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Exploring the Complexities of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa: A Comprehensive Analysis

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Abstract

In present times, gender-based violence (GBV) is a global scourge. It is highly prevalent in South Africa, where the rates of incidents are exorbitant, particularly those of sexual violence against women. The goal of this paper is to explore the implications of factors such as societal norms affected by the country's unique historical circumstances that promote rising rates of gender-based violence, significant underreporting of these instances, sexual violence and the consequences for the survivors. The paper uses secondary data to study the intersectionality of gender, population group (race), socio-economic status, and geographical location. We further analyze the sociodemographic of GBV (particularly rape) victims and perpetrators to put the focus on better and more gender-responsive prevention strategies. The paper highlights the importance of paying attention to intimate partner violence (IPV) as this constitutes a highly significant percentage of the total cases of rape and femicide. The study shows that non-white women constitute the most vulnerable group to GBV. We conclude that proper mechanisms must be put in place which require the cooperation of the police, judicial, medical, social and other support services to properly tackle this violence which must account for every population group, especially the historically marginalized ones.

Keywords

GBV, IPV, rape, South Africa, sexual offences, vulnerability factors

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1. Introduction

South Africa has long contended with one of the highest rates of sexual violence in the world, with incidents of rape and sexual offences persistently plaguing the nation. In context, the lifetime prevalence of sexual violence in South Africa is 24.9 percent compared to the global prevalence of 7.2 percent (Abrahams et al. 2014). This epidemic not only inflicts immense physical and psychological harm upon its victims, which are mostly women, but also undermines the integrity of society in its journey to equality, and it can lead to very serious or even fatal consequences. Understanding the dimension of GBV is relevant in effectively combating this pervasive scourge. Population surveys can play a key role in providing more accurate estimation of sexual violence in comparison to official figures provided by the police and medical centers due to the limitations caused by underreporting.

Conducting a comprehensive sociodemographic analysis of sexual offence victims and perpetrators provides valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of sexual violence in the country by examining factors such as age, gender, socio-economic status, race, family circumstances and geographical location among others. This data can help involved bodies to develop targeted intervention strategies and implement more effective support protocols and prevention plans.

Throughout history, South Africa has witnessed the intersectionality of various types of social oppression, including gender inequality, racial disparities, economic imbalance, and a complex history of violence. The vicious past of the country, oppressed by both colonization and apartheid, is a key determinant for the acceptance and use of violence understood as power that men have traditionally exerted, not just among each other, but especially and consistently towards women. This, supported by very rooted patriarchal practices (reinforced by colonialism and apartheid), has contributed enormously to a social landscape where sexual and physical violence is alarmingly common and, even if there are laws put in place to stop it, they are not always implemented effectively enough. When focusing on women, the intersectionality of race, gender, class and lack of equal opportunities (especially in the non-white communities), is still a reality to this day and it is a major contributory factor to the widespread GBV in South Africa.

Regarding limitations in terminology and classification, SAPS and the National Census categorize population groups (race) according to the denominations used during apartheid times as elements of discrimination such as Black African, Coloured, White and Asian/Indian. Further terminological limitation is seen in the data provided by the Rape Justice in South Africa (RJSA) report (Machisa et al. 2017) which was used in this study for comparative analysis of socio-demographics of victims and perpetrators, where White and Indian are treated as a single population group. This undermines the reflection of the extent of sexual violence amongst the non-white communities in South Africa.

This paper explores the high prevalence of sexual offences in South Africa, examining the contributing intersectional factors, the consequences for victims and recommendations to combat GBV.

2. Research Methodology and Data Sources

This research employed a mixed-methods approach to explore various aspects related to GBV, sexual offences, sociodemographic of victims and perpetrators of rape and other sexual offences, and the vulnerability factors associated with GBV in South Africa. The research methodology employed a combination of quantitative techniques such as linear regression and data visualization, as well as comparative analysis and secondary data collection from various sources.

Detailed data sources and procedures used in each section of the study are described in table 1.

2.1 Efforts made by South African law

South Africa participates in some of the most progressive international accords for the protection and empowerment of women, in addition to having one of the most advanced legal frameworks. Although the nation has active civil society organizations and government initiatives to support women such as the National Strategic Plan (NSP-GBVF), there is a gap between the legislative structure and how it is being applied, particularly by the police and health services who may not always be sufficiently aware or trained about such legislation and its proper application. Ensuring the protection of survivors of GBV must be given equal priority to preserve their rights and providing them with dignified and fair legal treatment.

