Gender-Based Violence: Lived experiences of female students at the University of the Witwatersrand

By

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to explore experiences of Gender based violence (GBV) among female students at the University of the Witwatersrand. It sought to ascertain how these experiences unfolded as well as the impact they have had on the students. Intersectionality theory was applied as the theoretical framework to observe the impact of overlapping identities on the students' experiences of GBV. The study consisted of seven female participants who were selected using a volunteer sampling method. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyse the transcribed interviews and derive themes from the collected data. Four themes in total were identified: power relations, internal experience, normalization of GBV, and help-seeking. The objectives of the study were used to guide the analysis of the themes. The findings showed that students face stalking, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse perpetrated mostly by fellow male students. Moreover, influences of hegemonic masculinity and gendered power imbalances played a role in the perpetration of violence against the female students. Furthermore, the findings indicate that these experiences had adverse effects on the mental well-being of the students and led the students to adopt various coping strategies while often failing to engage in help-seeking behaviour.

Keywords: gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, female students, university

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a phenomenon endemic to South Africa (Dosekun, 2013). Scholars have researched the pervasive issue within the country, intending to understand the factors that contribute to its increase (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). Some of the factors include desires to assert masculinities, gender inequality, and drug and alcohol abuse (Mngoma et al., 2016; Sibanda-Moyo et al., 2017; Williamson, 2017). Furthermore, researchers have sought to identify the presence of GBV in institutions such as schools and universities (Bhana, 2013; Gordon & Collins, 2013; Haffejee, 2006; Singh et al., 2015; Rasool, 2017). However, more research is needed to understand and examine the experiences of GBV at the university level.

South Africa has some of the highest GBV rates (Gordon & Collins, 2013). The impact of GBV has been identified on the political, social and health fronts (Buiten & Naidoo, 2016; Decker et al., 2014; Stauffer, 2015). This shows the extent to which it has permeated society. A report during the national lockdown in 2020 showed that 2300 GBV-related calls were made within four days in March (Youth Policy Committee, 2020). According to Sibanda-Moyo et al., (2017), 1 in 3 women report having experienced Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Furthermore, sexual violence is reported to be the most common type of violence experienced by women in the workplace, schools, and their neighbourhoods (Sibanda-Moyo et al., 2017). This indicates the extent of the pervasiveness of GBV within the country.

According to Karim and Baxter (2016), GBV takes on many forms, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence. This indicates that individuals can be violated in several ways, leading to extreme impacts on their overall well-being. While GBV can be experienced by different genders, women and children are affected at a

disproportionate rate (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2015). Thobejane et al., (2018) argue that women's perpetration of violence against men counts as GBV. However, given the disproportionate impact on women and children, the term is often used in the exclusion of men's experiences. Some scholars have thus opted to use the term GBV against Women and Girls to create a subcategory that places a focus on the disproportionate impact on this particular group (Grose et al., 2021; Mashiri, 2013; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). However, given the context of South Africa, GBV is the more appropriate term used to describe the violence that women experience from their male counterparts.

This societal issue has been identified within universities in South Africa and across the world, where students have experienced acts of violence from their friends, strangers, and romantic partners (Clowes et al., 2009; de Klerk et al., 2011; Gordon & Collins, 2013). Although it can be argued that there is a lack of reports about men's experiences of GBV, prevalence rates of GBV among women in South Africa are reported to reach above 50%, with men reported to have perpetrated violence more frequently (Department of Justice, 2020). Thus, the focus was on women because reported incidences of gender-based violence are higher in this population group. Many studies focusing on GBV in universities have focused on rape and sexual harassment (Elias & Solis, 2018; Iliyasu et al., 2011). However, this study expanded the lens by focusing on female students' experiences of gender-based violence holistically, without pinpointing any specific form. Focusing on GBV in its various forms provided an opportunity to broaden the scope by understanding how GBV presents within this microcosm. As a result, patterns of stalking as well as physical, emotional, sexual, and verbal violence were identified.

Research Aims and Objectives

This research aimed to explore lived experiences of GBV on campus. It sought to ascertain how these experiences unfolded as well as the impact they had on the students. Furthermore, it endeavoured to discover which types of GBV issues are present at the university. Through this study, an understanding of Wits university students' unique experiences was obtained.

The research question that this study aimed to answer is "what are the experiences of GBV among female students at university?".

This was further explored with the following research questions:

- Have female students experienced GBV on campus?
- What forms of violence have female students experienced on campus?

The study fulfilled the following objectives:

- Identifying the types of violence that female students experienced at the University of the Witwatersrand (also referred to as Wits University throughout the paper).
- Discussing the impact that these experiences had on their mental and emotional well-being.
- Understanding the impact of the students' intersecting identities on their experiences of GBV.
- Discussing the help-seeking behaviour of the students, and their perceived access to the University's assistance.

Rationale

This research is relevant because of the high prevalence of GBV in South Africa, which has led to an increase in academic discourse that aims to gain a better understanding of the topic (Boonzaier, 2005; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2015; Strebel et al., 2006). More specifically,

research interest has grown around GBV within institutions of higher education (Clowes, et al., 2009; de Klerk, et al., 2007; Gordon & Collins, 2013). Thus, this research contributes to the existing and developing literature on GBV within the universities of South Africa.

Existing research within this area has explored how violence impacts young women in universities as well as sexually coercive acts on university campuses (Clowes et al., 2009, Dosekun, 2007). This research will contribute to this conversation by exploring GBV in its entirety by looking at all forms of GBV and not just experiences of rape or sexual assault. In a study of the lived experiences of GBV in universities, it was found that GBV was experienced by individuals at various levels of the university and across genders (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2018). This study intended to focus solely on female students, using qualitative methods, to obtain an in-depth view of these experiences.

Practically, the study may contribute to policy-making decisions in addressing GBV on campuses. Currently, universities have policies in place; however, these policies must be informed by research findings. At Wits university, there are several policies in place to support students and staff that may be victims of GBV. These are under the following frameworks: Anti-Discrimination Policy and Procedures; Disciplinary Process for Gender Related Misconduct; Student Code of Conduct; Employment Equity Policy; Policy on Declaration of Interests; Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault and Rape Policy and Procedures; and Policy on Sexual and Romantic Relationships between Staff and Undergraduates (Wits University, 2020). There are also procedures in place that outline how the Gender Equity Office (GEO) will intervene in a situation where a victim has come forward to report a case. The researcher has not discovered any shortfalls during the review of the procedures ahead of this research; however, the emergence of such during the study would be highlighted. Furthermore, should any shortfalls arise, the research results can be forwarded to the GEO along with any proposals. Hence, this research may be useful for policymakers as it could

inform how they approach issues of sexual harassment and gender-based violence on university campuses. Although Collins et al., (2009) have attempted to produce a comprehensive document outlining systems and solutions to some issues of sexual violence in universities, they do acknowledge that institutions fail to implement it. The study findings may be able to show whether this applies to the chosen university.

Mahabeer (2020) asserted that it is important to place the accounts of young women at the forefront of policymaking discourse so that they can in turn influence the support of universities towards victims of GBV. This research contributes to important narratives and aims to gather narratives that could possibly be useful in policymaking. This research has the potential to produce new directions in responding to GBV on university campuses by providing insights which are based on empirical evidence.

Chapter Organisation

This research report contains four chapters. The first chapter provides an outline of the study by providing a brief background and the aims and objectives thereof. In addition, the first chapter provides a rationale that discusses the purpose of the study, its contributions to scholarship, and the practicality of researching the lived experiences of university students at the University of the Witwatersrand. Through this, the relevance of the study is established, and its benefits are identified.

The second chapter of the report is a literature review, in which the available literature on the topic is provided. This literature is provided under subheadings such as patriarchy, hegemonic masculinities, cultural and religious contributors, relationships, substance abuse, and social context to highlight the drivers of GBV. These different subheadings place the study in context and conceptualise the problem at hand. The literature review consists of studies that are South African as well as those from various parts of the world to provide a

multifaceted understanding of the phenomenon. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the intersectionality framework which allows for the study to be understood on a more in-depth level by considering the participants' intersecting identities.

The third chapter discusses the method used for the study. It discusses the participants, the data collection method, and the research procedure. Moreover, this chapter discusses the process of data analysis, focusing on the steps of IPA and the process of identifying the key themes. Lastly, the ethical considerations of the study are provided.

The fourth and final chapter of this study is a presentation of the findings of the study. These findings are discussed with respect to the aims and objectives of the study. In a conclusion, the limitations of the study are provided with recommendations for future studies on this topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter focuses on defining gender-based violence and briefly discusses gender-based violence within South Africa. The discussion centres on the prevalence of GBV in South Africa, the consequences thereof, and the barriers that prevent victims from obtaining justice and consequently exacerbate GBV. In addition, the chapter discusses some of the drivers of GBV identified in scholarship. These include patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, cultural and religious factors, relationships, substance abuse and contextual factors. Finally, this section presents intersectionality as the theoretical framework.

2.1 Defining Gender-Based Violence

Various definitions of GBV are used by different scholars. However, the central theme around these definitions is that violence is enacted against an individual primarily because of their gender, due to unequal power relations (CSVR, 2016). The section below provides some definitions that fit the scope of this paper.

Gender-based abuse is defined by Russo and Pirlott (2006, p. 178) as “any act of GBV that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” This definition encompasses “rape, torture, mutilation, sexual slavery, forced impregnation, and murder and distinguishes male perpetration from other non-gender-based forms of violence” (Shannon et al., 2009, p. 1). Therefore, GBV involves all forms of physical, sexual, economic, and psychological violence, among others (Cooper et al., 2013).

Some scholars prefer to use Violence Against Women (VAW) to study this topic. This is because it centres the female experience to bring a focus to those women who specifically experience it alongside intersecting issues of race, class, and gender (Moyo, et al., 2017). However, the reason for using GBV in this research is because it is a commonly used term among the general population and thus more familiar to the South African context than VAW.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is identified as the most prevalent form of GBV (Heise et al., 2002). IPV is recognized as not only a public health issue but a significant violation of human rights (Reed et al., 2010). Chester and DeWall (2017) define it as an individual's attempt at harming or controlling a current or previous partner. The defining aspect of IPV is that it occurs between individuals within a relationship. The term is further defined by the World Health Organization as violent behaviour inflicted on an intimate partner which causes psychological, sexual, or physical harm and includes acts of coercion, controlling behaviours, and physical and psychological abuse (Ali et al., 2016). Like GBV, IPV encompasses acts of "stalking, psychological aggression, physical violence or sexual violence behaviours and tactics through which an intimate partner seeks to establish and maintain power over another" (Ademiluka, 2018, p. 341).

The abovementioned definitions serve to grant an understanding of the terminology used in reference to this topic. Furthermore, understanding these definitions allows for a better understanding of the categories each of the participants' accounts fall into, allowing a more nuanced view of their personal experiences. The delineation of these seemingly minor differences further points to the broadness of GBV as a topic and its different presentations in varying situations.

2.2 Overview of GBV In South Africa

This research centres on GBV against women because, in South Africa, they are the most vulnerable group that are disproportionately affected by GBV (Nduna & Nene, 2014). Statistics show that 42% of men are reported to have committed an act of violence within a relationship setting, while about 1 in 3 men have confessed to raping a woman or girl (Boonzaier, 2017). Moreover, research shows that the likelihood of women being murdered by their partners is higher than that of any other group of people (Reed et al., 2010). While these statistics are grim, they do not provide an accurate picture of the pervasiveness due to the problem of underreporting (Van der Heidjen et al., 2019). Some of the reasons that contribute to underreporting include victims' lack of confidence in the justice system, experiencing apathy from service providers, fear of revictimization from perpetrators and the experience of feelings of shame and possible stigmatization from others (van der Heidjen et al., 2019).

2.2.1 GBV During Covid-19

Covid-19 is a virus whose outbreak spread worldwide and reached pandemic status in 2020. As a result, health departments around the world issued a declaration per WHO for quarantines and lockdown measures to be enforced to contain the virus and prevent its spread (Mittal & Singh, 2020). While it was a critical measure used to save lives, it also exposed the extent of the social issues that many countries contend with such as the lack of economic resources and limitations within the health system. Among these, GBV proved to be a pandemic of its own, as reports of violations spiked within weeks of lockdown measures being imposed. Based on past trends, an increase in violence is generally expected to increase amid pandemics (Mittal & Singh, 2020). It is reported that in South Africa, the national helpline received 120 000 calls related to violence against women (Mbunge, 2020). The

perpetration of this gendered violence is thought to emanate from pressures such as the financial strain resulting from the pandemic (John et al., 2020) as well as from perpetrators finding more freedom to abuse their partners (Mittal & Singh, 2020).

2.2.2 Consequences of GBV

GBV has enduring effects on an individual and further indirectly affects families, communities, and public health (Castañeda Camey et al., 2020). The enduring effects include psychological disorders such as substance abuse disorder, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. In addition, individuals can be infected with chronic illnesses such as HIV/AIDS and sustain physical injuries. Emotional effects include guilt, self-blame, shock, fear, mood swings, and anger (Naidoo, 2013) as well as loss of hope and control (Castañeda Camey et al., 2020). Survivors can also experience cognitive effects such as a decline in concentration (Naidoo, 2013). Some women develop chronic gynaecological illnesses because of sexual violence (Heise et al., 2002). Additional adverse outcomes of sexual violence against women include unwanted pregnancies, which can sometimes lead to illegal and unsafe abortions, and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and infections (Enaifoghe et al., 2021). Furthermore, the stigma and psychological trauma that results from GBV can go on to prevent survivors from achieving their economic potential (Enaifoghe, 2021).

