



**PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS AND STAFF ON THE CAUSES OF
UNDERREPORTING OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AT A SELECTED
UNIVERSITY**

by

Lungelo Cynthia Mdletshe

Student Number: 201719785

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts in Criminology

in the

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of Criminal Justice

Supervisor: Dr Mandisa S. Makhaye

2024

DEDICATION

To my late grandmother, who has been my guiding light since the day she passed away. I hope that in the realms of heaven, she looks down upon me with pride and love, knowing that her support has led me to this moment. This dissertation is dedicated to her enduring memory.

Additionally, I dedicate this research to all the women who have endured the harrowing experience of gender-based violence (GBV) and have suffered in silence. I fervently hope that one day, you will find the courage and strength to break free from the shadows of victimisation and share your stories, for your voices deserve to be heard and your pain deserves to be acknowledged. May this work contribute to shedding light on the darkness of GBV and pave the way for a more just and compassionate world.

DECLARATION

I, Lungelo Cynthia Mdletshe, Student Number 201719785, declare that the research dissertation titled: **Perspectives of Students and Staff on the Causes of Underreporting of Gender-Based Violence at a Selected University** submitted in fulfilment of the degree Master of Arts in Criminology at the University of Zululand is the product of my own work and effort. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

Signature: 

Date: 15/07/2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to begin by expressing my profound gratitude to Almighty God for His boundless grace which has breathed life into this research. Without His grace, this journey would not have come to fruition.

To myself, I extend heartfelt thanks for persevering through the moments of doubt and temptation to surrender. It is through my belief in myself that I have overcome the numerous challenges and obstacles along this path. My resilience has truly paid off.

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Dr Mandisa Makhaye, for her unwavering support and invaluable guidance throughout my research journey. Her mentorship has been a beacon of inspiration and I am immensely grateful for her contributions to my academic growth.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the National Research Foundation (NRF) for their generous sponsorship of this research. Without their financial assistance, I would not have been able to navigate this arduous journey towards completing my dissertation.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my partner, Senzo Mthembu, for his encouragement and belief in my endeavours. His constant support and motivating words have been a source of strength and inspiration.

My thanks also go to my friends and family for their unwavering support throughout this journey. Your encouragement and understanding have been invaluable and I am deeply grateful for your presence in my life.

Last but not least, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all the participants (postgraduates, Student Services Department, and Protective Services Department) who contributed to this research. Your willingness to engage in this study was pivotal to its success, and your contributions are greatly valued. Thank you all for being a part of this important endeavour.

ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a significant issue in higher education institutions (HEIs) globally, yet research on its prevalence on campuses remains limited. This gap has contributed to underreporting and inadequate responses from institutions. This study explored the factors behind GBV underreporting and proposed interventions to encourage victims to report. The research was guided by two theoretical perspectives: rational choice theory, which explains why victims may choose not to report, and the cultural acceptance of violence theory, which highlights how societal norms can normalise GBV and prevent victims from coming forward. A qualitative research approach was employed, using open-ended interviews and a focus group discussion to collect data from participants selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Thematic analysis revealed that intimidation was the leading factor contributing to underreporting, with victims fearing retaliation, disbelief, stigma, and the lack of trust in institutions. Additional factors included a lack of awareness of reporting procedures, financial dependence, and pervasive patriarchal norms. The consequences of underreporting affect both victims and institutions. Victims may experience mental health issues, poor academic performance, and isolation, while institutions risk reputational damage and perpetuate a culture of silence around GBV. To address these issues, the study recommended awareness campaigns, visible GBV offices, and anonymous reporting options. In conclusion, the research provides insights into the underreporting of GBV in HEIs and suggests practical interventions to create a safer, more supportive environment for students.

Keywords: Gender-based violence, higher education institutions, underreporting, victimisation

OKUFINQIWE

Udlame olusekelwe kubulili (i-GBV) luyinkinga ebalulekile ezikhungweni zemfundo ephakeme (ama-HEI) emhlabeni jikelele, kodwa ucwaningo mayelana nokusabalala kwalo emakhempasini luhlale luncane. Leli gebe libe nomthelela ekubikweni kancane kanye nezimpendulo ezinganele ezivela ezikhungweni. Lolu cwaningo luhlale izici ezenza ukuba i-GBV ibikwe kancane kanye nokungenelela okuhlongozwayo ukuze kukhuthazwe izisulu ukuthi zibike. Ucwaningo lwaluholwa yimibono emibili yezenhloso: umgomo wokukhetha onengqondo, ochaza ukuthi kungani izisulu zikhetha ukungabiki, kanye nomgomo wokwamukelwa kosiko lobudlova, olugqamisa ukuthi izinkambiso zomphakathi ziyigqugquzela kanjani i-GBV futhi zizivimbela kanjani izisulu ukuba zibike. Kwasetshenziswa indlela yocwaningo olusezingeni eliphezulu, kusetshenziswa izingxoxiswano ezivulelekile kanye nengxoxo yeqembu okugxilwe kulo ukuze kuqoqwe imininingwano kubahlanganyeli abakhethwe ngamasampula enhloso kanye ne-snowball. Ukuhlaziywa kwendikimba kuveze ukuthi ukwesatshiswa yikona okuhamba phambili ekuholeleni ekungabikeni kahle, njengoba izisulu zisaba ukuphindiselwa, ukungakholwa, ukucwaswa kanye nokungazethembi izikhungo. Izici ezengeziwe zazihlanganisa ukuntula ukwazi ngezinqubo zokubika, ukuncika ngokwezimali, kanye nenkambiso ye-patriarchal egcwele yonke indawo. Imiphumela yokungabiki kahle ithinta kokubili izisulu kanye nezikhungo. Izisulu zingase zibe nezinkinga zempilo yengqondo, ukusebenza kabi ezifundweni, kanye nokuhlukaniswa, kuyilapho izikhungo zisengozini yokulimala kwesithunzi futhi ziqhubekisele phambili isiko lokuthula mayelana ne-GBV. Ukubhekana nalezi zinkinga, ucwaningo luncoma imikhankaso yokuqwashisa, amahhovisi e-GBV abonakalayo, kanye nezinketho zokubika ezingaziwa. Sengiphetha, ucwaningo luhlinzeka ngemininingwane mayelana nokubikwa kancane kwe-GBV kuma-HEI futhi luphakamisa ukungenelela okungokoqobo ukuze kwakheke indawo ephephile, esekela abafundi.

Amagama Abalulekile: Udlame olusekelwe kubulili, izikhungo zemfundo ephakeme, ukubikwa kancane, ukuhlukunyezwa

ACRONYMS

AU	African Union
CJS	Criminal Justice System
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
DC	Disciplinary Committee
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HEI/s	Higher Education Institution/s
HOD	Head of the Department
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning and Intersex
PSD	Protective Services Department
PSET	Post School Education and Training
SAPS	South African Police Services
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SRC	Student Representative Council
SSD	Student Services Department
UCT	University of Cape Town
UN	United Nations
UNIZULU	University of Zululand

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	i
DECLARATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
OKUFINQIWE	v
ACRONYMS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xiii
CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY	1
1.1 Gender-Based Violence at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)	1
1.2 Problem Statement	4
1.3 Significance of the Study.....	6
1.4 Aims and Objectives	7
1.4.1 Research objectives	7
1.4.2 Research questions	7
1.5 Research Site	8
1.6 Conceptualisation of Key Terms	9
1.6.1 Gender-based violence (GBV).....	9
1.6.2 Staff	10
1.6.3 Students.....	11
1.6.4 Underreporting.....	12
1.7 Theoretical Framework	13
1.8 Research Methodology	14

1.9 Outline of the Dissertation.....	15
1.10 Conclusion	16
CHAPTER 2	17
LITERATURE REVIEW	17
2.1 Introduction	17
2.2 Global Prevalence of GBV	17
2.3 GBV in the South African Context.....	21
2.4 GBV on Campuses at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).....	24
2.5 Factors that Cause GBV	27
2.5.1 Patriarchy and toxic masculinity.....	27
2.5.2 Alcohol and drug abuse	30
2.5.3 Poverty.....	31
2.5.4 The 'hook-up' culture	31
2.5.6 Sex for marks.....	33
2.6 Underreporting of GBV at HEIs.....	34
2.7 Institutional Failures and their Intersectional Impact on Perpetuating GBV.....	37
2.7.1 Gender and power dynamics	38
2.7.2 Socio-economic status and vulnerability	38
2.7.3 Institutional culture and patriarchal norms	38
2.7.4 Cultural norms and social stigmas	40
2.7.5 Insufficient policy implementation	41
2.8 The Effects of GBV on Victims.....	44
2.8.1 Physical effects (injury and death)	45
2.8.2 Psychological effects	46
2.8.3 Academic impact	48

2.8.5 Social isolation.....	48
2.8.5 Long-term consequences and impact of GBV on women.....	49
2.9 The Effects of the Underreporting of GBV.....	51
2.10 Current Institutional Responses to Curbing GBV	52
2.10.1 Responses by various universities.....	52
2.10.2 University of Zululand's GBV policy and procedures	53
2.11 South African Legislation on GBV	55
2.11.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act No. 108 of 1996.....	55
2.11.2 Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act No. 13 of 2021.....	56
2.11.3 Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Act No. 12 of 2021.....	56
2.11.4 Domestic Violence Amendment Act No. 14 of 2021	56
2.11.5 The Protection from Harassment Act No. 17 of 2011	57
2.12 Interventions to Encourage the Reporting of GBV Incidences	57
2.13 Conclusion	60
CHAPTER 3	62
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	62
3.1 Introduction	62
3.2 The Rational Choice Theory	62
3.2.1 Rational choice intersectionality.....	66
3.3 The Cultural Acceptance of Violence / Culture of Violence Theory.....	68
3.4 Limitations of Theories.....	71
3.4.1 Limitations of rational choice theory.....	71
3.4.2 Limitations of the culture of violence theory	71
3.5 Conclusion	72