Table 1: Research methodology

Study	Data and Sample	Procedure	Research objective
Sexual offences in South Africa	<i>Data Source:</i> 2019-20 Crime data statistics from SAPS (South African Police Services) Calculation of percentage of subgroup: $\%N = [N_{\text{sub-group}} / N_{\text{total}}] \times 100$ Percentage change, Δ $= [N_{\text{max}} - N_{\text{min}} / N_{\text{min}}] \times 100$ <i>Linear regression model:</i> The regression line equation for the data: $Y = 0.00069X + 1382.78$ Where Y represents the number of sexual offence cases and X represents population.	A linear Regression model was used to establish the relationship between population (independent variable) and the number of sexual offence cases reported (dependent variable). Change in sexual offence cases between the years at its highest (2009) and lowest (2017) was calculated. Data Visualization was employed to represent the trends and distribution of sexual offences and rape cases up to 2020.	To analyze the evolution, prevalence, and trends of sexual offences in South Africa and examine the geographical distribution of sexual violence and rape cases. To demonstrate correlation between population and number of sexual offences in different provinces. To highlight the typical locations where rapes occur in recent years.
Socio-demographics of Rape victims and perpetrators.	<i>Data Sources:</i> a. 2011 Census Data b. Rape Justice Report with data from 2012 reported cases. <i>Sample:</i> random sample of 3952 rape cases proportionate to population size was analyzed. c. Governance, Public Safety, and Justice Survey of 2018-19 (for perpetrator analysis)	Comparative Analysis: A comparison was made between the 2011 census data and the Rape Justice in South Africa (RJSA) Report using data from sampled 2012 reported cases. Analysis focused on age, population group, and gender. The Governance, Public Safety, and Justice Survey of 2018-19 data was compared to the sampled 2012 cases to analyze the relationship distribution between perpetrators and their victims.	To explore age, population group, and gender distribution and other sociodemographic characteristics of rape victims. To show that non-white adult women are the main victims of rape in South Africa. Additionally, to identify the profile of perpetrators and their relationship to the victims.
Domestic Violence	<i>Data source:</i> 2016 South Africa Demographic and Health Survey (SADHS) <i>Sample:</i> Randomly selected 5865 women (>18 years) distributed geographically across South Africa to ensure representation from different provinces.	Data visualization was used to show the percentage of these women who have at some point experienced domestic violence. The distribution was shown based on education, relationship status, location and other relevant factors collected during the 2016 SADHS.	To examine the prevalence of domestic violence, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and investigate the influence of factors such as education and relationship status.
Vulnerability factors associated to gender-based violence	<i>Data Source:</i> Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) Reports up to 2020.	Data from the 2019-20 QLFS Q1 Reports were analyzed to identify the economically vulnerable population group. Furthermore, using data from multiple article sources, other vulnerability factors associated with increased sexual violence perpetration were determined.	To study the factors that can increase the risk of GBV perpetration. To demonstrate the most socioeconomically vulnerable population group in South Africa.

2.2 Reporting GBV

Comprehensive studies on sexual violence and other forms of GBV are constrained due to the lack of data availability because of underreporting to authorities. GBV prevalence can be determined either through administrative data by government departments such as SAPS or through surveys based on public perception of crime, which present a limitation due to factors such as the unwillingness to go through the process of recalling traumatic experiences or the huge difference between public perception of sexual crime in comparison to the legal definitions among others.

Medical Research Council (MRC) estimated in a population-based survey that only one in 25 women who have been raped have ever reported it to the police (Jewkes and Abrahams 2002; Machisa et al. 2011). This suggests that the data from SAPS only reflects a very small percentage of the actual numbers of rape in the country.

When talking about the survivors' perspective, the main reasons for underreporting are the fear of not being believed, the shame of admitting to another person that they have been raped or abused in any way and, in case of going ahead with it, the possible social or family rejection and ostracization, that sometimes comes with pressure to conceal the attack in order to avoid social stigma. Victim blaming is not an infrequent situation when it comes to sexual violence and it might even come from emergency services, family, friends or the perpetrators themselves. In some cases, the attackers may try to bribe or threaten the victim to stop them from reporting the case.

An essential element in the reporting process is the help and orientation of police officers and medical services. Inefficient personnel that do not provide the safety and guidance required to survivors of GBV, might be in some cases the cause of the victims not reporting the attacks. Linked to this, some sexual offence survivors have expressed fear of going through triggering experiences while trying to report their cases to emergency services due to the perception of lack of support or sensitivity in an already extremely vulnerable and delicate situation, so even if they started the process, they might not conclude their reports (Jewkes and Abrahams 2002; Naidoo 2013).

A critical reason for underreporting is the fear of perpetrators not being punished. Only very few cases end up in court with a conviction rate of around 7 percent (Ajayi, Mudefi, and Owolabi 2021; Jewkes and Abrahams 2002). Consequently, this creates a lack of trust in the criminal justice system.

2.3 Disparity between urban and rural areas

Rural areas and townships emerged because of racial residential segregation and forced relocations, which were part of the measures of the apartheid regime. Nowadays, low income and lack of resources still prevent non-white families (sometimes run by single mothers) to relocate to areas with less risk of violence, hence they are forced to stay in rural areas where the exposure to various forms of violent crimes might be higher (Abrahams et al. 2020).

These rural areas have been marked with lack of education and employment, limited access to transportation, health systems and infrastructure with no form of security which has led to increased vulnerability. In these areas, there are usually higher chances to rely on social norms and fixed cultural practices which in some cases can be considered harmful (Mazars et al. 2013). Some examples are the *Lobola* (bride price) tradition, and *Ukuthwala* (forced marriage). Jewkes et al (1999) identified that in rural areas it is more commonly believed that payment of lobola means the man owns his wife and is entitled to sex whenever he wants which reinforces male sexual entitlement and promotes IPV. This can be worsened by societal pressure that encourages women to reconcile with their husbands even after abuse without necessarily tackling the problem, particularly in situations where the woman is economically dependent on the husband. This dependence on the abuser can hinder the victim from leaving this abusive relationship to avoid greater economic hardship overlooking their physical and mental wellbeing (Lowry 2011).

Less priority is given to sexual offence prosecution in the rural areas, partly due to social pressure on victims not to report and less availability of courts aimed at prosecuting such crimes. Most of these courts are located in urban or semi-urban areas which are more likely to have better trained prosecutors to fight sexual crimes. Nevertheless, urban areas still carry a high risk of sexual offences due to factors such as increased population density, trouble with transportation, economic vulnerability due to high cost of living and income inequality, higher exposure to alcohol and substance abuse, gang violence and other forms of crimes that increase the risk of sexual violence.