2.2.3 Barriers to Obtaining Justice

Despite the development and passing of progressive laws that aim to protect women and children, and the introduction and implementation of anti-violence programmes and campaigns, GBV continues to remain a huge societal problem in South Africa (van der Heidjen et al., 2019). Johnson et al., (2017) cite a lack of accountability from service providers, insufficient funding towards GBV eradication efforts and irregularities in the

implementation of policies as contributors to the unsatisfactory response to the crisis. Castañeda Camey et al., (2020) maintain that the lack of rigorous justice protocol and punishment only serves to intensify the existing subordination and powerlessness of GBV victims and communicates a message of acceptance of violence leading to the normalization of violent behaviour. Several structural barriers play a role in this. In South Africa, the practice of "losing" dockets is an act that is carried out by perpetrators with the assistance of police officials which undermines the justice process in situations of rape and other GBV cases (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002). Moreover, victims are dissuaded from continuing with processes of seeking justice because of acts by court officials and police officers such as bringing the suspect to convince the victim to accept payment to drop a case or requesting payments for investigations to continue (CIET Africa, 1998, as cited in Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002). Furthermore, there is a general lack of trust in the justice system and its accompanying services such as the police force and health services that are available for rape and sexual assault survivors (Naidoo, 2013). In conjunction with this, in cases of rape, there are misconceptions about processes held by survivors and staff whereby survivors are led to believe that they cannot obtain access to rape-related medical care before they open a criminal case (Johnson et al., 2017). However, based on the guidelines, a medical examination must take precedence over the police statement which should only be recorded if the victim is psychologically, physically, and emotionally capable of making a statement (Women's Legal Centre, 2010, as cited in Johnson et al., 2017). Additional psychological factors deterring victims from reporting GBV crimes include feelings of shame, fear of being stigmatized, financial restrictions, and fear of the perpetrators not being convicted and the consequences thereof (Mutinta, 2022; Thomas et al., 2019). A provincial study in Gauteng showed that out of 2068 rape cases reported at 70 SAPS stations, "50.5% of reported cases ended in arrest, 43% of cases led to charges against the perpetrators, 17% of cases made it to

trial, and 4.1% cases ended in convictions for rape while those who were convicted received less than a 10-year sentence" (Johnson et al., 2017, p. 6). From this statistic, it is clear that despite the barriers, the chances of victims obtaining justice are very low which further feeds into the notion of impunity of perpetrators which ultimately perpetuates the cycle of underreporting.

2.3 GBV in South African Universities

Scholarship surrounding GBV in South African universities is lacking. However, it is believed that the university space will reflect the patterns of GBV present in society (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2021). De Klerk et al., (2007) wrote about the prevalence of rape at Rhodes University wherein they discussed the lack of proactive action from the university administration in preventing and mitigating the abuse of women on their campus. Furthermore, the article showed that the approach of denying that these acts took place on campus only served to normalize the abuse and assault of women (De Klerk et al., 2007). This is an example that is reflective of the impunity that was mentioned in the preceding section and therefore echoes the pattern in broader society.

Finchilescu & Dugard (2021) studied the presence of GBV experiences at all levels of a university's population. In this study, they found that students were mainly the victims of GBV on campuses and men were found to be the main perpetrators of GBV. In addition to that, sexual harassment appeared to be the most prevalent form of GBV. This included behaviours such as being shown sexual content, continuous unwanted proposals for dates or sex, and stalking. Moreover, rape was also found to be part of student experiences of GBV, with most cases happening with the victim under the influence of substances such as drugs or alcohol; however, it was unclear whether the consumption of these substances was voluntary or coerced.

In a study of the policies in place at universities, it was found that alcohol abuse is a big part of campus culture and is therefore often linked to cases of sexual harassment (Gouws & Kritzinger, 2007). Furthermore, this study highlighted that students are often unaware of the definition of sexual harassment which has led to a lot of confusion and prevented them from reporting it (Gouws & Kritzinger, 2007). Lastly, a primary aim of the study was to ascertain the knowledge of existing university policies against sexual harassment and the results showed that the students were not well informed on these, while there was a mixed response from staff regarding their knowledge of and implementation of these policies (Gouws & Kritzinger, 2007). Adams et al., (2013) studied the extent of sexual harassment at a South African university and found that male lecturers were using their authority and power to coerce female students to engage in sexual relations with them. While the majority (75%) of the participants had not experienced this, they reported knowing of fellow students who had gone through such experiences. The research found that students that refused to engage in sexual relations with lecturers were subsequently failed and had to repeat those specific modules. This research highlighted the impact of lax sexual harassment policies or the lack thereof, and the effect this has on the abuse of power by perpetrators, the disempowerment of female students and ultimately, the negative impact on the futures of female students (Adams et al., 2013).

Gordon and Collins (2013) studied the impact of GBV on women's identities and their social conduct and found that there was a widely held idea that women were responsible for protecting themselves from being victims of GBV. As such, women were policing their own behaviour to limit their risk of being violated. This includes limiting their movements, dressing in ways that seem non-provocative, and eliminating activities with men. All of these are identified as placing the woman in the position of being responsible for causing her own attack. The researchers assert that the normalization of these self-policing behaviours only

served to hide patriarchal power and “masculine sexual entitlement and legitimises the limitation to social freedom placed on the potential victims rather than the potential perpetrators” (Gordon & Collins, 2013, pg. 100). Some research has highlighted interventions that are directed at tackling GBV on the ground level through involving students. Magudulela (2017) profiled an initiative titled Girls Against Sexual Violence and Abuse (GASVA) which employed a variety of visual methodologies to encourage resilience, and involvement in raising GBV awareness and promoting discussions about the impact of GBV. The focus group aspect yielded conversations about the key concepts that contribute to the scourge of GBV. These included questioning the socialisation of boys, patriarchy, absent fathers, policing of women’s bodies and clothing, and acceptance of the normalisation of violence amongst others (Magudulela, 2017). A review of GBV in higher education showed that the consequences that victims experience are debilitating and can be a huge obstacle to their health (Makhene, 2022). The review showed that students can experience symptoms and signs of psychological distress and disorders such as anxiety, depression and trauma, and experience a decline in their school grades (Makhene, 2022). Thus, these adverse experiences can leave a long-lasting impact on students.

2.4 Drivers of GBV

Research has shown that various factors lead to the perpetration of gender-based violence. Dutton (1988, as cited in Dutton 1994) argued that violence against women is not due to a singular overarching cause but rather results from an interaction of the effects of an interlayered system such as the macro-, exo- and micro-systems. Thus, any analysis of the factors needs to be viewed from an ecological perspective (Dutton, 1994). Heise et al., (2002) outline the following factors on each level: on an individual level, these include childhood trauma such as being a victim of child abuse, or witnessing domestic violence, and having an

absent father. At a community level, they cite factors such as the lack of social support, and toxic masculinity traits such as condoning the use of violence amongst male groups. Lastly, at the societal level, they cite rigid gender roles, and cultural norms associated with violence and ownership of women. According to Brankovic (2019), the major drivers of violence include patriarchy: gender inequality, gender stereotypes; and contextual factors: substance use and unemployment. The following section will discuss a few of these identified factors.

2.4.1 Patriarchy

Scholars argue that violence is a gendered act and should therefore be studied based on the gender social order (Hunnicut, 2014). Furthermore, societies that place importance on male dominance and have high gender inequality result in power imbalances within romantic relationships and between genders in general (Madiba & Ngwenya, 2017). As a result, men benefit from the restrictions that are placed on women's lives because of the threat of men's violence towards them (Dutton, 1994).

Patriarchy is a concept that centres around a hierarchical organization, and social systems and arrangements that uphold male domination (Hunnicutt, 2009). It is a concept that was originally used by feminists to understand and describe power relations and dynamics between men and women and to investigate the core origins of women's subordination (Beechey, 1979; Sultana, 2011). It is also the institutionalization of the dominance of men over women (Sultana, 2011). Duncan (1994) highlights that the system does not necessitate the dominance of every man and the subordination of all women. Rather, it points to an emphasised gender division which then explains patterns of social behaviours within society. This takes place at a macro level through governments, laws, and religion as well as on a micro level such as in families, day-to-day interactions, and in intimate relations (Hunnicut, 2009, as cited in Hadi, 2017).

Patriarchy is also described to have originally been a system of social organization in which the father is given authority over the family, where the woman is subordinate to her husband and the inheritance falls on the male descendants of the family. As part of this authority and control by the male members, the roles and material gains of females are limited, and they are subjected to gender roles (Ademiluka, 2018). The dominance over women is extended to the values, customs, and societal institutions (Ademiluka, 2018). Walby (1989) theorized that patriarchy comprises six interdependent structures. These include a "patriarchal mode of production whereby women's labour is appropriated by their husbands, patriarchal relations within waged labour, a patriarchal state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality and patriarchal culture" (Walby, 1989, p. 220). Walby (1989) argues that these may vary based on place and time and may not be universal.

Ademiluka (2018) has identified male violence as a key feature of patriarchy. Patriarchy may justify or induce male violence against women but the behaviour of being violent consists of personal and situational factors (Ademiluka, 2018; Dosekun, 2013). While individual factors play a role, it is argued that the patterns of male violence against women are significant to the point where consideration needs to be placed on the normative nature thereof (Walby, 1989). Male violence is seen as having a causal power because it is used to elicit a desired response from those upon whom it is enacted. This is seen in the way in which women alter their conduct to avoid male violence (Gordon & Collins, 2013; Walby, 1989). Furthermore, the impact of violence is seen as instrumental both in professional and domestic settings (Walby, 1989). The pervasive power of patriarchy is also argued to be maintained by women who protect it as part of their leadership within families and communities (Ademiluka, 2018). Patriarchy does deprive women of having power through its oppressive structures; however, it does not render women completely powerless as it cannot deny them rights, resources, and the ability to be influential (Sultana, 2011; Wood, 2019). It relies on

institutions such as the education system, religion, and family to justify and reinforce the ideals of male dominance (Sultana, 2011). The subordination faced by women takes various forms such as “discrimination, control, insult, and exploitation” in society and other substructures within the society such as the workplace (Sultana, 2011, pg. 7). Wood (2019) posits that the media, social structures, and educational institutions play a vital role in the reinforcement of the patriarchal ideology.

“Male-dominant and male-controlling patriarchal ideology justifies men possessing more power and authority, using power to control women, and exerting violence when their partner shows disobedience” (You, 2020, p. 2). The belief that women are subordinate, dependent on, and biologically inferior to men perpetuates gender-based violence because, with this way of thinking, women are not allowed to have a say or disagree with their male counterparts as this is a sign of disrespect (Sultana, 2011). Consequently, this ideology places power in the hands of men by giving them the allowance to control the behaviour of women in abusive ways.

2.4.2 Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity describes an identity that promotes male domination over women and encourages gender inequality (Jewkes et al., 2015). It is argued that hegemonic masculinity refers to men who engage in “acts of low-level violence” against their partners, with this being perceived as having control over their homes (Jewkes et al., 2015). Masculinity is also linked to men’s power and how they can control a woman’s sexual behaviour (Harvey, 2005). It is often defined using terms such as brave, aggressive, and strong (Langa, 2012).

Hegemonic masculinity and cultural gender norms have an impact on the increasing rates of GBV in general, but more specifically, in GBV cases on university campuses

(Schwartz et al., 2006). The society in which we exist contains standards that see the objectification of women as part of masculinity (Boonzaier, 2005). Women's experiences of objectification include being called degrading names and receiving offensive sexual gestures (Russo & Pirlott, 2006). For example, men often behave violently towards women to maintain their authority (Hadi, 2017). Thus, patriarchy carries consequences for women by making them vulnerable to being violated.

2.4.3 Cultural and Religious Contributors to GBV

Cultural and religious ideologies surrounding the dominance of males also contribute to intimate partner violence (Jewkes, 2002, Sokoloff & DuPont, 2005). This is due to their maintenance of ideologies that contribute to the subordination of women through traditional expectations and practices (Madiba & Ngwenya, 2017). These ideologies are inherent in laws (such as those that protect harmful traditional practices) and justice systems and affect how abuse is dealt with by law enforcement institutions (Jewkes, 2002). For example, police are reported to deny assistance to domestic violence victims because these are household matters but also because some officers are domestic violence offenders as well (Moore, 2020). Some cultural beliefs that may contribute to the abuse of women include domestic violence being seen as a viable method of correction (Fernandez, 2006). Furthermore, some cultures view the ability to control one's woman as a sign of masculinity. One such cultural practice is that of lobola. Lobola is a traditional practice that takes place in Southern Africa, in countries such as Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa, which entails the gifting of the bride's family by the groom's family. Originally, this practice entailed the transfer of livestock to the bride's family as a token of appreciation to her family (CSVR, 2016). Lobola was also perceived as an act of unifying the two families (Montle, 2020). However, it is argued that in modern society, lobola has been turned into a practice of commoditizing women and therefore converting them to properties that belong to their husbands (Montle, 2020), where the

payment of lobola is symbolic of the transfer of a woman's rights into the hands of her in-laws (Ademiluka, 2018). As a result, a woman's body is abused under the notion that it can be used as the husband sees fit as he has "paid for it". Punishment, discipline, and other forms of violent acts towards women are seen as acceptable behaviours which husbands are entitled to because they have paid a bride price (CSVR, 2016). According to Ademiluka (2018), men see wife-beating as an accepted form of discipline because women are seen as children who when not disciplined, can resort to unwanted behaviour. Thus, physical violence is used as a form of control over women. Research shows that women who have had lobola paid for them are more vulnerable to abusive treatment and are unlikely to escape such relationships because of the expectations from their families, and the internalized expectations to accept the power relations that are introduced by the agreement between the two families which is solidified by the payment of lobola (Madiba & Ngwenya, 2017). In a study on HIV in sub-Saharan Africa, married women residing in Mpumalanga were found to be placed at higher risk of contracting HIV/AIDS due to being unable to speak up about their own preferences for fear of being reminded that they were their husband's property and should therefore give in to the husbands' desires (Madiba & Ngwenya, 2017). A study by Jewkes et al., (1999) showed that 79% of married women had the understanding that their husband's payment of lobola meant that they were now under his ownership. Furthermore, 79% of women shared that part of being lobola'd meant that they had to have sex whenever their husband wanted to, thus eliminating conversations about consent.

Moreover, women may tolerate abuse from men because of the economic support they receive from them (Bolis & Hughes, 2015). Economic abuse is the deliberate interference by men in their partner's acquisition and utilization of financial or economic resources (Postmus et al., 2020). They can also be at an increased risk of experiencing gender-based violence due to becoming economically empowered as their partners feel the

need to use violence to retain authority over their partners whom they may now feel are becoming less dependent on them (Bolis & Hughes, 2015). However, this becomes exacerbated when men are unable to provide economically or are romantically involved with independent women that they cannot control with patriarchal ideals (Jewkes et al., 2002; Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022).