CHAPTER 4	74
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	74
4.1 Introduction	74
4.2 Research Methodology	74
4.3 Sampling	75
4.3.1 Non-probability sampling	75
4.3.2 Purposive sampling	76
4.3.3 Snowball sampling	78
4.4 Data Collection.....	79
4.4.1 One-on-one interviews.....	80
4.4.2 Focus group discussion	83
4.5 Thematic Data Analysis	85
4.6 Achieving Trustworthiness	87
4.6.1 Credibility	87
4.6.2 Transferability	87
4.6.3 Dependability	88
4.6.4 Confirmability	88
4.7 Ethical Considerations	88
4.8 Conclusion	90
CHAPTER 5	91
DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS.....	91
5.1 Introduction	91
5.2 Demographics of the Participants	92
5.3 Findings	94
5.4 Theme 1: Factors that Contribute to the Underreporting of GBV	94

5.4.1 Intimidation	95
5.4.2 Fearing the perpetrator	99
5.4.3 Fear of not being believed	101
5.4.4 Distrust in law enforcement agents and institutions' support services	102
5.4.5 Lack of awareness of the nature of GBV	110
5.4.6 Fear of being tainted by stigma and shame	112
5.4.7 Bound to the perpetrator by financial dependence	114
5.4.8 The impact of patriarchy on GBV perceptions and behaviours	115
5.5 Theme 2: The Effects of the Underreporting of GBV	117
5.5.1 Effects on victims	118
5.5.2 Effects on the Institution	123
5.6 Theme 3: Low level of awareness of reporting facilities and procedures	127
5.7 Theme 4: Participants' Recommendations.....	130
5.7.1 Awareness campaigns.....	131
5.7.2 Ensuring justice for GBV victims.....	137
5.7.3 Creating a safe space for victims.....	139
5.7.4 Establishing an anonymous reporting service.....	140
5.7.5 Student parliament.....	143
5.7.6 Visible GBV offices	145
5.7.7 The appointment of designated personnel to investigate GBV cases.....	146
5.8 Discussions of the Main Findings.....	147
5.8.2 Factors that contribute to underreporting	147
5.8.3 The effects of underreporting.....	158
5.8.4 Awareness of reporting facilities and procedures	162
5.8.5 Participants' recommendations	163

5.9 Conclusion	170
CHAPTER 6	172
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	172
6.1 Introduction	172
6.2 Analytical Conclusion	172
6.3 Recommendations	176
6.4 Limitations of the Study	178
6.5 Recommendations for Future Research	179
6.6 Conclusion	179
REFERENCES	181
APPENDICES	203
APPENDIX A: Permit to Collect Data	204
APPENDIX B: Ethical Clearance Certificate	205
APPENDIX C: Editors Certificate	206
APPENDIX D: Turnitin Report	207
APPENDIX E: Interview Schedule	209
APPENDIX F: Focus Group Questions	211

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1: A rational choice model to explain the non-reporting of GBV	63
Figure 5.1: PivotChart of students' gender and levels of academic achievement.....	93
Figure 5.2: Factors that contribute to the underreporting of GBV.....	95

TABLE

Table 5.1: Gender representation of support staff members.....	93
---	----

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Gender-Based Violence at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

All forms of gender-based violence (GBV) are a violation of human rights, pose a significant threat to health and safety, and affect individuals across diverse gender identities (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2020; Mahabeer, 2021). The multifaceted issue of GBV encompasses various forms, such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, physical violence, emotional abuse, and stalking, and all these have far-reaching consequences for the physical and mental well-being, academic performance, and overall quality of life of those affected by it (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency [SIDA], 2015).

In South Africa, GBV has been a longstanding concern as it has affected people of all walks of life during modernity and post-modernity, but it has recently gained momentum due to heightened activism. George's study (2020) underscores the historical roots of GBV by associating it with the oppressive apartheid era, which was a time when acts of violence such as rape, female homicide, and domestic abuse were pervasive. The apartheid-era court system offered little protection to victims, particularly those from marginalised groups, and this lack of support perpetuated the cycle of GBV (George, 2020). Moreover, GBV can be seen as a consequence of apartheid's promotion of inequality and violence against marginalised communities, which are societal scourges that have continued to fuel GBV till the present day.

However, GBV in South Africa is a multifaceted issue influenced by various factors beyond its historical roots in apartheid. Patriarchal norms and gender inequality are primary drivers, fostering power imbalances that perpetuate violence against women and marginalised groups (Saferpaces, 2022). Additional factors include low levels of education, economic and social disparities, weak legal and justice systems, and a culture of silence and shame (Chibango & Chibango, 2022). While apartheid's legacy has

influenced the landscape of GBV in South Africa, contemporary factors such as patriarchal norms, socioeconomic challenges, cultural practices, legal system inefficiencies, and public health crises continue to perpetuate this pervasive issue. Efforts to address GBV were initiated by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 which guarantees equality and human dignity for all while it also explicitly prohibits GBV in any form (Brink, Mdaka, Matee, & Weppelman, 2021). However, despite constitutional measures, incidents of GBV at HEIs are underreported, and a culture of silence regarding this scourge prevails (von Meullen, 2021).

South Africa has witnessed increasing incidents of GBV reportedly perpetrated within and around campuses of HEIs (Davids, 2020). In recent years, the sexual harassment of female students on campuses of HEIs has garnered significant attention and has led to widespread protests across South Africa (Makhafola, 2020). Tragic incidents, such as the rape and murder of Uyinene Mrwetyana in 2019, have highlighted the pervasive nature of GBV within HEIs (Raborife, 2020). Another case of GBV occurred on the Tshwane University of Technology campus where a student, Ntokozo Xaba (21), was murdered by her ex-boyfriend on 2 February 2023 (Daniels, 2023). Another case involved a female student (26) at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) who was stabbed several times by her spouse (30) in a private student-owned residence in Belhar, Cape Town, on 11 November 2023 (University of the Western Cape suspends man..., 2023). Another incident that shocked the nation was when a lecturer at the University of Zululand was suspended on 23 May 2024 as a result of allegations of sexual harassment and assault against students in the Cheer Leading sport. According to a WhatsApp voice note from the victim, it was alleged that the lecturer had been abusing several students for quite some time, yet most of them had been reluctant to come forward because the perpetrator had coerced them into believing that no one would believe them when they reported the matter. Fortunately, one of these students found the courage to report him, and the lecturer was suspended pending an investigation (UNIZULU Notice issued by Management on 23 May 2024 [internal document]). These and many other such cases suggest that GBV is pervasive in HEIs, but that the matter is neglected because of underreporting. A further suggestion is that intimate partner violence (IPV) and sexual

harassment are also prevalent at HEIs but are ignored as they are underreported (de Wet-Billings & Billings, 2024).

Mutinta (2022) argues that the incidents of GBV incidents that make local or national news represent only a small fraction of the total occurrences in the country, as the majority go unreported for various reasons. This underreporting is attributed to several key factors such as a lack of categorisation of GBV as a distinct crime, cultural norms, and institutional challenges (Davids, 2020). According to Makhanya (2022) and Mutinta (2022), universities often mirror societal norms, and in South Africa, certain institutional cultures inadvertently perpetuate environments where GBV is underreported. For instance, male-dominated institutional cultures can create spaces that are unwelcoming to female and gender non-conforming students, leading to the normalisation of GBV and discouraging reporting. Younger female students, particularly those in their first year, are at increased risk of GBV (Makhanya, 2022). This vulnerability is exacerbated by factors such as prior victimisation and the consumption of alcohol or drugs, which are prevalent in university social settings. These factors not only increase the risk of victimisation but also contribute to the reluctance to report incidents due to fear of stigma or not being taken seriously (Saferpaces, 2022).

Many universities lack comprehensive policies and support structures to address GBV effectively (DHET, 2020). The absence of clear, up-to-date policies and accessible support services not only hampers reporting but also allows perpetrators to act with impunity, perpetuating the cycle of violence. Mahabeer (2021) argues that victims often face confusion and hopelessness due to unclear reporting channels, which deters them from coming forward. As a result, students resort to sharing GBV allegations on social media, because of the failure of universities to adequately address these allegations (Davids, 2020). This contributes to the culture of silence and fear among victims, hindering effective reporting and response mechanisms.

Despite the prevalence of GBV and the wide body of research on the subject, there is limited information on the extent of underreporting of this crime in HEIs, and this makes it challenging to gauge the true prevalence of GBV on campuses of South African

universities (DHET, 2019). Underreporting of GBV is a concerning issue in South Africa as it means that a significant proportion of victims choose not to seek help or report such incidents (SIDA, 2015). It has also been argued that initiatives to combat GBV have been devised, but that many gaps prevent their implementation (Makhaye, Mkhize & Sibanyoni, 2023).

The literature review of this study focused on the underreporting of GBV globally and nationally in the study's quest to identify the factors that contribute to GBV and the fact that it remains underreported. In fact, the key purpose of the study was to propose interventions that will encourage reporting through identifying potential solutions to address the issue of underreporting of GBV in South African HEIs. Furthermore, the study explored the effects of underreporting on the victims of GBV and the HEIs where such acts reportedly occurred, while it also assessed students' awareness of reporting mechanisms within their respective institutions. Prior to generating the data, a comprehensive review of literature related to GBV was conducted.

