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N CATAZO; Z GWAM; M XWESO; Emmison Muleya

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The Views of Male Youth Leaders on Sociocultural and Economic Influences Contributing to the Persistence of Domestic Violence: Implications for Social Work

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Ntombizandile Catazo
Department of Social Development Professions,
Faculty of Health Sciences, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa

Zukiswa Gwam
Department of Social Development Professions,
Faculty of Health Sciences, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa

Mzukisi Xweso
Department of Social Development Professions,
Faculty of Health Sciences, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa,
Mzukisi.xweso@mandela.ac.za

&

Emmison Muleya
Department of Social Work, School of Human
and Community Development, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa

Abstract

Domestic violence is a pervasive global issue, influenced by a myriad of sociocultural factors deeply rooted within diverse communities. Its effects are particularly pronounced in South Africa, with women and children being disproportionately affected. This article adopted a qualitative research approach

to explore sociocultural and economic influences that contribute to the perpetuation of domestic violence. The study adopts an ecological systems theory as the theoretical lens under which the study is foregrounded. Data collection involved conducting focus group discussions with ten purposefully selected community leaders in Gqeberha, located in the Eastern Cape province. The data collected was subjected to thematic analysis. Major findings point to certain cultural norms prevalent in their families and communities, the role of media, and the perpetuation of male superiority and gender inequality within the domestic sphere and broader society as ongoing catalysts for domestic violence against women. Based on its findings, the study recommends the implementation of interventions and policies aimed at breaking the cycle of domestic violence within the community. It emphasises the necessity of proactive measures to address the spread of domestic violence and advocates for consciousness-raising programmes to eradicate lingering negative influences.

Keywords: *Gender-based violence, Domestic violence, Equality, Ecological systems theory, Sociocultural influences*

Introduction and Problem Statement

This article begins with a hypothetical scenario that highlights the harsh realities faced by elderly women encountering domestic violence in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa and the critical role that world and national governments can undertake in addressing and curbing issues of marginalisation and violence against women and children. This narrative aims to capture the attention of the social development community workers. The scenario is presented as follows:

> Nozibele, 52, a mother of two children, Phakama, a 21-year-old female, and Mphilisi, a 15-year-old male, lives in a small rural village in the Eastern Cape, far from essential resources such as healthcare facilities, police services, and schools. Her village is also geographically isolated from other nearby homes. Every day, she endures physical abuse from her husband, which not only jeopardizes her well-being but also affects the development and safety of her children. Protecting Nozibele's rights and empowering her to break free from this cycle of violence is vital. By doing so, we support the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5: Gender Equality (United Nations [UN], 2015). Ensuring women's rights and safety is crucial for building resilient communities and fostering sustainable development.

The above scenario tragically illustrates the pervasive and oppressive nature of domestic violence, a reality that unfortunately affects countless women and children worldwide. Globally, an estimated 1 in 3 women, which translates to approximately 736 million, have experienced either physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner in their lifetime (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2023). The South African National Strategic Plan (NSP) on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) (RSA, 2020) defined sexual gender-based violence as any sexual act or unwanted sexual comments or advances using coercion, threats of harm, or physical force by any person, regardless of their relationship to the survivor, in any setting. Physical violence includes an intentional act to cause injury or trauma to any person. In the South African context, the government has put in place a number of initiatives to address gender-based violence. The NSP (RSA, 2020) is one of the major projects, and its goal is to develop a multi-sectoral, cohesive strategic policy to stop GBVF. To improve victim safeguards, the government has also reinforced existing legal frameworks, such as the Domestic Violence Act and the Sexual Offences Act. In addition, the Department of Social Development, as part of its core mandate to assist victims of crime, has developed the Intersectoral Policy on Psychosocial Services for victims of domestic violence. The South African Police Service (SAPS) has specialised GBV teams, while Thuthuzela Care Centres offer survivors all-encompassing support. Campaigns for public awareness and collaborations with civil society organisations are essential elements of the nation's attempt to confront and prevent GBV.