Furthermore, men's sense of entitlement to women's bodies leads to an increase in women's vulnerability to being sexually abused (Bhana & Anderson, 2013). Men who view dominance and control over women as a sign of masculinity are more likely to abuse women (Russo & Pirlott, 2006). In addition to that, men are reported to resort to violence when they feel their manliness is challenged and needs to be restored (Abrahams et al., 2006). Gender discipline is also a driving factor in GBV, whereby men use violence to exert power over women in the form of rape (Brankovic, 2019, Jewkes et al., 2006).

2.4.4 Relationships

As indicated above, gender-based violence happens frequently in dating or long-term relationships as well. This is termed "gender-based intimate partner violence" and defined as "acts performed by an intimate partner that includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, including physical assault, verbal abuse, forced intercourse, and other forms of sexual coercion as well as a variety of controlling behaviours aimed at restricting freedom of action (e.g., isolation from family and friends)" (Russo & Pirlott, 2006, p.184). Another definition of intimate partner violence that is specific to, but not exclusive to women, describes it as "physical violence directed against a woman by a current or ex-husband or boyfriend" and includes sexual and psychological abuse, which also accompany physical abuse (Jewkes, 2002, p. 1423). Abuse, coercion, and violence are reported to be characteristic of a lot of heterosexual relationships among students, which reflects the patterns seen in broader society

(Clowes et al., 2011). However, intimate partner violence is also reported by homosexual women, where women are exposed to emotional, physical, and sexual abuse by their partners (Tallis et al., 2020). Although very little research has been done on the experience of GBV among lesbian and bisexual women, there is a record of targeted violence such as corrective rape and murder that this group of women go through (Doan- Minh, 2019; Koraan, 2015; Maotoana et al., 2019). Sexual assault is reportedly common in romantic relationships between university students (Flacket al., 2007). Rape that happens outside the confines of a relationship can sometimes be conceptualized as “forced sex” as it marks the beginning of a relationship, thus being seen as being different from rape to escape the rape stigma (Jekwes et al., 2006). “Heterosexual relationships frequently involve male coercion and domination” which can in turn normalize the violation of women under the guise that it is part of being in a relationship (Boonzaier, 2005, p. 102). Unfortunately, this normalization only leads to further detriment for the woman. In 2008, a female student was murdered by her boyfriend in her university residence at the University of the Western Cape (Clowes et al., 2011). Similarly, in 2020, a student from the University of the Witwatersrand by the name of Asithandile Zozo was murdered by her boyfriend during the national lockdown (Lindeque, 2020). In 2023, another female student from the Tshwane University of Technology was murdered by her boyfriend at her university accommodation (Masilela, 2023). These are just some of the many situations that have shown the extent to which the normalization of violence in relationships can go, whereby it ends with femicide.

Date rape is another form of sexual violence that occurs among students. Date rape is a type of acquaintance rape whereby non-consensual sex takes place between people who are either on their first date or in an established relationship (Lee et al., 2007). This is typical of club situations, in which a lot of students participate as a form of pastime activity. Perceptions around consent, such as thinking that “a girl’s no means yes” and that when

dating, men are the predator and women are the prey contribute to the perpetuation of date rape among university students (Dull & Giacopassi, 1987; Talbot et al., 2010)

"Blesser-blessee" relationships are transgenerational relationships characterized by transactional sex between students and older men who offer financial favours in exchange for sexual activities (Varjavandi, 2017). These relationships are said to have a binary aspect where on the one hand, women are posed as victims of exploitative acts because of poverty while on the other hand, they can be sexual agents who partake in such relationships for the enhancement of their lifestyles (Varjavandi, 2017). However, these relationship dynamics are nuanced and can play out in more complex ways despite the seeming simplicity. While these relationships can be consensual, based on their transgenerational nature, the premise of them being based on the transaction of sex for money that they otherwise would be unable to obtain on their own introduces an element of coercion and exploitation (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002). An exploration of narratives surrounding transactional sex at university found that students engage in these relationships to afford basic needs (Shefer et al., 2012). The research further showed that issues of class also played a role, where girls opted to be in transactional relationships despite experiencing abuse so that they could have a better social image and fit in among their peers (Shefer, 2012). Entering the university space is accompanied by pressures both socially and financially. Students are faced with challenges such as student debts, poverty, and the desire to fit in with the crowd (Shefer et al., 2012). Thus, entering transactional relationships is seen as a solution to some of these challenges (Thobejane et al., 2017). The relationship power dynamic has consequences, one of which is the limitation of sexual agency. Letsoalo and Lentoor (2022) found that some participants could not negotiate safe sex, leaving them at risk of contracting STDs and STIs, and thus experiencing a form of sexual exploitation within these relationships. Within university spaces, transactional intergenerational relationships place students at risk of being abused economically due to the

imbalance that is present both financially and in terms of age (Thobejane et al., 2017). These relationships leave young women vulnerable to the risks of gender-based violence, physical abuse, and coercion to make sexually unsafe decisions such as abandoning condom use (Palfreman, 2020).

Research shows that daughters who grew up in households where their mothers were abused are also more likely to be beaten by their partners (Jewkes, 2002). This is understood using social learning theory, which explains that when children observe violent behaviour being tolerated, it becomes positively reinforced (Wagner, 2019). Thus, students that grow up in homes where abuse is endured by their mothers come to see that treatment as part of relationship problems, and thus normalize it in romantic relationships (Abrahams et al., 2006; Clowes et al., 2011; Fawole et al., 2018). This shows that the continuous exposure to and thus desensitisation to violent and aggressive acts from men perpetuates the normalization of GBV. However, this is not true for all women, as they are not passive and can create their own meaning of behaviour and consciously seek out different behaviours to model. Moreover, they get exposed to different behaviours as they grow up, which also influences their outlook on violence (Dekeseredy, 2011).

2.4.5 Substance Abuse

Pengpid and Peltzer (2013) report that alcohol and drug use are closely linked to intimate partner violence. Alcohol contributes to the increased risk of violence because it decreases one’s inhibitions and impairs the interpretation of social cues (Jewkes, 2002). The use and abuse of substances can increase the likelihood of GBV taking place; however, it is not the main cause of violence (Phorane et al., 2005; Pitpitan et al., 2013). It is the consumption of alcoholic beverages combined with other environmental and individual factors that create conditions that facilitate GBV (Cooper et al., 2013). Additional factors

such as young age, history of childhood abuse and attitudes that condone IPV were found to be compounding variables in increasing the risk for IPV (Abramsky et al., 2011). Scholars have theorized different models that can explain the relationship between alcohol use and IPV. One of the models cited is the common cause model which posits that alcohol use and IPV are connected because they have the same causal determinants such as antisocial behaviour, emotional distress, family conflict and poor parenting practices (Reyes et al., 2012; Rothman et al., 2012)

Research done on substance abuse in university settings also corroborates these findings. Alcohol consumption was highly correlated with sexual assault among students in institutions of higher education (Flack et al., 2007). In a study of unwanted sexual behaviours, it was found that "32,4% of students reported that they were violated because they were drunk, moreover, they found that students experienced 'unwanted intercourse' (rape) and 'unwanted fondling' (sexual harassment) when they were intoxicated" (Flack et al., 2007, p.152). Phorane et al., (2005) assert that the relationship between alcohol consumption and gender-based violence is brought about by the acceptance of drunkenness as a valid state for one to show rage. However, research has also shown that this knowledge is also taken advantage of, with men being reported to be violent when drunk because they believe they will not be held accountable for their drunk actions (Jewkes, 2002). Witte et al., (2015) describe alcohol-related expectations that are driven by alcohol schemas, which when activated lead people to describe abusive and violent behaviours as "drunken behaviour" and therefore excuse the act as normal under the circumstances. In addition to that, the consumption of alcohol is a risk factor for men raping women as alcohol undermines one's ability to correctly interpret a situation and defend oneself in the face of danger (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002; Wechsberg et al., 2014). Men are reported to sometimes engage in the

intoxication of women with alcohol to decrease the chances that women will be resistant to engaging in sex (Wechsberg et al., 2014).

Alcohol abuse is strongly related to violence against women and is further linked to unemployment which is also linked to GBV (Strebel et al., 2006). A study conducted at Rhodes University reported that alcohol played a role in a gang rape that took place on campus (De Klerk et al., 2007). Furthermore, a survey conducted with South African men showed that substance use is correlated with acts of violence (Dunkle et al., 2006; Hatcher et al., 2014). It was found that "half of all sexual assaults in the United States and the United Kingdom are committed by a perpetrator who has been drinking alcohol" (Cooper et al., 2013, p. 362). Moreover, drug use is a factor that increases the likelihood of physical assault within intimate relationships among students (Nabor, 2010). It was further reported that marijuana users are more likely to physically abuse their partners than non-users (Moore & Stuart, 2005). It is therefore clear that the disinhibitory effects of alcohol consumption give rise to the perpetration of intimate partner violence (Feingold et al., 2015).

2.4.6 Social Context

Brankovic (2019) posits that violence is not as simplistic as it is made to seem by the public health approach, with just a victim and a perpetrator. Rather, it is a complex interconnection between victims, perpetrators, and their social context, which often influences violence and how it occurs amongst the people who reside in the context. Boonzaier (2017) calls for scholars to identify the intersecting dynamics of social constructs such as race, class, age, and sexuality in the analysis of gendered violence. This is supported by Fawole et al. (2018), as they report that young people's exposure to high rates of violence and victimization in low-income countries has not encouraged the need to avoid violence to resolve conflict. Rather, this has taught the youth to lean towards becoming perpetrators,

which is often a result of being victimized themselves. Therefore, social issues can change the environmental situation in a way that harms residents, which then prompts the beginning of violence in various forms. To exemplify, Brankovic (2019) reports that physical and sexual violence against women and children was amplified after the massacre that took place in Marikana, and these behaviours are said to be exacerbated by substance abuse. Thus, violent societies are self-perpetuating when there are no consistent barriers and protective factors in place to combat the issue.

The factors discussed above show the multiple ways that GBV is perpetuated and sustained within the country and across the world. The discussion of these factors will highlight their continuous pattern in the various microcosms such as institutions of learning. They grant the topic various points of observation and analysis, while also indicating the deeply entrenched roots of the GBV phenomenon within already existing social issues in South Africa, further highlighting the need for a multidimensional approach in understanding and addressing it within the university space.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is one of the essential parts of conducting research. According to Varprio et al., (2019), a theoretical framework consists of previously developed concepts and premises that were derived from single or multiple theories, which a researcher can use to build a study on. It provides a blueprint for how a researcher is to cover aspects of research such as the problem statement, rationale, literature review as well as the methodology (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). It is therefore a foundational aspect of the research process. By using the theoretical framework, the researcher has tried to interpret the research findings through these existing concepts to relate the study to overarching theories (Varprio

et al., 2019). The chosen theoretical framework for this study is intersectionality which is discussed below.

2.5.1. Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a feminist concept that explains the relations between one's social identities (Shields, 2008). It constitutes the social identities that an individual ascribes to him/herself and how these can influence the individual's experiences in different contexts. Intersectionality suggests that gender cannot be used as the only analytic point of reference without considering how other factors such as race, class, migration status and one's history contribute to the experience of a woman (Samuels, 2008).

According to Gill (2018), by using intersectionality, scholars can observe the experiences of women in terms of the overlaps between gender, race, and class. When looking at violence, we ought to be cognisant of the power and inequality that are at play within relationships, as well as those external to the relationship that encourage violence between intimate partners (Gill, 2018).

Intersectionality is relevant to this research because it offers a way of thinking about GBV considering all the different identities that women possess. Patriarchal societies emphasize male dominance over their female counterparts. Intersectionality can help us understand GBV more broadly by showing that internalized and practised gender roles aid in the continuous perpetration of violence against women (Dosekun, 2013, Sokoloff & DuPont, 2005). This research also explores the influence of cultural values and norms among students that influence GBV directly and indirectly.

Gill (2018) asserts that those who find themselves at the point where multiple marginalized identities intersect experience intensified violence. Black women who are at the point of intersection with gender experience increased marginalization which results in having fewer options for services that are created to assist with specific issues that are faced

at that intersection (Walby et al., 2012). When thinking about GBV and black women, various identities are at play. Black women are often at the lowest level when it comes to economic class, which often makes them financially dependent on their intimate partners (Gill, 2018). This again makes them vulnerable to being victimized because they often cannot afford to survive without financial assistance from a male partner. In terms of university students, they are often led to enter relationships that are transactional, with older men that provide financial resources (Shefer et al., 2012). This puts female students in vulnerable positions with these partners and exposes them to violence either physically, sexually, or economically.

According to Gill (2018), various systems act as barriers that prevent and hamper help-seeking behaviours. These include “fear of criminal justice systems and scepticism of social service institutions” (Gill, 2008, p. 560). Thus, we must comprehend all the systems in place which sustain cycles of abuse and hinder victims from obtaining help and safety. This theory can also offer explanations for how students make use of university protocol in cases of GBV and how this has led them to either report or shy away from reporting violent crimes committed against them.

As mentioned before, violence experienced by women is often shaped by the other identities they carry, such as race and class (Crenshaw, 1993). It is therefore important for researchers to be cognisant of the different identities at play when reporting on violence, especially when it involves black women. Women of colour are largely at risk of being ignored in situations where there are no anti-racist and feminist activists due to structural racism and issues of sexism (Walby et al., 2012). Applying this framework to this study has allowed for an attempt towards fulfilling this need in research.

This intersectional framework was useful for this study because it provided a way to explore and understand this topic in light of the contextual influences that are at play in GBV.

It also granted an understanding of GBV experiences considering other oppressive factors and viewed the extent to which they played a role in fuelling GBV and hampering help-seeking behaviour. This framework added a more nuanced approach to exploring the lived experiences of the participants.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a contextualization and conceptualization of GBV in South Africa. The chapter also addressed some of the key factors that play a role in the GBV scourge in South Africa and the consequences thereof. Moreover, the drivers of GBV such as patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, culture and religion, relationships, substance abuse and contextual factors were discussed, further highlighting the complexity of GBV as well as the interconnectedness of the various contributors towards gendered violence. The review of existing GBV studies in South African universities highlighted the lack of substantial scholarship on this topic and therefore showed the importance of this current study. Finally, this chapter defined and discussed intersectionality as the framework upon which this study was based.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides a brief description of the research procedure, sampling method and data collection to provide the details of the undertaking of the research study. Moreover, the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is presented as the data analysis method which is then followed by the ethical considerations that were made in the process of the research study.