1.2 Problem Statement

The right to freedom from violence is a fundamental human right, protected by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and supported by international frameworks such as those of the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN). GBV not only infringes on basic human rights but also undermines the dignity and well-being of affected individuals. In South Africa, crime statistics show that four out of ten women experienced GBV between 2017 and 2022, with fluctuating sexual offence rates, such as 15,325 cases in 2019 and 15,284 in 2023 (Statistics South Africa, 2023/2024). These data reveal a decrease of 261 cases from 2019 to 2023, which underscores the persistence of the issue of underreported sexual offense cases. Despite the significance of GBV on university campuses, there is a lack of specific data in this context, though media coverage continues to highlight its urgent presence in these settings.

A major barrier to addressing GBV in HEIs is the low reporting rate, which hampers efforts to provide support and prevent further abuse. Research by Gillian and Jackie (2021)

indicates that many students prefer to report incidents to friends or family rather than formal authorities like the South African Police Service (SAPS) or university officials. This reluctance to report contributes to the continuation of abuse and prevents victims from accessing necessary support, leading to long-term psychological and physical harm. Finchilescu and Dugard (2021) note that GBV can result in depression, suicidal behaviour, substance abuse, and poor academic performance, further exacerbating the negative impact on students' lives.

Underreporting also poses significant challenges for HEIs, which are obligated to provide a safe environment for students and staff (DHET, 2020). Without accurate data on GBV, institutions are unable to effectively address the problem, develop policies, or implement appropriate interventions. Additionally, failure to report GBV can damage the reputation of institutions, as incidents that are later exposed by the media can undermine public trust and affect student enrolment and retention rates. For instance, while the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) has made strides in addressing GBV, media reports have highlighted troubling incidents, such as allegations of sexual abuse by faculty members and subsequent inaction due to insufficient evidence (UNIZULU abandons rape probe, 2017). A recent UNIZULU internal notice (May 23, 2024) confirmed the suspension of a lecturer for alleged sexual harassment and assault, pending a disciplinary hearing. These incidents, along with similar global reports, underscore the pervasive nature of GBV in HEIs and the urgent need for comprehensive measures to prevent and address it, particularly in the face of non-reporting.

The lack of formal statistics on GBV in HEIs further complicates the situation, as it prevents a clear understanding of the scope of the problem and hinders the development of effective interventions (DHET, 2019). Studies by Finchilescu and Dugard (2021) and von Meullen (2021) emphasise that underreporting leads to a lack of support for victims, difficulties in prosecuting perpetrators, and an inability to create targeted interventions. To combat this issue, it is crucial to identify the factors contributing to underreporting and implement strategies to encourage victims to come forward. The present study aims to explore these factors, assess students' awareness of reporting mechanisms, and recommend interventions to break the silence surrounding GBV in HEIs.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The lack of acknowledgment and discourse surrounding GBV on university campuses is a pressing concern. GBV represents not only distress for these institutes and the victims, but it is also a pervasive menace that jeopardises the safety and well-being of the entire campus community as perpetrators are often free to commit such crimes again with impunity. Efforts to combat GBV are a fundamental global objective, yet there is a dearth of literature focusing on the underreporting of such incidents at HEIs in South Africa. This identified knowledge gap necessitates further investigation into the underlying factors that contribute to such crimes and the fact that victims do not report them.

The significance of this study primarily revolves around academic implications and the potential impact that the perpetuation of GBV on campuses have for all students and staff. From an academic standpoint, this research should contribute innovative and valuable information that South African institutions of higher learning may utilise that curb the scourge of GBV on campus. Creating a safe and secure environment that is free from all forms of violence is the responsibility of the leaders of these institutions. Therefore, the light that the findings of this study shed on the factors that hinder victims from reporting GBV can help identify causal factors and inform measures to promote the reporting of GBV victimisation, thereby facilitating access to justice and psychological support for victims.

In effect, this study may equip South African public universities with practical solutions to address the issue of low GBV reporting rates and break the silence surrounding GBV victims. If the issue of underreporting of GBV is addressed, victims are likely to feel more empowered to report such incidents and to seek the necessary support. Ultimately, this study should address the challenge of underreporting GBV on HEI campuses and contribute to a safer and more supportive campus environment.

1.4 Aims and Objectives

In the context of the above discourse, the study aimed to examine the underlying factors that contribute to the underreporting of GBV at HEIs with the ultimate goal of recommending interventions that can effectively mitigate the problem of underreporting. The study was guided by three key objectives to achieve its aim.

1.4.1 Research objectives

- The first objective was to investigate factors that contribute to the underreporting of GBV incidences at the selected South African university. This objective served to uncover the reasons for the underreporting of GBV and to uncover the effects of underreporting on both students and the HEI itself. The effects of GBV are severe and life-threatening as affected students experience diverse negative consequences while the reputation of institutions is also ruined by such cases.
- The second objective was to investigate students' awareness of GBV reporting procedures and facilities at the selected university. This objective had been formulated to discover whether students were aware of reporting procedures and facilities at the selected institution as lack of such facilities might be why victims were reluctant or unable to report their victimisation.
- The third objective was to recommend interventions that may encourage reporting of GBV by victims at the selected university. This objective served to seek solutions that would eliminate the factors that cause underreporting, thus ending the silence of GBV victims. Solutions were recommended by both students and university staff members. Other interventions were drawn from the existing literature on the topic.

1.4.2 Research questions

The research questions that were posed that gave impetus to the study were the following:

- What factors contribute to the underreporting of GBV cases at the selected university?

- What information do students have regarding the reporting procedures for GBV and what facilities are available for them to report GBV at the selected university?
- What strategies can be recommended to encourage the reporting of GBV by victims at the selected university?

1.5 Research Site

The Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997 defines a university as “any institution that offers higher education on a full-time, part-time, or distance basis and is recognised or provisionally registered as a private higher education institution under this Act (South African Government, 1997). Harmon (2020) also describes a university as an institution of higher learning that offers undergraduate (Bachelor's) and graduate (Master's or Doctorate) programs. Harmon (2020) further avers that, for a university to be recognised as an institution of higher learning, it should be accredited by a recognised accrediting programme. In South Africa, there are 26 public universities that are spread across the country's nine provinces. The University of Zululand (UNIZULU) is one of these 26 universities and is located in the KwaZulu-Natal Province.

UNIZULU was selected as the research site for this study. UNIZULU has two campuses, namely the KwaDlangezwa campus (the main campus) and the Richards Bay campus. The KwaDlangezwa campus was established in 1960 and is home to four faculties: Humanities and Social Sciences, Commerce, Administration & Law, Education, and Science, Agriculture & Engineering. It also houses academic support departments. Conversely, the Richards Bay campus was completed in 2009 and is intended to further the university's entrepreneurial and vocational agenda in conjunction with local industry partnerships and the maritime sector. Courses currently being offered at the campus include Public Relations, Transport Management, and Hospitality Management.

This university is recognised as a prominent comprehensive African institution, distinguished by its commitment to quality education and its promotion of collaborative and innovative cultures across its rural and urban campuses. The university is uniquely

rooted in African wisdom, emphasising the principles of Ubuntu and the interconnectedness of humanity. Guided by its slogan, "A Node for African Thought," UNIZULU prioritises the diversity of perspectives that shape the future of African scholarship and development.

The researcher selected UNIZULU as the study area to gain an in-depth understanding of the environment in which she is a student. This choice aligns with the saying, "charity begins at home," reflecting a commitment to first addressing and exploring challenges within her immediate context before extending the scope of research to other institutions. By focusing on UNIZULU, the researcher seeks to provide insights that are contextually relevant and nuanced, rather than aiming to generalise the findings. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the dynamics specific to the institution, which can serve as a foundation for broader comparative studies in the future.

For this study, the research focussed exclusively on the KwaDlangezwa campus. This campus is situated within the Umhlathuze Municipality, which is an area that experiences rapid industrial growth and serves as a significant employment hub in northern KwaZulu-Natal. The rationale for selecting the KwaDlangezwa campus was that the study sampled postgraduate students and, as the Richards Bay campus does not currently accommodate postgraduate programmes, it was deemed incompatible with the objectives and scope of this research.

1.6 Conceptualisation of Key Terms

1.6.1 Gender-based violence (GBV)

GBV is the acronym for a term that is used to recognise how gender shapes certain forms of violence, including sexual harassment, assault, domestic violence, intimate partner violence (IPV), and other forms of violence (DHET, 2019). GBV can also be classified as a hate crime when it is directed at someone because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The term GBV is defined differently by various organisations. For instance, the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993: 2)

defines GBV as “any act that causes or is likely to cause 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”. The University of Zululand’s (UNIZULU’s) Policy and Procedures on Sexual Harassment and GBV (2019: 5) defines GBV as “any act of violence directed against any person based on their gender, sex, marital status, or sexual orientation that causes or is likely to cause physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering”. Although these definitions highlight different aspects of GBV and refer differently to the identity of victims, both are essential in understanding the different dimensions of GBV and developing strategies to prevent and address it. In that regard, it can be argued that acts of GBV are the most common acts that violate human rights and that compromise the health, dignity, security, and autonomy of victims.

In this study, GBV is defined as a violation of human rights that undermines the peace, freedom, and dignity of those affected. It encompasses physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional behaviours that can harm an individual's well-being and health. The consequences of GBV are often severe and long-lasting. While GBV manifests in various forms, this study focuses on behaviours such as IPV, sexual assault /or harassment, rape, and physical assault. These acts may be perpetrated by partners or non-partners, and GBV can affect individuals regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. It has no boundaries.

GBV is a significant public health concern globally as it affects millions of people of all walks of life, but the targets are primarily women and girls. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), globally one in three women will experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. While women are particularly vulnerable to GBV, it is important to acknowledge that anyone can be a victim or perpetrator. This study, however, focuses on female students as victims of GBV and explores the perspectives of students and staff on the factors contributing to underreporting at a selected university.