3. Sexual Offences in South Africa

In South Africa, about one in ten reported contact crimes is a sexual offence crime. In figure 1a, an evolution of sexual offences in South Africa is shown between 2007 and 2020 with its highest in 2009 and has experienced a steady decline of 28 percent in the overall reported cases seen in 2017. From 2018 to 2020, there has been about 1.7 percent increase in the total cases of both rape and sexual offences reported with the highest numbers registered in the most populated provinces such as Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces which are the ones with higher population density.

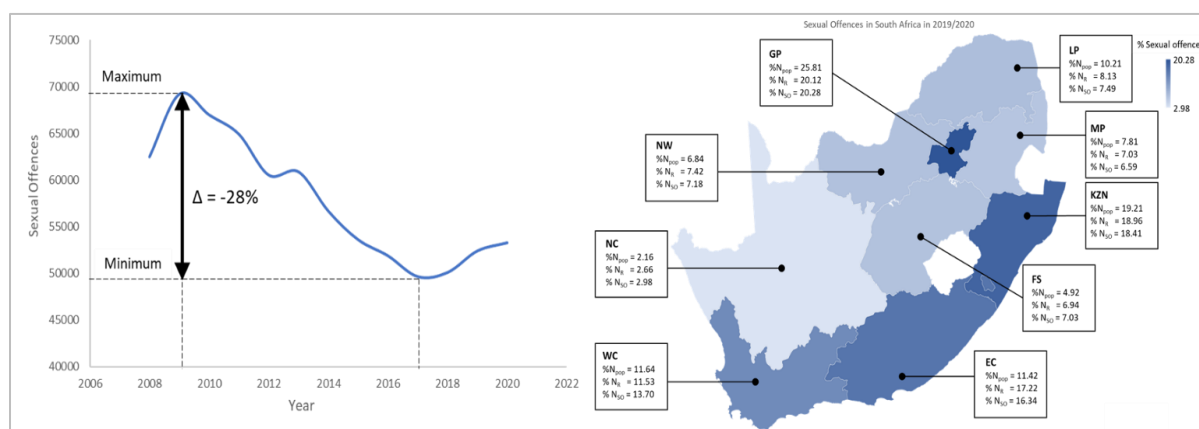


Figure 1: (a) Evolution of sexual offences in South Africa between 2007 to 2020 with a percentage change calculation between the years with highest and lowest number of reported cases (b) Geographical distribution, by province, of 2019 percentage population (%N_{pop}) compared to the percentage number of reported sexual offence cases (%N_{so}) and reported rape cases (%N_R).

A linear regression model was used to demonstrate the relationship between the mid-2019 estimated population of the 9 provinces in South Africa and its effect on the number of sexual offence cases reported between 2019 and 2020 (figure 1b) with results summarized in table 2.

Table 2: Linear Regression Model results

N _{Pop}	N _{so}	R-Squared (R ²)	Correlation (R)	p-value
58.78 million	53293 cases	0.8339	0.9132	0.0005821

The results of the linear regression model (R², R and p-value) suggest a very strong direct relationship between population and the number of sexual offence cases reported in these nine provinces, which means the variability (83.4 percent) of Sexual Offences is explained by Population. For example, in 2019/2020, Gauteng, which is the most populated province with 25 percent of the total population in South Africa, has also seen the highest percentage of sexual offence cases reported (> 20 percent) whereas the least populated Northern Cape registered only 3 percent of the total cases in the country.

Rape accounted for 79 percent of all sexual offence instances recorded in South Africa in the ten years prior to 2020, with women and children (particularly female) constituting the majority of victims. According to [Jewkes et al \(2002\)](#), at least 1 in every 3 South African girls experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18 years. Between 2015 and 2020, about 70 percent of the victims in the total sexual offence cases were women. In those five years, women were also the victims of rape in three out of every four occurrences as seen in figure 2a. These acts of rape are committed by individuals, mostly men, who are known to the victims, that can include (but not exclusively) members of the family, classmates, workmates, friends or acquaintances or intimate partners. One of the most common locations where sexual attacks occur is the victim or perpetrators' residence.

In 2019/2020, a total of 28,067 rape cases were recorded with the location of where the crime happened. Sixty five percent of these total documented cases took place in the residence of the victims or the perpetrators, which can be linked to the familiarity that the rape victims might have with the offenders. The next most popular location are public places such as streets, parks, beaches, and other open areas, which constitute approximately one in every four rape cases and evinces that the perpetrators lack the fear of being stopped or punished for the crime they are committing. Other significant locations of rape are business premises such as hotels, pubs, government buildings and shops, means of transportation, educational institutions like schools and universities, and university campuses. In fact, the first year of university is predicted to be the most vulnerable for sexual violence occurrence and at least one in five women experience sexual violence or assault during their college years ([Ajayi, Mudefi, and Owolabi 2021](#)).

