and Harm in South African Universities, estimates that over 240 students had experienced sexual violence, and of the 240 students, 20 (8.3%) are students from the University of the Witwatersrand (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2024). Gender-based violence is the most significant and challenging problem which higher institutions in South Africa are facing. In response to gender-based harm, the University of the Witwatersrand established Gender Equity Office (GEO) in 2014. Between 2014 and 2016, an estimate of 76 cases was reported by students and staff (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014). Therefore, one can argue that gendered harm is also prevalent at the University

of the Witwatersrand. Moreover, the alarming rate of IPV amongst university students in South Africa has become a major contributor to multiple injuries and deaths (Malesa, 2022). For example, the alarming case at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), where a university male student allegedly stabbed his girlfriend multiple times at the student resident in Belhar, Cape Town (Botterrill, 2024).

2.8. Precipitants of IPV

2.8.1. Cultural factors

Cultural factors that influence IPV often revolve around deeply rooted values concerning the relative importance of an individual's goals and autonomy versus the expectations and priorities of the society to which they belong (Stewart et al., 2013). Research shows that collectivist cultures that are patriarchal have rigid gender roles which allow men to control women's behaviour and is linked to hyper masculinity that accepts violence as a way of reaching same consensus (Stewart et al. 2013; Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). Research conducted at the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University on how to break the vicious cycle showed that cultural and social norms are influential in shaping behaviour in intimate relationship, and social norms can encourage perpetration of violence (Joyner et al., 2015). Similarly, research showed that female students perceive patriarchal structures within their campuses, and the remote geographical location of their institutions makes it difficult for their grievances to be acknowledged. As a result, many suffer in silence and do not report incidents of sexual violence to university management or law enforcement officials (Kheswa & Mashabela, 2020).Furthermore, a qualitative study on young black male students at the University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal showed that cultural norms are related to masculinity and gender, intersect to shape individual attitudes and practices (Khumalo et al., 2020). Based on these findings, one can argue that cultural norms promote perpetration of IPV, therefore, there is a need to deconstruct cultural norms that approve IPV.

Community and societal influences on intimate partner violence (IPV) encompass several interconnected factors. These include fragile social ties and insufficient deterrence mechanisms against IPV, diminished social cohesion, and adherence to traditional gender roles, disparities in gender equality, and cultural norms that condone violence against women (Stewart, MacMillan & Wathen, 2013). A study on awareness and rejection accounts of IPV by young women in Soweto, Johannesburg found that young females between the ages of 14 to 17 are aware of the perpetration of IPV but are not able to report the abuse due to the social norms, cultural beliefs, and not having access to social services (Makongoza & Nduna, 2021). Furthermore, in South Africa women and young girls, especially in rural areas are subjected to harmful cultural practices, such as child marriage, abduction for marriage "*ukuthwala*" and polygamy unions that enable IPV (Lubaale & Budoo-Scholtz, 2021). Therefore, one can argue that existing cultural practices do perpetuate gender-harm.

A comparative study conducted in China and on American students on tolerance of IPV, found that Chinese female students are reluctant to report IPV incidences due to cultural norms and belief systems that exist within their environment (Li, Sun & Buttom, 2020). Additionally, Jesmin (2017) found that to maintain patriarchal beliefs, violence is justified as a source to uphold women's subordination and male authority over women. Jesmin (2017) also found that living in a society that is strongly imbedded with patriarchal norms present greater chances of tolerating IPV. Research on men's conceptualization of gender-based violence (GBV) against women in Alexandra Township, Johannesburg, found that the socio-cultural system of patriarchal norms violates women's rights, denies them power, and undermines their decision-making, leaving them more vulnerable to GBV (Zinyemba & Hlogwana, 2022). Consequently, although victims of IPV fully understand the harmful nature of the violence, prevailing cultural factors make it difficult for them to take formal action.

2.8.2 The practice of lobola

Research indicates that cultural practices dominate in South Africa such as paying lobola (bride price), automatically position men in a superior role over women, consequently leaving women with less power within the marriage (Ranganathan et al., 2022). Cultural practice of lobola, refers to when the bride's family receives gifts and money, in exchange of their daughter with the aim to joins the husband family (Beta Maguele., et al., 2013). Physical abuse towards women is recognized as entitlement that comes with marriage and closely bound to men's payment of the bride price for the women (Sikweyiya et al., 2020). The main issue with such practice is that some families do not allow their daughters to return even if there is persistant violence in the relationship (Beta Maguele et al., 2013; Thupayagale-Tshweneagae & Seloiwe, 2010). This claim is supported by a study on Christian women's experiences on IPV in Zimbabwe, which indicated that lobola is the contributing source of oppression towards women and directly led to IPV perpetuation (Chireshe, 2015). A similar study found there is a relationship between *lobola* and IPV, which consequently results in the subordination of women, and contributes to perpetuation of GBV (Mazibuka, 2016). Furthermore, a qualitative study conducted in Limpopo, Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga involving women showed that the arrangements related to the cultural practice of labola, provide men with power to abuse their partners (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005).

The notion of *lobola* reinforces imbalanced power dynamics in relationships. The social norms related to lobola, such as women being submissive to their husbands and sex as a conjugal right, deliberately silence women, forcing them to normalise violence within their marriages (Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). Omeje and Chikwedu (2019), contend that women are not allowed to discuss experiences of abuse with outsiders, as this is regarded as family affairs. Furthermore, payment of bride price to the family of females prior to the actual marriage makes it difficult for women to leave abusive relationships (Mazibuka, 2016).

2.8.3. Alcohol

Research conducted in Cape Town, South Africa, shows that there is a close relationship between heavy alcohol consumption and intimate partner violence, with heavy intake that potentially leads to inappropriate ways of resolving conflicts (Lazarus et al., 2009). Research has also found that IPV is perpetuated by increased interpersonal conflict between couples as an outcome of spending less time together, specifically when men go out to bars and return home drunk (Ricks at al., 2018). In support of the above assertion, a study conducted at the University of Fort Hare on the impact of IPV among female students living in cohabitation revealed that these students suffer emotional harm because of IPV, with their partners often resorting to abuse after consuming alcohol (Kheswa & Mashabela, 2020). Furthermore, participants reported that their intimate partners would start by being unfaithful and then severely punching them with fists (Kheswa & Mashabela, 2020; Oyedeni & Rabothata, 2023).

The issue of heavy alcohol consumption in most cases predominantly affects females as men continue to perpetrate IPV. Research conducted on views and perspectives of young females in Mozambique, indicated that alcohol consumption might lead to IPV because of reduced inhibitions and increased propensity to violence, leading to physical and sexual abuse (Maguele., et al., 2013). Similarly, a study by Kheswa Mashabela (2020), revealed that one of the female participants was raped after intake of alcohol, as her partner brought a friend at their private accommodation and raped her following amnesia (Kheswa & Mashabela, 2020). Alcohol-induced Amnesia refers to the excessive intake of alcohol that leads to blackouts and impairs individual thinking and judgment (Wetherill et al., 2016). Blackout amnesia is a type of memory loss in which a person cannot recall the incidences that occur after excessive drinking alcohol (Hingson et al., 2016). Furthermore, the issue of alcohol consumption is

associated with male coercive behaviour and if females challenge the controlling behaviour this usually results in IPV (Beta Maguele et al., 2013).

2.8.4. Transmission and normalization of abuse

Violent behaviour is closely linked to intergenerational transmission of violence and normalization of abuse (Kheswa & Mashabela, 2020; Makhosazana Kubeka, 2008). It has been found that women exposed to IPV from their families, may come to normalize abuse if they hold the belief that males have the authority to make all decisions, a view that can perpetuate and encourage violence (Bata Maguele et al., 2023). Research conducted on perceptions of intimate partner violence among university students: situational and gender variables, indicated that the normalization of violence in contemporary culture often led to inability to recognize abusive behaviour. The study also found that women internalize and take accountability of victimization because they believe they acted inappropriately towards their intimate partners (Larsen & Wobschall, 2016). Comparatively, a study on childhood maltreatment and IPV, found that men who had been exposed to violent acts and experienced childhood abuse can perpetuate violence against their intimate partners (Crombach & Bambonye, 2015). Therefore, we can argue that the reinforcement of violence is normalized across generations and genders.

A study conducted in Limpopo province exploring the perspectives of female university students on IPV, found that female students remain in abusive relationships because they internalize IPV as a normal and acceptable way of life. They replicated such behaviours observed from their families and communities (Ross et al., 2021). For example, research has found that some female students tend to normalize abusive relationships, with the main reason for not reporting violence being fear that their partner may leave them. Many also feel they have invested too much, emotionally, socially, and materially, into the relationship to walk away (Oyedemi & Rabothata, 2023). Furthermore, a study on awareness and rejection accounts

of intimate partner violence by young women in Johannesburg, has found that young women are reluctant to share their experiences of IPV, because they have normalized the abuse and they consider it as a private matter which requires no formal intervention of authorities or familial (Makongoza & Nduna, 2021).

2.8.5. Toxic Masculinity and IPV

Intimate partner violence is a widespread issue in South Africa, with numerous contributing factors including violent and toxic forms of masculinity (Ross et al., 2022). Research indicates that IPV is comprehended as a social construction originating from the social structure that support masculinity norms (Bata Maguele et al., 2023). It has also been discovered that female students at the University of Limpopo claim that IPV is not a criminal act, but it emphasises the aspect of masculinity that disciplines their female partners to maintain order in the relationship. It can also be used to demand sexual intercourse when denied by females' partners (Oyedemi & Rabothato, 2023). In support of the above study Jewkes et al., (2015) found that practices implemented by men to preserve gender inequality include hegemonic masculinity, which centred on men's domination over females. This also indicates that masculinity enables men to perpetrate IPV.

There has been more research that focuses on the idea of masculinity within higher education in South Africa. Research on dominant masculinity ideas among university students in South Africa, shows that patriarchal norms influence male students to prove their masculinity through use of violence. Conforming to these norms reinforces violence among students (Mndebele, 2015; Malesa, 2022). It has been found that some male students adhere to masculine norms that support coercive control leading to IPV (Khumalo et al.,2021). According to Mshweshwe (2020), IPV demonstrates the intersection of patriarchy, culture and the construction of negative masculinity.

Therefore, conformity to traditional notions of masculinity can lead men not only to perpetrate violence but also to tolerate it. Research has shown that men who experience IPV often interpret and respond to their experiences through a masculine lens, rejecting vulnerability (Rowlands, 2022). Furthermore, studies involving gay men in South Africa have found that IPV can serve as a mechanism to reinforce dominant masculinity by refusing vulnerability, demonstrating that IPV is perpetuated regardless of sexual orientation (Gibbs et al., 2020).

2.8.6. Information Communication Technology facilitating IPV

Information communication technology emerged as a tool for controlling and inflicting abuse withing intimate relationships (Reed et al., 2016). Consequently, digital media communication has reshaped dating relationship boundaries, often rendering new opportunities for the perpetration of IPV (Draucker & Martsolf, 2010). Digital dating abuse refers to patterns of behaviours that control or use some threats towards the other partner using a mobile device or the internet (Reed et al., 2016). A study on the abuse of technology in domestic violence and stalking, found that approximately 42% perpetrators primarily used mobile devices to stalk women, resulting in significant psychological distress (Woodlock, 2017). Furthermore, research has shown that digital technology is used in dating relationships to inflict violence, serving as a major source for verbal aggression and behaviours that escalate to offline dating violence (Melander, 2010; Draucker & Martsolf, 2010). Thus, ICT can be seen as a mechanism for perpetuating IPV.

Research on technology-facilitated coercive control revealed that victims experience threats through repeated texting, calling, online stalking and reported constant fear of being monitored online even after separation (Dragiewicz et al., 2018). In addition, it has been found that after separation victims do experience social media surveillance and cyber dating abuse

(Dragiewicz et al., 2018; McMillan et al., 2013). Furthermore, research has shown that digital devices are increasingly weaponized in intimate relationships to isolate, stalk, harass and manipulate victims, highlighting vulnerabilities within domestic settings (Freed et al., 2018). Stark (2007) argues that information communication technology can mediate coercive control, with men demanding mobile device passwords to gain access into emails and social media accounts of their partners, tactics that enable IPV recognition of ICT-facilitated IPV has also emerged among university students. For instance, a report compiled by Gender Links in collaboration with the Department of Social Development in South Africa recognized rising cases of digital harassment among university students (Gender Links, 2022). Taken together, these studies suggest that ICT plays a significant role in facilitating IPV by enabling online monitoring and reinforcing coercive behaviours within intimate relationships.