1.6.2 Staff

Staff encompasses all individuals employed by a university, either on a permanent, contract, or part-time basis, to perform various roles necessary for the institution's

operation (UNIZULU Policy and Procedures on Sexual Harassment and GBV, 2019). This includes academic staff, who are involved in teaching, research, and academic support, as well as administrative and support staff, who handle non-academic functions such as management, finance, and student services. The definition aligns with the Employment of Educators Act No. 76 of 1998, which governs employment practices in educational institutions in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1998).

This study will focus on support staff responsible for student services within the selected institution, particularly those who work directly with GBV victims. For the purposes of this study, the terms "staff" and "support staff" will be used interchangeably to refer to these individuals. These individuals include support staff members from Guidance and Counselling, Protective Services Department (PSD), Clinic, and Pastoral Care Units. As reflected in the study's topic, these are the staff that were selected to provide their insight on the causes of underreporting at a selected university.

1.6.3 Students

In the context of South African universities, students refer to individuals formally enrolled in an institution of higher learning for the purpose of pursuing a qualification, such as a diploma, degree, or postgraduate certification. These individuals are registered with the university and engage in academic programs, either on a full-time or part-time basis, as stipulated by the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997 (Republic of South Africa, 1997). Students may include those residing on campus and in private accommodation (off campus), attending classes in person, or participating in online learning.

For this study, registered postgraduate students residing both on-campus and off-campus were selected to share their perspectives, as detailed in Chapter 4. While the primary focus is on female students as victims of GBV, the sample includes both female and male students to enrich the depth and scope of the data collected on the underreporting of GBV in HEIs.

1.6.4 Underreporting

Underreporting is the reverse of reporting; thus, it is necessary to define reporting to comprehend underreporting. In the context of this study, reporting means that cases of illegal behaviour that are associated with GBV are reported to the authority of the HEI in question. Crimes can also be reported to the SAPS which, according to Ranapurwala, Berg, and Casteel (2016), means submitting a formal complaint and providing as much information as one can about the incident so that a police investigation may begin. Moreover, there is no time limit to reporting as one can still submit a report regardless of how long ago the incident occurred (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003). Unofficial reporting occurs when one discloses or shares information about a criminal act with a trusted friend, family member, teacher, tutor, staff member, or member of a respected relationship unit. This is done to understand and manage the situation rather than to seek help (Ranapurwala et al., 2016).

Conversely, underreporting of GBV cases refers to non-reporting of GBV incidents, and such incidents are therefore never included in official statistics or records and never become known in the public sphere where a friend or family member may assist the victim (von Meullen, 2021). Underreporting can occur for various reasons, such as fear of retribution, shame, cultural norms that discourage disclosure of intimate matters, lack of trust in the justice system, and limited access to reporting mechanisms (WHO, 2013b). Therefore, according to WHO, the true extent of GBV is likely to be far bigger than official figures suggest, given that many cases go unreported (WHO, 2021). In a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) research project, it was discovered that only 40% of women who had experienced physical or sexual abuse sought assistance or confided in someone about their GBV experience (UNFPA, 2019). This illustrates that underreporting hides the true picture of GBV and undeniably contributes to the persistence of the problem as the perpetrators are not brought to book. Failure to address the underlying causes of GBV can then lead to the insufficient allocation of resources for preventative and response activities (WHO, 2021). It was against this background that the current study aimed to mitigate the problem by investigating the causes of underreporting so that interventions

that encourage reporting may be devised. Moreover, this study will focus on underreporting of GBV in HEIs.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This study employed rational choice and the cultural acceptance of violence theoretical frameworks to elucidate the factors underlying individuals' engagement in GBV and the hesitancy of victims to disclose such incidences. These theories were applied concurrently to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted phenomenon of GBV and the underreported of such cases at HEIs.

The rational choice theory posits that individuals make decisions by evaluating the potential gains and losses linked to their actions (Green & Shapiro, 1995). In the context of this investigation, it was contended that the decision not to report GBV incidents to authorities was a calculated choice made by individuals after a meticulous analysis of associated risks and benefits. The risks might include fear of retaliation, stigma and shame, secondary victimisation, as well as a lack of trust in the institutional authorities, whereas the benefits only included the vague possibility of justice and social support (Kabaya, 2021).

Conversely, the cultural acceptance of violence theory asserts that certain manifestations of violence attain normalisation and endorsement within specific cultural or societal settings, and that subjecting women to any form of GBV is a manifestation of this normalisation (WHO, 2009). In the context of South African universities, institutional cultural norms often reflect and reinforce broader societal patterns of violence and inequality. The legacy of apartheid has left South Africa characterised by social inequalities and violence against Black students, workers, and staff within HEIs (Adonis & Silinda, 2021). For example, in several African cultures, women are conditioned to be submissive to men and the 'receivers' of sex, whereas men are conditioned to be dominating and the 'initiators' of sex. This cultural belief teaches males to regard women as objects to be obtained and controlled rather than as independent individuals, and this view reinforces the belief that women are weak and should be subordinate to men

(George, 2020). These norms are mirrored in universities, where patriarchal attitudes often persist, fostering environments where GBV is normalised (Hlatshwayo, 2020). Women are therefore exposed to sexual violence and other forms of violence. Consequently, survivors of such acts of violence are disinclined to report these incidents due to prevailing cultural norms that trivialise or validate such behaviours.

These two theories jointly explain the silence surrounding GBV concerns. The first theory (i.e., the rational choice theory) plays a significant role in explaining how victims choose to not report their victimisation. Conversely, the second theory (i.e., the cultural acceptance of violence theory) plays a significant role in explaining cultural norms as a factor that normalises GBV and that prevents victims from reporting victimisation.

1.8 Research Methodology

This research employed a qualitative methodological framework that was grounded in the Hermeneutics paradigm to explore the perspectives of both students and staff members concerning the underlying factors that contribute to the underreporting of GBV at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU). The selection of the participants for this study was conducted by using a non-probability sampling approach, specifically the purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Postgraduate individuals from the student body and members of staff from the Protective Services Department and the Student Services Department were identified and actively engaged to participate in the study.

The primary instruments for data collection were semi-structured open-ended interviews and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis was employed to meticulously examine the transcribed data, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and themes related to the research questions. To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the study, the criteria as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were integrated, and the research process encompassed the aspects of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Throughout this process, stringent adherence to ethical guidelines and principles governing research was maintained. Thus, all considerations related to the treatment of participants, the confidentiality of the information they shared, and the

broader ethical implications of the study were adhered to. In other words, the POPIA was considered in the data collection process.

1.9 Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter contains the introduction to the study while the researcher elaborated on the general problem area, presented the research problem and questions, explained the importance of investigating the topic, and discussed the research approach. This chapter essentially served as a summary of the entire dissertation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Existing literature served as a basis for the research and key concepts were extracted and conceptualised while the phenomenon under study is explained. The importance of this study is explained by evaluating earlier research and establishing a connection. With reference to scholarly discourse on the subject, the various dynamics of the research are clarified. The chapter specifically examines a number of viewpoints on GBV, including the reasons for underreporting, its results, solutions, and other issues associated with the underreporting of GBV. This chapter also elucidates the gaps in previous research that this study filled.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

The two theories that were best suited to the subject under study are discussed and the reasons for scrutinising the topic under investigation is explained. This is followed by an explanation of what these ideas entail. Therefore, rather than being solely based on a literature review, the subject is situated within a theoretical framework. The mechanics of the subject under study are explained using various components of each theory.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

This chapter outlines all the activities that were conducted to examine the perspectives of students and staff on the causes of the underreporting of GBV. The qualitative research

methods that were adopted to achieve the aim of this study are described, namely; research design, the data collection methods, and the data analysis interpretation processes. In brief, all the research methods are discussed as they contributed to the effectiveness of the outcomes of the study,

Chapter 5: Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter provides a thorough analysis of the information gathered during the interviews. The data were transcribed and, after careful scrutiny, organised into topics and then analysed, and these results are reported. The theoretical framework and literature review both contributed to the validity and dependability (trustworthiness) of the data and the interpretations of the findings, which are linked to the study's actual findings. The data reporting procedure was conducted within the ethical demands of a study of this nature in mind.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter summarises the study with emphasis on the results obtained, the contribution made by the results to the pool of knowledge, recommendations, and suggestions for further research.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the study. The study's background and key objectives and aims were presented. To help the reader navigate the dissertation, a succinct synopsis of all the chapters was also included. Aspects of what have been briefly highlighted in this chapter will be further discussed in detail in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a significant issue, often overlooked within HEIs. While HEIs are perceived as sanctuaries for intellectual growth, they have increasingly become spaces where GBV occurs, threatening the safety and rights of students (Chitsamatanga & Ntlama, 2020). Creating a secure learning environment in HEIs is critical, as emphasised by the Department of Higher Education and Training (2020) policy framework.

This chapter engages with literature on GBV in HEIs to direct scientific research towards the growing problem of the underreporting of GBV on university campuses. The chapter commences with a detailed literature review to identify relevant empirical perspectives on GBV and to operationalise the research objectives. The literature is therefore explored to highlight known reasons for GBV underreporting, understand students' lack of awareness of resources available for reporting GBV, and to discuss some interventions that could be employed to promote reporting.

2.2 Global Prevalence of GBV

GBV is a pervasive problem that affects individuals worldwide, irrespective of their socio-economic status or country of origin. Globally, IPV and sexual coercion are the two most prevalent acts of GBV (Enaifoghe, Dlelana, Durokifa, & Dlamini, 2021). According to WHO (2021), one in three women (30%) experience GBV in their lifetime. WHO (2021) also indicates that 38% of females worldwide were murdered by an intimate partner, with only 6% of those deaths being attributed to sexual assault that occurred outside of a relationship. These numbers emphasise not only the pervasive nature of the issue across countries, but also its deeply entrenched impact on human rights, gender inequality, health, economics, and societal well-being.