Despite these efforts, intimate partner violence statistics remain alarmingly high. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these circumstances (Odeku, 2021), with approximately 51% of South African women reported to have experienced gender-based violence (Stats SA, 2020). It is noteworthy to emphasise that in South Africa, a significant proportion of the affected population are women in urban areas and mostly those who reside in rural areas (Cabras, 2019). Kasa and Saunders (2022) pointedly accent that among the issues contributing to domestic violence are patriarchal and cultural discourses that remain the larger sources of domestic violence. Within these two broader factors contributing to domestic violence, there appear to be a myriad of socioeconomic aspects. For instance, such social and economic factors have resulted in women belonging to lower social status and power owing to cultural norms, religious and societal standards, limited

women's empowerment and a lack of social support (Muller, Gahan, & Brooks, 2014; Jewkes & Morrell, 2018; Dartnall & Channon, 2020; Mshweshwe, 2020).

The consequences of domestic violence are devastating, especially for women. Its consequences are a reflection on human rights violation (Kagiso, 2021; Kasa & Saunders, 2022), which are entrenched in the Declaration of Human Rights and the Constitution of South Africa (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996). Domestic violence survivors regularly describe negative effects on their physical, emotional, and reproductive health (Perrin *et al.,* 2019). Women frequently do not disclose domestic violence to providers or access health care or other services (e.g., protection, legal, traditional authorities). This is because social norms that blame the woman for the assault (e.g., she was out alone after dark, she was not modestly dressed, she works outside the home), and norms that prioritise protecting family honour over survivor safety and institutional acceptance (Perrin *et al.,* 2019). Governments attempts to address the effects of domestic violence, especially in rural areas such as those mentioned above, have not been successful (Mshweshwe, 2020). This deficit must be addressed so that domestic violence prevalence can be reduced in rural communities as well.

In this context, it is noteworthy that comprehending the continued prevalence of domestic violence requires a look beyond individual actions and into the larger social and cultural settings. A complex interaction of variables including poverty, education, cultural norms, and social views on gender roles and family dynamics often results in these circumstances maintaining cycles of abuse. This article aims to build on existing literature by reporting on the findings of a study into the socioeconomic and cultural factors that lead to the continued prevalence of domestic violence. Exploring these aspects allows for a deeper understanding of the systemic constraints that impede the elimination of domestic violence. Furthermore, the article discusses the critical implications for social work, emphasising the importance of informed interventions capable of addressing the prevalence of domestic violence in society.

Theoretical Framework

The article is underpinned by the Ecological Systems Theory propounded by Bronfenbrenner (1979). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) the ecological perspective views people within layers of relationships with systems in their social environment. It is concerned

with the progressive accommodation between growing human organisms and their immediate environment and the way in which this relation is mediated by forces emanating from more remote regions in the larger physical and social milieu (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). In Bronfenbrenner's (1978) initial articulations of the ecological perspective, he posited that the ecological perspective includes three levels of structures or systems that are nested around a focal individual, like a set of concentric circles included in figure 1 below, namely, microsystems, macrosystem, and exosytems (Neal & Neal, 2023).

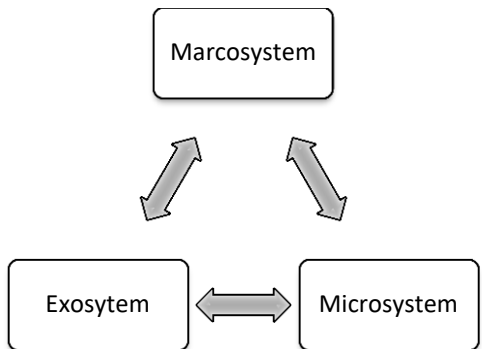


Figure 1: Levels of Ecological System (Adapted from Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