3.1 Research design

This study used an exploratory design as it sought to collect data from students about their experiences of GBV. Exploratory designs provide an opportunity for researchers to obtain new meaning and information to develop, instead of placing a focus on already-existing information (Shaughnessy et al., 2000). Thus, this design fits with the study because it aims to learn about the experiences and understanding of participants around the topic of GBV. The experiential aspect of the IPA design leads the research to place a focus on the way participants understand their lived experiences and how they make meaning from these (Alase, 2017). Qualitative research allows us to get an understanding of social realities and bring attention towards processes and meanings that people apply to experience (Flick et al., 2000). It seeks to understand the reasons behind individuals' behaviour, how opinions are formed, the impact of different life events on people and the development patterns of cultures (Hancock et al., 2009). A major benefit of qualitative research is that it allows a researcher to obtain thick descriptions from the participants and gain insights into a phenomenon (Flick et al., 2000). Therefore, the researcher will make use of a method which allows for in-depth data collection to collect rich information that will help satisfy the research questions.

3.2 Procedure

The research procedure required an initial stage of preparing and submitting a research proposal to the university for review and approval. As part of this submission, an analysis of the research's ethical validity was required. This was done with the assistance of the Psychology Department and supervisors. Once completed, the application for ethical clearance was submitted to the Human and Community Ethics Committee (HREC Non-medical). The initial submission was made in June 2021 and ethical clearance was granted to the researcher on the 27th of September following the processes that were requested to be completed such as the additional submissions and corrections required by the Ethics Committee. Once the ethics process was concluded, a request for permission to conduct research with the student population was submitted to the Dean of Students; this permission was subsequently granted. Following this process, with the assistance of the Dean's Office, invitations to participate in the study were disseminated to all registered students through the university's internal communication system. The initial number of participants to be interviewed was 10. However, there was difficulty with obtaining participants as some who had volunteered had experiences prior to their enrolment at Wits, thus not meeting the participation criteria. Furthermore, there was great difficulty with recruiting participants, which may have been due to the sensitivity of the topic. Preparations for the individual interviews began soon thereafter due to the sensitivity of the topic as well as the researcher's lack of experience in conducting research interviews.

3.3 Sampling Method

The research sample in this study consisted of female students from the University of the Witwatersrand. The study was open to female students of all races as GBV takes place across all races with differing impacts depending on the individual case. Furthermore,

participants were to be over the age of 18 years from any financial background, and sexual orientation. The final sample consisted of 6 black females and 1 Indian female. The participants were heterosexual females and were all above 18 years old. The sample was appropriate to the research because it is the target population of the research study as it aims at looking at the experiences of females within the university environment. The total sample size was 7, which was small and appropriate for the micro-level analysis that took place (Smith, 2015). This directly implicated the generalizability of the findings, given that the university population consists of more than 30 000 students. Therefore, the sample size only represents a fraction of the university population as qualitative studies often do, and thus the findings presented in this study are not generalizable (Acharya et al., 2013).

3.4 Sampling Procedure

This study made use of a convenience sample given the time limit of the research as outlined by the university research protocol. The sampling strategy used in this study was non-probability sampling and the sampling method was volunteer sampling, where non-individualized invitations were sent out to the students for them to decide to participate in the study (Vehovar et al., 2016). This sampling method seeks out participants that are motivated to participate and will contribute their experiences in a reflective way (Etikan, 2016). To recruit potential participants, the university emailing system was used to send out invitations to registered students so that those who were interested could volunteer to participate in the study. In addition to this, the researcher approached the university's campus residences by emailing the house wardens to try to reach students in various ways and through people who had a more proximal relationship with the student population given the limited movement on university campuses in 2021. Following the failure of these two methods to garner interest in students and help the researcher meet the required number of participants, social media

posters were created and circulated on the researcher's Twitter and Instagram pages to increase the reach of the invitation. Likewise, lecturers within the Psychology Department were emailed to share the research invitation with their students. The final sample consisted of students who had seen the initial email sent out using the university's emailing system as well as those who had heard about the study from their psychology lecturers and made contact months later.

3.5 Data Collection Method

This study made use of semi-structured interviews. This interview strategy included the interviewer preparing an interview guide and allowing the direction of the interview to be determined by the participant's responses (Stuckey, 2013). The guide served to open opportunities for flexibility and therefore create space for sensitivity, allowing the participants to be able to follow up on desired points of interest (Hancock et al., 2009). This was a suitable strategy because it allowed the researcher to collect accounts that could later be compared with other information from separate interviews, while also allowing the interview to remain flexible so that additional information could also arise (Dawson, 2002). Interviews were conducted in English as all the participants were fluent in the language and did not require interpretation. Each interview began with answering any questions the participants had about their participation in the research, to help them understand the purpose of the study and to ensure that they understood the confidential nature of the study as well as their right to revoke consent at any point of the interview. At several points, some participants expressed themselves in isiZulu and Sepedi to give verbatim accounts of conversations that formed part of their narrative. The interviews were conducted online using the Zoom application as this was during the Covid-19 pandemic and would therefore be the safest way to interact with participants. Furthermore, online interviews granted the

participants the opportunity to retain physical anonymity and allowed for interviews to be held in the evening which was often a more suitable time for most of the participants as well as the researcher. The interview sessions lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Data collection took place between November 2021 and March 2022. Data gathering tools included a laptop that was used to record the interviews, as well as the list of the general questions that were posed to the participants. The researcher did not experience any difficulties during data collection apart from the occasional drop in the network, which was always mitigable.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data analysis method used for this study was interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) which is a common approach in the field of psychological research (Hancock et al., 2009). IPA is a method of analysis that aims to explore how participants are making meaning of their personal and social world (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The phenomenological aspect of the approach lies in its concern with the participant's own account and perception of a significant life event rather than attempting to come up with an objective statement of the event (Smith & Osborn, 2007). This method of analysis recognizes the interpretive role of the researcher in producing the account from an insider's perspective (Hancock et al., 2009). To integrate this method with the intersectionality framework, the questions were phrased in a nondirective way to eliminate the possibility of leading the participants, and to rather allow them to provide responses that would be as authentic and unbiased as possible. When analyzing the data, the researcher took an interpretive stance and looked to comprehend the content of meanings found in the data (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The data was engaged with continuously to obtain the meanings as the interpretations needed to still relate to what the participants said. Hence, it was important to have a close interaction with the data. The first step involved reading the data multiple times while making note of any information that was

interesting or stood out from what the participant said on the left margin (Smith et al., 1999). The researcher had the option to either summarize or attempt to make preliminary interpretations or connections among the data. On the other margin, the researcher took note of titles for emerging themes. Next, the researcher made a list of the emerging themes and identified links among them (Smith et al., 1999). The researcher ensured that as new clusters of themes emerged, they still linked with the primary data.

The second step was to create a table of the main themes that were identified. All the themes needed to relate to exactly what the participant said without any bias and distortions from the researcher (Smith et al., 1999). In the case of this specific research, where there were 7 participants, the researcher had the option of using the master themes list to guide the analysis of the next interview. Alternatively, the researcher could follow the same steps again for each interview and then consolidate a list of master themes for the entire participant group. For this study, the researcher used the latter method of completing all the steps for each interview and then coming up with a list of master themes for the entire group. This method was used to also allow for the opportunity for diverse and contrasting views to be identified. Finally, when new themes came up, they were compared with earlier interview data to see if they impacted on previously generated themes. Depending on the relation to previous themes, they were either modified or changed to sub- or overarching themes (Smith et al., 1999).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

As with all research, ethical considerations must be put in place to avoid infringing on the participants' rights and to maintain the dignity of the participants (Akaranga & Makau, 2016). To begin with, voluntary participation was to be always upheld. The manner of obtaining participation was through sending out invitations whereby willing participants could make first contact with the researcher to make their interest known. Following that,

discussions about participation could begin. Additionally, the participants were to be made aware of the scope of the research and what the research aims were, as well as what participation in the study would entail. This process was done by providing the participants with informed consent documents, where they could clearly state that they understand what the research scope is and that they consent to participate in the research (Akaranga & Makau, 2016). These forms had to be signed before the interview. Additionally, the consent form consisted of a section that allowed participants to revoke their participation at any point during the interview should they decide to revoke their consent to participate in the study. The participants were also permitted to refuse to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with, which is in line with the ethic of voluntary participation (Arifin, 2018). The content of the informed consent form was revisited at the beginning of each interview to ensure that all participants had read and understood what they had consented to and any questions they had were addressed to help them feel secure about their participation. Consent to record the interview was also requested before the recording was begun.

Anonymity and confidentiality were two additional aspects that were included in the consent form and discussed with the participants (Arifin, 2018). Given the personal and traumatic nature of the research, some participants raised concerns about their identities being hidden. As this was a qualitative study that aimed to tell the lived experiences of students on campus, it was important to only highlight the issue without publicizing those who had survived these experiences. Therefore, maintaining anonymity and confidentiality was imperative. This was ensured by conducting the interviews online and in a space where the participants felt that they were safe and private. Furthermore, the participants were encouraged to keep their videos off during the interview if they felt that they did not want to be exposed to the interviewer. This was readily welcomed as all that was required was an audio recording of the interviews. In maintaining the anonymity of the participants, their names were not used in the

transcription process. Rather, they were referred to as “Participant 1” for example. In the write-up of the research, pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity and confidentiality as stated in the informed consent form (Arifin, 2018). Transcription was done in a private space and all the transcribed material was kept in a secure room as well as on a password-protected device.

Given that the study is based on traumatic life experiences, an arrangement was made with the Gender Equity Office (GEO) ahead of submitting the proposal to provide counselling for any participants who may have experienced distress during or after the interview. The participants were made aware of this service and the contact details of the counsellor were made available. A distress protocol document was also prepared by the researcher to use in such cases to ensure that all the correct steps would be taken.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a brief discussion of the research design, sampling process research procedure, and data collection method. The IPA data analysis process was outlined, and the ethical considerations made during the research process were explained.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the study's key findings. Interviews were conducted with students and then transcribed. Once transcription was complete, the data was analysed using IPA wherein themes were derived from the data.

Themes

The following themes were identified upon analysis of the data: (1) Power Relations (2) Internal Experiences (3) Normalisation of Violence (4) Help-seeking. Two sub-themes were identified under the first theme: emotional manipulation and coercion, and power battles. Similarly, two sub-themes were identified under theme two: sense of shame and heightened anxiety. Three sub-themes were identified under theme three: surviving the perpetrator, revictimization and trauma, masculinity, and violence. Lastly, two sub-themes were identified under the fourth theme: barriers to seeking help and hesitation. Each of the themes are discussed in the following section.

4.1 Theme 1: Power Relations

This overarching theme is an indication of the use of a power imbalance within the participants' relationships to create opportunities for abuse and maltreatment. Power is "the ability to influence or control others using persuasion, legitimate authority or coercion" (Gravelin et al., 2019, p. 99). Different forms of power exist, two of which are legitimate power and coercive power. Legitimate power exists where an individual has a recognized right to affect another individual based on their possession of a socially accepted role or position. In such a dynamic, the target must acknowledge, respect, and comply with the requests made by the individual who holds legitimate power (Simpson et al., 2015). In a relationship context it is the ability of an individual to change a partner's thoughts, behaviour,

and feelings for the purpose of obtaining a desired outcome, with the possibility of the other partner resisting the influence (Korner & Schutz, 2021; Simpson et al., 2015). Contrastingly, coercive power exists when one individual is aware of their ability to punish another individual for not complying with his/her demands. This kind of power is used to elicit desirable behaviour through using threats or punishment (Simpson et al., 2015). Physical and psychological strength are often used to achieve this (Hall & Knox, 2017). In these exploitative relationships, the victim's vulnerability is used to gain benefits from the individual being abused (Gregoratto, 2017). The power differences between two people in a relationship reflect the characteristics, the nature of the relationship or the greater external environment in which the relationship exists (Hall & Knox, 2017). However, gender contributes greatly to the way individuals in a relationship perceive their power, with men seeing their physical strength and sex as a source of power and women seeing their social skills and emotional intimacy as a source of power (Hall & Knox, 2017). The two sub-themes of emotional manipulation and coercion are discussed below.

4.1.1 Emotional Manipulation and Coercion

In several cases, the perpetrators played on the emotions of their victims to downplay the abuse and to offset the chances of resistance from the victims.

> *I think we were good friends at the beginning, but there was a time when he was drunk and he needed help going up the stairs and stuff because he could barely walk, so I tried to assist him with that. Uhm, but when I tried to leave him, like after opening his door seeing that he goes in and whatnot, I don't remember how I even got inside, but when I did, it was difficult for me to leave nje. He was pushing me on the bed. Uhm (sigh) he got on top of me when I tried to ask him ukuthi "what are you doing?" he was like "shhh, you're making a noise the neighbours are going to hear*

us. What are you doing, are you trying to get me into trouble?" Those types of things.." - Participant 1

I just sort of tried to put it on extinction because the more I gave it attention, the more he would deny, the more (verbally) aggressive he would be, and I honestly didn't want him to discredit my reality even more because I knew what I was going through. I knew what he was putting me through. But if I ever had to address it, he would deny it and he would turn it around and I was not in a place where I could deal with that. – Participant 7

In Participant 1's case, the perpetrator was her friend who had known that she would likely be compassionate towards him in a vulnerable situation. The quoted excerpt shows that the request was made in an effort to get the participant into the perpetrator's room without any indication of an intent to sexually assault her. The framing of himself as a helpless character who was at her mercy created a desire to assist, while also leaning on the pre-existing friendship. This combination of factors is what led the participant to be unsuspecting of the manipulation that was taking place.