The fact that 38% of female deaths were caused by their intimate partners emphasises the life-threatening nature of such relationships and highlights the urgent need to address power dynamics, societal norms, and support systems. Moreover, the disproportionately high percentage of fatalities within relationships compared to those attributed to sexual assault outside of relationships emphasises the importance of tackling violence within intimate settings. These statistics also underscore GBV's profound violation of human rights, its deep links to gender inequality, and the imperative for comprehensive efforts spanning legislation, education, mental health support, and international collaboration to effectively combat this pervasive issue.

The prevalence of GBV varies across countries, with some countries reporting higher rates of GBV than others. For instance, it is estimated that, in the United States, one in four women will experience IPV in their lifetime (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). In India, a study found that 31% of women reported experiencing physical and sexual violence by their partners (International Center for Research on Women, 2021), while Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) (2020) revealed that 36.4% of South African women suffered GBV at some point in their lives. However, GBV is not gender-specific, as men and sexual minorities also experience significant victimisation. Globally, an estimated 1 in 6 men have experienced sexual violence before the age of 18 (Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, & Hamby, 2014).

Additionally, WHO (2021) reports that male survivors of GBV often face barriers to reporting due to stigma, societal expectations, and fear of being disbelieved. Sexual minorities are also disproportionately affected; for example, a study in the United States found that 44% of lesbian women and 61% of bisexual women experience IPV, while 26% of gay men and 37% of bisexual men report the same (Human Rights Campaign, 2022). These statistics illustrate that GBV affects individuals across gender and sexual orientation, with underreporting being a common challenge for male and minority victims.

GBV is prevalent in both developed and undeveloped countries. However, the prevalence and severity of GBV vary significantly among these countries. In developed countries, GBV often takes the forms of IPV, sexual harassment, and sexual assault (Enaifoghe, Dlelana, Durokifa, & Dlamini, 2021). In contrast, in undeveloped countries, GBV is more

widespread and forms of violence are more varied. For example, South Sudan experiences high levels of sexual coercion and rape (United Nations Human Rights, 2022). The variations in the prevalence and severity of GBV between developed and undeveloped countries may stem from a complex interplay of socioeconomic, cultural, legal, institutional, and conflict-related factors.

Developed countries such as Sweden and Canada benefit from greater access to education, economic opportunities, and support services that empower women and encourage reporting of GBV incidents (Government Offices of Sweden, 2016). Efforts to challenge traditional gender norms and promote gender equality also contribute to heightened awareness and a better response to GBV in these countries. This notion is supported by Dawson, Sutton, Zecha, Boyd, Johnson, and Mitchell (2020), who refer to the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability (CFOJA) that was initiated to address the root causes and consequences of GBV in this country. The root cause of GBV in Canada, as highlighted by Dawson et al. (2020), is deeply rooted in systemic gender inequalities, harmful cultural norms, and entrenched patriarchal structures. These factors contribute to the vulnerability of women and girls to violence, particularly at the hands of intimate male partners. The Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability (CFOJA) was established to address these root causes by raising awareness of femicide and advocating for systemic changes to prevent such violence. The observatory aims to shed light on the broader societal issues that perpetuate violence against women and girls, as evidenced by the alarming toll of 160 femicides in 2020 alone (Dawson et al., 2020).

In contrast, undeveloped countries such as Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) face challenges like poverty, limited education, and inadequate legal frameworks which can perpetuate power imbalances and contribute to higher GBV rates (George, 2020). George (2020) underscores the impact of cultural norms that reinforce patriarchal attitudes on GBV, particularly in conflict zones where violence against women is exacerbated. For example, South Sudanese women encounter an alarming level of physical and sexual violence as many are subjected to physical assault while being sexually violated at gunpoint (United Nations Human Rights, 2022). The latter survey also

suggests that these violent acts are not sporadic or opportunistic, but frequently involve armed soldiers who are actively and deliberately pursuing women and girls for sexual gratification. These heinous crimes occur within the framework of patriarchy and gender inequality, particularly in times of conflict (United Nations Human Rights, 2022). Moreover, lack of access to healthcare, mental health services, education, and awareness campaigns further exacerbates the prevalence and non-reporting of GBV in these regions, and these factors also collectively shape the divergent landscapes of GBV in different countries.

Some developed countries have implemented laws and policies to address GBV. For example, in the United States, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was enacted in 1994 to provide legal protection and services to support victims of GBV (Lynch, 2023). The UN further established the Sustainable Development Goals, which include a goal to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Similarly, Australia's National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2010-2022) was launched to coordinate efforts to prevent and respond to GBV (Australian Government, 2021). The UN and other international organisations thus recognise the urgent need to address GBV and have established initiatives to mitigate the problem.

Notwithstanding considerable efforts that have been exerted to combat GBV worldwide, its prevalence persists and is exacerbated by the underreporting of such incidents. A research study titled *Experiences of sexual violence on public transport* that was conducted in Australia provides noteworthy insights into this matter. For instance, among the 41 participants involved in the study, a mere 5 individuals had chosen to report their GBV experiences to law enforcement authorities (Ison, Forsdike, Henry, Hooker, & Taft, 2023). This reluctance to report GBV was attributed to various factors, including the fact that some victims perceived their encounters as trivial and unworthy of official attention, apprehension that law enforcement officers might not believe their accounts, and past negative encounters with the police. The findings of this study underscore the devastating nature of underreporting, and the authors argue that urgent and concerted action against GBV is necessary.

The underreporting of GBV has a significant impact on the perpetuation of GBV globally as it undermines the efforts of policymakers and several organisations that aim to prevent its perpetuation (WHO, 2021). This lack of accountability tends to give criminals more courage and guides communities to accept GBV as the norm, hence contributing to an abusive cycle. Without support, victims find themselves in a continuous cycle of violence, which often results in additional abuse and trauma (Devries, Mak, Bacchus, Child, Falder, Petzold, & Watts, 2013). The current study thus aimed to eliminate the problem by examining reasons for underreporting to recommend interventions that may effectively encourage reporting.

2.3 GBV in the South African Context

GBV is rife in South Africa as incidences of such acts continue to emerge. Yesufu (2022) argues that the killing of women by men has reached a disproportionate crescendo in South Africa. This statement is supported by figures of GBV produced by the SAPS in the last few years (2013-2019) that showed that 2 771 women were killed by men in 2018/2019, 2 930 in 2017/2018, 2 639 in 2016/2017, 2 416 in 2015/2016, 2 234 in 2014/2015, and 2 354 in 2013/2014 (SAPS Annual Crime Report 2013–2019). In total, 15 344 women died at the hands of men over the 2013-2019 period.

The fluctuation in reported figures of GBV in South Africa from 2013 to 2019, as indicated by the SAPS Annual Crime Reports, could be attributed, at least in part, to variations in the levels of underreporting of GBV incidents over these years. Studies have shown that underreporting of GBV is influenced by factors such as social stigma, fear of retaliation, lack of trust in law enforcement, and insufficient awareness of available support services (Mathews, Abrahams, Jewkes, Martin, & Lombard, 2013; Jewkes, Flood, & Lang, 2015). During certain years, increased awareness campaigns, changes in law enforcement practices, or shifts in societal attitudes could have led to higher levels of reporting and a more accurate reflection of the actual extent of GBV. Conversely, during years with lower reported figures, pervasive underreporting due to these factors might have caused the inaccurate capturing data resulting in a blurred picture of the true magnitude of the problem. This highlights the need for sustained efforts to address the barriers to reporting

and to create an environment where victims feel safe and supported so that they will come forward and report their experiences of GBV.

In addition to the figures that were cited above, a report by Statistics South Africa (2020) suggests that this country has one of the highest rates of femicide in the world, with an estimated 2 695 women murdered in 2019 alone. This translates to a femicide rate of 11.5% per 100 000 women, which is five times higher than the average rate for the world (Statistic South Africa, 2020). The SAPS crime statistics report for 2023/2024 indicates that South Africa had 15 545 reported cases of sexual offences in 2022, which decreased to 15 284 in 2023. There was thus a decline of 261 cases between 2022 and 2023. These statistics highlight the persistent issue of underreporting of GBV in South Africa. These data also suggest that many women in South Africa may live in a state of perpetual fear of men and the threat of becoming victims of violence. Moreover, due to underreporting, these statistics do not accurately reflect the scope of GBV. The study by Fouché and Francois Fouché (2024) and Ngcobo (2024) highlights the prevalence of this issue, depicting that South Africa experiences the killing of one woman every hour. The authors further note that the true extent of violence against women and children is likely underreported, and this obscures the full scope of the problem. According to Ngcobo (2024), South Africa is unsafe for all women.

Conversely, Nakayiza (2024) argues that violence against women and girls is prevalent in almost all countries. The author cites Uganda as one of these countries as 95% of Ugandan women experienced physical and sexual violence in 2021, illustrating that South Africa is not the only country suffering from a high rate of GBV against women and children. According to Hadi (2017), violence against women and girls is a violation of their basic human rights. Such violence affects all aspects of society and people of all ages. Women all over the world are constantly subjected to several forms of violence. These include sexual and domestic violence, intimate partner violence (IPV), and other forms of abuse (WHO, 2013b). Thobejane, Luthada, and Mogorosi (2018) contend that GBV can occur as abuse between dating partners or non-partners and that its victims are both men and women, yet several studies explored it as a phenomenon only experienced by women. These studies disregarded the fact that GBV chooses no person, race, age,

sexual orientation, religion, or gender and that anyone can become a victim or perpetrator; thus, men also become victims of GBV. However, the current study focused only on women as victims of GBV as they are generally more exposed to GBV than men (WHO, 2018).