2.9. Socioeconomic issues and IPV

Research findings indicate that there is a close link between violence and poverty among young women with those from very poor household and societies being at a greater risk of experiencing IPV (Akinkorah et al., 2018; Neille & Penn, 2017). It has been discovered that men who are unable to provide a better living for their partners, they experience stress, creating a climate of violence within the relationship that often ends in physical abuse (Jewkes, 2002; Makhubele et al., 2018). Violence against women is a social ill that men resort to when they can no longer control or economically support their partners (Morrel, 2001). Slabbert (2017), indicates that females enter and remain in extremely abusive relationships for financial security. The World Bank (2020) indicates that poverty rates in South Africa have escalated drastically. Moreover, findings revealed that female students lacked financial support from their families. This led them to be committed to unhealthy relationships leading them to

experience IPV (Ross et al., 2021). Therefore, we can argue that financial independence contributes to the experiences of IPV in certain situations.

A qualitative study conducted at Mashamba training college in Vhembe district, Limpopo province, indicated that students engage in transactional sex to get essential needs such as food and rent. Moreover, engaging in transactional sex, while sometimes used by students as a means of sustaining college life and addressing poverty-related challenges, is an extremely risky practice. It exposes individuals to intimate partner violence (IPV), often in the form of being coerced into unwanted sexual acts under the expectation of later compensation (Mashau et al., 2018). Similarly, research has shown that although transactional sex may provide material benefits, the consequences often outweigh these gains, as women may find themselves trapped in violent relationships, subjected to sexual violence, or even at risk of homicide (Makongoza & Nduna, 2021; Zembe et al., 2015). Furthermore, a study conducted at University of Fort Hare, indicated that when female students are financially dependent on their partners, they will compromise their life and tolerate any form abuse that they experience (Kheswa & Mashabela, 2020). From the above studies, it can be asserted that proper financial support is essential to reduce risky sexual behaviours among students and promote healthier and more sustainable lifestyles.

Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that financial constraints are a major factor contributing to individuals' endurance of IPV. Studies have shown that several factors hinder women from reporting violence, including lack of awareness of their human rights, poverty, unemployment, and financial dependence on men (Oyedemi & Rabothata, 2023). Supporting this, Makongoza and Nduna (2021) found that financial hardship linked to low socioeconomic backgrounds often pushes young women into risky situations to meet their basic needs. Similarly, a quantitative study conducted across four South African universities, Nelson Mandela University, Fort Hare University, Rhodes University, and Walter Sisulu University,

demonstrated that female students receiving low monthly allowances were more likely to engage in relationships for economic benefit, which increased their vulnerability to GBV (Mutinta, 2022). Consistent with these findings, Gouws and Kritzinger (2007) reported that financial problems and economic dependence in relationships serve as obstacles preventing female students from resisting GBV, as they fear losing financial support from their partners. Therefore, maintaining financial stability among women can play a crucial role in building resilience against the traumatic experiences of IPV.

2.10. Challenges in reporting IPV

Interpersonal Violence is a multifaceted phenomenon which is compounded by more challenges that individuals are subjected to when they tend to report/access services. According to Oyedeni and Rabothata (2023), victims of IPV face numerous challenges when they want to report IPV experiences. These include poor knowledge of the legal system, lack of resources, and access to health services. Furthermore, it has been found out that female students do not often report physical abuse to law enforcement authorities, which might be influenced by the perceived lack of proactiveness amongst police officials. Gordon (2016) found that many women have internalized the fear of their intimate partners, particularly concerns about abandonment or withdrawal of financial support, which act as significant barriers to reporting IPV. It is important to highlight that fear of victimization and shame make many women to remain silent and not to report intimate partner violence (Larsen & Wobschall, 2016, Ross et al, 2022).

According to Mutinta (2022), victims of IPV are aware of the violence perpetrated to them, but they do not know what to do afterwards due to the trauma and lack of information on where to report abuse. Furthermore, research within higher education institutions has shown that students do not usually report their victimization, which is reinforced by barriers such as

stigma, disbelief, and lack of knowledge on reporting channels (Mdletshe & Makhaya, 2025). A systematic review indicated that there are higher levels of IPV cases, especially within South African universities, however the weakness of institutional policies and the distrust in the legal system leads to underreporting of IPV (Hewett et al.,2023). Moreover, research indicates that most South African universities lack policy frameworks addressing IPV, a gap that is compounded by patriarchal culture and transactional dynamics, which contribute to silencing and underreporting (Mazibuka, 2017).

Furthermore, a study conducted on students who are victims of dating violence showed that students fail to recognise harassment, coercive acts, and psychological abuse within their intimate relationships which contributes to non-reporting (Barros-Corroto et al., 2014). Demonstrating the ongoing problem of non-reporting of IPV, research in Soweto, Johannesburg, found that young women often view non-physical forms of violence, such as psychological and verbal abuse, as unworthy of reporting and instead regard them as normal challenges within intimate relationships (Makongoza & Nduna, 2021). Moreover, Nekhavhambe (2021) found that male students also experienced various forms of abuse from their intimate partners. However, they face challenges in reporting due to cultural stigma. Therefore, one can argue that survivors of IPV can recognise, but they are various factors which hinder them to report abuse cases.

2.11. Mental health problems and IPV

Oram et al. (2022) posit that individuals who are experiencing mental health problems are at high risk of perpetuating or experiencing IPV. The research further found that individuals who are diagnosed with severe mental health illnesses experienced IPV in previous years. Women are found to report more cases of IPV than males (Oram et al., 2022). Research findings indicate that women who experienced IPV reported increased levels of mental health

symptomatology and women who were abused by their intimate partner exhibited symptoms of anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Yonfa et al., 2021).

Other studies show that women who were diagnosed with depressive disorder experienced IPV for the first time compared with women with no depressive symptoms (Devries, 2013). A contrasting study showed that not all people who were exposed to IPV will further experience some mental health problems, although there is association between IPV and mental health (Oram et al., 2022). According to Lewis (2010), people who experience IPV are prone to persistent mental health problems than those have not never experienced IPV in their lives, and it was found that women are likely to become victims of IPV than men. Research revealed that IPV is associated with intense and long-term effect on the victim's mental health, such as depression, anxiety, and increased post-traumatic stress disorder (Gevers & Dartnall, 2014). Additionally, Rees et al., (2014) research findings reveal that females who are exposed to IPV experiences are at high risk of mental disorders and suicidal thoughts. Research conducted amongst students in Ethiopia showed that there is a close link between GBV and mental health disorders, which in most cases resulted into depression (Geleya et al., 2009). Additionally, research conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, shows that GBV results in victims suffering from psychosocial stress, and low self-esteem.

Research conducted at the University of Venda in Limpopo highlights the importance of addressing IPV within higher education institutions, as neglecting this issue can lead to severe mental health problems, including suicidal behaviours among abused female students (Ross et al., 2022). Similar findings were reported in a study at the University of Limpopo, where participants described their experiences of IPV as deeply traumatic, resulting in mental health challenges such as stress, a sense of meaninglessness, and anger-related difficulties (Oyedemi & Rabothata, 2023). Furthermore, research on students' knowledge of IPV in higher

education institutions revealed that physical abuse not only affects the mental wellbeing of female students but can also cause serious physical harm, including severe injuries that may result in death (Makhubele et al., 2018; Grose et al., 2019). Therefore, it can be argued that IPV has profoundly detrimental effects on students' overall wellbeing

2.12. Coping mechanisms of IPV survivors

Within the context of IPV, coping mechanisms are defined as resistance and resilience strategies employed by the victims of IPV to minimize harm and gain control over the situation (Chadambuka, 2022). Survivors of intimate partner violence utilise different coping mechanisms in response to IPV. Research shows that there are many ways in which women actively cope with violence including repeated efforts to access a range of formal and informal sources of help in response to increasing and severe levels of violence (Ansara & Hindin, 2010). A qualitative study showed that women's primary aim is to find alternative ways of achieving non-violence rather than ending the relationship, which results in resilience to abuse as a coping strategy (Campbell et al. 1998). Resilience is a commonly employed strategy between men and women to save the relationship or marriage than terminating (Baffour et al., (2022). Machisa, Christofides, and Jewkes (2018) reported that women who experience IPV often demonstrate psychological resilience, which is closely linked to factors such as community support, social connectedness, and financial independence. Furthermore, research indicates that women adopt various coping strategies, including reframing their thoughts about the abuse, temporarily leaving the relationship, and remaining silent (Baffour et al., 2022). Research has shown that there are two categories of coping strategies in the context of IPV, namely: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Zakar et al., 2012). Emotion-focused coping is conceptualized as managing one's emotions and cognitive responses, with a primary emphasis on changing patterns of thinking. Emotion-focused coping strategies are influenced by traditional norms that encourage male domination in intimate relationships

(Zaker et al., 2012). Problem-focused coping in the context of IPV involves using various strategies to address and resolve the abuse, often by seeking assistance from external sources of support (Zaker et al., 2012). External sources include family and friends as the primitive sources of support sought by women experiencing IPV (Ansara & Hindin, 2010). The problem-focused coping mechanism has been the most commonly used strategy to reduce mental problems (Zaker et al., 2012). Conroy (2014) argues that the problem-focused mechanism is not common in rural areas and this leave women exposed to IPV. However, research has found that even though victims of domestic violence employed the problem-focused strategy they tend to break the silence by reporting to law enforcement officials and obtaining protection orders (Gumede, 2014).

Furthermore, research has shown that victims of IPV utilise counselling services to cope with violence, and these services include therapy with mental health professionals, volunteering at churches, and group counselling (Freeland, Goldberg & Stephenson, 2018). A qualitative study on faith and intimate partner violence in rural South Africa, has shown that women who experienced IPV rely on the role of faith as a coping mechanism while navigating financial difficulties (Ramos et al., 2024). Letsoalo et al. (2025) found that survivors of IPV employed various strategies to cope with IPV which involves spiritual resilience, seeking support from professional practitioners, and relying on distraction activities which can be both healthy and unhealthy. This suggests that victims of IPV adopt diverse coping mechanisms in response to abuse. However, research also shows that resilience and coping are shaped by factors such as childhood experiences, personal identity, and intersectional marginalization (Chikwira, 2019). Beyond the higher education context, studies with incarcerated women illustrate how resilience and coping are often framed by negotiation of oppressive identities and institutional constraints. Qhogwana (2020) demonstrates how women in maximum-security prisons negotiate stigmatized offender identities while simultaneously attempting to

construct alternative, dignified self-definitions. This resonates with how survivors of IPV within universities negotiate stigma, shame, and silence while striving to maintain their sense of self.

Building on the insights from the literature on IPV, coping, and resilience, this thesis draws on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Intersectionality Theory to examine how multiple, interrelated layers of influence, ranging from individual and relational to structural and societal, intersect with factors such as gender, class, and identity to shape women's experiences and responses to IPV.

2.13. Conclusion

This chapter has comprehensively presented the literature review about IPV. The chapter further discussed the concept IPV, and describing the multiple forms of abuse. The chapter delved into the prevalence of IPV from different points and highlighting that students' experience IPV within higher education sector in South Africa. Moreover, the chapter explained the precipitants of IPV including, cultural factors, the practice of lobola, alcohol, transmission and normalization of abuse, masculinity, and ICT, and highlighted compounded issues that reinforces IPV. Furthermore, the chapter highlighted the challenges that are faced when reporting, mental health problems and coping mechanisms that are employed to cope with IPV.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical frameworks that were used to guide the study. In this study two theoretical frameworks were used to explain the multifaceted problem of IPV, namely the ecological model and the intersectionality.

3.1.1. Ecological Model

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how multiple, interrelated layers of the social environment shape experiences and perceptions of intimate partner violence (IPV). In this study, the ecological model is used to explore how various social systems influence university students' understanding and responses to IPV. The theory consists of five interconnected levels: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The **microsystem** represents the most immediate level of interaction, encompassing close relationships and direct environments such as family, peers, and schools. Sheng (2020) explains that individuals who are exposed to violence or experience maltreatment within their family environments are more likely to replicate such behaviours in their intimate relationships later in life.