These levels are interconnected to make a whole, and they involve numerous components that function together to make a whole (Mbedzi, 2019). In this article, the sociocultural influences contributing to the persistence of domestic violence are embedded in all the levels of the ecological perspective, starting with microsystem, which explains that the individual has social interactions with others (Neal & Neal, 2013; Mbedzi, 2019), and in some instances, the interactions strengthen human relationships and can result in tension owing to imbalance in relationships. For example, intimate partner violence happens owing to imbalance and tension between two individuals, which result in one partner being abused, and that perpetuates an act of violence. Secondly, the exosytem includes settings that influence the focal individual, such as a broad community (Neal & Neal, 2013). Community influences are important within ecosystems as they are a result of interactions between individuals. For example, certain views withheld among communities about the GBV could inflict numerous efforts to curb issues of gender-based violence and thus result in its persistence. Thirdly, the

macrosystems, within which exosystems are nested, include broad cultural influences that have long-ranging consequences for people (Neal & Neal, 2013), and in the context of the article, which looks at the cultural aspects within systems or structures that continues to make gender-based violence a norm, are also looked at, such as myths that women are subordinates of men within communities, and culture also embraces such myths as patriarchy (Catazo *et al.,* 2023). Mbedzi (1019) notes that the disconnect between the individuals and the cultural structures may cause tension, which leads to excavation of either social or a structural problem such as domestic violence. Therefore, this article draws on the strengths of this theory, which lie in the different systems as described above, in order to understand the factors that contribute to domestic violence. These factors are related to the various socioeconomic systems found in the South African context, such as patriarchal and gendered economic disparities. The UN (2015) SDG goal 5 calls on national governments to work towards gender equality, and hence this theory will also help explain the findings in relation to SDGs.

Methodology

The article used a qualitative research approach to conduct the research, with an emphasis on exploratory, descriptive, and contextual research design. This decision was made to completely capture the breadth and complexity of the study subject, in accordance with the premise that qualitative techniques provide comprehensive knowledge of a phenomenon (Fouche *et al.* 2022). Similarly, Maree (2016) defines qualitative research as the process of gathering in-depth, qualitative data about a subject to achieve a comprehensive understanding of that subject. Therefore, considering the emphasis on understanding the socio-economic and cultural factors that contribute to the ongoing incidence of domestic violence, the qualitative method was deemed to be most appropriate. As a result, better informed and successful social policy and intervention measures could be implemented. The explanatory, descriptive, and contextual research designs worked together to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the factors leading to domestic violence. The snowball sampling technique (Fouche *et al.,* 2021) was used to choose and recruit participants. According to Maree (2016), this approach has shown benefits because it entails the first volunteer participants helping researchers find other possible participants for the study. The primary investigator, as the first author of this article,

conducted a preliminary interview with a representative from the Department of Social Development. This representative ensured access to selected participants, who comprised ten male youth leaders from various community organisations or leading institutions in Gqeberha, formerly known as Port Elizabeth, in the Eastern Cape.

These male youth leaders were considered *'information-rich cases'* capable of providing valuable insights into the research topic (Patton, 2002; Babbie, 2010). They are community leaders who have been involved in addressing domestic violence issues or have witnessed such situations. The inclusion of leaders from diverse community settings such as community development programmes, church groups, and sports clubs was aimed at representing several perspectives and enhancing the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The inclusion criteria for sampling were as follows:

- They must have been 18 years and older, representing any race groups.
- Participants must have been recognised male youth leaders in specific fields.
- Participation must have been voluntary.

Individuals without experience in community leadership and women leaders were excluded from the study, as the focus was specifically on male leaders' perspectives of domestic violence, and often times studies on domestic violence often target female participants with the exclusion of the perpetrators, who are often male.

Ten male leaders were chosen because of the recruitment process, and they participated in focus group discussion (De Vos *et al*., 2015), where they shared their perceptions on the factors they believed contributed to the occurrence of domestic violence in communities. The data collected was analysed by means of thematic analysis following Carrey's (2012) five-step process of familiarisation, developing themes, coding, elaboration, interpretation, and checking themes.

Ethical considerations and study limitations

Permission to conduct the study was received from the ethics committee of the faculty of Health Sciences at Nelson Mandela University. The first author collected data while adhering to ethical guidelines. Information was provided to participants before they signed the consent form. The

consent form was distributed to obtain permission to conduct interviews. Participants were informed of the privacy of the information they would share, which is consistent with the principle of confidentiality, which seeks to preserve the right to keep their information secure. Participants were advised that if the information was shared, it would only be disseminated in an accredited publication journal for research reasons and to contribute to the existing body of knowledge, and that their names would not be displayed in reports; instead, fictitious names would be used.