Several factors contribute to the prevalence of GBV in South Africa, such as the culture of patriarchy that endorses inequality and perpetuates the belief that men are superior to women, which in turn reinforces harmful gender norms (Jewkes, Flood, & Lang, 2015). This is evident in the high rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) that prevail in this country, with studies showing that one in four women experienced (or will experience) IPV in their lifetime (Statistics South Africa, 2020). Poverty and unemployment contribute to GBV as individuals living in poverty are more likely to experience violence and have fewer resources to escape abusive situations (Nduna & Tshona, 2021). This also contributes to the underreporting of GBV as victims are often financially dependent on the perpetrators, resulting in a cycle of violence (Makhene, 2022).

The issue of underreporting has made it difficult to address GBV in South Africa although the South African government has made meaningful strides towards addressing this issue through legislation and policies. On 28 January 2022, President Cyril Ramaphosa signed the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, the Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Act, and the Domestic Violence Amendment Act, all of which are intended to strengthen efforts to end GBV and provide legal protection for victims in South Africa (Advisory Committee, 2022). This demonstrates the government's dedication to the goal of reducing GBV in South Africa. However, despite these efforts, there are still major gaps in the application and enforcement of these regulations (Nduna & Tshona, 2021). One of the male participants in Anwana, Dlamini, and Reddy's (2024) study highlighted this gap by arguing that South Africa has good policies but poorly implement them. Fouché and Fouché (2024) argue that insufficient effort has been made to examine existing legislation and policies to determine their effectiveness in addressing GBV in South Africa. As a result, the regulation of these laws and policies is considered ineffective and therefore GBV continues to be a problem for society at large and for institutions of higher learning in particular (von Meullen, 2021).

The South African society has also responded to GBV through activism and awareness campaigns. The #MeToo movement has gained traction in South Africa, with social media campaigns such as #AmINext and #TotalShutdown drawing attention to the issue of GBV in the country. Additionally, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) and Sonke Gender Justice provide support and advocacy for victims of GBV. However, regardless of these initiatives, some victims still enshroud their victimisation. They cannot be blamed for remaining silent, as some believe it is the only way to survive and heal while collecting strength to deal with the demons that nearly destroyed them (van den Heever, 2021). However, their silence results in underreporting, and underreporting contributes to the perpetuation of GBV.

2.4 GBV on Campuses at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

According to the DHET (2020), no national data exist about the extent of GBV on university campuses, which suggests that these forms of violence against students has been neglected. It is contended that rape, sexual assault, physical assault by intimate partners, requests/demands for sex for improved marks or accommodation in residences or other needs and benefits, spying, and/or intruding upon women and men in residences while they are bathing or dressing are acts of violence that affect students the most (DHET, 2020). Both intimate or third parties can perpetrate these offenses, and the perpetrators include individuals who are visitors to campuses, on-site contractors, or anyone outside the institution who enters the premises. Mutinta (2020) shockingly points out that university buddies, boyfriends, and lecturers are the leading perpetrators of GBV.

It has been pertinently argued that women fear crime and violence more than males at tertiary institutions (Asencio, Merrill, & Steiner, 2014). For instance, a poll that was conducted at the Rhodes University in South Africa established that 12 to 23% of students feared walking on campus late at night, which amounted to 334 to 364 students who were concerned about their safety. Female students were four times more inclined than male students to feel unsafe on campus late at night, which is a finding that corroborates the notion that crime affects women more than men (Statistics South Africa, 2018).

According to Culatta, Clay-Warner, Boyle, and Oshri (2020), previous victimisation is a risk factor for GBV that is perpetrated on campus against individuals. Several students enrolled at South African institutions have been exposed to or experienced violence before enrolment owing to extreme rates of sexual abuse and violence against women and girls in this country (Ward, Artz, Leoschut, Kassanje, & Burton, 2018; Makhanya, 2022). Moreover, males who experienced GBV are more inclined to victimise others through such acts, whereas prior victimisation increases the risk of the re-victimisation of females (Kabaya, 2021).

The issue of GBV is pervasive on South African university campuses where high rates of intimate partner violence, rape, and femicide occur (WHO, 2021). However, the underreporting of these crimes is a major obstacle to understanding the true extent of the problem and addressing it effectively (SaferSpace, 2022; Hadi, 2017). For instance, Asithandile 'Kwasa' Zozo, a first-year student at the University of Witwatersrand (Johannesburg), was tragically stabbed by her lover on 17 August 2020 after trying to quit this abusive relationship (University of Witwatersrand, 2021). More recently, a case of GBV at the Tshwane University of Technology shook the country when a student, Ntokozo Xaba (21), was murdered by her ex-boyfriend on 2 February 2023 (Daniels, 2023). These are only two examples of GBV at HEIs, but this issue is neglected because of underreporting. This also confirms Enaifoghe, Dlelana, Durokifa, and Dlamini's (2021) argument that intimate partner violence and sexual coercion are the two most prevalent types of GBV globally. In fact, in 2021 WHO reported that 38% of murdered women had died as a result of intimate partner violence (WHO, 2021).

It is imperative that increased measures are implemented against GBV in response to the distressing incidents of murders and mistreatment of young women on South Africa's university campuses. The notable cases above, as well as those of Nosicelo Mtembeni (University of Fort Hare), Zolile Khumalo (Mangosuthu University of Technology), and Takalani Mbulungeni (University of Venda), serve as grim reminders of the 1 000 women who tragically lost their lives to GBV (University of Witwatersrand, 2021). This growing menace has left women living in constant fear of becoming the victims of marauding males and even their intimate partners. Furthermore, Moletsane's research (2022:11) has

revealed that many students only feel safe when secluded in their rooms, which is a statement that highlights the unfortunate reality that educational institutions, which should be sanctuaries for learning and personal growth, have become sites where human rights are violated. It is indeed a travesty that students are subjected to GBV while pursuing their academic advancement.

A study that was conducted by Mutinta (2022) sheds light on the various forms of violence experienced by students, which include verbal or emotional violence, sexual violence, and physical violence. The latter study found that 58% of students had encountered some form of GBV during their time at university. Of this group, 36.1% reported experiencing physical GBV, 56.5% reported experiencing verbal or emotional violence, and 46.7% reported experiencing sexual violence (Mutinta, 2022). Regrettably, despite the high prevalence of GBV, most affected students (98.6%) never reported their experiences to the police. The reasons they provided included fear of parental reaction (39.4%), perceiving the issue as insignificant (35.2%), apprehension about retaliation by the perpetrator (7.8%), and a lack of awareness about reporting facilities and procedures (9.6%) (Mutinta, 2022). The severity of the GBV issue is further underscored by the fact that, in 2021/2022, campuses of public universities in the Eastern Cape alone harboured 57.8% of students who had encountered some form of GBV (Mutinta, 2022). This underscores the urgent need for comprehensive and effective measures to combat GBV within the academic environment and to devise measures that will ensure the safety and well-being of students who pursue their academic aspirations.

Kabaya (2021) and Anderson and Naidu (2022) state that Student Representative Council (SRC) members take advantage of first-year female students by promising them accommodation in exchange for sex. The SRC is meant to be a group of student leaders who contribute to the creation of a secure and encouraging environment. Unfortunately, they are doing the opposite by using their powers to harass students. A first-year student at the University of Cape Town (UCT) claimed that she had been raped by the UCT SRC president known as Mila Zibi on 28 October 2021 (UCT suspends student following sexual assault..., 2022). It was alleged that the SRC president had pressured the student to consume alcohol and he raped her afterwards. However, the accused denied the

allegations against him, but the UCT suspended two students because of this allegation. The UCT spokesperson, Nombuso Shabalala, attested that the victim was receiving support (UCT suspends student following sexual assault..., 2022). This incident highlights that the UCT makes an effort to support survivors of GBV as they are committed to the fight against GBV.

The University of Cape Town has a Sexual Assault and Harassment Policy that outlines procedures for dealing with incidents of sexual harassment or assault, including reporting mechanisms, investigations, and disciplinary actions (University of Cape Town Sexual Assault and Harassment Policy, 2021). One of their reporting mechanisms is an online reporting system that allows students to report incidents of sexual harassment or assault anonymously. These two examples demonstrate that some universities devised policies in line with the current DHET (2020) framework, which emphasises regulating policies that have clear reporting channels for survivors. However, von Meullen (2022) argues that these policies against GBV are not implemented correctly as GBV remains a persistent issue at HEIs. She further argues that if these policies had been implemented correctly, they would have curbed the prevalence of GBV.

2.5 Factors that Cause GBV

GBV is a significant problem at universities and has an impact on students' physical and mental health. It can take many different forms, including sexual assault, rape, violence against intimate partners, and stalking (DHET, 2019). GBV is a problem at universities for several reasons, such as patriarchy, toxic masculinity, poverty, the 'hook-up' culture, and alcohol and drug misuse.

2.5.1 Patriarchy and toxic masculinity

Patriarchy and toxic masculinity are two significant contributors to GBV at South African universities. Patriarchy refers to a system of social organisation in which men hold all the power and dominate women (Mkhize, 2015). Toxic masculinity refers to cultural norms and attitudes that uphold traditional expectations of masculinity, including aggression, dominance, and control (Makhafola, 2020). These concepts can lead to attitudes and

behaviours that perpetuate violence against women and gender non-conforming individuals. Studies have shown that men who adhere to traditional masculine norms are more likely to engage in sexual harassment and other forms of GBV than those who have discarded such beliefs (Vincent, Gordon, Campbell, Ward, Albritton, & Kershaw, 2016; Rice, Oliffe, Seidler, Borschmann, Pirkis, Reavley, & Patton, 2021).