The **mesosystem** refers to the interactions between two or more microsystems—for instance, the relationship between home and school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Research has shown that schools play a crucial role in shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviours toward violence. According to the World Health Organization (2012), educational institutions can serve as key platforms for fostering awareness and prevention of IPV. Students who receive

education about IPV within the school context are likely to develop informed attitudes and responses toward violence in their peer groups, families, and intimate relationships.

The **exosystem** encompasses the broader social structures that indirectly influence individuals, even though they may not participate in them directly (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). This level includes both formal and informal systems such as community structures, local government, and the mass media (Sheng, 2020). For example, media representations of gender and relationships can shape societal attitudes toward violence and acceptable behaviour.

The **macrosystem** represents the overarching cultural and societal context that influences individual development. It includes cultural beliefs, ideologies, values, and social norms (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Heise (2011) notes that prevailing social norms—such as those promoting "male honour" and "female obedience"—can legitimise violence and perpetuate unequal power dynamics within intimate relationships, thereby increasing the risk of IPV.

Finally, the **chronosystem** captures the dimension of time, reflecting how experiences and environmental influences evolve across the lifespan (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Early exposure to IPV can have lasting psychological and behavioural consequences, including mental health challenges, risky sexual behaviours, and poor academic performance (Amar & Gennaro, 2005).

In this study, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory is applied to analyse how these multiple, interacting layers shape university students' perceptions and responses to IPV. The following section further elaborates on how these interconnected systems influence experiences of violence in university contexts.

At the individual level (Microsystem), students' attitudes toward IPV are shaped by personal experiences, beliefs, and socialisation. Research suggests that men are less likely to

report IPV due to masculine norms that discourage vulnerability (Connell, 2005), while women may internalize IPV as part of gendered relationship dynamics (Jewkes et al., 2015).

At the relationship level (Mesosystem), power imbalances, coercion, and emotional dependence influence perceptions of IPV. Some students may normalize controlling behaviours due to cultural scripts that equate jealousy with love (Wood & Jewkes, 2001). The dynamics of peer relationships also shape how students respond to IPV; male victims, for example, may face ridicule rather than support from friends, reinforcing silence around abuse (Douglas & Hines, 2011).

At the community level (Exosystem), institutional responses to IPV play a significant role in shaping whether students seek help. A lack of trust in law enforcement and university support services discourages victims from reporting abuse (Machisa et al., 2017). Universities, while offering counselling and advocacy services, often fail to address IPV effectively due to stigma, resource constraints, or a lack of gender-sensitive interventions (Sikweyiya & Jewkes, 2012).

At the societal level (Macrosystem), patriarchal norms and legal frameworks influence perceptions of IPV. Traditional gender roles dictate that men should be dominant and women submissive, which not only justifies male-perpetrated violence but also minimises female aggression (Mshweshwe, 2020). Furthermore, cultural practices such as lobola (bride price) reinforce power imbalances in relationships, making it difficult for women to leave abusive partners (Chireshe, 2015). Societal definitions of IPV also shape how students interpret their experiences, with some failing to recognize psychological abuse or coercive control as forms of violence (Stark, 2007).

The Chronosystem considers the role of time in shaping experiences and perceptions of IPV, emphasising both socio-historical shifts and individual life transitions. Over time,

changing gender norms, legal reforms, and digital influences have significantly altered how students understand and respond to IPV. For example, increasing awareness of gender-based violence, fuelled by social movements such as #MeToo and #AmINext, has led to greater recognition of psychological abuse and coercive control as forms of IPV. Legal changes, including amendments to domestic violence laws, have also influenced societal attitudes by broadening definitions of abuse and strengthening protections for survivors (Copp et al., 2019).

3.1.2. Intersectionality

Crenshaw (1989) coined the intersectionality theory to understand the experiences of women of colour by recognising structural forces of inequality. According to Sololoff and Dupont (2005) posits that individuals with different backgrounds faces various vulnerabilities because of overlapping identities. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) provides an essential lens for analysing how gender, race, class, and sexuality interact to shape experiences of IPV among university students. Women of colour, for instance, may face additional barriers in reporting abuse due to racialised stereotypes that frame them as either strong and unbreakable or submissive and deserving of male control (Collins, 2000; Gqola, 2015). Similarly, male victims encounter double marginalisation as they are often excluded from IPV discourse due to the assumption that men cannot be victims, and they are ridiculed when they attempt to seek help (Swan et al., 2008).

Intersectionality highlights how layered identities, such as gender, class, race, and social status, shape women's experiences of violence and marginalization. Qhogwana's (2020) work on incarcerated women shows how the "offender identity" intersects with structural inequalities to reinforce stigma and exclusion. Similarly, for university students, being young, female, and financially dependent intersects with patriarchal cultures to reinforce silence around IPV.

Economic inequalities further complicate IPV experiences. Female students who are financially dependent on their partners may tolerate abuse for survival, particularly in cases of transactional relationships where material support is exchanged for companionship (Zembe et al., 2015). Additionally, LGBTQ+ students face unique forms of IPV that remain underreported due to the heteronormative framing of violence in both legal and support systems (Messinger, 2017).

3.1.3. Conclusion

The ecological model and intersectionality framework were discussed in detail to explore how students understand and response to IPV. The ecological model and intersectionality theory, this study captures the multi-layered nature of IPV among university students. The ecological model provides a structural understanding of the social and institutional forces that shape IPV, while intersectionality ensures that the analysis accounts for how gender, race, class, and other identities intersect to create different experiences of violence and help-seeking. These theoretical perspectives guided the study in exploring how students understand, respond to, and navigate IPV within the university environment.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief description of research processes that were used to compile the research methodology section where the researcher outlines the design and methodological components that were used to answer the research aims of the study. The aim of the study was to examine gendered perspectives of intimate partner violence (IPV). The researcher used two self-tailored vignettes as data collection tools. Data was analysed using thematic analysis. This chapter also outlines the trustworthiness, procedures, and ethical considerations observed by the researcher in conducting the study.

4.2 Research question

What are perspectives of university students on interpersonal partner violence at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg?

4.3 Primary aim

The core aim of the study was to investigate gendered perspectives surrounding intimate partner violence (IPV) amongst university students at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

4.4 Objectives of the study

- To examine the perspectives on the nature of intimate partner violence experienced by university students.
- To identify the socio-cultural factors influencing perceptions and responses to intimate partner violence among university students.
- To examine gender-specific coping mechanisms employed by university students, in response to intimate partner violence.

4.5 Research approach and design

4.5.1 Research approach

A qualitative research methodology was utilized conducting this research study. A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because its main objective is to investigate a phenomenon methodically while gaining in-depth understanding through participants' ideas, how do they feel, thoughts, perceptions, and their lived experiences (Ataro, 2020). According to Aspers and Corte (2019), a qualitative approach is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretative and naturalistic approach. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their context in the attempt to make sense of and interpret the phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. It is used in the exploration of meanings of social phenomena as experienced by participants, in their natural context. Furthermore, Creswell (2014) posits that qualitative approach focuses on exploring and understanding the meanings which participants ascribe to a social problem. Qualitative approach enables the researcher to understand issues by investigating them in their own specific context and the meanings that individuals bring to them. Qualitative research captures participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior (Tenny, Brannan & Brannan, 2017). It answers the "how and why" questions within the research and mostly focuses on the data that is concerned about the feelings, perceptions, and emotions utilizing unstructured approaches such as focus group interviews to collect data (Taherdoost, 2020). Meaning that it enables participants to explain how, why, or what they were thinking, feeling, and experiencing at certain events of interest.

This research study explored university students' perspectives on IPV. A qualitative approach was appropriate, as it allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding from the participants' viewpoints. The researcher examined the social issue of IPV in the context of participants and attempted to understand how participants interpret IPV. In addition, students'

perceptions were examined to comprehend their interpretation of IPV as it is a multifaceted phenomenon.

4.5.2. Research design

Research design is the plan of action, which acts as a framework of the study to achieve its objectives (Bezuidenhout, 2011). According to Creswell (2014) research design is an inquiry which provides specific guidelines in research and involves step by step procedure which is adopted by a researcher before data collection and analysis process to achieve the research objective in a valid way. This definition is in line with Creswell and Poth (2016), who state that research design refers to the entire study conducted from identifying problems to the study of research questions leading to data collection, analysis, and writing the final report. In essence, the research design translates a research problem into data analysis to provide relevant answers to research questions adequately. A research design articulates the type of data required, the methods that are going to be used to collect data and analysis techniques to answer the research questions. For this study, the researcher adopted an exploratory design, to answer appropriately research questions of this study. According to Drew (2023), exploratory research designs refer to a type of research that is conducted with the purpose of gaining a general understanding of a research topic when there is a limited clarity about the problem. Exploratory research as a qualitative methodology is used when researchers have a limited understanding of the topic at hand and aim to gain more insights into the subject (Orina et al., 2015). In this study, the researcher employed exploratory research design to allow participants to share their understanding of IPV. Furthermore, using exploratory research design was appropriate, as it allowed the researcher to gain more insight into students' perspectives about IPV.

4.6 Population, Sampling Strategy and Study Setting

4.6.1 Population

Majid (2018) defines population as a targeted group that contains the characteristics that the researcher is interested in investigating. The research population for this study involved both male and female postgraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and were aged 23-40. The participants demonstrated understanding of IPV and interest in participating in the study. The exclusion criteria for this study required that participants had neither perpetrated nor experienced IPV. Additionally, students who were not registered at the University of the Witwatersrand, undergraduate students, and those younger than 23 or older than 40 were excluded.

4.6.2 Study Setting

This current study was conducted at the University of the Witwatersrand premises in Johannesburg, Gauteng province, South Africa. The University of the Witwatersrand, is a public research institution of higher learning, is situated in the northern area of Johannesburg. The university has its origins in the mining industry and was founded in 1896 as the South African School of Mines in Kimberly (Murry, 2022). The University of the Witwatersrand is considered as the third oldest South African University, which continues operating (Mchgregor, 2010).

4.7 Sampling procedure

Sampling is a process of selecting participants from the entire population with the aim of having several participants who can assist in answering the research questions (Otze and Manterola, 2017). In this research study non-probability sampling was used, and two sampling techniques were used, specifically purposive and snowballing sampling techniques. Purposive sampling involves selecting individuals who are knowledgeable about or have more experience

to the phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano, 2011). Bernade and Spradley (1979) emphasise the importance of participants being available and willing to take part in the study, as well as having the ability to communicate their experiences and perceptions in an expressive and reflective manner.In this study, the researcher purposefully selected participants who could engage appropriately in the focus group discussions and provide in-depth understanding of the research objectives. The study excluded participants who had direct experiences of IPV, either as victims or perpetrators, but acknowledged the potential for vicarious or indirect exposure to such experiences.

Intimate partner violence is perceived as a sensitive topic and gendered issue that individuals may be reluctant to discuss. Therefore, to mitigate such barriers in this study, the researcher employed snowball sampling to optimize access to the participants. According to Naderifar et al (2017), snowball sampling is utilized when the participants with desired characteristics are difficult to access. In this research report, the researcher used snowball sampling to improve access to the participants, as it was difficult to locate male participants, and it was more convenient for the researcher.

The sample of the research was limited to the University of Witwatersrand postgraduate students. Two focus groups were conducted at the institution. One group consisted of six males, and the second group had six female students. Two self-tailored vignettes were used to aid the focus group discussion. In this current study, participants were recruited using students' emails, requesting them to voluntarily be part of the study. The administrative staff at the University of Witwatersrand sent out the recruitment letter (see appendix G) to postgraduate students email accounts and interested participants contacted the researcher to participate in the study.

4.8 Research instruments

In this study, two self-tailored vignettes were used to facilitate focus group discussions and collection data (see appendix A). Vignettes refer to shorter stories about a hypothetical person or individuals that are utilized in qualitative research to collect information about participants' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours (Gourlay et al., 2014). The researcher presented fictional scenarios and research participants were requested to comment on how they would have reacted or how they feel the third party should react in these scenarios. Vignettes allow participants to share a variety of perspectives from the points of view of the vignettes' characters (Gourlay et al., 2014; Miller & Brewer, 2003). The use of self-designed vignettes in this study was appropriate, as it enabled the researcher to gather responses from a third-person perspective. This created an immediate sense of distance, which was beneficial for exploring the sensitive topic of IPV (Miller & Brewer, 2003).