The manipulation further continued with the verbal suggestions that she was placing him in danger by making noises that would alert the neighbours to his actions which would land him in trouble. In this attempt, the victim was being led to believe that she was the problem in the situation and the responsibility was on her to prevent him from getting into trouble as opposed to him not trying to sexually assault her. However, she proceeded to fight him and escape the attempted rape situation. Participant 7 describes her experience of gaslighting, which is a type of mental manipulation/psychological abuse where the victim is made to believe that her feelings are false and unreal (Sweet, 2019). These attempts by the perpetrator are aimed at making the victim seem crazy to discredit their version of

experiences (Sweet, 2019). This experience is also described as psychological isolating, a perpetrator's strategy of breaking down a victim's psyche to prevent them from being able to figure out ways to challenge the violence (Pain, 2022). In this situation, the victim resorted to avoiding voicing her feelings as a strategy to protect what she knew to be true. This experience suggests that she was often left confused and perhaps even pushed to believe untruths in order to protect herself from further violence. In addition to this, his increasing aggression towards her suggests that he was using it as a defence against her resistance, while simultaneously using it as an intimidation tactic. This constant state of shifting between wishing to speak up and not wanting to make things worse left the victim in a state of powerlessness.

Similar to Participant 1's experience, Participant 2 was being led to believe that her reaction was wrong and she was at fault instead of the abuser:

> *And then there will be times when I'm like, you know, like when I just call him out, he'll be like "ai relax. You're still young. Why do you act like a magogo (old woman). You know, I was checking your I.D. number on the system. I was like oh this one's just acting older than she is"- Participant 2*

Participant 2 outlined one of the many interactions she had with her research supervisor, wherein he constantly attempted to emotionally manipulate her to behave in a manner that would be pleasing for him. Her research supervisor had romantic interest in her, which was unrequited and therefore created an uncomfortable environment for the student who kept resisting his advances. In his attempts to pursue her, the lecturer played on the participant's age, by "jokingly" making her feel as though her resistance was inappropriate and misplaced. The process of grooming is portrayed as innocent within the interactions so that the perpetrator can assess whether the victim is suitable (Bull & Page, 2021). This was

meant to be a subtle attempt to get the participant to feel as though she indeed had to react in the way he was leading her to and feel the need to avoid being viewed in a negative light because being older was framed an undesirable state. This manner of targeting the student was a form of grooming as he made several attempts to blur the professional boundary. Grooming behaviour relies on a power differential, where the perpetrator begins laying down the foundations for the entrapment of a targeted victim (Bull & Page, 2021). The supervisor was in a position to do so given the legitimate power he was afforded by his position in the university. This case exemplified the intersection of the participant's gender and age as factors that increased her susceptibility to being sexually predated by her lecturer. In addition to this, the lecturer had abused his power to access her personal details to know exactly how to approach her. Noteworthy is his communication of his ability to know this information about her, which further adds to his efforts of entrapment through mildly suggesting that he may know more about her than she thinks, or that he is more aware of the way she should be behaving than she is, as an individual in authority and as an older man. The above cases exemplify manipulation as an act of abusing power wherein the perpetrator uses specific strategies to illegitimately influence a victim through using words to form beliefs within the recipient (van Dijk, 2006). These insidious actions rely heavily on the recipient's inability to fathom the perpetrator's true intentions and anticipate the harmful consequences and the extent thereof (van Dijk, 2006).

In some of the participants' cases, coercion was used to force them to agree to be in situations in which they were ultimately abused. In Participant 5's situation, she was manhandled by her boyfriend and restricted before he proceeded to physically assault her:

> *So, I close the door. As I close the door, he locks the doors. So now I'm on my way- what I thought was on my way home because it was a street where he was supposed*

> *to turn right so he turned left. So, I guess I'm not going home. So, we drive, I'm quiet. As we get outside, he parks by the gate to get out the car and open the gate manually. So, I'm like "you know what, this is my chance to literally get out of this car and start walking home". I get out of the car and I start walking home. He parks the car in the yard, he runs after me. You know, when a child is, I don't know, like when a child takes something they're not supposed to take and they start running away and then you pull them by their pants? Yes, it was literally that. He just came and he pulled me by my pants, like "ye wena (hey you) let's go". And he pulled me by my pants, on the back. So, he drags me back to into the yard, locks the gate, confiscates my phone - Participant 5*

In Participant 5's experience above, her boyfriend manhandled her, and proceeded to beat her following his displeasure that was aroused by a conversation that the participant was having with her friend regarding the physical appearance of another man. She shared that she had attempted to request that her boyfriend drop off her at home; however, he refused and drove her to his place where he subsequently physically assaulted her. The reactive aggression theory of violence outlined previously explains his behaviour, where he experienced an unpleasant conversation that impacted his emotions negatively, which in turn triggered the will to harm her and resulted in his extreme and aggressive reaction (Hyde-Nolan & Juliao, 2012).

Participant 1 describes the increasing intensity of her friend's actions before he attempted to rape her in his residence room:

> *He was trying to forcefully kiss me and then he just continued for some times and he, he like, he was holding me tight, like pinning me on the bed, and I couldn't really loosen the grip, it was difficult - Participant 1*

The above quotes show the progression of refusal to respect the participants' request to leave and the subsequent violent and aggressive treatment they received due to the physical power differences in the situations. Participant 5's case depicts coercion, where the perpetrator used physical violence to make her adhere to his demands (Jeffrey & Barata, 2017). She uses an analogy of a child that had done something wrong, which is a contrast to her situation where she had done nothing wrong despite her actions being perceived as wrong and deserving of punishment. Moreover, the comparison to a child is an additional indicator of the age difference between herself and her boyfriend as well as the unequal power dynamic which placed him in the position of decision-maker and disciplinarian. This is consistent with the patriarchal ideal of physically disciplining women to correct the behaviour of challenging them and to retain the position of dominance (Abrahams et al., 2006; Sultana, 2011). Furthermore, the analogy of a child points back to the infantilization that men project onto women which in this case was particularly true because of the age difference, both of which are features of the gender roles assigned under patriarchy (You, 2020).

The sexual coercion that Participant 1 was exposed to can be understood through Byers's (1996) explanation of different types of traditional sex scripts (TSS), one of which was the expectation of women to be resistant to men's sexual advances following which men must be persistent in overcoming that reluctance by being active and aggressive in those instances to get what they want. Beliefs that a woman's no means yes has also contributed to sexual cases on university campuses (Talbot et al., 2010). Moreover, the idea of giving in to a woman's refusal is seen as being insufficiently masculine, which is looked down upon by peers (Byers, 1996). As previously mentioned, men will tend to subscribe to the violent behaviours that they understand will grant them access to the hegemonic masculinity that they wish to attain and constantly portray, thereby creating a self-perpetuating cycle of violence.

Participant 6 shared thoughts about her experience wherein there was a consistent and subtle forcefulness that was undertaken by the perpetrator that led her to yield to his demands because of how burdensome the badgering had become. The yielding to the continuous demands takes place because of the sense of helplessness that develops within the victim:

> *I think it becomes easier to do that because I mean, 30 minutes is a long time to walk. So, I mean, I think the reason men continue to badger women is because it does actually wear you down like to the point of a woman will sometimes have sex with a man because he just will not stop nagging about it. And then eventually you're just like "can we do it so you can leave me alone?". So, I think there is definitely an aspect of that, of saying, "okay, this guy is here. He's not going anywhere. Let me just talk to him because "hey nkosiyami (my lord), what else can I do?". So, yeah, there's not much in our choices, is there? – Participant 6*

> *And I don't know what I had on me, but he always did that. And it came to a point where now he would pop up out of nowhere. Like when I was walking, he would just pop up out of nowhere. I was like "wait, where did he come from" because I didn't see him behind me. Or he would quickly walk behind me or run towards me. So, he was forcing himself to speak to me. He knew gore (that) I didn't want anything to do with him. So, he thought maybe if I just make sure that she doesn't have a way out, then she is obviously going to have to speak to me - Participant 3*

The above excerpts display power through behaving in emotionally and physically threatening ways. In each of the above, the participants were being stalked by male students. However, in the case of Participant 3, she was being stalked by an ex-lover while Participant 6 was being stalked and harassed by a stranger who had learned her movements and continued to pursue her romantically. Typical cases of stalking involve individuals who had a

prior relationship, where the stalker still desires to be romantically involved with the victim while the victim does not (Lambert et al., 2013). It is reported that 50% of stalking cases occur between people who had previously been involved in an intimate relationship (Sheridan et al., 2018), which indicates the high prevalence of stalking as a form of IPV. In both extracts above, the idea of one's autonomy and choice being exploited and withheld comes to the fore, indicating that the perpetrators were aware of themselves overstepping boundaries but continued based on their perceived entitlement to the time and attention of these women.

The normalization of aggressive courtship in society has led to a confusion regarding appropriate dating behaviours among men and women (Lambert et al., 2013); as a result, violent acts are not easily viewed as illegal by victims, while stalkers view themselves as being in the pursuit of desirable objects (Lambert et al., 2013). Present in these two accounts is the feeling of helplessness, which is described as a situation in which all of an individual's attempts to impact the outcome of a situation are insufficient in effecting a change, leading to them giving up after realizing that nothing that they do will matter (Nuvvula, 2016). Ultimately, the various tactics employed by the men resulted in feelings of powerlessness and put the victims at the mercy of the perpetrators. Furthermore, it shows that these female students are placed in a position of having to bargain for their autonomy by first giving up their freedom by entertaining the male students' demands and attempting to earn it back in the way they navigate these interactions.

4.1.2 Power Battles

Participant 5, who was in a relationship with an older man, describes an interaction that displays her boyfriend's forceful attempt to re-establish a sense of power over her:

> *So, there was this, I was wearing this wig that he once bought me. He literally grabbed it off my head. I was wearing his jacket; he was like take off my jacket. I was*

> *wearing a watch he bought, the earrings… So, I'm just like, wow okay cool. So, I do all of that and now it starts being an argument. He starts saying "yeah this is exactly why you'll never have friends because you think you know too much. Your problem is that you're too educated" – Participant 5*

The extract above depicts her older boyfriend using the perceived power afforded him by his possession of material to control her. The decision to strip her of things that he perceived to grant him control over her, and proceed to manhandle and beat her up for her opinion on another man shows his association of financial status, masculinity, and power which was symbolized by the material items he had afforded her. Frieslaar and Masango (2021) argue that this behaviour of enacting control over a partner due to being a financial provider has roots in the practice of lobola in which men pay an amount of money in exchange for total ownership and control of a woman. Research based on relationships between financially well-off males and their younger partners reports that male partners often use their financial power as a manipulative tool to elicit desired behaviour from their younger female partners through controlling them (Frieslaar & Masango, 2021). Furthermore, in some instances, female autonomy such as negotiating condom use in sexual interactions is denied on the basis of the man's provision of money and luxury (Hoss & Blokland, 2018). The perpetrator also points out her education level as an additional aspect that was challenging his sense of power over her because it seemed to make her less subservient to him. This account further shows the intersectionality of Participant 4's identity as a young, financially dependent but educated female, which in this case were the four identities (age, SES, education and gender) that lent her to being abused. First, because she was somewhat financially dependent on him for status symbols, second because she was somewhat empowered to speak her mind as an educated individual, and third because she is a woman, which he expected not to challenge his masculinity and power that was afforded to him by the

societal gender roles which she was not living up to in that instance. Thus, in her experience, her education level, age, socioeconomic status, and gender were the intersecting identities that exacerbated the physical abuse (Mackey & Petrucka, 2023).

Research done in institutions of higher education show that changing consumer cultures have led to a trend of transactional relationships with better resourced men (Clowes et al., 2009). This places young and under-resourced women at risk of abusive relationships (Clowes et al., 2009). Therefore, while the age difference between herself and her partner was not necessarily significant as compared with those that characterize “blesser-blessee” situations, her partner used his resources and their age difference as a means of control, and subsequently abused her when he became displeased by her actions. Furthermore, her partner’s comment regarding her education level contains an underlying patriarchal undertone of the expectation of women to set aside their education and consequently, their mental capacity to rationalize situations, so that they submit to patriarchal standards of female behaviour in relation to male domination (Kambarami, 2006). Thus, while education is perceived as a protective and emancipatory factor, it can in such instances prove to be a risk factor to IPV.

4.2 Theme 2: Internal Experience

Throughout the narratives, the women shared the internal emotional and cognitive experiences that they went through during these various abusive experiences.

4.2.1 Sense of shame and regret

Abused victims often go through different emotional experiences during their victimization, one of which is feelings of shame and/or guilt. Shame is defined as the affective aspect of stigmatization after the experience of abuse which can also lead to a

diminishing self-esteem (Kennedy & Prock, 2018). The extracts below provide insight into the emotional experiences the victims had as they processed what had happened to them.

Participant 2 describes her sense of regret following an unwanted and unanticipated kiss from her lecturer:

> *I don't know. I was also disappointed in myself because I was thinking, why didn't I just push him away or punch him? Or I have like, a knife in my car, why didn't I just grab the knife and stab him to death. Like, I just think I was just so overwhelmed with all these emotions of how I was just so stunned and just frozen// All these suggestive things that he's always been saying. Like I just proved him so right today. So, it was just so terrible. So terrible. Like it was just so terrible that I even wished that I would have stabbed him to death. That's how angry I was like when I just started thinking about it// I just think I went blank. Like I was in awe of just the moment. Nothing went on. I just was- I don't know if I was numb, I was in shock or I think probably even in that moment, if he wanted to rape me, probably he would have because I was just not responsive in any way. – Participant 2*

> *But like that trauma and vulnerability that you feel within yourself to think I let this person do this to me for so long? I let this person creep into so many different aspects of my life and ruin so many friendships and so many relationships// like I didn't stand up for myself and that's something that I really have tried in the last year or two years to build up again because I mean, they break you down. – Participant 7*

Both extracts above show the desire to have engaged in behaviour deemed appropriate for a violent situation and show an unexpected psychological reaction to trauma. Participant 2 mentions a desire to have acted on her aggression. The rage and anger expressed by the participant is described as post victimization anger (Sheffield et al., 1999) or posttraumatic

anger, which refers to the intense anger one feels towards the self and the perpetrator following an experience of assault (Orth & Maercker, 2009). The pain in Participant 2's missed opportunity to externalize the anger is indicative of the lasting emotional effects that a victim is left with following a GBV crime. She further shares an experience referred to as tonic immobility in which an individual experiencing sexual harassment is rendered incapable of reacting defensively and instead experiences muscular rigidity and physical immobility but retains cognitive awareness of what is taking place (Schiewe, 2019). The experience of tonic immobility led to her experiencing disappointment towards herself for failing to react in a violent or retaliatory manner. This type of response is explained to be quite confusing for victims as they continue to face difficulty trying to understand it (Stones & Moss, 2013). The participant further speaks of the self-blame she experienced, where she felt as though after all her refusals, resisting his advances, and even calling him out, she acted in a way that made it seem like he was right all along. This suggests the experience of behavioural self-blame, which refers to "the cognitive attribution of fault to one's own controllable behaviour" (Kennedy & Prock, 2018, p. 2).