The relationship between the two genders can be understood in terms of one's vulnerability to violence and danger and the other's tendency to perpetrate violence. Females are often deemed highly susceptible to violence, while males are seen as more likely to perpetrate violence (Kabaya, 2021). Various factors such as blame-shifting, toxic masculinity, cultural context, and the perception of women as weak contribute to the feminisation of gender-based violence (GBV). Dlamini and Makhaye (2023) argue that social and gender norms are particularly prevalent in societies where a gendered hierarchy is emphasised and where violence in interpersonal relationships is tolerated, thus giving men greater authority to perpetuate GBV. Ethiopia, for instance, has been identified as a country where the patriarchal ideology is prominent and where it leads to a mentality that grants males constant access to women's bodies (Workye, Mekonnen, Wedaje, & Sitot, 2023). Consequently, many men in this country tend to exploit females' vulnerability and abuse them.

The impact of GBV extends to university students, as societal norms governing interactions manifest within academic settings. Makhafole's (2020) empirical study titled *Hidden narratives of sexual harassment in South Africa's academy*, reveals that patriarchal norms, culture, and toxic masculinity influence female students' susceptibility to sexual harassment. This belief has been passed on from generation to generation and has migrated to universities. This observation aligns with the learning theory, which posits that students internalise patriarchal norms within their homes and subsequently apply them in the university context. For instance, women may learn to adopt a sense of helplessness, while men may learn to embody the traditional notions of masculinity and superiority.

Kanjiri and Nomngcoyiya's (2021: 4) observe that certain male respondents in their study supported adherence to traditional gender norms and toxic masculinity which they had

learned since childhood and subsequently demonstrated in the university context. A male participant emphasised that, in his cultural context, the father's decision-making role was dominant while the mother was expected to comply with his decisions. He argued that certain female students at the university he attended appeared to be unfamiliar with these cultural norms due to their education, leading them to disregard their heritage. The participant expressed resistance to challenges against his authority as a man and indicated a willingness to use violence to reinforce his dominance and uphold traditional gender expectations. This indicates that certain students perpetuate GBV by internalising the toxic masculinity values they acquired at home, subsequently manifesting them in the university setting. As a result, women are particularly vulnerable to experiencing GBV due to the cultural norms that grant men a sense of authority, superiority, and ownership over women.

In South Africa, the prevailing masculine ideal places constraints on women's ability to assert authority in romantic relationships, as they are conditioned to assume a subordinate role to their male family members (Hadi, 2017). This dynamic is deeply rooted in sex role theory, which posits that societal norms and expectations dictate gender-specific behaviours, reinforcing the notion that women should embody submissiveness and men dominance (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Moreover, in many cultures, the misconceived notion persists that men feel inherently entitled to dominate women, which can lead to physical abuse by husbands, boyfriends, and even strangers (Davids, 2020). Such misconceptions align with the tenets of the culture of violence theory, which seeks to elucidate how cultures and societies justify violent behaviours (WHO, 2009). These misguided beliefs, perpetuated by gender role socialisation, contribute to the silence surrounding acts of violence, as women are often socialised to perceive reporting such incidents as disrespectful and contrary to their prescribed roles.

Mkhize (2015) and Makhafola (2020) concur with the notion that patriarchal power is utilised in societies to exert control over women, thereby perpetuating GBV. A respondent in Kabaya's (2021) study referred to women's reluctance to speak out about their victimisation, attributing it to ingrained teachings of submission and acceptance of violence as a manifestation of love. This observation underscores the perilous

implications of patriarchal norms and gender socialisation for women. Consequently, Mkhize (2015) advocates for both women and men to recognise and address gender equity issues at an early stage as a means to tackle divisive gender inequality. This contention aligns with Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney's (2006) and Cranney's (2016) argument that gender-inequitable attitudes and beliefs significantly contribute to certain crimes, while they also influence the reporting of such crimes. This suggests that women who choose not to report their experiences of violence may be influenced by these prevailing attitudes. Moreover, the cultural notion that men should suppress emotions and avoid showing vulnerability fosters GBV, as some men resort to physical aggression towards their female partners as an outlet for their anger (Kabaya, 2021). It has also been argued that these gender-inequitable attitudes and beliefs can both tolerate or exacerbate GBV (Cranney, 2016).

2.5.2 Alcohol and drug abuse

Alcohol and substance abuse is also a significant contributor to GBV at universities. Students who use alcohol and drugs may be more likely to engage in risky behaviours, including sexual assault and intimate partner violence, than those who abstain. Research has shown that alcohol use is a common factor that contributes to sexual assault on campus (Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Clinton, & McAuslan, 2004; Shiva, Shukla, & Chandra, 2021).

A cross-sectional study that was conducted by Ajayi, Mudefi, and Owalabi (2021) associates sexual violence with substance abuse as several perpetrators of GBV did so when they were under the influence of alcohol or drugs. For example, when a man at a tavern buys drinks for a lady, he expects sex in return and, when he does not attain this objective, he uses threats and even violence. Mbandlwa (2020) contends that women should know that everything comes at a price; if they are not ready for a relationship or sex, they should not accept alcohol from strangers.

Ajayi et al. (2021) and Makhaye et al. (2023) found that male students bought beverages for female students, pressured them to consume this alcohol above their limits, and then abused them when intoxicated. Alcohol intoxication can incapacitate individuals,

subjecting them to rape or inappropriate and unwanted touching (Anderson & Naidu, 2022). Drug and alcohol abuse, which is associated with a drinking culture, exacerbates sexual violence and perpetuates gendered norms. House parties, which are emblematic of the overlapping nature of the drinking and rape cultures, can create a hostile environment in which the probability of unwanted sexual encounters is enhanced (Chauke, Dlamini, Kiguwa, Mthombeni, Nduna, & Selebano, 2015). This prevents victims from reporting any abuse as they cannot identify or interpret cues nor negotiate or make an active decision during such incidents (Chitsamatanga & Ntlama, 2020).

2.5.3 Poverty

George (2020) posits that GBV can be attributed to poverty, arguing that poor regions are more susceptible to acts of violence such as homicides, severe assaults, and intimate partner violence. Yesufu (2022) attributes this to the phenomena of financial disparity and limited economic development. Moreover, impoverished women may become targets of sexual exploitation by men because the former seek monetary gain and essential resources; hence, poverty compels them to enter into relationships with high-income individuals (UN Women, n.d.). For instance, financially disadvantaged female students might resort to engaging with 'sugar daddies' to obtain not only luxury items, but also necessities like tuition fees, educational support material, and clothing (Mgijima, 2014).

Mutinta (2022) avers that underprivileged or economically challenged students are likely to experience GBV when they engage in relationships in which they become financially dependent on their partners and subsequently relinquish their agency as an equal partner in the relationship. These students often find themselves at the mercy of their financially more stable partners, thus granting them the power of control (Jasor, 2020). Makhene (2022) further argues that women who feel obligated to engage in sexual activities with men to secure financial support amplify their vulnerability to victimisation and sexual coercion.

2.5.4 The 'hook-up' culture

The 'hook-up' culture, which is prevalent on many college and university campuses, can also contribute to GBV. This culture refers to a normative culture that emphasises casual

sexual encounters without emotional attachment or commitment (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012). Studies have shown that students who participate in the 'hook-up' culture are highly likely to experience sexual assault and other forms of GBV (Bogle, 2008; England, Shafer, & Fogarty, 2008). For example, Manik and Tarisayi (2021) discuss the event of a first-year student who was invited by a female student to a party, where she was raped. At the party, there were flashy men with beautiful cars. She was lured into a car and abused at the scene. This incident affirms that the 'hook-up' culture creates hostile environments where students may be exposed to several forms of violence such as sexual assault, rape, and demand for oral sex (Garcia et al., 2012). Moreover, this also confirms that first-year female students are a vulnerable group as they live away from family care and supervision and are thus easily exposed to abuse as they wish to 'experiment'. Because of their young age and lack of experience, they are vulnerable to abuse and lack the skills to protect themselves.

In addition, most hook-ups occur at school bashes or parties, at clubs, or in cars and it is mostly associated with alcohol and drugs (Garcia et al., 2012). Studies have affirmed that college students who engage in the 'hook-up' culture are highly likely to use alcohol and drugs before or during sexual encounters (Paul & Hayes, 2002). Students have been known to hook up with 'blessers' (rich men on the prowl for easy prey) at house parties because they want these 'blessers' to provide them with alcohol and drugs (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2021). This can lead to impaired decision-making and an increased risk of GBV, as individuals may not be able to fully consent or may become more vulnerable to coercion or assault.

Furthermore, the 'hook-up' culture may contribute to GBV by perpetuating gender stereotypes and power imbalances. For example, some studies have found that men are more likely to initiate hook-ups while women are more likely to feel pressured to comply with male advances (Fielder & Carey, 2010). This power dynamic can make it difficult for women to assert their boundaries and can increase the risk of coercion or assault. As a result, victims may question whether their experience was really GBV or they may be less likely to seek help if they believe their experience was just a normal part of the 'hook-up' culture. This often makes the victims of GBV feel ashamed or embarrassed about what

happened to them and many are unwilling to come forward and report the incident (Weiss, 2019).

2.5.6 Sex for marks

‘Sex for marks’ refers to a disturbing phenomenon where students are coerced or manipulated into engaging in sexual activities with their educators or other academic staff members in exchange for favourable grades, academic advantages, or other benefits (Makhafola, 2020). This issue has gained attention as a form of sexual harassment and abuse of power within higher education institutions, highlighting the vulnerability of students and the abuse of authority by those in positions of power. Several studies and reports have shed light on the prevalence of ‘sex for marks’ within higher education institutions. For instance, a study by Chikwesigha (2019) in Nigeria found that a significant proportion of female students reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment, including solicitation of sexual favours for academic advantages. Such incidents reinforce the unequal power dynamics between students and those in positions of authority, fostering an environment where the dignity and well-being of students are compromised. This power imbalance violates students' right to a safe and a respectful educational environment.