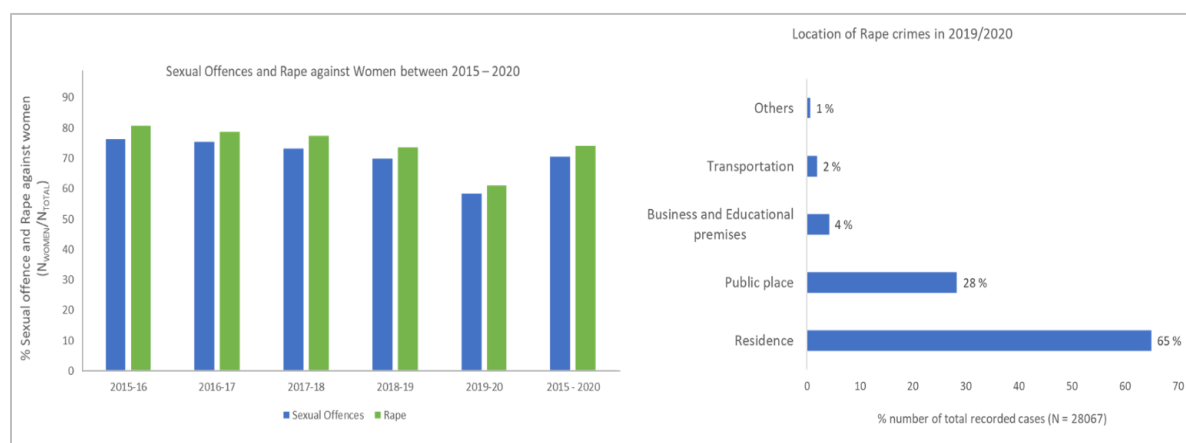


Figure 2:(a) Percentage of overall reported sexual offences and rapes in South Africa where the victim was a woman between 2015 - 2020 and the average between these years. (b) Location of rape cases in 2019/2020 (by percentage).

The stigmatization and lack of support suffered by rape survivors has led to them remaining silent about their rape and this, in turn, increases the risk of revictimization.

Due to the persistent endemic nature of rape in South Africa, it is utterly useful to understand the context in which rape occurs, for example, the sociodemographic of victims such as the gender, race, and societal status, as well as the relationship between the victims and the perpetrator of their rape. These are important factors to consider for establishing more effective measures and legal protection that need to be implemented and enforced.

4. Sociodemographic of rape victims and perpetrators

In order to identify significant at-risk population groups and patterns of rape that can guide responses to and prevention initiatives for sexual violence, it is extremely helpful to fully understand the characteristics of victims and offenders in reported rape cases by identifying factors as the gender, race, age and occupation based on the study sample from reported cases in 2012 (Machisa et al. 2017).

4.1 Victims

In the study from 3,952 cases, victims were classified based on their age as minor (less than 18 years old) and adult (18 years or older), racial population group (Black African, Coloured, White or Indian, as classified by the authorities) and gender (male or female, as classified by the authorities) as a percentage of the total sample size. This was compared to the 2011 census (Stats-SA 2011) based on the same information as seen in Figure 3a.

As demonstrated in the figure, the number of victims from the sample cases is almost evenly distributed between minors and adults with 45.3 percent and 54.7 percent respectively. However, compared to the census, minors account for only 34 percent of the total population which indicates that children are among the most vulnerable population and suffer a high risk of rape due to exploitation by adult and mainly male offenders. Based on gender, women are by far the most at risk with almost 95 percent of victimization in the total sampled cases. The data also shows that non-white women are the main victims, especially Black African and Coloured women with a higher proportion compared to the 2011 census. Black African women constitute the highest proportion with an 86 percent of the total sample size, which also represents the most vulnerable population group based on socioeconomic status. Non-white women have historically lacked the opportunity to have access to higher education, professional jobs and have been abused and separated from their families from colonial times to the apartheid era, in which they were frequently left with the only alternative of becoming domestic servants raising the children of white families to be able to have access to the cities and have the means to provide for their families (Pawłowska 2006). The democratic changes that occurred from the 1990s after the end of apartheid have slowly favored the equal treatment of non-white people in theory, yet the consequences of this social, cultural, economic, educational, political and legal oppression and discrimination are difficult to erase in practice. This echoes especially in the lives of non-white women, slowing down their right to be treated as equals with the same access to opportunities and safety.

Taking into consideration that access to education and remunerated jobs has been one of the multiple struggles that non-white South African women have faced and that it is still an important inequality factor, we can observe that occupation is one of the main socioeconomic vulnerability factors and was studied for adult female victims based on the sample data. Approximately 95 percent of the total adult female cases had recorded data on the employment status of the victim. The majority of the total adult female victims were either unemployed (60.2 percent), students (10.6 percent) or doing unqualified jobs (14.9 percent) which include manual labor and domestic work. A much lower number of cases in the sample data accounted for victims doing qualified jobs or who were self-employed.