4.8.1 Piloting

According to Dikko (2016), pre-testing means a mini version of research in preparation of a full-scale study and is conducted with the aim to pre-test research instruments. The pre-testing of the research instrument is achieved through a small number of participants comprising of same characteristics as those of the main research study. In this study, pre-testing of the two self-tailored vignettes was conducted by the researcher with six female students from the University of the Witwatersrand. In this study, pre-testing was a way of preparing the researcher to appropriately facilitate and probe during the actual focus group discussions. Van Wijk and Harrison (2013), indicate that pre-testing helps to highlight unnecessary questions, determining whether each question elicits adequate responses, allowing the researcher to practice and perfect interviewing techniques. In this study, the researcher was able to determine

which questions were worth keeping, and which ones needed to be adapted or removed. Through the pre-testing phase, the researcher was able to switch genders from the vignettes, and to explore the intensity of IPV as perpetrated by females. The pre-test focus group discussions data was not included as part of the research study. Moreover, this pre-testing added value and credibility to the research study.

4.9 Data collection Procedure

In this current study, the data collection method that was selected is focus group discussions. Focus group discussions is a qualitative method of data collection in which the researcher interacts with a group of 6-8 participants (Barrett & Twycross, 2018), who originate from similar social and sharing similar experiences (Liamputtong, 2011The use of focus group discussions in this study was appropriate, as it allowed the researcher to gather rich qualitative insights into how participants perceive, experience, and respond to IPV, particularly within the educational context. The interaction between researchers and participants allows the establishment of rapport (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). To establish rapport in this study, the researcher introduced himself to the participants and welcomed them at Umthombo building, Department of Psychology, where focus group discussions were conducted. In addition, the researcher comprehensively explained the main purpose of the research through the participation information sheet, and given participants consent forms to be signed. All participants were given the opportunity to ask further questions in relation to the research study. The participants for this research were all postgraduate students at the University of Witwatersrand.

Focus group discussions offer an efficient method for researchers to gather the perceptions of multiple participants simultaneously (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). As participants engage in discussions on the same phenomenon, diverse opinions emerge, fostering a dynamic and interactive exchange of ideas. This can provide the researcher with

rich data from the participants about the area of interest (Barret & Twycross, 2018). In this study, focus group discussions provided the researcher with rich data and allowed participants to express their opinions on the phenomenon of IPV. In addition, two focus group discussions were conducted consisting of 6 participants per group. One group consisted of females while the second group consisted of male participants. Each focus group discussion lasted for 1 hour and 30 minutes. The researcher chose to conduct separate focus group discussions because IPV is a highly sensitive topic, and men and women experience it differently due to gendered power relations and societal expectations. Conducting gender-specific discussions allowed the researcher to capture the unique perceptions and responses of both male and female students. This separation also created a safer and more comfortable space for participants to share their views openly, facilitating the emergence of gender-specific themes that might otherwise have been overlooked. All focus group discussions were conducted in English; however, participants occasionally used their mother tongue to express certain words that were difficult to articulate in English. Words spoken in Sepedi and IsiZulu were translated into English.

4.10 Data Management

Data management refers to a multistep procedure that involves obtaining, protecting, and storing data to allow accurate analysis and enhancing the credibility of the data (Dhudasia et al., 2023 & Grillenberger & Romeike, 2017). In this study, during the data collection phase all the participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. The audio-recordings were transcribed by the researcher word by word. In addition, the researcher saved the audio-recordings of the focus group discussions and transcribed data in one folder, and the folder was protected with a password.

4.11 Data Analysis

For this current study, data was analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is defined as an analysis that identifies meanings, patterns and reporting the themes from the data

(Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a method that captures participants' findings, experiences, meanings, and realities from their perspectives. When applying thematic analysis, codes and themes are used to identify patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The researcher used six steps of thematic analysis to identify and capture participants' perspectives (Braun & Clark, 2006). The first step was familiarisation with the data set. The researcher familiarised himself with the data set by listening and transcribing the focus group discussions manually. This phase involved reading and rereading actively to identify anything meaningful.

The second step was coding, which involves developing codes from the data set. Through coding the researcher organised the data into meaningful groups that answer the research questions of the study. The researcher coded the data manually, by systematically immersing through the whole data set and identifying interesting characteristics of the data.

In the third step, the researcher immensely sorted the codes and collected extracts from the data set and identify possible themes. In the fourth step, the researcher refined, reread and produced preliminary themes that were identified in the previous step. Step five, involved identifying the essence of what each theme is about and writing a detailed analysis. The final refinement of the themes was established by identifying the "story" that each theme entails. The final step involves writing up the report. After all comprehensive description of the themes, the researcher started to write up the final research report. At this stage, the researcher compiled all the themes that meaningfully answerered the research questions of the study.

4.12. Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, reliability cannot be established in the same way as in quantitative research due to the subjective nature of the data, which is shaped by individuals' perceptions and opinions. Instead, the quality of qualitative research findings is ensured

through the concept of trustworthiness, which assesses the extent to which the findings can be trusted (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985, as cited in Stahl & King, 2020) identified four key criteria for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

4.12.1 Credibility

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985 as cited in Stahl & King, 2020), credibility asks the question of whether the research findings are congruent with reality. Moreover, it determines whether the findings are trustworthy and accurately reflect the reality of participants' experiences. This means that the researcher's interpretation of the findings accurately reflects the participants' perspectives. In this study, to enhance the credibility of the findings, the researcher shared the transcriptions of the focus group discussions with the participants to verify their accuracy and ensure they authentically represent their viewpoints. The researcher and supervisor had regular discussion during the data analysis phase to share and compare the preliminary findings, and interpretations with the raw data. At the end of the research report, the researcher presented the findings to participants for verification of the interpretations.

4.12.2 Transferability

Transferability deals with the questions of whether the findings can be transferred to other context with other participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Firstly, ensuring transferability in this study the researcher has provided, the context in which the research was conducted, its setting, description of sample, sample size, and sampling strategy, and supporting facts regarding sampling method opted in the study. Moreover, the researcher has provided, an explanation of research methods, demographic information of participants, and inclusion criteria of the research.

4.12.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the extent to which research findings are consistent and whether the research findings will be dependable if the research were to be replicated in a similar context. This means that if the study was repeated, in the same setting, following similar methodological strategies and same participants; similar findings would be generated (Shenton, 2004; Megheirkouni & Moir, 2023). In this study, the researcher provided a comprehensive methodological process to allow other investigators to replicate the study. To establish dependability in this research report, was through an audit trial. The researcher ensured dependability by performing data quality checks, peer review was part of the process, provided the participants with relevant documents before data collection, such as the ethics certificate and the approval letter from the supervisor. These processes permit other researchers to replicate the study.

4.12.4 Confirmability

Confirmability means the findings of the research study could be corroborated by other researchers. It is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the enquirer's imagination but clearly derived from the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p.3.). In this study, confirmability was established through audit trial. The researcher provided in-depth decisions made during the research process, sampling, preliminary findings, and description of data management, to enable other researchers to reconstruct the development of the research step-by-step through the decisions and procedures outlined. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989 cited in Nowell et al., 2017) confirmability is established first when credibility, transferability, and dependability are all achieved. The researcher provided quotations from the raw data to demonstrate the relationship between data and interpretation of the findings.

4.13. Ethical consideration

Research ethics deals with variables that need to be carried out on a daily basis, including the protection of dignity of the participants and the publications of the findings (Fouka & Mantzorou, 2011). The major ethical issues when conducting research involve informed consent, respect for anonymity and confidentiality, and protection of the participants from any kind of harm (Fouka & Mantzorou, 2011). This study abided to the Nuremberg Code, the Declaration of Helsinki, and the Belmont Report which serve as the ethical principles which form the basis of research (Davis et al., 2017). The ethical guidelines that the researcher adhered to when conducting this research study are discussed below.

4.13.1. Permission to conduct the study

Ethical certificate (see appendix E) was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Non-Medical) of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and protocol number: MASPR-24-08. Furthermore, the researcher obtained permission from the Office of the Registrar to conduct the study in institution premises (see appendix F).

4.13.2. Informed consent and Voluntary participation

Informed consent deals with informing participants regarding the potential risks of research study and obtaining their agreement to participate in the research study and is a standard procedure of research that involves human subjects (Perrault et al., 2018). It is not just a standard procedure but informs the participants about their rights, responsibilities, the anticipated benefits and potential risk prior to their participation. The concept of informed consent indicates that participants must adequately be informed of the aims, methods, sources of funding, and all-important aspects of the research study. The potential participants must be informed of the right to withdraw consent to participate at any time without reprisal and freely decide to volunteer (Millum & Bromwich, 2021). In this study, the researcher provided all potential participants with all information about the study through participation information

sheet (see Annexure PA) so that they understand what is required from them and enabling them to make informed decisions. Moreover, after making an informed decision about their participation, they were given consent forms to be signed for participation and audio recording (see Annexure Consent form). Participants were informed that their participation is voluntary, and anyone has the right to withdraw at any time without any penalties. Furthermore, they were informed that there's no incentives for participating in the research.

4.13.3. Confidentiality

According to Sieber (1992, p. 52 cited in Kaiser, 2012) confidentiality refers to "agreements with a person about what may done with their data". In research study, confidentiality deals with ensuring that no one other than the researcher knows who participated in the study. It means the information is disseminated to those with the need to know and to not divulged to others (Ethicist, 2015). In this study, the researcher ensures that no one other than the researcher and his supervisor had access to audio-recording of the focus group discussions and transcribed data. Moreover, the documents that contain personal information about the participants, such as signed consent forms by the participants, were filed and kept in a locked cabinet. The audio-recordings and transcripts of the focus groups discussions were stored in one folder of the computer and encrypted with password. Moreover, adhering to the principle of confidentiality was to ensure participant's privacy is maintained. The researcher is obliged to ensure that any information shared by participants is treated with respect and dignity; it does not violate the participant's interest and well-being (Bos & Bos, 2020).

3.13.4 Anonymity

According to Vainio (2013), anonymity involves not disclosing the identity of research participants in the research report. For Clark (2006), anonymity means information of

the participant identity, such as names, nationality, age, place of residence, and telephone numbers should be removed from the final research report. In this study, anonymity was not maintained because the researcher used focus group discussions to collect data. However, the researcher and the focus group participants agreed to maintain confidentiality and not disclose any information discussed during the sessions. In this study, the researcher adhered to the ethical principle of anonymity by not disclosing identifying information of the participants. This was maintained by allowing participants to replace their real names and assigning themselves with pseudonyms that they prefer. Moreover, all the research data was stored in a computer and will be kept for 5 years. The research data obtained from this research may be used for educational purposes for writing articles and the results will be disseminated in Wits WIRedSpace.

4.13.5. Avoidance of deception

Deception in research occurs when the researcher blatantly misleads the participants of the study about important information of the study or when there is intentionally withholding relevant information from participants (Kimmel, 2012). In this study, the researcher did not mislead or withhold any important information of this study, this was achieved through provision of participation information sheet to participants and allowing them to make informed decisions about the participation in the study.

4.14. Reflexivity

Reflexivity exercises how qualitative researcher maintains self-awareness and critical reflection on their biases and preconceptions as they influence the research process (Ide & Beddoe, 2024; McLeod, 2024). The purpose of reflexivity is to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative research by ensuring that the researcher's influence is transparent (McLeod, 2024). Therefore, reflexivity is an ongoing and multifaceted process through which researchers critically examine and evaluate how their own subjectivity and relationships with

participants may influence data collection and interpretation (McLeod, 2024; Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). My interest in a study that focuses on IPV was influenced by personal experience as IPV was more common in my community yet not challenged. This impacted my childhood significantly and made me question how, as society, we normalize such barbaric acts. This made me realize that addressing interpersonal partner violence requires gender inclusive research that explores how both genders experience and respond to it due to gender norms that shape experiences. Another element that influenced the selection of the research topic was higher rate of IPV cases among university students in South Africa as it is consistently reported on media. This made me realise that IPV is an intergenerational issue and is common amongst university students. Additionally, being a man, men are usually labelled as the perpetrators of IPV, without acknowledging that males may be victims too. Therefore, I had my own biasness during topic selection and conducting the study, so self-reflexivity was very important in this study. To enhance reflexivity throughout the research process, I tailored a self-reflexive journal where I reflected: my background, experiences, my relationship with participants, and biases. Then, later I used the journal during data analysis and writing of the research report. This enabled me to remain aware of my positionality, ensuring fairness and striving for analytical rigor.