The authors of this article acknowledge that, like any research endeavour, this study has its limitations. These limitations include the fact that the study was conducted solely in Gqeberha and data was collected from a sample size of only 10 community leaders. Therefore, it is recognised that the findings presented cannot be generalised to the broader population. However, despite these limitations, the study still holds significance in contributing to the existing body of knowledge on the subject.

Research Findings and Discussion

This section is divided into two parts. The first part provides the biographical information of the participants (community leaders), and the second presents the thematic themes that emerged during the conducting of the study with the participants, whose verbatim comments are italicised and indented. The confidentiality and anonymity of the study participants has been protected.

Table 1: Biographical information of the study participants

Participants	Sex	Age	Role in Community
Participant 1	Male	36	Soccer coach
Participant 2	Male	39	Soccer coach
Participant 3	Male	29	Karate coach
Participant 4	Male	31	Church leader
Participant 5	Male	42	Soccer coach
Participant 6	Male	27	Non-government organisation (NGO) project manager
Participant 7	Male	30	Church leader
Participant 8	Male	52	High school cricket coach
Participant 9	Male	26	Founder of Non-government organisation (NGO)
Participant 10	Male	47	High school soccer coach

Source: *Research data*

The section below discusses the themes that emerged from the interviews with participants and analysis performed in the current study, which are given as follows:

Theme 1: Cultural norms in families and in communities play a role in the continued prevalence of domestic violence

The participants in this article identified certain cultural norms prevalent in their families and communities as ongoing catalysts for domestic violence against women. Lomazzi (2023) vividly posits that every society and social group is characterised by prevailing cultural values and social norms that regulate social life within that specific context. In this article, these norms are referred to as cultural boundaries, which serve as obstacles to reducing violence against women. Participants provided examples such as the practice of paying Ilobola[1] (bride price) for a woman. Chuunga (2012) posits that in many parts of Africa, when people marry, a payment is made for marriage. This payment is known as dowry, bride price, or lobola in Southern Africa (Moono *et al.,* 2020). Paying lobola is a customary practice in marriage where a groom's family and kin transfer a certain amount of money and goods to the bride's family as a commitment to marriage (Moono *et al.,* 2023). In this article, participants reported that in some cultures, certain individuals still perceive the payment of Ilobola as a means of owning the woman, thereby granting the husband the perceived right to exert control over her. These findings are further supported by the following sentiments:

> A brother that I know has this mentality that since he paid lobola 'so I can demand anything from my wife anytime (Participant 4)

> Some believe in tradition and customs even though times have changed. You will find men saying a stick is a solution, beating is a solution (Participant 8)

[1]*Ilobola* is also known as lobola or bride price, is a traditional ritual in many African cultures, notably in Southern Africa, in which the groom or his family presents gifts or cattle to the bride's family as a token of gratitude for their daughter's hand in marriage. It's an important cultural ritual that represents respect, unity, and the union of two families.

> If one pays Ilobola, that means that the wife is yours. I think this is when it starts to go wrong, because some of us realise that Ilobola is for creating a connection, not to control a person (Participant 2)

In contrast, and articulating Ilobola's role more positively, Mawere and Mawere (2010) highlight that the practice of paying Ilobola is essentially done to provide formal recognition for marital relationships, including protecting wives against abuse, not exposing them to it simply because money was paid. Mawere and Mawere (2010) further note that when Ilobola is paid, a man attaches value to the woman he pays for, which primarily includes respecting her. Ilobola makes a woman an 'official wife' and solidifies her status as a worthy woman in the eyes of all. It legitimises the marriage as it confirms the cultural symbolism of accepting the groom and the bride into each other's families. Ilobola serves as a unifying factor, binding, and cementing the relationship between the couple and the two families joining together (Dery, 2015).