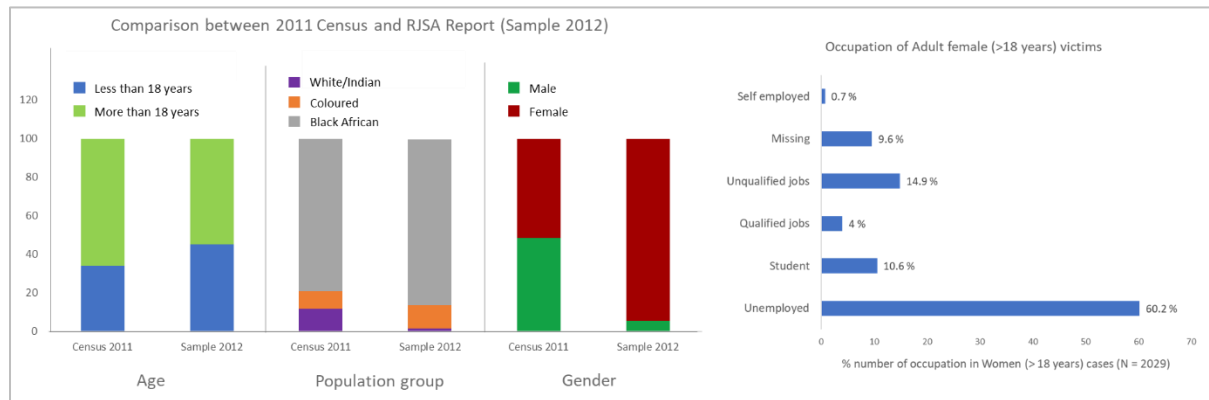


Figure 3: (a) Comparison between 2011 Census and the 2012 RJSA Report based on age, population group, and gender. (b) Occupation of adult female (> 18 years old) rape survivors sampled data in the RJSA Report.

4.2 Perpetrators

In the sample, sociodemographic data was partially or fully available for 58 percent of the total perpetrators. This information was classified into age, gender and population groups. 86 percent of the offenders were more than 18 years old while 99 percent of all recorded perpetrators were male. One very significant factor in most rape cases is the racial group relationship between victims and perpetrators. Figure 4a shows the population group distribution of perpetrators by the race of their victims as presented in the sample data. Over 97 percent of rapes involving Black African perpetrators involved Black African victims, while 91.4 percent of Coloured perpetrators had Coloured victims. Approximately 70 percent of cases where the perpetrator was White or Indian had White or Indian victims, whereas almost one in every four cases involving a White or Indian perpetrator had a Black African victim. In conclusion, the data denotes that a perpetrator is predicted to be an adult male in the same racial population group as the rape victim and that Black and Coloured women are the most at risk of all the population groups.

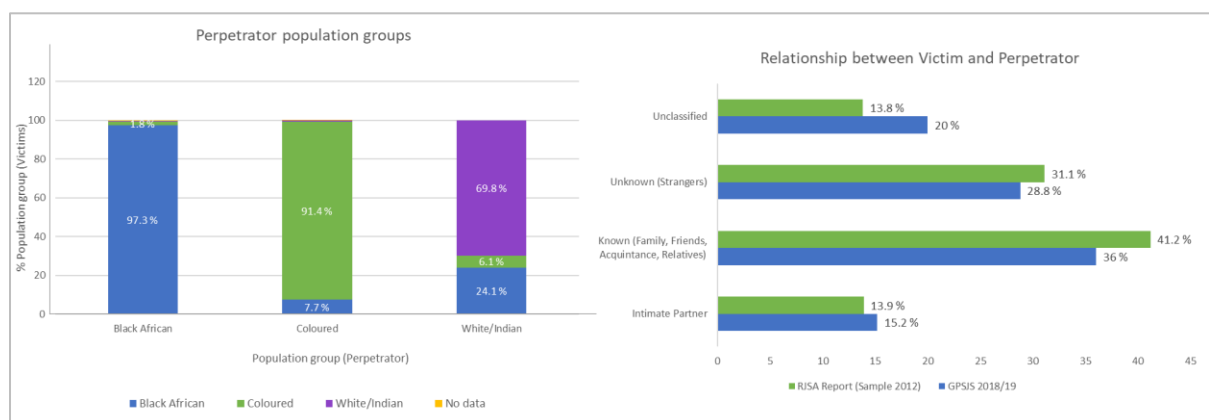


Figure 4:(a) Population group distribution of perpetrators by the race of their rape victims as presented in the sampled data of the 2012 RJSA Report (b) Comparison between victim-perpetrator relationship in the RJSA Report and the 2018/2019 GPSJ Survey.

More than half of the perpetrators are known to their victims, either as a family member, friend, acquaintance or an intimate partner. This has been demonstrated in both the sample data from 2012 and the 2018/2019 survey on Governance, Public Safety and Justice (figure 4b). There is also a significant percentage of perpetrators who are not known to the victim classified as strangers. Under the unclassified section there might be offenders known by the victim but that the victim does not want to admit as someone they know. Multiple perpetrators and gang rapes constitute a very significant percentage of rape cases. These gang rapes usually involve using the female victim as a sexual tool under the false pretext of male-bonding and reinforcing masculinity (Jewkes and Abrahams 2002). In some cases, the motive is to humiliate or punish the victim, which sometimes involves an intimate partner or ex-partner, or it is done under the pretext of the myth that homosexual women can be 'converted' to heterosexuality.

Significantly up to 15 percent of rapes are perpetrated by the intimate partner of the victim, which can be seen as a consequence of male entitlement and very instilled patriarchal practices. The root causes include sexist notions of ownership and subjugation of women, particularly when they resist or reject sex. Societal factors such as reinforcing patriarchy, male dominance, punishment, threatening of abandonment or infidelity and sexual entitlement contribute to the prevalence of rape among intimate partners. As a result, women face the impossibility to refuse sex due to these societal norms, lack of empowerment and support from families and friends, fear of losing their social status, emotional and economic dependence or difficulties to know how to stop these situations from happening which may lead to the acceptance and underreporting of these intimate partner rapes since they are wrongfully seen as common practices that women have to deal with (Lowry 2011).