Similarly, Participant 7 recounts the extent of the trauma as well as her feelings of being laid bare and exposed to threat after putting up with the emotional and verbal abuse she was exposed to by her ex. However, in the same breath, she communicates a sense of ownership over the experience by acknowledging that she did nothing to stop it despite having realized the harm she was experiencing as expressed previously. The expression of shame and guilt in tandem are characteristic of traumatic experiences, with shame reflecting the feelings towards oneself while guilt reflects the negative assessment of one's actions or inaction in a traumatic situation (Beck et al., 2011). This picture provides insight into the psychology of trauma, where power dynamics can create a complexity of reactions. Research shows that ongoing cycles of reward and punishment in romantic relationships can cause

strong emotional bonds that are resistant to change, thus leading to a traumatic bond (Effiong et al., 2022). The guilt she feels is apparent in the victim's narrative, as well as the determination to rectify that behaviour once she managed to leave the relationship. The participant further expressed that "they break you down", showing that there is a sense of mental overpowering that takes place that is beyond what she could manage, leading one to succumb under the attacks, as discussed previously.

Below, Participant 3 expresses the emotions accompanying the powerlessness rendered by her ex's disrespect of her bodily autonomy, following her decision to forgive his stalking:

> *And then I hugged him, right? And then I remember him grabbing my butt, and I pushed him off immediately because we were in the matrix, just next to the elevator. And then he did that and then after that he smiled, you know, he laughed it off as if he didn't do anything wrong. And right then I knew it and I didn't, I never got to say the things I wanted to say to him face to face. You know, I felt he took away that power from me and he was like doing all of those manipulating things so I couldn't speak when I wanted to speak and tell him gore (that) "no, what you're doing is wrong" - Participant 3*

Participant 3's experience quoted above illuminates the tendency of male perpetrators to engage in opportunistic violent behaviour with the expectation of not being held accountable for their harmful acts. This typology of perpetrator is described as "the opportunist", who makes use of specific locations and situations to harass an individual (Hendricks, 2022). This behaviour is further accompanied by acts such as downplaying the situation and pretending as though nothing has happened, thereby gaslighting the participant.

Participant 4 expresses a difficulty accepting that she was victimized, despite knowing that she had indeed been drugged and raped by a fellow student:

> *Because it was hard for me to accept that, you know, something did happen because I kept trying to convince myself that, you know what? This is the story: you got drunk; you hooked up with him. That's the end, you know? But I knew that's not what it was, and something was wrong - Participant 4*

Mkhize et al., (2020) explain that in institutions of higher education, date rape is common and coincides with the rape culture that is present in university living spaces. Drug-facilitated sexual assault refers to the deliberate use of drugs to override one's denial of consent by incapacitating her (Krebs et al., 2009; Wechsberg et al., 2014). The intoxication occurs to prevent physical and verbal resistance from the victim, which insinuates that this behaviour is calculated, particularly because the perpetrator was acquainted with the victim.

Participant 6 describes the emotions she felt a long time after the experience had passed, some of which she experienced during the interview as she reflected on what had happened:

> *It does cross my mind maybe here and there. But the feeling I'm having right now would be I feel I could have just stood up for myself more, better. And I'm kind of feeling like I betrayed myself by befriending him rather than like firmly saying no. Those are the feelings I am having right now. – Participant 6*

Regret formed part of her reflection as she realized that she had acted in a manner that was not typical of her personality or character just so that she could have an easier experience in university. Her choice to befriend him is explained by traumatic bonding, particularly referring to an attachment that forms within a victim in an effort to increase her personal power in a situation where there is an insurmountable power imbalance (Dutton & Painter, 1993). The regret experienced by victims who did not leave the abusive situation is argued to be compounded with feelings of shame, anger, and disappointment (Fry & Barker, 2001).

The anger that victims experience and direct towards themselves is manifested as feelings of guilt, wherein the victim feels that the outcome would have been different had she acted differently in the situation (Messing et al., 2012). Moreover, her narrative also indicates a symptom of trauma, namely reliving the interactions through flashbacks or involuntary thoughts (Kaminer et al., 2008).

4.2.2 Waves of Emotions

When questioned about the internal experiences at the time of being violated, the students described a variety of emotions and cognitive processes.

> *I couldn't [defend myself] because he's built, he is bigger than me, and now there's a whole lot, a wave of emotions. I'm shook, I don't know what's what. I'm very slow to react to certain things. I take time to like process these things so I was literally in like a "huh?" space. I was literally in a confused space for the longest time, for the longest time. So, I couldn't defend myself at all. At all. I think he knew that you know? He knew that there was absolutely nothing I can do, absolutely nothing I can do. And also, in that moment, the one thing you're thinking is I can't even try and defend myself or to and slap him. That's just going to make things even worse, and lord knows what I could possibly push him to do. – Participant 5*

When her boyfriend hit her the first time, Participant 5 was in complete disbelief and shock, which made it difficult for her to figure out what to do. However, she simultaneously understood that if she tried to retaliate and defend herself, things could get worse for her because he was in possession of a gun and he was aware of the physical advantage he possessed in the situation. Gun ownership has been associated with high homicide rates and the implementation of the Firearms Control Act (FCA) in 2000 saw a decline in homicidal deaths in the country (Matzopoulos et al., 2014). Despite this decrease in gun ownership,

guns still play a large role in the South African femicide rate through being used by men in killing their female partners (Taylor et al., 2020). Interestingly, considering that gun ownership is a privilege that was only made available to black South Africans post-apartheid (Langa et al., 2018), researchers have suggested a link between gun ownership amongst black males and the desire to defend their masculinity in an increasingly equal society that has left them disenfranchised as they struggle to meet some expectations of hegemonic masculinity (Taylor et al., 2020). The helplessness and powerlessness that she experienced made her vulnerable to more attacks and she therefore had no other option but to endure the beating.

Participant 5 goes on to say that she didn't know what "I could possibly push him to do", which suggests that in the process of being beaten up by her boyfriend, she had accepted that she had done something wrong and doing anything else would warrant further assault from him, almost indicating an acceptance of the powerless position she had been placed in. Thus, the alteration of her thought patterns begins to come to the fore, showing the rationalization taking place in her that she was now responsible for what could happen to her. The participant's thought process is indicative of the manipulation discussed in theme 1 earlier, where the victims begin to internalize the scripts that are communicated by the perpetrators.

One participant described being diagnosed with a mental disorder following their abuse experiences while others experienced anxiety:

> *She diagnosed me with PTSD when I came in after the incident. And then that's why she booked me in. It was supposed to be for about a week, but I just wasn't doing well at all and that's why it ended up being three weeks. I'm still struggling with it to this day. I still have sleepless nights just trying to think about what actually happened. - Participant 4*

> *Like, I put myself through that, and not that I'm blaming myself too much about it. But it's funny how things happen because one minute we were friends, the next minute we dated, next minute this happened. And it's like, I don't realize, I didn't see anything right? And then last year, that's when it hit me after the whole anxiety phase and all of that. - Participant 3*

The dominant emotion experienced by participants during and after their abusive experiences was fear. The participants battled to cope with the thoughts of potentially experiencing the abuse again or in a different form. This emotional experience is supported by researchers who showed the psychological impact of abuse (Naidoo, 2013). Additionally, the participants showed symptoms that were linked to PTSD. A study done in Limpopo showed that more than 51% of the female victims of IPV experienced severe PTSD (Peltzer et al., 2013). Unfortunately, GBV victims are left untreated because South Africa has an under-resourced mental health sector (Kaminer et al., 2008). This, alongside the low economic status of most South Africans makes accessing mental health services virtually impossible for most (Kaminer et al., 2008), thus making it extremely difficult for women to cope as they have no option but to deal with their GBV experiences without the help of qualified practitioners. Despite the progressive mental health legislation, the barriers faced in the implementation and financing of the mental health sector contribute to the lack of mental health human resources as well as community and psychosocial mental health rehabilitation (Burns, 2011).

Participant 2 describes the fear she had after the case against her lecturer fell through and she worried about whether it would be over:

> *For a couple of months after I left, I was just scared, you know? I just had to check. Like, I still live at the same address, what's going to happen? I still have the same*

numbers. I just thought, what if he stalks me or even harasses me? Like, there is nothing really that's stopping him from doing that. So, it was just anxiety in terms of I was just so scared in terms of what if he attacks me? What if he kills me? Or what if something terrible happens after he's left the university? - Participant 2

The fear experienced by Participant 2 echoes the high rate of femicide in the country, which refers to the murder committed against women by their intimate partners (Yesufu, 2022). It is a known trend that females who have been victimized are often murdered in South Africa, where it is reported that a woman is murdered every four hours (Frieslaar & Masango, 2021). This extreme form of GBV is argued to be viewed as a way of control, which is particularly dangerous in a country such as South Africa where the control of a female partner is generally accepted, and a poor command of this control is viewed as an indication of a masculinity under threat (George, 2020). Regrettably, the high femicide rate shows a higher value for one's portrayal of socially accepted masculinity over the life of his partner (George, 2020).

4.3 Theme 3: Normalization of GBV

4.3.1 Surviving the Perpetrator

In the narratives they shared, it was apparent that the participants reached points where they changed their behaviour to adapt their lives in a way that would decrease the impact of the abuse and limit their exposure to the abusers:

I mean, what can you do? I think now that I think about it, I'm very assertive and I'm very sure of myself. So, I know I said no strongly. I know I said it more than once. I know I said that, but he was just not taking it// It just became a matter of saying look, I think it's better when I'm friends with this guy. – Participant 6

…it was just really hard to hear it because it took me so long to accept that I was the victim. – Participant 4

The extracts above show the challenges that abused women go through in trying to retain their identities amidst the external violent experiences that oppose these identities and self-beliefs. The difficulty with accepting one's victimhood is rooted in the idea that one has lost dignity and admits to being defeated (Mijke, 2016). In addition to this, the victim label carries a connotation of passivity and weakness as well as loss and suffering (Fohring, 2018; Leisinring, 2006), which as seen in the above quotation, was the opposite of Participant 6's self-concept and identity. This difficulty demonstrates how the schemas they had of themselves as strong and empowered black women were being challenged by an oppressive, external, masculine influence, which aimed to impose its own idea and understanding of what it means to be a woman (i.e., inferior and subordinate to males). Thus, the denial of victimhood was a psychological means to retain the foundational empowered and strong beliefs they held about themselves (Fohring, 2018). Research further suggests that this act of rejecting and avoiding the label helps defend against psychological distress (Fohring, 2018). Thus, it can be concluded that this internal psychological process is linked to self-preservation against the negative links to victimhood. Ultimately, the power dynamic brought about by the threat of harm subsumed the assertive and self-aware educated women, leading them to accept the identity of victimhood and then figure out ways to cope as seen in the befriending of the perpetrator and the adoption of survivor position. Participant 1 shares a similar strategy to shift away from victimhood towards coping and adopting a survival strategy, particularly in shared university spaces:

> *There was no way I could avoid seeing him. And when he was invalidating that, it made it even more difficult. But as time went on, I think I kind of got used to seeing him and keeping my emotions in control- Participant 1*

Participant 1 paints a picture of resilience and self-empowerment. Resilience is defined by Singh and Myende (2017) as the process of human adaptation in the face of adverse circumstances that threaten one's well-being. This mental shift created a reality where instead of allowing the perpetrator to influence how she felt, she decided to take back control and not act on her negative emotions despite the difficulty she was facing.

Some participants chose to create a physical distance between themselves and their abusers so that they could cope with the emotions and trauma:

> *So, there was a period where I stopped going to the dining hall. I felt like it was too much for me going there because I couldn't stand in line for a long time without thinking gore (that) he would just pop out of nowhere and stand next to me or say something or send somebody to say something or call me or things like that. So, I stopped going until I felt like I was getting better and I found somebody to go with so at least that was reassuring gore if anything happened there would be someone there, as, you know, a witness- Participant 3*

> *I moved back to res eventually and I was still living in the same building as this guy, still running into him randomly. My roommate was still friends with him, would bring him into our room and yeah, eventually I had to move to a different building. – Participant 4*

In the extracts above, Participant 3 appears to have developed some paranoia and anxiety from the experience, which were alleviated by her limitation of the interactions that

she could potentially have with her ex. In addition to that, her fears of not being believed are evident in her taking someone along with her for protection and for support in the form of witnessing the incidents. Participant 4 chose to change her entire living arrangement to avoid having to be in contact with him, given the proximity that they had. This is a self-protective strategy that is often employed by abuse victims to help themselves cope (Hamby, 2013). This particular arrangement indicates the destabilizing impact of GBV, where life changes sometimes have to be made so that victims can try to return to a sense of normalcy despite the life-altering events they go through. Gordon and Collins (2013) discuss how the normalization of self-policing behaviour contributes to hiding patriarchal power and masculine entitlement and further legitimizes the limitations to victims' social freedom rather than that of perpetrators. These accounts show that male violence possesses the causal power to have significant ability to change women's behaviour in their attempts to cope with the fear that arises from victimization (Walby, 1989).

Apart from the change in perception and physical distancing from the perpetrators as methods of survival, one participant turned to substance abuse to help herself cope:

> *After that year, like I was smoking weed more than I care to admit, and it's not something that I'm proud of, but like even then, I was finding all these things to sort of like, act as crutches and distract me from what was really going on. – Participant 7*

Participant 7 describes substance abuse as a consequence that followed her experience of verbal and emotional abuse. Her description of her abuse of cannabis as a crutch shows the level of dependence upon the substance in order to help her function, while also serving the purpose of numbing the effects of the experience so that she would not think about it. This method of coping is accounted for in research as part of the effects that IPV has on one's mental health (Baird et al., 2021). Considering the learning context, it becomes clear that

adopting disordered ways of coping was a useful way of offsetting the malfunction that was introduced by a cycle of abuse, which could have potentially led the participant into an even worse state had she not eventually been able to opt for a healthier way of coping.