Theme 2: Domestic violence within one's family of origin can serve as a precursor for its perpetuation over time and may also be replicated by others

In this article, participants report that domestic violence is influenced by social learning and exposures within the family of origin. This is supported by the ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which emphasises that interactions within the microsystem contribute to socialisation. Individuals learn behaviours through observation and imitation (Ahn, Hu, & Vega, 2020). Research indicates that children who witness domestic violence or experience abuse within their family of origin are more likely to replicate these behaviours in their own relationships (Roberts, Gilman, Fitzmaurice, Decker & Koenen, 2010; Forke *et al.,* 2019; Holt, Buckley & Whelana, 2008; Rodriguez & Venzor, 2022). For example, participants noted that when a father abuses a mother, children who observe this violence may come to view it as normative, leading them to reproduce similar patterns of behaviour, including both physical and verbal abuse, in their future relationships. A study by Ehrensaft, Cohen and Brown (2003) supports this, showing that children exposed to domestic violence are at an increased risk of perpetrating or becoming victims of intimate partner violence in adulthood. In this article, participants similarly indicate that one's family

of origin influences domestic violence, particularly, family with history of domestic violence. The following evidence supports these findings:

> Domestic violence is caused sometimes by various reasons such as background maybe a person grew up his father beating the mother and does exactly that (Participant 7)

> Sometimes I think a person witnessed his father doing it and thought it was good thing (Participant 3)

> You know some abusers, I can assure you, they are that most men indirectly taught this by their fathers in their homes (Participant 1)

The sentiments expressed suggest that domestic violence persists in society largely because young people exposed to it during childhood may come to view such behaviour as normative. These individuals might replicate domestic violence as a defensive mechanism, believing it is an accepted response to aggression. Gilbert *et al.* (2015) extend this view by noting that the impact of domestic violence is not limited to social learning; it also encompasses the trauma experienced by victims. Children who witness domestic violence or suffer abuse are at significant risk for long-term physical and mental health problems. This indicates a society deeply affected by trauma. In light of this, Catazo, Gwam, Xweso and Terblanche (2023) recommend engaging men in efforts to combat domestic violence. They argue that involving men in these initiatives is crucial for addressing and mitigating generational trauma and for implementing effective intervention strategies within communities.

Theme 3: The perpetuation of male superiority and gender inequality within both the domestic sphere and broader society

The recent literature, such as the study by McCarthy, Mehta and Haberland (2018; RSA, 2020), along with earlier research by Levinson (1989), observes that intimate relationship violence is more prevalent in countries where men are considered superior and dominant. According to the participants in this article, violence is justified since the husband has the right to discipline his wife in accordance with traditional beliefs. According to WHO (2017), traditional views that men have the right to govern women expose women and girls to physical, emotional, and sexual assault from men. Domestic violence remains endemic in traditional societies, including South Africa. The National strategic plan of action on gender-based violence and femicide (RSA, 2020) posits

along similar lines that gender-based violence is enabled by the prevalence of gender inequality and is rooted in patriarchal gender norms. Mazibuko (2016) stated that South Africa has many such communities where domestic abuse is culturally established and men hold authority and control over women; also, violence is on the rise in South Africa. Similarly to the observations in preceding studies, this article reports that the perpetuation of the belief that men are superior to women remains persistent within communities. This ongoing perception continues to subject women to an inferior status, contributing to the continued growth of domestic violence. The quotations below support these sentiments:

> It happens in relationships as well… men want to be bossy at all times and want to do what they want which affects the relationship (Participant 1)

> You know there is a belief that a man has power over a woman, so man have a final say in whatever is happening in that relationship. Women and young female have to submit themselves under men because men have the authority, …so everything has to start with men (Participant 6)

> They believe traditionally males are the heads of house and should show dominance over women (Participant 3)

Some participants also noted that in certain households, the allocation of household chores between boys and girls is unequal. This early differentiation fosters perceptions of inequality, which can persist into adolescence and contribute to domestic violence's escalation. Consequently, boys are often afforded greater respect and preferential treatment compared to girls, as illustrated by the following quotation:

> At home when parents are disciplining children, they tend to give more respect to boys than girls, which creates the feeling of superiority in boys unlike girls…So that is why I will always mention that this leads a child from a younger age to believe that a woman is useless, a man is superior (Participant 10)

These results seem to clearly show that the study's participants were aware of gender disparity between men and women, which is ingrained in the belief that power is not allocated equally to men and women. According to Valladares (2005), gender norms and traditions, including violence, are frequently invoked to justify the continued inequality that

exists between men and women. Gender inequality and the belief that men must be powerful and in charge are the root causes of violence (Flood, 2009; Kasa & Saunders, 2022; Catazo *et al.,* 2023).