4.3 Stranger vs non-stranger rape

There are two main types of rape, which are stranger and non-stranger (acquaintance and intimate partner) rapes. Stranger rape is significantly prevalent in South Africa with approximately 1 in every 3 rapes committed by someone unknown to the victims according to surveys (GPSJS 2019) and this present study. Most of these rapes are committed by individuals who are involved in other violent criminal activities such as robbery, carjacking, burglary, gang violence and similar violent acts. In many of these rapes, weapons are used for victim intimidation. Stranger rapes are committed by either single or multiple perpetrators, with the latter being part of male bonding practices and criminal gang initiation in gang rape practices known as *jack-rolling* or *streamline* (Jewkes and Abrahams 2002). An example is a rape case reported in Ikageng police station which involved 20 perpetrators, which was the highest multiple perpetrators counts in 2019-2020 cases reported to SAPS (SAPS 2020).

Non stranger rape is perpetrated by someone known to the victim either as an intimate partner or an acquaintance, for example, friends and family. These non-stranger rapes mostly occur in the residence of the perpetrator or victim and sometimes at social settings like parties and leisure areas. Acquaintance rape is the most common type among younger females including underage girls (Jewkes et al. 2002). These rapes are usually the least reported due to victim shaming, blaming and disbelief or pressure from family to not report with the desire to 'handle' the situation at home. However, this type of rapes tends to have a higher possibility of revictimization, which may be combined with other forms of GBV thereby creating higher chances of psychological harm and negative impact on mental health (Abrahams, Jewkes, and Matthews 2013). Stranger rape survivors, on the other hand, tend to receive a little more empathy than women who are raped by intimate partners or acquaintances.

Intimate partner rape is more common in South Africa than perceived; however, it is the least reported form of rape as the victims might be easily dismissed by the family and authorities. According to surveys (Mazars et al. 2013), between 15 – 20 percent of men have forced a partner into sex, which agrees with the data analyzed in the present work. In some cases, partner rapes have been reinterpreted by survivors as a sign of extreme affection or as an act of forced sex to avoid the stigma of the term 'rape' and its associated trauma.

4.4 Femicide

According to the South African Research Council and the Gender & Health Research Unit (Abrahams et al. 2022), the number of femicides decreased from 3,793 estimated murder of women in 1999 to 2,407 estimated in 2017. Comparing this information, it can be observed that the number of victims of femicide by intimate partners decreased only from 1,553 in 1999 to 1,033 in 2017, while the number of murders by non-intimate partners had a more meaningful decrease from 1,672 to 946 in 2017. The provinces with higher femicide rates in 2017 were Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal that together with Gauteng have been pointed out as the provinces where the police

action in the investigation of these types of cases has lowered the quality the most (Abrahams et al. 2022) and these are also the three provinces that have recorded the highest numbers of sexual offences in this study.

5. Domestic violence

Domestic violence is a form of gender-based violence, which involves not only acts of sexual violence, but also physical, emotional or/and economic violence committed by an intimate partner or family member. The vast majority of victims of domestic violence are women. In the domestic violence section of the 2016 South Africa Demographic and Health Survey (SADHS 2016), responses were taken from 5,865 ever-partnered women over the age of 18. The prevalence of sexual, physical and emotional violence was recorded based on socioeconomic status, education and geographical location, which are presented in figure 5. In the overall recorded data, 26.2 percent of the total number of women had, at some point in their lives, experienced any of the three forms of violence (PSEV) by a partner, 20.5 percent had experienced physical violence (PV), only 6.2 percent had experienced sexual violence (SV) and 17.1 percent on emotional violence (EV). 13 percent of the women that were interviewed had experienced some form of domestic violence within the 12 months prior to the survey.

The prevalence of PSEV increases among women with lower level of education, particularly those with less than secondary education. The percentage of PSEV among this group is up to 30 percent. Based on marital status, the highest prevalence of PSEV is seen among women who had either been separated or divorced prior to the survey. However, it is important to note that these findings were based on a small sample size (N = 338).

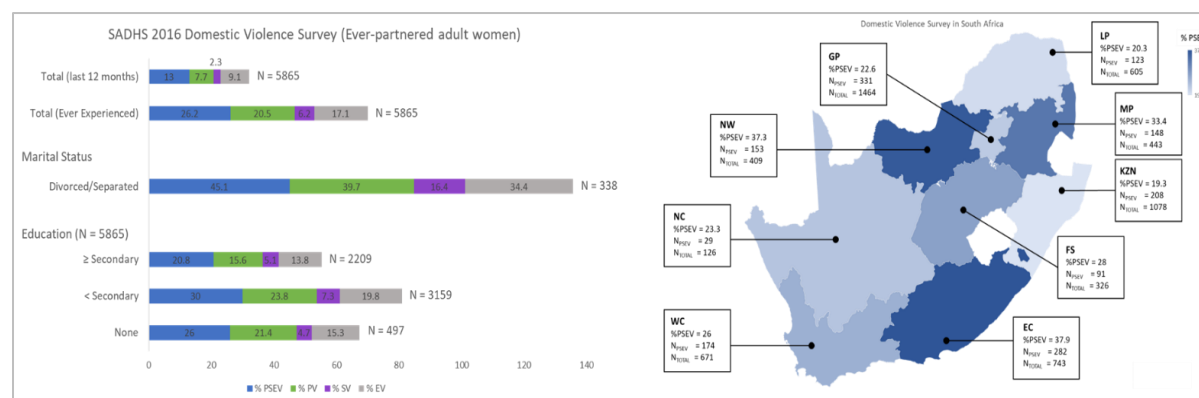


Figure 5: Percentage of ever-partnered adult women who have experienced PSEV, PV, SV and EV in South Africa from the domestic violence survey of the 2016 SADHS report based on marital status (divorced or separated), education and geographical distribution by province.