4.3.2 Revictimization and Trauma

Research has shown that victims of GBV are often likely to have been victimized multiple times across their lifespan.

> *He really made me miserable that first year because it wasn't even my first experience of being stalked. In primary school… that guy also waited for me at the gate, and he would walk me home and it was a long 30 minute walk and he would be asking me out the entire way. It was another case of being harassed the entire time - Participant 6*

Her account shows the forced nature of these interactions, where she was monitored, followed, and harassed. The predator's actions are part of the cycle of entrapment where he attempted to groom her by walking her home and constantly making advances towards her (Vartapetiance & Gillam, 2014). This account further shows the presence of helplessness which was reminiscent of the kind that she experienced as a child, which was playing out again in her stalking experience on campus. The endurance of continuous 30-minute interactions of discomfort and pressure also highlights the implied need to be pleasant towards the person making the advances for fear of more violent treatment from them.

> *I think he was once an English teacher, so most of the time I would go for that until he started… he started doing things I wasn't comfortable with, he started to touch me at some point, he was telling me that nothing is for free, "what did you think this was?" and he would forcefully do other things// Yeah, but then I had another*

experience after that with a friend again. And he, he was also trying to force himself on me, trying to forcefully kiss me. So, I think when that happened, it was like "arg, again?" - Participant 1

Participant 1's account of experiencing additional sexual harassment from a different friend ends with an expression of exasperation and defeat. In addition to that, it shows that she was reminded of what she had been through with her other friend who had tried to rape her. Her account of revictimization shows that victims are placed in situations where their trauma is repeated or relived. The accounts above show the pervasiveness of GBV in South Africa, and the likelihood that women will experience a form of gendered abuse at multiple points of their lives as seen in these two participants' experience of sexual grooming in their childhoods. Research shows that women who experience such childhood trauma are 2-10% more likely to re-experience it in adulthood which then adds to their experience of PTSD symptoms (Becker et al., 2010). Moreover, this has dire consequences for the individual's well-being as early experiences of childhood abuse were found to have adverse effects on mental health, contributing to symptoms of psychological distress as one grows up (Macmillan, 2001). Participant 1 was sexually assaulted by a neighbour who was providing her with English lessons back when she was in primary school, and she did not disclose this to her parent, a common occurrence in situations of paedophilia and grooming, where perpetrators are shown to take advantage of the environment to deter the abused child from exposing them (McElvaney, 2019). In this instance, the authoritative position that the former teacher was in, was manipulated to coerce her by making her feel responsible for reciprocating something in return for his academic assistance.

Noteworthy is the fact that both these participants experienced the same kind of abuse in adulthood as they did in primary school. Poly-victimization refers to the occurrence of

childhood abuse being associated with experiences of IPV in adulthood (Cavanaugh et al., 2012). In attempts to explain possible links, Carbone-Lopez and colleagues (2011) suggest that individuals who go through cumulative abuse situations may have developed certain tendencies that occur as a result of mental alterations owing to past experiences of trauma, making them more susceptible to revictimization. Additionally, personal characteristics such as physical size can create vulnerability as well as psychological traits including temperament or more submissive or aggressive behaviour (Carbone-Lopez et al., 2011).

4.3.3 Masculinity and Violence

The way that men and women are socialized plays a role in the way they view and treat each other. Unchanging patriarchal norms as well as harmful masculine ideals endorsed by social institutions such as schools and the media contribute to violence perpetration and further the cycle of GBV (Hunnicut, 2009, as cited in Hadi, 2017).

> *I don't know if he ignores it or he just acts like he doesn't feel anything, but he doesn't really seem bothered. Me texting him, me telling him to stop doing all of this. They don't seem to shake him in any way// I just know that he didn't feel bad about what he did, he just thought that it was normal or was part of the hugging process or something. But it was the first time he touched me that way. Wabona (you see) if it wasn't the first time I would understand gore (that) for him, it's in his mind that every single time we hug he has to do that. But that was the first time he did it and he still didn't, you know, apologize for it. He just brushed it off - Participant 3*

> *At first, he kind of made a joke out of it, that he didn't see anything wrong with it and he would just come by, try to hold me, and then laugh about it, asking me what my problem is. Yes, stuff like that. // I know it was difficult to deal with the second one because he didn't really see anything wrong with it - Participant 1*

The two extracts above portray a type of masculinity that is unapologetically violent and has normalized the mistreatment of women. Despite being confronted about their actions, the men involved in the cases above did not seem impacted by the women's protests against their behaviour. This behaviour is in line with the traits of male domination and female subordination entrenched under patriarchy (Beechey, 1979). The dismissive attitudes that are described are reflective of the normalization of abuse and the expectation for women to accept the status quo and the ideology that men can treat them as they see fit without question because they are male. The ways in which the physical boundaries were overstepped, and the maltreatment of women's bodies, showcase the sexist ideology that women's bodies are for men's pleasure (Makama, 2013) and the questioning of this is perceived as unnatural and problematic as depicted by the participants' utterances of "he just thought it was normal" and "asking me what my problem is". The reactions above signal the underlying subordination of women in seemingly subtle ways such as disregarding their experience and using language that is meant to manipulate the victims by problematizing their resistance to violence (Sultana, 2011). Furthermore, the responses indicate the men's internalized sexist expectations for the women to be timid and obedient (Sultana, 2011) and placing an importance on pleasing men and objectifying themselves for male pleasure (Black & McCloskey, 2018) which led them to believe that the women were acting abnormally.

The lack of remorse from the perpetrators is an indication of the entitlement over women's bodies that men are socialized to develop, making this behaviour seem normal to them (Bhana & Anderson, 2013). In Participant 1's account, the act of turning his behaviour into a joke shows that he wanted to make light of the situation, to present it as not being as serious as she felt it was to escape responsibility but also perhaps to influence the victim to think of it as harmless. The need to escape responsibility takes away the prospect of

accountability and the possibility of changing parts of his masculinity that are negative, which would then create cognitive dissonance in the perpetrator.

Participant 6's experience portrays a different kind of response, showing a consideration of the woman's experience and some understanding that his perceived normal behaviour was experienced as harmful and abusive:

> *So recently we were talking and I, I did tell him that he made my first year so terrible and he like completely didn't get it. He apologized, but he completely didn't get it. He just said that he was trying to be persistent because he thought, you know, I'm playing hard to get and the more he tries, the more I will see that he's really serious about me. So he wasn't trying to make me uncomfortable// then I said I don't know, I felt I had to be your friend for you to stop harassing me. Then he says "I've never been abusive towards wena. Iphutha lami wakuba ukukthanda. I know I was very scary first year. Second year kodwa the environment made me a better person. Wena ngangi'phelezela to your hood to make sure you were safe. If ngake ngakwenza wa feela otherwise ngiyaxolisa (I've never been abusive towards you. My fault was loving you. I know I was very scary in first year. [in] second year though the environment made me a better person. I was accompanying you to your neighbourhood to make sure you were safe. If I have ever made you feel otherwise, I'm sorry). – Participant 6*

This extract shows an attempt to reconcile the two perspectives, and the ultimate acceptance of wrongdoing on the man's part. This account displays a manner of interacting with women that is characterized by the sexual script of male persistence (Ryan, 2011) where the man has to continue to express and show his interest in the woman to prove his love for her and subsequently win her over. This form of initiating courtship is described as a South

African traditional concept of respectability where young men in townships are expected to continue to pursue women that reject them (Hattingh, 2011). This idea of chivalry expressed by his act of protection is a learned behaviour that was experienced as threatening. This extract shows that generalized and unclear sexual scripts characterized by boundary crossing through forced conversations (Hattingh, 2011) do not hold up because they disregard individual preferences and create complexities in interactions between individuals of the opposite sex. Furthermore, the perpetrator's apology without a genuine understanding of where he went wrong is an indicator of the self-centred nature of abuse where all actions that lead up to the abuse have to do with the desires of the perpetrator and take no account of the impact on the recipient of these advances. Moreover, his appraisal of his behaviour indicates the benevolent sexism that underlies his actions. That is, his stereotypical view of women, in which he would play the role of protector, hence him maintaining that his actions were positive (Miglietta et al., 2019). He criticized her based on his view that her behaviour was antagonistic against his pursuit and served to make him work harder, instead of accepting it as a clear communication of her boundaries based on what she wanted.

Participant 7 shared aspects of her experience which portrayed an enactment of hegemonic masculinity that was interlinked with the violence that she experienced. She explained a scenario where one of her friendships was controlled based on how her partner felt about a particular male friend:

> *So it is a whole thing of like, it was a dick measuring contest to be honest, between them. I don't know why that was the case// I actually stopped talking to my friend because it had gotten to such a point where he was like "this is disrespectful, don't even talk to him. Do this, blah blah blah"//We started dating around October, November and like things were good, like especially in the beginning because like he*

> *had finally, like sort of won his trophy. And I use the word trophy because he literally called me that at like some point further down the line. So the first couple of months, like they were fine and things, but he would always been very caught up in the way that I look, the way that I dress. Whether I was wearing makeup. Just sort of like how I presented myself because he didn't want other people to see him with me if I wasn't at my best. – Participant 7*

The above extract shows an expression of objectification which is a branch of sexism where women are seen as objects that exist for the pleasure of men. However, this is also a foundational component used in competitions that take place within their homosocial groups (Bird, 1996). Male homosociality explains men's enactment of masculinity in front of other men to obtain their approval (Flood, 2007). Within these social groups, male competition establishes hierarchies within the relationships and determines a level of status. Oftentimes, as part of trying to establish these hierarchies, women are arranged as pawns in games orchestrated for and played by males where the basis is often intertwined with female sexual objectification (Bird, 1996; Flood, 2007). In this instance, Participant 7 is seen as a prize for him having been able to get a good-looking woman. He then went on to treat her as one would treat a trophy (inanimate object), always looking polished and ready to be displayed to adversaries as a reminder of his triumph over them, which in this case was his peers. The symbolism in this instance shows a sense of ownership and it provides a parallel to abusive tendencies where there is a superficial need for the object, only when it is useful for display; however, it obtains no care outside of its usefulness.

4.4 Theme 4: Help-seeking

The help-seeking behaviours of the participants were investigated, to get an understanding of whether their identities had impacted the kind of assistance received, and whether their

positionality had impacted their decision to seek help at all. Help-seeking is a form of seeking assistance following the experience of assault or abuse (Lelaurain et al., 2017). Lelaurain et al., (2017) posit that it involves three stages, recognizing the problem, deciding to seek help, and selecting a help provider.

4.4.1 Barriers to Help-seeking

Research shows that women face a myriad of challenges when seeking justice against their perpetrators. Factors such as a lack of accountability from official service providers, low conviction rates and personal feelings surrounding the experiences deter victims from seeking help (Johnson et al., 2017; Mutinta, 2022; Thomas et al., 2019). Participant 4 shared her experience of the treatment she received when she decided to report that her friend drugged and raped her:

> *I reported it in Braam. First we went to Hillbrow Police Station because I remember the night I told my mom what happened, we were coming from.. my cousin had recently passed away. And I think that's what triggered me to actually tell my family what happened because I felt like I couldn't deal with everything alone anymore. She immediately drove to Hillbrow Police station with my brother and so that's when I opened the case// All I remember is the victim blaming. That was the first thing is, you know, first I was asked what I was wearing, the officers in Braam asking what I was wearing on that night and why did I go out at 02:00am when I already had a bad feeling. And I felt gaslit because I was being asked questions like maybe you were just drunk maybe that's why you don't remember. And I remember the officers also saying that "well this happens to a lot of you, you girls in first year, you come here and then you go wild, you go drinking and then this happens to you and you come in, you open cases. So, it just felt hopeless. It was like, this is useless. What's the point of opening a case because even the police don't seem to care? - Participant 4*

This account showcases misogyny on the part of the policeman whose internal beliefs about a woman's conduct are revealed by his line of questioning. The pattern of victim-blaming has been shown in research to be indicative of the biases held by the police officers regarding the roles played by the perpetrator and victim in the abuse (Venema, 2016). Victim-blaming is a common occurrence in situations of date rape that occurs between acquaintances (Gravelin et al., 2019). Research has shown that schemas are employed to decrease the amount of work that goes into understanding situations but can often lead to improper ways of performing due diligence in cases of crime (Venema, 2016). These schemas are informed by rape myths which minimize the harm of rape and blame victims (George et al., 2022). The policemen she interacted with show the victim precipitation myth by placing an emphasis on her dress code. George et al., (2022) assert that those who endorse this rape myth perceive reports of rape involving intoxication as misunderstandings between acquaintances. In this case, it completely led to the policemen treating the victim as being responsible for the act, and they then treated the perpetrator with pardon, almost apologetic for infringing on his time to try to get to the root of the matter. This account shows dismissal of the victim's case just because it is frequent. The lack of prioritization because of the frequency of similar situations implicitly communicates a message that women should figure out a way to avoid gendered violence instead of making it a problem for SAPS to take care of. This is another example of the expectation that women should engage in self-policing behaviour to prevent being violated (Gordon & Collins, 2013). Consequently, this leads to secondary trauma, characterized by the negative reactions of others towards a victim of sexual assault (Gravelin et al., 2019).

Victim-blaming has links to negative cognitions, which in turn can compound into much worse internal experiences, adding to the trauma (Baird et al., 2021). Fohring (2018) when writing on victimhood, asserts that receiving sympathy from others plays an important

role in helping the victim feel supported, which ultimately contributes to a positive experience of receiving the resources required from police as well as health and legal services (Fohring, 2018). Thus, this case shows how apathy on the part of members of SAPS feeds into the cycle of not reporting. It implies provocation and deserved victimhood, leading to the participants having feelings of hopelessness that develop from the realization that the policemen had taken a stance already, which would influence the approach they took in resolving the case.