Theme 4: The economic repercussions of domestic violence

In this article, participants report that a significant factor contributing to domestic violence is the perception among some women that men are obligated to cover their expenses. This belief can lead men to feel financially burdened and responsible for supporting women, which may foster a sense of entitlement to control their behaviour. Therefore, men may feel justified in exerting dominance over women, believing that their financial support entitles them to demand respect and obedience.

> You know, it is common that when you give a woman money you are responsible for her expanses you cannot see her even dating another man because you spent on her (Participant 7)

> At times, men express frustration about being cheated out of money by those close to them. This is why, even during arguments, you'll hear them saying, you can't blame me when I do everything for you. This feeling of being taken advantage of often leads men to become more controlling (Participant 9)

The preceding findings appear to indicate that such financial dependency can raise the likelihood of domestic violence, as men may use their financial support to control and manipulate women, resulting in various forms of abuse. According to Johnson *et al.* (2022), economic dependence on a partner can greatly impede an individual's ability to depart and create independence. This economic dependence can result in a power imbalance, making it difficult for the dependent partner to make decisions or take acts that could jeopardise their financial stability. This dynamic frequently traps people in relationships that they might quit if they had the financial wherewithal to maintain themselves independently. Economic reliance can thus perpetuate cycles of control and abuse, as the dependent spouse may believe they have no viable alternatives to their current circumstances (Singh, El-Bassel & Kaushal *et al.,* 2022). Significantly in this article, some male participants believe that men and women's economic roles must be equal and that monitoring sharing must be 50/50, which means that they will not feel compelled to give money

to women, which justifies why they will be violent and exert control over them.

> The role of men and women in a relationship we believe is [2]50/50. It is stated that we are equal… in a relationship they must support each other because we are equals (Participant 2)

In essence, the participant suggests that exchanging money equally could reduce anger and control exerted over women. Men and women would recognise that everything in a relationship should be shared equally, preventing one party from feeling a sense of ownership over the other due to financial responsibility. However, this perception is specific to the context of this article and aligned with the participant's views.

Theme 5: The portrayal of domestic violence in media and its impact on its perpetuation

According to Gavin and Kruis (2021), there is a correlation between media aggression and perceptions of domestic violence. For instance, Malamuth and Check (1987), as cited in Gavin and Kruis (2021), observe that exposure to films with high levels of violence and sexual content, particularly misogynistic content, influences individuals' perceptions. Furthermore, Kahlor and Eastin (2011) highlight the significance of media in developing attitudes and behaviours towards violence against women. They claim that watching violence on television can normalise violent attitudes, perpetuate damaging gender stereotypes, and boost acceptance of rape myths. These perceptions, as documented in the study, are illustrated through sentiments expressed by the participants, indicating that social media portrayals can indeed influence the commission of domestic violence.

> You know what... I think also the influence that people get from watching television has added to the social situation where women are being abused (Participant 8)

[2] The term 50/50 in money sharing refers to an equal distribution of financial responsibilities and resources between two parties, typically in a relationship or partnership. This means that both individuals contribute equally to expenses and share financial responsibilities without one person being more financially dependent on the other.

> We also look at television and find out that many movies show violence and some people read it in books, it is not only at home where people meet (Participant 4)

> You see it all the time in the news on TV and in the newspapers here in the Eastern Cape, and nothing is talked about it. You always hear about people[perpetrators] killing women, which causes it to worsen rather than help since we don't know whether the individuals who do it are arrested (Participant 6)

The participants in the article who shared these findings are community leaders and trusted individuals. However, they seem to focus on the impact of aggression as portrayed on television while overlooking the broader influence of social media platforms. These platforms play a significant role in the daily interactions of young people. It is important to acknowledge that in the contemporary world, depictions of violence are not limited to television but are also prevalent on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Snap Chat, Facebook, and Twitter (Xue, Macropol, Jia, Zhu & Gelles, 2019). It is important to acknowledge the significant role these platforms play in communication. However, it is equally crucial to recognise that social media can also have negative effects. Many women and children have been harmed or killed due to deceptive interactions on these platforms, often involving financial lures (Crabtree & Geara, 2018; Web Foundation, 2020). This issue became more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to widespread job losses. As a result, many women were left desperate and more vulnerable to exploitation online. Additionally, these platforms are often used to perpetrate verbal attacks and psychological harm against women and children (Amnesty International, 2018).