The number of PSEV (N_{PSEV}) were evenly distributed to match the population size of the nine provinces. The highest percentages of PSEV were seen in North West, Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga provinces, however, the highest number of PSEV were seen in the most populated provinces such as Gauteng, Eastern Cape and Kwazulu-Natal.

In some cases, domestic violence can lead to extreme consequences like severe physical injuries and even femicide (Gass et al. 2011). It is fundamental to remember that the real number of victims that suffer GBV from their partners on a regular basis will never be known due to lack of reporting. An essential aspect to consider is emotional violence, which is not only underreported but also challenging for the victims to identify, since in many cases their social circumstances make them assimilate these violent and dangerous behaviors as normal. The patriarchal views and practices tend to stereotypically consider women as 'the submissive gender' favoring and supporting this alarming normalization. Between 2019 and 2020, 1,482 femicides and 923 attempted femicides recorded by the South African Police Services were domestic related and 82 femicides and 50 attempted femicides were rape-related (not categorized under domestic violence).

6. Vulnerability factors associated with GBV

Many studies have primarily focused on the victims. However, for successful rape prevention strategies to be implemented, it is also vital to study the perpetrators and the causative factors that contribute to GBV perpetration. These vulnerability and risk factors are not direct causes of gender violence but rather underlying factors that need

to be considered when planning effective gender-responsive strategies to tackle this epidemic. These factors can be categorized on an individual or relationship level and on a community or societal level.

Individual and relationship level factors include poor family structure and negative childhood experience, for example: exposure to childhood trauma, intergenerational cycle of violence (intensified by colonialism and apartheid), abuse, neglect, or witnessing the abuse of their mothers or other female figures in their lives, which can influence developmental process, leading to extreme hostility and inability to form healthy violence-free relationships. In the case of men, such individuals may lack empathy, which is commonly seen among violent perpetrators in population-based studies (Jewkes et al. 2011). They tend to display exaggerated sexual behavior such as transactional sex, involvement with multiple partners and usually employ violence to get what they want. Many of these perpetrators blame peer pressure and gang affiliation as the causative factor for perpetrating a rape with the claims that as part of initiation and bonding rituals, they are forced to rape or participate in the raping of their victims or claim that the victim's dress code seduced them. Another widely studied vulnerability factor in physical and sexual violence cases is alcohol and substance abuse (Abrahams et al. 2020; Mazars et al. 2013). Individual and relationship-level factors are important to consider when addressing GBV, not as an excuse, since society usually considers them as valid justifications for the perpetrators' actions, but as factors that need accountability and gender-responsive education.

On the other hand, societal and community factors are critical underlying causes of rape and other types of gender-based violence. These critical vulnerability factors, such as gender power inequalities and disempowerment of women, socio-economic vulnerability, societal tolerance to violence, high crime prevalence, socio-demographics, societal norms and occasional lack of support from police, health services and judicial system, contribute greatly to the persistence of GBV. In many countries, including South Africa, women have very limited power due to patriarchal practices, gender inequalities, assumption of female sexual submissiveness and the notion of male dominance. Men tend to see women as subordinate and believe they have an entitled control over women's bodies and sexuality. One cause of this disempowerment of women is economic vulnerability, such as poverty and lack of employment, which play important roles in the rise in crime and sexual violence. Unemployed men have spare time to perpetrate sexual violence, likewise, economically vulnerable women depend on their abuser financially, and as a result could stay in abusive relationships. Some economically vulnerable women may be forced into sex work, which put them in significant risk of sexual abuse and sexually transmitted diseases. In the work setting, it is not unusual that men in power coerce sex from women with the promise of a job or promotion. Also, working non-white women are exposed to sexual violence on their way to work and the risk of leaving their children at home with potential aggressors, therefore, the economic independence might be riddled with difficulties and dangers for them and their children (Lowry 2011).

There are different layers of societal marginalization based on gender, age, race, education, disability, sexuality and economic status among others that contribute to vulnerability to sexual violence. Perpetrators usually target more vulnerable individuals whom they have physical, emotional or financial control over. According to Jewkes and Abrahams (2002), poverty and low socioeconomic status increase victim's vulnerability to sexual violence and exploitation in the workplace, school and society at large.

In Figure 6, the percentage of unemployed people within their population group is presented based on the data from the 2020-Q1 Quarterly Labour Force Survey in South Africa (QLFS 2020). The total unemployment rate for both men and women, men only and women only are presented for each racial group. The data shows that in general, women have a higher unemployment rate than men, except in the case of the Coloured population. However, non-white women have a significantly higher rate of unemployment compared to white women. Black African women have an unemployment rate of 36.5 percent, which is the highest among every population group which can be explained by the lack of equal opportunities for women and, in the case of non-white women, the intersectionality of sexism, racism and the short- and long-term consequences of apartheid and colonialism.

The percentage of young people between the ages of 15 to 34 years who are not in employment, education or training (N.E.E.T.) between 2019 and 2020 was also studied (QLFS 2020). It is shown that over 45 percent of females within this age group were not employed or in any form of education or training. This cycle leads to continued dependence on family or intimate partners who also contribute a significant percentage of perpetrators of different forms of domestic and gender-based violence.