4.15. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter presented methodological components employed to conduct the study. This study employed a qualitative approach and exploratory design to illustrate the area of the study. This chapter provided an overview of population, sampling strategy and setting that were selected to execute the study. The chapter further discussed the instruments that were used to facilitate focus group discussion and their appropriateness towards the study. In addition, this chapter discussed the data collection procedures, data analysis, and

management of data. Lastly this chapter elaborated on the principles related to trustworthiness, ethical considerations and reflexivity of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the key findings from the study and discusses themes in relation to relevant theoretical frameworks and literature. The analysis is based on data gathered from both male and female university students regarding their perceptions and understandings of intimate partner violence (IPV), particularly in the context of the vignettes shared with them. Table 1 below illustrates participants' demographics.

Demographic information of the participants.

The study sample consisted of 12 postgraduate students, male, female, and non-binary, from the University of the Witwatersrand. This research included participants of all genders to ensure diverse representation. Participants selected pseudonyms to protect their identities. Table 1 presents the demographic information of participants, including their chosen pseudonyms, race, field of specialization, and level of study. The participants were between ages of 24-35 years and were all postgraduates studying at the University of Witwatersrand.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race	Field of Study	Year of Study
Tshego	24	Female	Black	Masters in psychology	Postgraduate
Sandy	28	Female	Black	Masters in Psychology	Postgraduate
Ava	25	Female	White (Serbian)	Masters in Psychology	Postgraduate
Blue	25	Female	Black	Masters in Political Sciences	Postgraduate
Makz	32	Female	Black	Masters in Psychology	Postgraduate
Zoe	24	Female	White	Masters in Psychology	Postgraduate
Jay Adams	22	Male	Black	Molecular and cell biology	Third year
Valuta	24	Male	Black	Masters in computer Sciences and applied Mathematics	Postgraduate
Donna Powers	20	Non-binary	Black	Bachelors of Arts in Law	Postgraduate
Keith	21	Non-binary	Black	Medicine	Third of study
Mpho	22	Male	Black	Honours Big data analytics	Postgraduate
Obakeng	24	Male	Black	Medicine and Surgery	Level Four

Table 1: Participant Demographics

There are two types of coding, namely a-priori and in-vivo coding. In qualitative data analysis, a-priori coding refers to the use of codes that are developed in advance of the analysis, often derived from existing theory, literature, or research questions. This deductive approach helps researchers organise data according to pre-established concepts but may risk overlooking unexpected insights (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In contrast, in-vivo coding is an inductive strategy where codes are drawn directly from participants' own words in the data. By privileging participants' language, in-vivo coding captures the meanings and expressions most salient to them, thereby preserving their voices and lived experiences (Saldaña, 2021).

In this study, the researcher applied in-vivo rather than a-priori coding. In other words, instead of being pre-determined from existing theory or prior research, these themes arose inductively from participants' narratives (Nowell et al., 2017). This approach allowed the researcher to remain attentive to the voices of participants and to highlight unanticipated patterns in their accounts (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Interestingly, many of the emergent themes were common to both male and female participants, including understandings of intimate partner violence (IPV), coercive control, mental health consequences, the role of alcohol, the need for awareness and education, the impact of intergenerational violence, and concerns around support systems and institutional responses. While these shared themes revealed broad agreement in how students of different genders perceive IPV, particularly regarding academic impacts and emotional harm, presenting all of these overlapping concerns risked repetition.

To maintain analytical depth and avoid redundancy, the researcher chose to present slightly different themes for each gender, emphasising areas where perceptions diverged in focus or emphasis despite broad commonality. This approach provided a more nuanced understanding of gendered perceptions and experiences of IPV among university students. The themes are therefore presented as follows:

Females	Males
Understanding of Intimate partner violence	Mental health and Academic performance
Lack of trust in law enforcement, institutions and friends.	Intergenerational transmission of violence
Support Systems for victims of abuse	Traditional masculinity and power dynamic

Table 2: Themes by Gender

Each theme is analysed using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1979) and Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989) to explore the multiple, interacting systems and social identities that shape how IPV is perceived and experienced.

5.2. Themes from Female Participants

5.2.1. Understanding of intimate Partner Violence

This theme explores students' understanding of interpersonal partner violence, as a multifaceted societal problem that requires multiple approaches that goes beyond conventional definitions focused on physical abuse. It demonstrates that IPV involves a range of violent behaviours, including physical, psychological, sexual, and more awareness on psychological abuse dimensions of coercive control, stalking and sexual coercion. Below are some quotations from participants.

“I think that it sounds like quite an emotionally abusive and psychologically abusive relationship, that Johannes and Jane have” **(Ava)**

“I feel like Johannes is in a toxic and abusive relationship with Jane which could be dangerous and then because the initial signs of the health relationship of them is that they have deteriorated it into a physical and emotional abuse. So Jane’s behaviour is escalating and Johannes is danger” **(Blue)**

“My perception of the situation, there is definitely abuse, emotionally so and a bit of physical abuse because there is a time were stated that Jane shoved Johannes to the ground and beat him” **(Makz)**

“There is a lot going on physical abuse, psychological abuse, but they also might be sexual assault because this person clearly is being coerced into constantly having sex with this person without protection despite them saying that they want to be protecting the situation. So, there is sexual assaults into intimate partner violence and Yeah, psychological abuse and verbal abuse” **(Sandy)**

“uhm I think the problem is like a domestic abuse and specifical Johannes is experiencing. Physical and emotional abuse from partner Jane” **(Blue)**

“I don’t think of one concept for it because the information holds different things, but an umbrella term domestic violence or abuse I think” **(Tshego)**

“I wouldn’t go as far as calling it domestic violence because domestic violence is more than legal term to if for example you and your partner get into a fight in your house then it's considered domestic violence. But for example if they were just having a fight outside the campus or outside the lecture venue is not considered domestic violence so it would be maybe we can conceptualise it as like intimate partner violence, like it's abuse that is psychological, that is also physical as opposed to saying domestic

violence, because we don't know we're not told here if they were at home and then she pushed him onto the ground. We just told that she shot them into the ground And so we can't we wish yeah, for legal purposes. It's domestic violence, but yeah" **(Sandy)**

"I'm just going to quote the waiting out of the lecture hall, so Jane has this tendency of constantly waiting, which I think could be stalking, this person can always follow you wherever you go I guess" **(Makz)**

The ecological model and intersectionality theory provide a complete framework for understanding how intimate partner violence (IPV) is perceived and experienced. The students' discussion reflects the complexity of IPV, highlighting its multiple forms, the gendered dynamics at play, and the structural barriers that shape victims' experiences.

From an ecological perspective, IPV can be analysed at different interacting levels: individual, relationship, community, and societal. At the individual level, personal beliefs and psychological factors influence how abuse is understood. Some students in the discussion recognise that IPV extends beyond physical violence to include emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse. For example, **Ava** and **Blue** describe the relationship between Jane and Johannes as emotionally and psychologically abusive, while **Makz** and **Sandy** identify physical violence and coercive sexual encounters. Their perspectives align with research indicating that IPV is not limited to physical harm but encompasses coercive control and manipulation, which can be equally damaging (Heise, 1998; Walby, Towers, & Francis, 2022). However, there remains confusion over terminology, with some students debating whether the situation should be classified as domestic violence or intimate partner violence. This uncertainty reflects broader societal misconceptions about IPV and the ways in which gender influences its recognition. Male victims, in particular, struggle to self-identify as abused due to social norms that equate masculinity with strength and emotional resilience (Douglas & Hines, 2011; Machisa et al., 2011).

At the relationship level, the dynamics of power and control emerge as central themes. Jane's coercive behaviour, including isolating Johannes from his friends and making decisions about their sexual relationship without his consent, aligns with Stark's (2007) theory of coercive control. The control exerted in the relationship reflects broader gendered dynamics, where abuse is not solely about physical harm but also about dominance and psychological manipulation. Despite this, there is a noticeable hesitation among students to fully acknowledge Johannes as a victim. While female victims of IPV are often readily identified, male victims face greater scrutiny, suggesting that dominant narratives about IPV continue to centre women as victims and men as perpetrators. Research indicates that although there is considerable evidence showing that men can also be victims of various forms of abuse, male survivors of IPV often receive limited recognition (Hines, 2025). Furthermore, the mention of stalking behaviours, where Jane persistently follows Johannes, highlights how IPV can manifest in ways that extend beyond physical violence. Research on post-separation abuse has shown that stalking is a common tactic used by abusers to maintain control over their partners, often escalating after the victim attempts to distance themselves from the relationship (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

The community level shapes how IPV is recognised and responded to, particularly in relation to law enforcement and institutional support systems. Some students mention the difficulty of reporting abuse, especially for male victims, who may fear disbelief or ridicule. This aligns with research showing that men who experience IPV are often met with skepticism when they seek support, reinforcing barriers to disclosure (Douglas & Hines, 2011; Machisa et al., 2011). Additionally, legal definitions and institutional frameworks contribute to the confusion surrounding IPV. **Sandy's** assertion that domestic violence is typically associated with abuse that occurs in the home, rather than in public spaces like a university campus, reflects a common misunderstanding of IPV. This highlights a broader issue where legal and

institutional frameworks fail to fully capture the complexity of abuse, leaving many victims without adequate recourse (Walby et al., 2022).

At the societal level, cultural norms and gender ideologies play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of IPV. Traditional masculinity in many African societies equates manhood with stoicism and strength, discouraging men from expressing vulnerability or seeking help. Several students refer to idioms and cultural expressions that reinforce this notion, such as "monna ke nku o llela teng," which implies that men should suffer in silence. These beliefs mirror broader societal expectations that men should not display weakness, making it difficult for male victims of IPV to come forward. The discussion further reveals that legal and institutional frameworks often fail to recognise male victimisation, reinforcing the idea that IPV is primarily an issue affecting women. This reflects Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity, which conditions men to suppress their emotions and discourages them from reporting abuse. Similarly, cultural narratives that encourage women to endure abusive relationships, such as "bhekezela" demonstrate how traditional gender roles contribute to the normalisation of IPV.

Intersectionality theory provides further insight into how gender, culture, and power intersect to shape experiences of IPV. The students' reflections highlight that IPV is not experienced uniformly but is mediated by broader structural and cultural forces. Gender plays a critical role in determining whose victimisation is recognised and validated, with male victims often dismissed or ridiculed. Cultural norms surrounding masculinity and femininity further reinforce patterns of abuse and silence. The legal and institutional barriers that male victims face suggest that IPV interventions must adopt an intersectional approach, recognising how overlapping systems of power and oppression shape different individuals' experiences of abuse (Crenshaw, 1989; Machisa et al., 2011).

Ultimately, the students' discussion demonstrates that IPV cannot be understood in isolation from the broader social, cultural, and institutional factors that shape its occurrence

and recognition. While many students acknowledge the complexity of IPV, their varying interpretations reflect the ongoing challenges in fully conceptualising abuse beyond traditional gendered narratives. Applying the ecological model and intersectionality theory highlights the urgent need for comprehensive interventions that address IPV at multiple levels. This includes legal reforms that recognise diverse forms of abuse, cultural shifts that challenge harmful gender norms, and institutional measures that provide effective support for all victims, regardless of gender (Chiramba, 2024).

5.2.2. Lack of trust in law enforcement, institutions and friends

This theme examines contributing factors to IPV which is how law enforcement deals with cases of IPV, victims of IPV are blamed, making it difficult for men to report abuses.

> "I think that another thing that could cause the problem is lack of places to report abuse and the police maybe not taking it seriously or attending to reports of abuse quickly Yeah" **(Eva)**

> "I think that perhaps people would feel that they shouldn't bother to report the abuse that they're experiencing because of the distrust and that the police wouldn't do a lot to intervene even if they were to address the case" **(Eva)**

> "I'm not going to have those problems or for example, he's going to think about they are going to laugh at me at the police station, so he might just choose to abscond, like, just maybe the risk where he's staying, he just finds another risk" **(Sandy)**

From an ecological model lens, the students' reflections indicate that victims of IPV, particularly men, often feel discouraged from reporting abuse due to institutional failures, societal stigma, and the anticipated lack of support (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Crenshaw, 1989).