Implications for Social Work Practice

The article situates itself within the framework of current issues that are prevalent in South Africa and around the world. The article rests its discussion vitally on the extent and context of domestic violence among women and children by highlighting and adding value to the ongoing literature on the issues that continue to perpetuate domestic violence. Addressing domestic violence is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Goal 5: Gender Equality (UN, 2015). Therefore, it is key that community structures and constructs be consistent with these global goals so that they do not continue to

perpetuate the escalation of inequality and captivity for women and girls but to reduce violence against women. Significantly, the study contributes to current research aimed at resolving difficulties faced by women in marginalised communities. The position that women find themselves in as they are subjected to various forms of abuse should be challenged through the lens of social justice, seeing women's rights as equal to men's rights.

In line with the primary values of social work, such as promoting social justice and social change as well as enhancing the worth and dignity of persons, emanating from this research findings, the social work profession can contribute to addressing the noted root causes of gender-based violence in various ways. To start with, this research will inform policymakers about the need for multisectoral collaborative efforts to address domestic violence, and the social work profession is well poised to contribute towards shaping policies, laws, and programmes to prevent and respond to domestic violence. As a finding of this study that media plays a negative role in perpetuation of domestic violence, the social work profession can contribute to raising awareness, and social work research can increase understanding and awareness of domestic violence, reducing stigma and promoting empathy for victims. Furthermore, social work research can inform the development of effective support services for victims, such as the provision of counselling, shelter, healthcare, and even legal aid. Social work programmes for amplifying victims and survivors' voices, promoting their empowerment and agency in seeking help, and demanding justice will be crucial. Providing comprehensive services, including counselling, legal assistance, and economic support, can help victims rebuild their lives.

Another necessary implication of this research is the need for social workers to help hold perpetrators accountable by challenging impunity and harmful cultural practices and promoting justice. Social work research can also promote cultural change and contribute to shifting cultural norms and attitudes that perpetuate domestic violence, thereby promoting a culture of equality and respect. This could be done through programmes for men that address patriarchal norms and attitudes toward lobola, among others, poverty and economic inequality. It is a finding of this study that men might feel entitled to exert dominance over women due to their financial contributions, as they perceive that they cannot support them financially without also demanding respect and obedience, and as such, social workers could develop life skills programmes to resocialise men to discard some cultural beliefs such as assisting women

genuinely without feeling as if they own or possess them whilst at the same time offering values that do not infringe on the rights of women. Such life skills programmes could also assist women not to exploit men economically. The social work profession could also do research and improve data collection methods that assist government and other stakeholders with accurate and comprehensive data that can be used for planning to address domestic violence. Social work research can inform prevention strategies such as education and community-based programmes to reduce domestic violence. However, it should be noted that collaboration between social work education institutions and those in practice is key for addressing domestic violence and as such fostering collaborative partnerships can bring together stakeholders, including governments, non-profit organisations, donors and funders, and communities, to coordinate efforts and share knowledge to address domestic violence. Raising awareness about domestic violence and its consequences can help to challenge harmful cultural norms and beliefs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, addressing domestic violence requires a multifaceted approach that involves challenging ingrained cultural beliefs, promoting gender equality, improving economic opportunities, and enhancing awareness and support systems. It requires collaboration across various sectors, including education, law enforcement, healthcare, and community organisations. As stated above, by exploring the complexities of domestic violence research can help create a safer and more equitable world for all.

As discussed in the presentation of findings above, the following socio-cultural factors contribute to domestic violence in Gqeberha:

- Traditional Gender Roles**:** rigid gender roles that reinforce male dominance and female subordination can create an environment where violence is seen as acceptable or even expected.
- Cultural Norms and Beliefs**:** cultural norms that condone violence, shame victims, or prioritise family honour can prevent victims from seeking help.
- Social Isolation**:** victims may be isolated from social networks, making it difficult to seek support or escape abusive situations.
- Lack of Awareness**:** limited awareness of domestic violence and its consequences can contribute to its persistence.