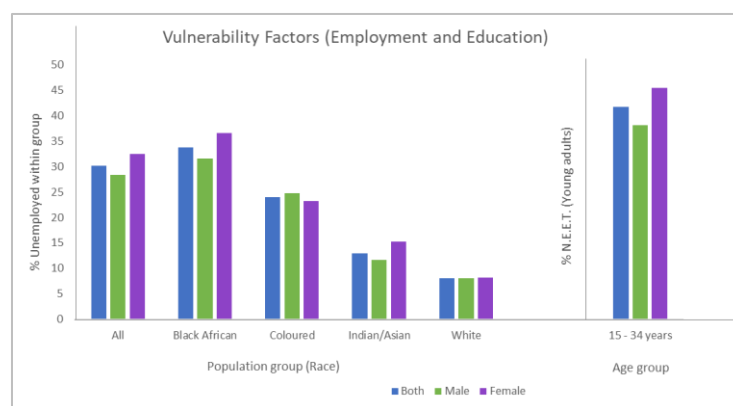


Figure 6: Unemployment rate of male and female within different racial population groups and percentage of young people between the ages of 15 to 34 years who are not in employment, education or training (N.E.E.T.)

GBV in South Africa is not caused by just one factor but a combination of different risk factors that creates an environment where violence against women thrives. There are many under-researched factors such as struggles of various groups like foreign women, LGBT community, sex workers and female experience in the educational institutions which are not covered in the present article (Joyner 2016; Naidoo 2013).

7. Consequences of suffering GBV

According to the WHO, there are a wide range of consequences of being a victim of any type of gender-based violence: physical, emotional or both. These can be linked to physical, reproductive or mental health and, in some extreme cases, they can lead to death (WHO 2012). The main effects on the mental health of the survivors can include PTSD, depression, anxiety, panic attacks, sleeping difficulties, difficulties to deal with intimacy with partners, fear of human contact and some of these can lead to fatal outcomes such as suicide. Regarding physical health, the effects can range from STDs, HIV, unwanted pregnancy, unsafe or unwanted abortions, physical trauma, wounds due to physical violence and femicide in the most extreme cases of GBV. Since some victims are in some cases unable to share or report their experiences, they might also fail to get the help needed to treat these physical and/or mental conditions, which can contribute to lack of improvement in their recovery process or ultimately lead to fatal consequences.

We cannot forget the effect on children who live in households where GBV occurs. In some cases, it perpetuates the cycle of violence, and these children might become perpetrators or potential victims of emotional and/or physical violence since they assume these roles as natural and they normalize the violent episodes they suffer growing up, which can also contribute to the underreporting due to the lack of ability to identify and problematize GBV.

8. Discussion

As shown in the present study, more than half of the perpetrators are known to the victims, which supports the ideas demonstrated in previous studies (GPSJS 2019; Jewkes and Abrahams 2002; Mazars et al. 2013). The present study also shows that most women were more likely to be raped by a man from the same racial group, which agrees with the work of Swart et al (2000). Population-based studies have found that 28 percent to 37 percent of men reported to have perpetrated rape at some point in their lifetimes and almost half of these men were multiple offence perpetrators, even serial rapists (Jewkes et al. 2011).

One of the main points to take into consideration to tackle this pandemic of violence and women's inequality is the creation of protocols and their enforcement to protect GBV survivors at every level, supporting them through the process of reporting and giving access to counsellors or social support workers. Girls and women cannot be expected to share their experiences if they feel coercion, pressure, victim-blaming attitudes, lack of credibility or fear of a very traumatic process. Also, it is important for perpetrators to suffer tangible consequences for their actions thereby sending a clear message of non-tolerance to any kind of violence towards women to society, reinforcing the equality structures and making effective and preventive laws, that are fully enforced.

In search of a balanced and egalitarian society, it is imperative to avoid the blaming of the victims, protecting their physical and mental health and minimizing the levels of invasion and trauma that the process of reporting might entail. It is necessary to create a safe space for survivors to be able to share their experiences and get the psychological, physical, medical, legal and social support that they need. It is completely unacceptable to try to discourage the victims to report these abuses and it is imperative to promote well communicated systems between the medical centers and police stations, with effective and trained personnel, able to take care of the GBV survivors and follow clear and protective protocols during and after the process of reporting. In order to achieve these basic structures in the fight against GBV, education and visibility play a decisive role.

Visibility is a major factor in the fight against GBV. Modern technology and its widespread use have made it possible for a huge portion of the world's population to have access to information but, also, to use the Internet as a platform to share, educate others and themselves and to contact and help people in a way never possible before. Using these tools to reach the maximum audience can enhance the comprehension of the problem and put the focus on the importance of solving it, starting with the education of the younger ones that will constitute the adult society of the future and stop perpetuating harmful societal norms that seek to oppress and marginalize women without enough consequences.

Women and girls need to have access to information about sexual health, their rights and how to act in case of being abused in any way. Workers including emergency personnel, doctors, nurses, lawyers, judges and police officers need to be instructed on how to tactfully and decisively follow gender-responsive protocols that ensure the total protection and guidance to the sexual offences survivors from the first medical attention to the report of their case, the legal proceedings and the subsequent physical and/or mental support, including the supply of emergency contraceptives, prophylactic treatments for STDs and HIV, access to information about safe abortion and facilitation of professional psychological and legal support.

It is essential likewise to create awareness among the perpetrators by educating them about the consequences of their actions, on a personal and judicial level, making them understand how these acts affect them and others by openly rejecting violence at every level and therefore reverting the effects of the patriarchal, colonial and violent practices to promote a fairer and more egalitarian society.

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