This distrust operates at multiple levels, individual, relational, community, and societal, shaping how victims navigate their experiences and the choices they make in seeking help. At

the individual level, victims of IPV may internalise societal attitudes that downplay their suffering, leading them to believe that reporting the abuse would be futile. As **Eva** notes, victims might hesitate to report their experiences because they assume that the police will not intervene meaningfully. This perception aligns with broader patterns in which victims of IPV, especially those who do not fit the conventional profile of a female survivor, anticipate indifference or even hostility from authorities (Langa, 2010).

Within relationships, the fear of disclosure is compounded by expectations from friends and social networks. **Sandy's** observation that Johannes might be laughed at if he reports his abuse reflects a key issue in male victimisation: the cultural belief that men should not be vulnerable. The reluctance to disclose abuse to friends stems from the broader social script that equates masculinity with strength and emotional stoicism. If seeking help is perceived as weakness, male victims may feel even more isolated, further diminishing their likelihood of seeking institutional support. This aligns with research on gender and IPV, which highlights how dominant norms of masculinity discourage men from acknowledging victimisation (Connell, 2005; Jewkes et al., 2015).

At the community level, institutional distrust is reinforced by repeated failures of law enforcement and social services to address IPV cases with sensitivity and urgency. **Eva's** comment about the police not taking abuse seriously speaks to a widely recognised barrier in IPV interventions: victims are often met with skepticism or outright blame when they seek help. This is echoed in South African studies which reveal that police officers often dismiss or trivialise reports of IPV, particularly when the victim is male (Machisa et al., 2017; Seedat et al., 2009).

At the societal level, legal and cultural frameworks shape how IPV is understood and addressed. The students' reflections suggest that systemic failures in law enforcement contribute to a broader sense of impunity for perpetrators, reinforcing cycles of abuse. If IPV

cases are routinely ignored, victims, especially those whose experiences challenge dominant narratives, may disengage from formal justice processes altogether. **Sandy's** remark that a victim might simply "abscond" rather than seek help highlights how IPV is often addressed through avoidance rather than intervention. This reflects a structural problem where reporting mechanisms fail to offer safety or accountability, forcing victims to remove themselves from danger without institutional support (Furusa & Limberg, 2015).

Intersectionality theory further illuminates how these dynamics are shaped by the intersections of gender, societal expectations, and institutional responses. Male victims, in particular, face compounded barriers due to the intersection of masculinity norms and institutional neglect. The expectation that men should be self-sufficient intersects with legal and social systems that are ill-equipped to recognise or support their experiences. Additionally, race, class, and socioeconomic status further shape how IPV victims interact with the justice system. For instance, Black men in South Africa may encounter additional skepticism or criminalisation when reporting abuse, which further discourages help-seeking (Crenshaw, 1989; Langa, 2010).

The students' observations highlight that IPV cannot be addressed solely at the individual or relational level but must be understood as a structural issue. The failures of law enforcement and social institutions are not isolated but part of a larger systemic pattern that devalues certain victims while reinforcing harmful gender norms. Addressing these challenges requires not only improving institutional responses to IPV but also shifting societal attitudes that discourage victims from seeking help. Institutions must actively work to rebuild trust by ensuring that reporting mechanisms are accessible, sensitive, and responsive to the diverse realities of IPV survivors (Furusa & Limberg, 2015; Jewkes & Morrell, 2018). Without such systemic change, the barriers to reporting IPV will continue to leave many victims, especially those who do not fit dominant narratives, without recourse or support.

5.2.3. Support Systems for victims of abuse

This theme explores the role of university counselling services and advocacy groups in supporting students who experience abuse. It also examines the structural, social, and psychological barriers that may prevent students from accessing these support systems, highlighting the complexities involved in help-seeking within a university context.

> "So, for Johannes, first of all, what comes to mind is reach out to your university, because most universities should have some shape or form of counselling and today's age there's a lot of emphasis on Gender-based Violence especially in terms of what men could possibly experience. I know at WITS, there's quite a few initiatives going around trying to break that stigma, being that both genders, if you want to use binary that both genders can experience Gender-based Violence, so what you should do is to possibly reach out to counselling or to reach out to them, and then they can help facilitate further support, because here you have these academics involved, they're just going to stay possibly at rest. Its mental health, so just get full support, I wanted to say that maybe you should reach out to your friends, but considering my perception of how males engage with each other, you would get more support from the university" **(Zoe).**

> "So it might be worthwhile seeking out counselling, and if they're in university, and they have for example like a Counselling Career and Development Unit, reaching out to them to sort of figure out what's going on internally that's causing her to have this very visceral reaction to the relationship, I think that's what she can do, is get herself help, figure out what's going on" **(Sandy)**.

> "Yeah, like, maybe she definitely needs to go to therapy as well, need to learn maybe to express herself in a different way, because if maybe like you think back to

the beginning of the conversation, that's all she knows, like maybe that's how she knows how to express her emotion" **(Zoe)**.

"I agree with Sandy in terms of The nature of the intervention being effective I think that that is very important and I think that there needs to be a certain degree of resource sharing and collaboration of institutions and communities need to work together because the abuse is complicated the type of support you need is complicated so universities need to collaborate with other universities with stakeholders with the police and develop interventions in that way sharing resources and in a way that's collaborative multifaceted" **(Ava)**.

"So I also feel like with the campaigns the awareness let's not give it to young people only, but let's target the older people because when we're going through situations, advice we seek it from the older people to say, I'm in a situation like this, what should I do and then they're being programmed to behave in that certain way. They'll give me the very bad advice that the campaign is telling me to run away from, so let's target those older people to say, you know what, those older ways, they're not relevant anymore, we can't be passing that kind of education to younger people, we're trying to get rid of the problem. But then like, there's no point in cutting the tree if the roots are still there. So let's start at the root. Yeah" **(Tshego)**.

"I mean, the point still remained. If the universities have these gender-based violence centres, they should be effective in what it is that they're doing. If we're going to the police, the police need to be able to engage appropriately with people who are coming to report abuse to them. Communities, families need to also know how to appropriately engage with people that are going through abuse instead of shaming them. These are the things that we were saying can be done to help in this situation" **(Sandy)**.

The availability and effectiveness of support systems for victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) can be examined through the ecological model, which explains how individual, relationship, community, and societal factors interact to shape access to help. At the individual level, students recognise the importance of university counselling services in addressing IPV. **Zoe** suggests that Johannes should seek help from counselling services at Wits, emphasising that universities are beginning to address gender-based violence (GBV) more inclusively. However, the reluctance of male victims to seek support is shaped by socialised masculinity norms that discourage men from expressing vulnerability (Connell, 2005). The ecological model suggests that individual responses to IPV cannot be separated from broader social contexts; the stigma surrounding male victimhood often deters men from seeking the very services designed to support them.

At the relationship level, the role of peer and familial support becomes crucial. While universities may provide structured interventions, some students express skepticism about seeking help from friends. **Zoe** points out that traditional male friendships may not offer the kind of emotional support Johannes needs, reinforcing the idea that men experiencing IPV often are left without adequate peer support. This supports research showing that male victims are more likely to internalise their experiences rather than disclose them to friends due to fears of ridicule (Douglas & Hines, 2011). Meanwhile, **Tshego** raises an important concern about generational influence, noting that older individuals often pass down harmful advice that discourages victims from leaving abusive relationships. This illustrates how IPV support systems must target both young people and older community members, ensuring that harmful traditional norms do not continue to shape responses to abuse.

At the community level, institutional collaboration is critical in providing holistic support for IPV survivors. **Ava** emphasises that addressing IPV requires resource-sharing and cooperation between universities, advocacy law enforcement, and organisations. However,

institutional responses remain inconsistent, with Sandy pointing out that while universities may have GBV centres, their effectiveness depends on how well they engage with survivors. This reflects a broader issue in IPV interventions, where services may exist but remain inaccessible or ineffective due to inadequate implementation (Machisa et al., 2011). Research has shown that survivors often face bureaucratic hurdles or unresponsive institutions, further discouraging them from seeking help (Jewkes et al., 2015).

At the societal level, broader cultural and legal frameworks shape how IPV support is structured and accessed. **Sandy** highlights the need for law enforcement officers to be trained in responding to IPV cases with sensitivity. Many survivors, particularly those who do not fit the conventional profile of a female victim, face disbelief or outright dismissal when they attempt to report abuse. This reinforces a cycle where victims remain silent, and perpetrators are not held accountable. Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) highlights how overlapping identities, such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status, shape access to support. Male victims, LGBTQ+ survivors, and individuals from marginalised communities often experience compounded barriers when seeking help, making it essential that IPV interventions adopt an inclusive and intersectional approach.

Overall, the students' reflections reveal that while university counselling services and advocacy groups play an important role in supporting IPV survivors, significant barriers remain. Institutional effectiveness, social stigma, generational influences, and law enforcement responses all shape the accessibility and impact of support systems. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-level approach that not only strengthens institutional resources but also shifts societal attitudes toward IPV, ensuring that all survivors, regardless of gender or background, can access the help they need.

5.3 Themes from Male Participants

5.3.1 Mental Health and Academic Performance

This theme explores how experience of IPV can affect students' mental well-being and academic performance. It examines how psychological challenges such as depression and isolation compounded by limited support from family and institutions, can exacerbate the effects of IPV.

> "Lastly, another thing I didn't mention. The fact that also it might not be related to IPV, but we can also assume that from the last statement where Johannes didn't qualify for his examinations could mean that he has the lack of support as well from both his institution and family because again he's isolated in this situation" **(Jay Adams)**

> "In addition to what has been said already I think you can also see that the abuse coming from Jane to Johannes is affecting Johannes in I would say different aspects, physically, emotionally, even academically you can see that he's failing his first semester already so a lot of abuse is going on there" **(Valuta)**

> "First step is then to ask himself why, then if he realizes, oh, maybe I'm depressed, go to therapy, when he goes to therapy, maybe at Counselling and Career Development Unit, something at his university, if they have it, then he'll speak about everything that's been going on, and then they'll be like, okay, well now it looks like you're in an abusive relationship. That's the first thing which can lead him to recognizing that, oh, this is the situation I'm in" **(Keith)**

> "I'm just curious if Lindiwe tells Thandi to leave the relationship, let's saying maybe she gets in another relationship and she find similar situations, she will develop

mental problems like depression because she will feel like she's wrong all the time" **(Mpho)**

"there's a high possibility of being a dropout here. He's not qualifying for his first semester. It just happened within six months. This relationship is like six months and already he's not qualifying for his semester and continuing with this, he might get out of school. Something like that can happen again and again," **(Valuta)**

"I'm going to just be a pessimistic individual. I mean if this cycle continues, I see Johannes failing, because the fact that in such a short time of six months, they're able to fail first semester. It shows that this has taken a huge toll on their mental health and how they engage with their academics. So, the worst-case scenario is them failing. The worst-case scenario, if it's not dealt with, it's just them being in danger." **(Jay Adams)**

From Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), these impacts can be analysed through multiple nested systems. The microsystem, which includes immediate relationships such as intimate partners and peers, is where abuse occurs and where emotional support is often absent. Male participants in the study highlighted how abusive relationships deeply affect students' mental health and academic functioning. They noted signs of depression, emotional exhaustion, and academic decline as intertwined consequences of intimate partner violence (IPV). For instance, **Jay Adams** and **Valuta** observed that Johannes' poor academic performance could be linked to emotional abuse, neglect, and institutional/familial isolation. These observations reflect the compounding stressors young men may experience in emotionally abusive relationships, especially when lacking support systems. This aligns with research on IPV and academic performance among adolescents, which shows that victims of IPV often experience psychological challenges such as depression and anxiety. These

difficulties can impair their ability to concentrate effectively and result in reduced academic engagement (Onyeyili et al., 2024).

The mesosystem, connections between microsystems such as the link between home and university, breaks down when there is no coordination of support. For example, **Jay Adams** noted that Johannes did not qualify for examinations as results of abuse and lack of support from both family and institutions which contribute to mental health problems. This is consistent with research showing that unsupportive home environments, particularly where IPV is prevalent can significantly hinder individuals' ability to focus effectively (Onyeyili et al., 2024).

The exosystem, such as university counselling services, influences the individual indirectly and is critical for mental health intervention, yet participants like **Keith** question whether students even know such services exist. This supports research showing that it is important for institutions to implement full support services for students experiencing IPV, which includes counselling, advocacy, and safety planning (Onyeyili et al., 2024). Finally, the macrosystem, which encompasses cultural norms and gendered expectations, often discourages men from seeking help due to stigma around male victimhood and mental health (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Swartz, 1998).

Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989) adds further insight by analysing how overlapping identities, such as being male, Black, and a student in a patriarchal society, intersect to compound vulnerability. While men are generally socially positioned as less likely to be seen as victims of IPV, these participants point to how societal expectations around masculinity create barriers to recognising abuse and seeking psychological help. **Keith's** comment underlines how self-recognition of mental health issues becomes the first, but difficult step in escaping abuse, suggesting the need for gender-sensitive and trauma-informed services in university settings (Ratele, 2022). Unaddressed IPV and mental health issues like

depression and anxiety can affect more than just emotions, they can also lead to poor academic performance, losing interest in studies, and even dropping out. These challenges can shape a student's future and keep them trapped in difficult life circumstances. This shows why universities need to offer support that deals with both IPV and mental health in a way that considers students' different backgrounds (Onyeyili et al., 2024).

5.3.2. Intergenerational Transmission of Violence

This theme focuses on intergenerational transmission of violence, demonstrating how direct exposure to patterns of violence, as a victim or witness can be learnt, internalised, and with potential replication across once life-hood.

> "Johannes wouldn't necessarily see this as abuse another thing we can also assume or extrapolate is that maybe Johannes grew up with abuse maybe that's why Johannes doesn't see this as an issue in this instance maybe abuse has been so normalised in his life that it's an everyday thing. If you're used to being insulted by your mother when she insults you 10 years later it doesn't make a huge difference, but it takes a toll on your mental health so again that could be part of the reason as well" **(Jay Adam)**

> "I think it's also, it will touch back on how you have seen love growing up. Again, if you've seen love in a good light, I think Johannes would see this as a wrong issue. If maybe Johannes grew up with an abusive mother or an abusive father, he wouldn't see this as an issue" **(Jay Adams)**

> "The second thing here comes, if, for example, Johannes, let's just put it on Johannes alone. Do you realize that everything that Johannes has been through in Jane's life, that abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and so forth, can also follow Johannes.

Johannes can end up being like Jane now. Johannes can end up being like Jane now, starting to be sexually abusive and beating other girls out there" **(Valuta)**

The male participants highlighted how experiences of violence during childhood can shape one's understanding and tolerance of abuse later in life. As **Jay Adams** and **Valuta** suggest, if Johannes grew up in an environment where abuse was normalised, he may not recognise his current experience with Jane as abusive. This suggests a cyclical pattern of violence, learned and repeated across generations.

Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, this theme can be located primarily within the microsystem (family environment where direct interactions occur) and chronosystem (the dimension of time, including life transitions and sociohistorical influences). If abuse was present in Johannes's early life (microsystem), it could influence his worldview, especially regarding what constitutes love or normal behaviour in intimate relationships. The mesosystem, interactions between school, family, and peer groups, can also either reinforce or challenge these early lessons (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Ross et al., 2021).

From an intersectionality perspective, Crenshaw (1989) encourages us to understand that individuals like Johannes are positioned at multiple intersections of identity, including gender, age, cultural norms, and possibly socioeconomic status. These intersections affect how violence is experienced, interpreted, and responded to. Male victims of IPV, for example, may internalise abusive behaviour due to cultural expectations of masculinity, leading to silence or replication of violent patterns (Kimmel, 2002; Scott-Storey et al., 2023).

Valuta's reflection that Johannes might "end up being like Jane" points to the intergenerational transmission not only of victimhood but also perpetration, highlighting the blurred line between victims and abusers within cycles of violence. This is supportive of studies

showing that exposure to violence in early life increases both vulnerability to future abuse and likelihood of perpetration (Ward et al., 2015).

These insights underline the importance of early intervention and education, particularly programs that challenge normalised abuse and promote healthy relationship models across gender lines (Tsui et al., 2010). It also calls for a gender-sensitive and trauma-informed approach to support male survivors of IPV, who are often excluded from mainstream discourse and services due to narrow gender norms (Hine et al., 2022).

5.3.3. Traditional Masculinity and Power Dynamics

This theme explores how traditional masculinity and gender dynamics promote conformity of gendered norms which contribute emotional suppression and silencing male vulnerability.

> "Not this specifically. I've seen something similar where if it's like children and the girl hits the boy, if the boy hits back, it's, Like, she's a girl, don't hit her back. Like, amongst children, if they're playing and if the boy child comes crying, it's like, no men don.t cry, you are a guy don't cry. So, I've seen something similar and I think that's where we get this idea that men shouldn't report cases, because even from an early age, you aren't believed as a boy that you are hurt, not that you aren't believed, you are told, like, your emotions are made little, your emotions are lowered, because even if a girl child drops, let's say a cup, and she starts crying, they're going to go, ah, it's a mistake, but if it's a boy, it's, So, I've seen something similar. But not like this exactly. I think there's imbalance how men and women are socialised, yes, like men a taught to be tough hide emotions, I believe thus why is difficult to report" **(Donna Power).**

“there's a very big issue in South Africa. I think one of the major contributors of, I guess, gender-based harm that is caused by men or male identifying people is men tend to advise each other on certain things, which, again, could perpetuate toxic masculinity. So, I think that's also another big issue where toxic masculinity comes into play and men don't provide each other with the safe haven of saying, what should I do in this situation” **(Jay Adams).**

“I think another angle of it could be that you know abuse and you can see it for yourself but you can't take steps on it because you don't know if it will be believed because it's a man you're supposed to be usually stereotypically in the narratives it's always the man as the perpetrator so it becomes difficult to come with a story that contradicts that narrative in the social discourse you go to the police station, you go to your friends you come here as a victim it's difficult to have the confidence to stand up for yourself and say hey I'm a victim and I'm being abused” **(Obakeng).**

“But if ladies there the once only reporting, for example, what we will see maybe in Limpopo is that more men are abusing women, but just because men themselves they just decided to be strong, you know a man can Say I'm strong, there is saying of *“Monna ke nku o llela ka teng”* (means men don’t cry outside, you cry inside nobody has to see your tears) but I mean like when you cry you must cry inside not out we don't have to see your tears just cry inside, So that's one of the things It's happening there” **(Valuta)**

“I think also culturally, there's this thing of *“Indoda inhloko yendlu*”, meaning a man is a the head of the house, that again in itself is the biggest issue that we currently face, and it gives men so much power in dictating a certain relationship, or how a relationship goes. If the man in the relationship says, today we're not going anywhere, now you must cancel your plans, because *“Indoda inhloko yendlu”(A man*

is the head of the house) Or another thing that people currently do, and if you search about the history of lobola, and again, I'm going to touch on a very sensitive topic, again, lobola is another thing that is being used to control women into submission, because I paid 100,000 at your family, now as *"Indoda inhloko yendlu" "(A man is the head of the house)* as the head of the family, I am supposed to tell you on what to do, because I paid this amount of money to your family. So I mean, the whole idea of lobola has been lost in translation and now there is caused or forced a situation where women now must conform to anything that the man says in the relationship, now the woman loses autonomy on themselves, and now they must hear from the man, *"baba ufanele siyezeni namhlanje?"(Husband what must we do today?)*

(Jay Adams)

"Okay, culture. So culturally, when I speak about African culture, culture tells us certain things on how to navigate relationships. For example, certain things. Since I volunteer at gender office as a postgraduate student, I had to host a talk for the Batswana people, so to do research on the Batswana society, Batswana in general and funny enough, I found this other dissertation of a study that was conducted and was proven that in the Batswana culture, the husband was allowed to physically abuse the woman, but they beat them from neck down and also privately. It's like they're not allowed to beat them outside in public, but inside the household they're allowed and even the chief can't intervene in that situation. So, I mean, certain things like that, and certain cultures making provisions for abuse was wild for me. But I mean, certain minute things, even in the Zulu culture, does perpetuate IPV as well, things like polygamy, If polygamy is done wrong, it could somewhat perpetuate IPV again. So culturally, and a lot of cultural practices, a lot of traditional things would, I feel like the

biggest factor that might also stop students from even understanding IPV because of certain cultural practices that allow them to do certain things" **(Jay Adams)**

Male participants in this study illuminated how societal expectations around masculinity shape attitudes towards interpersonal violence, male victimhood, and the normalisation of power imbalances in relationships. Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), these narratives can be understood as emerging from multiple, interacting environmental layers:

Microsystem: Immediate relationships, such as family, peers, and romantic partners, reproduce norms of male strength, emotional suppression, and dominance. For example, **Donna Power** observes how boys are discouraged from showing vulnerability from an early age, influencing their reluctance to report abuse later in life. The perception algins with research shown masculinity expectations that man must endure pain, not allowed to express agony /vulnerability in public and support of cultural adage such as "a strong man must suffer in silence": these masculinity expectations make it difficult for male victims to report abuse (Majola et al., 2023 & Thobejane et al., 2018).

Mesosystem: The interactions between family, school, and community systems further reinforce these masculinities. **Jay Adams** notes how male peer groups often advise one another in ways that perpetuate toxic masculinity, creating a network of reinforcement for harmful behaviours. This is consistent with studies on help seeking for male victims of IPV, which show that males often learn from their friends and peers that seeking professional help is a sign of weakness, compounded by fear of rejection and ridicule from the groups (Bates et al., 2022; Lynch et al., 2018).

Exosystem: Institutions such as the police, legal systems, and cultural institutions may fail to support male victims, as **Obakeng** explains the difficulty men face in reporting abuse

due to societal disbelief and gendered stereotypes. This supports research on violence which reveals that men are often not recognized as victims of abuse due to prevailing social systems and the values attached to masculinity. These factors discourage men from disclosing or reporting abuse, and when they do, their experiences are frequently not believed (Starker et al., 2007). Similarly, research on sociocultural barriers that prevent men from speaking up and seeking help in South Africa, shows that societal perspectives often point men as the perpetrators rather than victims of IPV, resulting in lack of support for male victims (Majola et al., 2023).

Macrosystem: Cultural ideologies such as "indoda inhloko yendlu" (a man is the head of the household) or proverbs like “monna ke nku o llela ka teng” (a man suffers in silence) reflect patriarchal values that validate male dominance and silence emotional expression **(Valuta; Jay Adams)**. This is consistent with research showing that culture legitimises patriarchy and sustains male supremacy by endorsing and promoting hegemonic masculinity, a configuration of gender practices that reinforces male domination and the subordination of women (Tonsing & Tonsing, 2019, as cited in Mshweshwe, 2020). These norms also intersect with cultural scripts around lobola and obedience in marriage, as discussed by **Jay Adams** and **Keith**. This perception aligns with research, shown that cultural practice of lobola (bride price) contribute to power imbalance between men and women in intimate relationship and places women on risk position to experience IPV due to obedience to lobola principles (Chireshe, 2015; Ranganathan et al.,2022).

Chronosystem: Over time, these systems shape life trajectories, where unaddressed emotional repression and societal pressure can result in internalised trauma or even suicide, as **Jay Adams** points out.

Complementing this, Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989) helps expose how overlapping social identities, such as being Black, male, and culturally socialised within

patriarchal traditions, compound the silence around male victimisation and reproduce harmful masculinities. These intersecting identities are evident when participants highlight how cultural norms in Zulu, Tswana, and Sepedi communities often place men in positions of authority while also denying them the space to express emotional vulnerability **(Jay Adams; Donna Power)**.

Furthermore, Intersectionality highlights how gender norms are not experienced in isolation but are mediated through race, culture, language, and class. For example, traditional proverbs and customs are not merely individual beliefs but part of larger cultural logics that structure both male privilege and emotional repression, affecting how men experience and respond to interpersonal violence.

In sum, traditional masculinity, as described by the participants, is shaped by interlocking ecological systems and intersecting identities that perpetuate power imbalances, silence vulnerability, and normalise abuse in intimate relationships.

5.4 Conclusion

This study found that both male and female participants had similar views on intimate partner violence (IPV), especially about its emotional, psychological, and academic effects. They both recognised issues like coercive control, mental health struggles, and the passing down of violence through generations. However, each group also shared different gender-based concerns. Men were more focused on issues like masculinity, lack of awareness about support services, and the need for psychological evaluation, while women raised concerns about not trusting the police, health risks, and the emotional difficulty of seeking help.

Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory and Crenshaw's Intersectionality Theory helped show how IPV is influenced by different levels of society, from personal relationships to wider cultural and institutional systems. Gender plays an important role in how abuse is seen

and how people access support. These findings highlight the need for universities and society to create more inclusive and gender-sensitive support systems to properly address IPV.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

6.1. Introduction

The study sought to examine gendered perspectives of university students on interpersonal partner violence. This chapter presents limitations, implications of the study, recommendations, and conclusion.

6.2. Limitations

The study had several limitations which should be addressed when interpreting the findings.

6.2.1. Sample size

The study approach was qualitative in nature. This implies that the sample size was limited; thus, no generalisation of the findings can be achieved from the study, and conducting a similar study in other geographical areas may reveal different findings that were not found in this current study. For example, the study only includes students from the University of the Witwatersrand.

6.2.2. Study location

This study was pinned to a specific location (University of the Witwatersrand). As such, the findings cannot be generalised towards the student population in other higher institutions of learning.

6.2.3. Language translation

The focus group discussions were conducted in English, however participants used their indigenous languages, such as Zulu and Sepedi, which were then translated into English. The translation process could have altered the meaning of some of the words which may not have their equivalents.

6.3. Implications of the study

Based on the findings of this study, the study has both theoretical development, policy formation, and practical implications.

- Theoretical development: the findings of this study will add to the body of knowledge on the perspectives of university students on interpersonal partner violence thus filling the gaps of previous research. By integrating the findings of the study researchers can refine existing theories to explain the issue of IPV within the context of higher institutions in South Africa.
- Policy formation, the findings indicate that policymakers within higher education systems in South Africa must craft policies that are sensitive to gender dynamics and that promote the safety of students.
- The findings of this study highlight the need for gender-specific interventions within the university context. These should include awareness campaigns, counselling services, educational programs, effective reporting mechanisms, and extensive collaboration to address the unique needs of students.

6.4. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made.

- Universities should implement comprehensive support services for students who experience IPV, which include, counselling, advocacy, and therapeutic interventions for students with history or exposure to IPV. These support services should be sensitive to gender and meet the needs of students.
- Implementation of gender-inclusive responsive programs that deconstruct issues that promote gender-harm, such as stereotypes, toxic masculinity, and

social norms. Those programs should form part of curriculum for students to enhance their understanding on the complexity of IPV.

- Establishment of collaboration between university staff, counsellors, law enforcement officials, community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGO's), legal services to challenge and addresses IPV.
- Provision of comprehensive training towards university staff, police officials, counsellors, and healthcare professionals, to able be to recognize and respond appropriately to victims' unique needs. The training should reiterate the intersectionality of gender, race, socio-cultural issues and be more inclusive.
- Implementation of awareness campaigns that challenge the discourse around IPV and which foster reporting and disclosure for IPV survivors.
- Promote peer support, academic support, active engagement of stakeholders that addresses issues that contribute gender-harm within learning environments.
- There should be integration of the legislations, policy frameworks within higher institutions, and prevention programs that are aimed at addressing intimate partner violence.

6.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the aim of the study was to examine the gendered perspectives of university students on interpersonal partner violence, at the University of the Witwatersrand. The findings of the study demonstrate that IPV is a social and health issue which affects students in higher education in South Africa. It can be concluded that, addressing and challenging IPV within higher education in South Africa requires a comprehensive, intersectional approach and gender-responsive approach. By implementing the suggested recommendations universities can foster safer and more inclusive environments where students are empowered to challenge and report interpersonal partner violence.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A : Vignette

Vignette 1

Context: Johannes is a 21-year-old student in his 3rd year at the University. Six months ago, he began dating Jane. In the beginning, things were going very well, and they both believed they had found their soulmate. Johannes even noticed that she would wait for him outside his lectures hall. Johannes was a little concerned when Jane didn't want him to wear a condom, but he loved and trusted her. Lately, when Jane comes over Johannes's room, she yells at him, calls him names, and tells him he's worthless. He is worried because Jane has been drinking heavily. When she is intoxicated, she shoves Johannes to the ground and beats him. Jane threatens to leave the relationship if Johannas hangs out with his friends. Johannes feels stressed and alone. He doesn't know what to do and stays in bed. As as result, he doesn't qualify for his first semester examinations.

Questions

1. What is your perception of the situation?
2. If you had to name the problem/conceptualise, what is it?
3. What is causing the problem?
4. What should Johannes do?
5. What should Jane do?
6. What do you think will happen?
7. How common is this where you come from?
8. What could be done at the university or in the communities or school or family to help with this kind of situation?

Vignette 2

Context: Thandi and Sipho are both third-year students at a university in South Africa. They have been dating for about a year. Recently, their relationship has become strained due to academic pressures and misunderstandings. Thandi feels that Sipho has become increasingly possessive, often checking her phone without her permission and getting upset when she spends time with her friends. One evening, after an argument about Thandi's plans to go out with her friends, Sipho grabs her arm forcefully and demands that she stay home. Thandi feels frightened and unsure of what to do.

The following day, Thandi confides in her friend, Lindiwe, about what happened. Lindiwe advises her to talk to Sipho calmly and suggests that maybe he is just stressed out. However, Thandi is worried that this might be a sign of a bigger problem in their relationship.

Questions:

1. How would you describe the situation between Thandi and Sipho?
2. In your opinion, is Sipho's behavior acceptable or unacceptable? Why?
3. What do you think Thandi should do in this situation?
4. What factors might influence how students perceive interpersonal violence?
5. What role do cultural or societal norms play in how this situation is perceived?
6. How might this situation be viewed differently if the roles were reversed, with Thandi being the one who grabbed Sipho's arm?
7. If you were Thandi's friend, how would you support her?
8. What resources, if any, do you think should be available to students who find themselves in situations like Thandi's?

Appendix B: Participation Information Sheet

Title of the Study: Examining gendered perspectives of university students on interpersonal partner violence.

Good day,

My name is Rasakanya Malesela Abraham, and I am a post graduate student registered for Master of Arts in Social and Psychological Research at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am conducting research on Examining gendered perspectives of university students on interpersonal partner violence.

The aim of the study is to investigate and comprehend the gendered perspectives surrounding interpersonal partner violence (IPV) amongst university students. By focusing on gendered perspectives, this study aims to uncover the complex interplay of societal norms, cultural expectations, and personal beliefs that influence how male and female university students perceive, understand, and respond to interpersonal partner violence.

I am inviting you to participate in this research project. Therefore, no participant will receive incentives for participating in this research. Participating in this research project is voluntary, and anyone have the right to withdraw at any stage without any penalties imposed to them. There is no risk associated with this study, but if you tend to feel discomfort during focus group discussion you are allowed to stop or ask for break, and any question through focus group discussion make you feel discomfort you are welcome not to engage.

If you understand what is required from you as part of the research, I would like you to form part of the focus group discussion. Additionally, you will be required to sign a consent form, you will be given a copy of the consent form and the researcher will keep the original copy. The focus groups will last about 1 hour and 30 minutes. A vignette will be presented to you, and you will be sharing your perspective surrounding the phenomenon of interpersonal partner violence. Your participation is anonymous, and your information will be kept confidential. Ensuring anonymity participant will be assigned pseudonym to your name, this means information linking to your identity will not be included anyhow. You are required to sign the consent form to participate in the study. To ensure confidentiality the audio recordings, and transcribed data will only be accessed by the researcher and supervisor. Additionally, the hardcopies of the consent forms will be filed and kept locked in a cabinet for a minimum of 5 years. Finally, the information discussed during focus group discussions will not be shared with anyone.

By granting your permission I would like to record the focus group discussion using my mobile device. No one other than the researcher and the supervisor, will have access to the recording. The recording will be encrypted with a password and will be stored for a minimum of 5 years. The information you are providing in focus group discussion may be used for educational purposes such as writing articles. The results from this study will be incorporated into a research report and disseminated through Wits WIRedSpace.

If you have any queries or want more information, please contact me on 0818791724 or 2595167@students.wits.ac.za. Alternatively, you can freely contact my supervisor Dr Mpho Mathebula on 011 717 4563. We shall avail ourselves to our best regarding any enquiry. If you have any complaints regarding this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, or email hrecon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher

Rasakanya Malesela Abraham

Supervisor

Dr Mpho Mathebula

Appendix C: Consent form

Title of the study: Examining gendered perspectives of university students on interpersonal partner violence.

I,_____, hereby agree to participate in study project. The aim and procedures of the study project have been explained to me.

Please circle the relevant option.

- The research study was explained to me clearly. I understand the aim of the Study. YES NO
- I understand that my participation is voluntary YES NO
- I agree that the focus group discussion may be audio recorded YES NO
- I may directly be quoted in the research report and pseudonym will be used YES NO
- I am aware that the results for this study will be incorporated into research Report for partial completion of the degree. YES NO
- I agree that the researcher may use the information I provide in my focus group discussion for other educational purposes such writing articles, but my personal information will not be used anyhow. YES NO

Name of the participant:_____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Name of the researcher:_____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix D: Registrar Letter

Dear Register, **03 May 2024**

Re: Permission to conduct research at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Good day, my name is Rasakanya Malesela Abraham, and I am a post graduate student registered for Master of Arts in Social and Psychological Research at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am conducting research on Examining gendered perspectives of university students on interpersonal partner violence.

The study intended to investigate and comprehend the gendered perspectives surrounding intimate partner violence (IPV) amongst university students. By focusing on gendered perspectives, this study aims to uncover the complex interplay of societal norms, cultural expectations, and personal beliefs that influence how male and female university students perceive, understand, and respond to IPV.

Participant's responses will be treated confidentially, and identities will be anonymous. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. The results will be incorporated into a research report and disseminated Into WIReSpace.

The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. The participants will be assured that they can withdraw from the study at any stage without any penalty imposed to them. There is no foreseeable risk in participating in this study. The participants will not be remunerated anyhow in this study.

I therefore request permission in writing to conduct my study at your institution.

The permission letter should be on your university's headed paper, signed and dated, and specifically referring to myself and the title of my study.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I look forward to your response as soon as convenient.

Your Sincerely

Rasakanya Malesela Abraham

2595167students.wits.ac.za: Cell phone: 0818791724

Supervisor: Dr Mpho Mathebula

Mpho.mathebula@wits.ac.za . Tel: 011 717 4784

Appendix E: Ethical Clerance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MASPR-24-08**
PROJECT TITLE:	Examining gendered perspective of university students on interpersonal partner violence.
INVESTIGATOR	Rasakanya Malesela
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SHCD/Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	07 June 2024
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Low Risk
EXPIRY DATE	31 December 2026

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 08 July 2024 **CHAIRPERSON** Aline Ferreira Correia
(Prof. Aline Ferreira Correia)

cc: Dr Mpho Mathebula (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee.

RASAKANYA MA
Signature

Date 08 / 07 / 2024

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix F: Permission Letter

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY REGISTRAR

23 July 2024

Malesela Rasakanya
Student Number (2595167)
Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report
School of Human and Community Development

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

"Examining gendered perspective of university students on interpersonal partner violence."

This letter serves to confirm that the above project has received permission to be conducted on University premises, and/or involving staff and/or students of the University as research participants. In undertaking this research, you agree to abide by all University regulations for conducting research on campus and to respect participants' rights to withdraw from participation at any time.

If you are conducting research on certain student cohorts, year groups or courses within specific Schools and within the teaching term, permission must be sought from Heads of School or individual academics.

Ethical clearance has been obtained. (Protocol number: MASPR-24-08)

Research Expiration: (31 December 2026)

Nicoleen Potgieter
University Deputy Registrar

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Appendix G: Recruitment letter

Dear prospective participant,

My name is Rasakanya Malesela Abraham, and I am a post graduate student registered forMaster of Arts in Social and Psychological Research at the University of the Witwatersrand, supervised by Dr Mpho Mathebula.

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study titled "Examining gendered perspectives of university students on interpersonal partner violence".

In order to obtain data for the study, I am asking postgraduate students studying at the University of the Witwatersrand to form part of focus group discussions, which will take approximately 1 hour 30 minutes.

Participation in the study is voluntary, and all responses will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes.

Criteria

Post-graduate students, who never experienced or perpetrated interpersonal partner violence.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me (rasakanyaabraham@gmail.com) 0818791724

Thank you in advance

Malesela Abraham Rasakanya

Researcher: Abraham (rasakanyaabraham@gmail.com)

Supervisor: Dr Mpho Mathebula (Mpho.mathebula@wits.ac.za)