4.4.2 Hesitations

The extracts below show that the participants were reluctant to report their experiences to the university. They tended to desire separation and distance from these experiences because they did not want to dwell much on what had happened to them:

> *When I sit and reflect, I think I always really question if I was ever going to report this. If events leading to me reporting it never happened. // So I was the class rep in 2020… seeing that there's three of us with the same issue, let me just like report this academic behaviour// The head of school called me to ask like "is this all that you really want to report in this regard? And then I asked "what do you mean?" she's like "so it was just the academic stuff, you've never been harassed in any way?" and that's how I came about to be like, okay, this is my story and this is what I've been going through and this is what happened. Then she linked me up with people from the GBV office and this like mental health service, counselling and legal and that's how the whole issue was then reported. – Participant 2*

> *… during the time I was attending counselling, the lady once asked me since I can identify this as gender-based violence "why don't you go report the guy?" and I was faced with such a decision. Do I go or do I not go and guess what I did, I decided to*

protect him. I was like "no, I don't want him to get into trouble". I don't want him to get expelled from school because I understood that it was a whole other process where he would have to go for [hearings] you know, things like that. - Participant 3

In Participant 2's experience, we see that there was an intentional attempt to assist her based on the staff member's probing about what the students were going through. Thus, there is evidence of concern among university representatives to protect female students from predatory behaviour by other staff. Her narrative shows the extent of the available resources at the university, which she was not aware of, but was able to access through the proper guidance. Her hesitation is representative of the tendency of black women to be unlikely to seek formal support and lean more towards approaching social support from family and friends (Monterrosa, 2019). However, Participant 3's reluctance highlights the concept of community code of silence, where black women feel the need to live up to the social expectation to protect black men's image and freedom (Barrios et al., 2021), highlighting the intersection of her gender and race identity in relation to help-seeking.

Participant 2's contemplation of whether to report the sexual harassment that she received from her lecturer points to her weighing the possibility of a favourable outcome considering the perpetrator's position in the university. Thus, her hesitation is fuelled by the understanding that obtaining justice is not simple and hinges on various factors, including individual and structural influences (Mutinta, 2022; Thomas et al., 2019). It is therefore important for the structures to prioritize justice and make avenues that make it easier for victims to receive help as seen in her experience.

Situational factors such as academics as well as desires to move past the trauma further contribute to poor help-seeking behaviours. Additionally, psychological factors such

as feelings of shame and fear of being stigmatized contribute to the deterrence of reporting (Mutinta, 2022; Thomas et al., 2019).

> *I didn't seek any help from Wits. I think I only talked to my friend, one of my friends a couple of weeks later even. I would first say that I didn't want to go back to that moment. I kind of just wanted to forget and like act like it never happened because I still had to process it and it felt like something that's going to keep happening if I keep talking about it and I thought seeking help from Wits, I thought that could have been a long process. Also, the time and academics. So, I thought that I could deal with it by myself or I could just forget. - Participant 1*

Participant 1, who later shared that she knew that there were available sources of assistance, chose not to seek help because of the perception that reporting it would lead to her having to relive the abusive experience. Misconceptions about the processes and expectations further discourage victims from reporting GBV crimes (Johnson et al., 2017). Thus, it becomes clear that one of the barriers to reporting abuse on campus is the desire to distance oneself from the mental and emotional toll that comes with rehashing the experience. The participant opted to suppress the experience as a way of coping with the difficult mental and emotional impact it had had on her. Unfortunately, this adds to the rate of underreporting which is a contributor to the perpetuation of GBV within universities and has a negative effect on the attempts to eliminate the issue (Mutinta, 2022).

> *And nobody, nobody knew what I was going through because like myself couldn't explain it because I put myself in that situation. So, I am not going to ask for pity from somebody else when I literally caused this for myself. – Participant 7*

Participant 7 shares that she had no support because she could not express exactly what she was going through because of the self-condemnation she appears to have been carrying with

her. What she expressed shows an underlying cultural stigma that encompasses the socially held ideology that serves to delegitimatize victims' IPV experiences, the internalization of which has internal and external consequences (Crowe et al., 2021). She had internalized the stigma to the point where it hampered her openness to reaching out for social support and engaging with protective factors that could have been instrumental in getting her out of that abusive relationship sooner (external) and it led her to experience feelings of shame and guilt (internal) as discussed above.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a discussion of the themes drawn from the participants' accounts. These include *power relations, internal experiences, normalization of violence, and help-seeking*. The first theme consisted of two sub-themes which showed the exertion of power by the perpetrators to coerce and subjugate the participants and highlighted the often-subtle manner of influencing the victims to make them more susceptible to victimization. Two sub-themes were identified under theme two, which focused on the emotional and cognitive aspects of victimization, highlighting the internal battles that the students wrestled with as they tried to make sense of their experiences. Under the third theme, three sub-themes discussed the challenge of continuing to exist in similar spaces with the perpetrators, the re-experiencing of trauma as well as the factor of masculinity and how it enables men to perpetrate violence against women. Lastly, the two sub-themes of theme four focused on the issues of help-seeking such as the barriers faced by the students and their own hesitations toward seeking help, showing the added complexity in their attempts to establishing a sense of security.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the key findings of the study based on the research question, its objectives, and the intersectionality framework. In addition, the researcher's reflection is included to provide a brief discussion of her positionality during the research process. The limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

This research aimed to understand the lived experiences of GBV among female students at the University of Witwatersrand. The main aims were to ascertain the impact that the GBV experiences had on the students and the types of violence that female students were exposed to at the University. The research found that the participants had experienced stalking, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse as well as sexual abuse in the form of sexual harassment and sexual assault. The most prevalent one experienced by the students that participated in the study was stalking.

The second objective was to discuss the impact of these experiences on the mental and emotional well-being of the participants. It was discovered that the impact was adverse, with some participants describing the experience as traumatic and then going on to be diagnosed with mental disorders such as anxiety and PTSD, while some described emotional experiences that allude to paranoia. A sense of loss of control was experienced by some participants, where they had to ultimately fashion their movements and decisions around the traumatic violent experiences.

With regard to the intersectionality objective, it was clear that the students did not necessarily show consideration of their intersecting identities as being oppressive or exacerbating their oppression. However, their narratives did provide insight into the subtleties of these intersections such as in their adoption of the victim role, challenges with choosing whether to report their experiences, and their susceptibility to being victimized because of

their age, gender, and socio-economic status in cases where the perpetrators were older than them.

Lastly, results pertaining to the fourth objective showed a hesitation towards help-seeking, with the participants indicating a tendency to deal with the issues on their own and within close social support systems and foregoing the formal route of help-seeking. However, the data also showed that in some instances where assistance was sought by participants, a lack of support from institutions such as the SAPS as well as from close friends compounded the feelings of victimization and created feelings of regret, which literature has shown to contribute to the issue of underreporting. In addition to this, one participant expressed fear of getting her ex into trouble because of her understanding of the implications that the record could have on his future. Contrastingly, two participants that obtained assistance from the university received adequate care and support and were encouraged to seek justice. This shows that the university does have staff that is willing to support GBV victims through the various support services available such as GEO and CCDU. However, it would be beneficial for universities to place a higher emphasis on extending the knowledge of existing policies to assist students and improve their help-seeking behaviours in that manner.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the task of establishing trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research (Dodgson, 2019). It enables the researcher to understand her role in the contribution to new knowledge and allows her to engage in a process of monitoring the self and how this impacts the research outcomes (Dodgson, 2019). This requires the researcher to pay attention to the ways in which personal beliefs, ideologies, personal experiences, social position, and emotional experiences during the interaction with the participants affect the way in which the research process is undertaken (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). The central goal of reflexivity in

research is to improve research quality and to recognize the study limitations by accounting for the different aspects of the researcher's influence (Berger, 2015).

Interviewing the participants was a nerve-wracking experience. Having never done interviews for research, I had very few skills to rely upon aside from my clinical experience where I learned how to ask meaningful questions and hold space for those sharing their confidential histories with me. In an effort to improve on this, I did my own research on how to conduct interviews for the purposes of research, which provided additional guidance on how to approach the interviews. In the initial interview, this insecurity was tangible in that some parts of the interview were slightly abrupt, which was compounded by the participant's reserved personality. While the interview was rich in data, the insecurity may have possibly contributed to the way the process unfolded. There were some worries about triggering my clients and inducing adverse experiences in them, which at times I feel prevented me from following up on certain things that they shared. Guillemin and Gillem (2004) write about the difficulty with deciding how and when to probe for more information when studying violence victims about their distressing experiences. Moreover, I had reservations about asking deeper and more direct questions out of fear of appearing as though I was victim-blaming or seeming sceptical of what they were presenting. Therefore, I felt somewhat limited by my own feelings as a researcher. In such instances, reflexive questioning had to come into play whereby the framing of more sensitive questions was implemented to maintain an ethical approach to research and ensure that the process was not harmful to the participants (Guilleman & Gillem, 2004). Special attention was also given to the timing of the questions, with an attempt to be tactful and letting the temperament and openness of the participant guide the appropriateness of follow-up questions.

Berger (2015) asserts that reflexivity places the researcher as a compassionate and non-exploitative actor within the research process. My identity as a black woman, who at the time was also a student, created a sense of alliance with my participants. Power differences are unavoidable between researchers and their participants (Dodgson, 2019). Thus, my positionality as somewhat of an insider may have decreased the power differential and granted a degree of understanding between us as peers and individuals who shared an ethnicity. Furthermore, my field of study and profession may have created an expectation of support and understanding from my participants, making them more open to sharing their stories. This positionality created a need for me to make the interviews pleasant to avoid disappointing this possible expectation as well as not bringing disrepute to my school and the profession as a whole by ensuring that I was holding space and being affirming of their experiences. As someone who has had similar experiences as my participants, I could at times identify with the stories they were sharing, which in turn, induced a sense of supportiveness during the interviews. The relatability in the process could have potentially influenced the comments made by me as the researcher. In addition to this, given the nature of the topic and its damaging impacts on the victims, there could have been a bias of siding with the victims during the interviews, while vilifying the perpetrators. However, this was often offset by the victims' ability to bring in their own empathy and humanization of the perpetrators.

Using the intersectionality framework was a challenge, given my limited understanding of the framework during the process of the research. When it came to the analysis of the data from an intersectional point of view, I began to question the applicability of such a framework in the South African context, at the University level, given the fact that these were black women, who form part of the largest ethnic group, are privileged to be at university, were victimized by fellow black men, and had not experienced opposition from the law enforcement either due to the genuine support given by the university or because they

did not interact with the larger structures. My growing understanding of research frameworks during the write-up of the paper led to a questioning of whether my approach to the interviews was true to the essence of the framework. In an attempt to give the research participants free rein to tell their stories, my questions were structured in a manner that would avoid leading the participants to offer up only specific types of responses such as identifying how their experiences were riddled with multiple oppressions. This undoubtedly led to the research taking a more narrative direction, but I would argue that it retained the authenticity of their experiences. Furthermore, I understand the limitations of the non-diverse sample, which in some way limited the analysis from bringing forth more themes of intersectionality.

As an individual with a conservative worldview, which got even stronger during the period between the submission of my first draft and the second, it became apparent to me through reflections that I held some of the opinions that came about from some participants and in some of their interactions. However, my training as a psychologist consists of an identification and understanding of my countertransference, which I believe came into play during the process of interviewing and analysing the transcripts. This is a positive effect of the training and plays an assistive role in reflexivity during the research process (Berger, 2015).

Limitations and Recommendations

This study aimed to employ an intersectional framework; however, the lack of focused application of the framework throughout the research process and a diverse sample hampered the execution thereof and thus limited the analysis of the findings in accordance with the framework. Additionally, the use of theoretical sampling would have ensured a more diverse sample, which consequently would lead to comparable data and clearer links between varying identity categories and their interaction with power to exaggerate experiences of

oppression and produce a more substantial understanding of IPV among women within the university environment. Unfortunately, the time limits and the sensitivity of the study did not allow for this appropriate sampling method.

Based on the limitations stated above, future studies should make use of a sampling method that will create a more diverse sample, which will be better suited for a more effective application of the intersectionality framework.

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APPENDIX A- Participant Information Sheet

[Masters in Community based Counselling]

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Good day

My name is Serole Kgolane and I am a Masters tudent in Community-Based Counselling Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating Gender Based Violence under the supervision of Professor Malose Langa. The aim of this research project is to explore the lived experiences of GBV among female students at university.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview This activity will involve answering questions and will take around 45 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to audio record the interview using a digital device. This recording will be stored in a secure device and only the researcher will have access to this recording. It will be deleted after 3 years.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project, You will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time. If you need some support or counselling services following the interview, these are available free of charge at Gender Equity Office. The name of the correspondent is Fiona Mahlori and her contact details for the counselling service are Fiona.mahlori@wits.ac.za.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. With your permission the data collected from this research project may be used by other researchers in an anonymized format. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,
Serole Kgolane
Serole Kgolane, 1754052@students.wits.ac.za, 0791905661

Supervisor:
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APPENDIX B- Informed Consent form

[Masters in Community based Counselling]

Appendix A
CONSENT FORM

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE: Female students' lived experiences at Wits University

RESEARCHER: SEROLE KGOLANE

I,……, agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:
(Please circle the relevant options below).

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous.	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his / her research report.	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded.	YES	NO
I agree that the information I provide may be used in an anonymized format after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.	YES	NO
I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, and I can withdraw from it at any point should I not wish to continue as a participant.	YES	NO
I understand that I have the right to withhold responses to any questions that I do not feel comfortable answering.	YES	NO

…… (signature)
…… (name of participant)
…… (date)
…… (signature)
SEROLE KGOLANE
6 APRIL 2021

APPENDIX C- Participant Invitation

ARE YOU A WITSIE WHO HAS EXPERIENCED GBV?

Tell your story by participating in this research study.

Hi, my name is Serole Kgolane. I am a Masters student studying towards a degree in Counselling Psychology at the University of Witwatersrand. I am conducting a study that is aimed at exploring abusive intimate relationships between students.

01 Abusive intimate relationships may include the following:
- emotional abuse
- physical abuse
- Stalking
- Name calling

02 To be eligible to participate in this study you must be:
- a female student at Wits
- 18 years or older

If you would like to participate in this study and share your story, please email me at 1754052@students.wits.ac.za. Interviews will be conducted on Zoom.

APPENDIX D- SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your understanding of GBV?
2. When was your experience of GBV?
3. What took place when this incident happened?
4. Did you seek any help from the school/ friends?
5. What kind of help were you offered?
6. How was the experience of having to continue with your studies and being on campus like after the incident?