Linked to the above sociocultural factors are economic factors perpetuating domestic violence, such as:

- Financial Dependence**:** victims may be financially dependent on their abusers, making it difficult to leave.
- Economic Hardship**:** poverty and economic insecurity can increase stress and tension within households, making them more prone to violence.
- Limited Access to Resources**:** victims may lack access to essential resources, such as safe housing, employment opportunities, and legal assistance.

Based on the research findings and implications of the study raised in the preceding sections, the following recommendations are provided:

- **Collaboration on running educational programmes on domestic violence:** the issue of educational programmes on domestic violence is mostly highlighted in the literature with diverse focus. The study recommends that there should be collaborations of leaders who are influenceable in communities. These leaders should not exclude the inclusion of traditional leader/chiefs, as most societies are often aligned traditionally to the leadership of traditional leaders. Traditional leaders in most communities are well heard, and it would make it easy to influence those who are affiliated with the same traditional. Social workers can advocate for victims' rights and empower them to make informed decisions about their safety and well-being. Raising awareness about domestic violence and its consequences can help to challenge harmful cultural norms and beliefs.

- **Social workers are well placed to play a preventative role on gender-based violence:** As such, social workers should intensify awareness and education campaigns to traditional leaders around the socioeconomic and cultural drivers of gender-based violence and encourage traditional to adopt gender equality principles. These campaigns should also be extended to institutions such as the South African Police Service and the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, which are also responsible for investigating, arresting, and adjudicating gender-based violence matters, and as such, all employees in these Departments need to be mindful of some of the socio-cultural stereotypes and prejudices that may be contributing to gender based violence. Public awareness and education through training and a victim-centred social justice approach rooted in

human rights and intersectional understanding of power, privilege, and oppression is one good way of achieving this.

- **Role of basic and higher education institutions:** Furthermore**,** schools also play a positive role in the education of citizens, and school social workers may play an active role in social behaviour change programme within primary and secondary schools and higher education campuses to influence changed behaviour for boys and young men, while involving all sectors of society. To start with, the Life Orientation curriculum could be updated to include themes on the socio-economic and cultural drivers of gender-based violence. This would assist with socialising learners on some of the drivers of gender-based violence at a young age and result in well informed boys who probably might grow up as well-informed men. School social workers have an active role to play here in enhancing lessons learnt from life orientation classes through further engagement with learners in reflective social groupwork engagement sessions. Furthermore, as already expounded in the national strategic plan on gender-based violence and femicide (RSA, 2020), the social work profession has a responsibility to research and provide evidence-based prevention and theory-driven programming based on what is shown to work from South Africa and globally across different sectors and disciplines. This would assist in addressing the drivers of domestic violence, particularly the inequality arising from the gender superiority enjoyed by heterosexual men - who in turn practice produce and reinforce toxic masculinities. This research alluded to the fact that men continue to abuse women because they are victims of their own socialisation. Henceforth, as a society, there is a need to revisit our social scripts. Parenting practices need to be revised and aligned to the laws that promote gender parity, and the social work profession needs to be proactive and design programmes that help the community members acquire parenting practices that promote gender parity.

- **Economic empowerment:** The findings appear to indicate that financial dependency can raise the likelihood of domestic violence, as men may use their financial support to control and manipulate women, resulting in various forms of abuse. The societal impact of unpaid social care, unequal pay for equal work between men and women, inflexible labour policies, poor regulation of minimum wage and precarious impact women negatively (RSA, 2020). Thus, to address the structural causes of domestic violence due to economic conditions, it is

recommended that deliberate accelerated initiatives that address women's unequal economic and social position through access to government and private sector procurement, employment, housing, access to land, financial resources, and income generating initiatives be encouraged. The social work profession, through multisectoral collaborations can assist in driving this woman's economic empowerment initiative, for instance, through the Department of Social Development's women and cooperatives programme or the Department of Women located in the Presidency, so as to eliminate the impact of economic drivers of domestic violence.

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