One major reason victims of ‘sex for marks’ is reluctant to report these cases is the fear of retaliation or negative consequences. A study by Lang, Lloyd, and Cutts (2021) that was conducted in South Africa investigated the experiences of university students with regards to sexual harassment. The findings highlighted that ‘sex for marks’ was a recurring concern, particularly for female students. The study indicated that students often felt powerless to report such incidents due to fear of retribution or authorities’ disbelief. Victims also worry about damaging their academic progress or being targeted by those in authority if they spoke up. Makhafola’s (2020) findings provide evidence for this assertion, as one of his respondents attested that she did not report her victimisation because she feared that reporting would make her learning environment unpleasant as the perpetrator was a friend of the HOD of the department.

Furthermore, the lack of trust in institutional response mechanisms plays a significant role in victims' reluctance to report 'sex for marks' cases. If victims have witnessed or heard about previous cases being mishandled or ignored by the institution, they may believe that reporting will not lead to a satisfactory resolution. This lack of confidence in the system's ability to address the issue can deter victims from coming forward. This calls for institutions to implement and enforce strong anti-sexual harassment policies, provide clear channels for reporting, and offer support services for victims. Educational campaigns that raise awareness about sexual harassment, consent, and reporting mechanisms are also crucial. The #RURReferenceList campaign can serve as a powerful tool to fight institutional culture by exposing systemic failures, demanding accountability, and fostering a culture of zero tolerance for sexual violence, ultimately encouraging institutions to adopt transformative policies and practices.

2.6 Underreporting of GBV at HEIs

The issue of GBV in HEIs has garnered substantial attention in scholarly literature. However, there remains a notable gap in investigating the intricate problem of underreporting of GBV cases in these institutions. This deficiency is evident in a recent online survey conducted by Brink, Mdaka, Matee, and Weppelman (2021) at Stellenbosch University, which revealed practitioners' limited understanding of the factors hindering victims from reporting GBV incidents to both law enforcement agents and university authorities. This paucity of research underscores the lack of comprehensive studies on the underreporting of GBV phenomenon within HEIs. Although numerous studies have highlighted the prevalence of underreporting in South Africa, only few have examined the root causes of this issue or proposed viable solutions that address the underreporting of GBV in HEIs.

As asserted by Mahabeer (2021) and von Meullen and van der Walddt (2022), GBV continues to persist within South African universities despite institutional policies and government interventions. Of concern is the fact that some student victims exhibit reluctance to report such incidents. Mahabeer (2021) further contends that a significant number of GBV cases at universities remain unspoken of and undisclosed due to various

factors that impact students, including the fear of intimidation, the perpetuation of stereotypes, secondary victimisation, embarrassment, the fear of not being believed, and the financial dependence of victims on the perpetrators (Nobanda, Nkosi, & Sibanyoni, 2021). Nobanda et al. (2021) and von Meullen and van der Walddt (2022) also corroborated these findings by identifying similar underlying factors that contributed to underreporting. Notably, von Meullen and van der Walddt (2022) revealed that 35.4% of their participants perceived universities' failure to hold GBV perpetrators accountable as a crucial factor leading to underreporting.

In light of these concerning insights, it is evident that further research and intervention are necessary to comprehensively address the issue of underreporting of GBV in HEIs in South Africa. Addressing the root causes of underreporting and fostering an environment where victims will feel safe and supported so that they will not hesitate to report incidents is essential in combatting and preventing GBV within the academic community. According to the empirical research conducted by Davis and Meerkotter (2017), the issue of underreporting is prevalent in South Africa and significantly contributes to the inaccuracy of crime statistics. This problem exacerbates GBV across all sectors of society. This assertion aligns with Dlamini and Olanrewaju (2021), who also argue that underreporting distorts the perspective on crime and undermines the effectiveness of preventive measures. Despite the difference in the years these investigations were conducted, their outcomes are comparable, revealing that underreporting has persistently impacted crime figures in South Africa from 2017 to 2021.

Regarding sexual offenses, the official figures released by the SAPS indicate a decrease of 2.0% in reported cases in 2022/2023 compared to the previous year when 11 616 cases were reported (SAPS Annual Report, 2022-2023). However, it is essential to recognise that this figure is likely a substantial underestimation of the true prevalence of sexual violence in the country due to victims' reluctance to report such incidents to the police. A study by Statistics South Africa (2019) also revealed that only 38.2% of women who had experienced sexual violence reported it to the authorities, indicating that official crime statistics do not accurately reflect the full extent of sexual violence in South Africa and may downplay the severity of the issue (Statistics South Africa, 2019). Furthermore,

underreporting of GBV not only hinders the understanding of the nature and patterns of these crimes, but also obstructs the development of effective interventions and prevention strategies (Adams, Mabusela, & Dlamini, 2013; Saferspaces, 2022). For instance, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency [SIDA] (2015) found that most women who experienced violence refrained from seeking assistance or reporting the incidents to the authorities. The reasons for nonreporting included fear of stigma, shame, and the potential for further victimisation. Many women also lacked trust in authorities or believed that reporting the incidents would not lead to meaningful action or justice (SIDA, 2015). Such barriers to reporting need to be addressed to enhance the response to GBV in South Africa.

Various studies, such as that of Saini (2021), have demonstrated that female students encountering GBV are often hesitant to formally report the victimisation due to fear of stigmatisation and concerns about the institution's inadequate handling of their cases. Related findings by von Meullen and van der Wald (2022) highlight additional reasons for underreporting, including fear of retaliation, prejudice, disbelief, and a lack of institutional response. Unfortunately, this silence perpetuates the cycle of GBV, as offenders persist in their abusive behaviour without facing any consequences. This normalisation of abuse at universities poses a significant challenge in combating GBV in society, as higher education institutions serve as mirrors of societal norms.

The study by Saini (2021) also reveals that certain universities prioritise protecting their reputation over providing justice to victims of sexual harassment. Makhaye, Mkhize, and Sibanyoni (2023) argue that many institutions overlook cases of sexual harassment, thus leaving victims vulnerable and perpetrators unpunished. This lack of accountability perpetuates a culture of impunity for offenders and further discourages victims from reporting their experiences, leading to a continuous cycle of violence and underreporting. Considering that HEIs reflect broader societal dynamics, Kanjiri and Nomngcoyiya (2021) emphasise the importance of addressing the feminisation of GBV at universities as a vital step in the fight against GBV. Thus, to combat GBV effectively, it is imperative to address the issue of underreporting in all spheres of society.

2.7 Institutional Failures and their Intersectional Impact on Perpetuating GBV

To fully understand the underreporting of GBV in South African HEIs, it is crucial to consider how institutional failures intersect with broader societal inequalities, including race, gender, identity, class, and sexual orientation. These dimensions shape the lived experiences of victims and significantly influence their willingness or ability to report GBV incidents (Yesufu, 2022; Malatjie & Mamokhere, 2024).

According to Adams et al (2013) and Makhafola (2020) institutional failures, such as inadequate support systems, insufficient training of staff, and a lack of clear and accessible reporting mechanisms, perpetuate an environment where victims feel unsupported and vulnerable. For example, victims from marginalised racial or socio-economic backgrounds may face compounded challenges, including systemic discrimination or a lack of resources to navigate institutional processes (de Klerk et al., 2007). Similarly, individuals from LGBTQ+ communities often encounter stigma and bias, which can lead to further marginalisation within institutional settings, deterring them from seeking justice or assistance (Chibango & Chibango, 2022).

Intersectionality reveals that these barriers are not experienced equally by all victims. Women from low-income families may fear losing financial support if the perpetrator is a breadwinner, while students from minority racial groups may distrust predominantly white institutional structures, perceiving them as unsympathetic or discriminatory (Collins, 2000; Yesufu, 2022). A study that was conducted in Ethiopia (Central Statistical Agency [Ethiopia] and ICF International, 2016) contends that women who rely on their partners economically might hesitate to report violence due to the fear of losing financial support or becoming socially isolated. This highlights the intricate link between financial autonomy and the ability to report incidences of GBV. Additionally, victims who challenge traditional gender norms or sexual orientations may face heightened scrutiny or disbelief, further discouraging them from reporting (Kabaya, 2021; Malatjie & Mamokhere, 2024).

Fear, as outlined in this literature, is intricately linked to these institutional shortcomings. Victims may not trust that their complaints will be handled confidentially or fairly, particularly when institutions fail to hold perpetrators accountable or demonstrate

transparency in their processes (Makhaye et al., 2023). This distrust, according to Makhafole (2020) is exacerbated when perpetrators occupy positions of power or have close ties to institutional leadership, leaving victims feeling isolated and powerless.

2.7.1 Gender and power dynamics

The intersection of gender and institutional power significantly contributes to the underreporting of GBV. Perpetrators in authoritative positions, such as lecturers, often exploit their status to intimidate victims into silence. Makhafole (2020) documents instances where female students refrained from reporting sexual harassment by lecturers due to fears of academic retaliation and disruption of their educational pursuits. This dynamic is further compounded by societal patriarchal norms that perpetuate male dominance and normalise such abuses of power. Davis and Meerkotter (2017) argue that these entrenched power imbalances facilitate an environment where male perpetrators manipulate institutional structures to suppress victims' voices, thereby reinforcing a culture of silence.

2.7.2 Socio-economic status and vulnerability

Socio-economic disparities intersect with gender to exacerbate vulnerabilities among female students. Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may be coerced into non-consensual sexual activities under threats of academic failure or promises of financial assistance, a phenomenon colloquially known as "sex for marks" (Lang, et al, 2021). Makhafole (2020) highlights how perpetrators leverage the economic insecurities of female students to demand sexual favours, exploiting their desperation to succeed academically. This coercion is facilitated by institutional cultures that often prioritise reputation over accountability, as noted by Makhaye et al. (2023), thereby discouraging victims from reporting due to fears of institutional inaction or personal repercussions.

2.7.3 Institutional culture and patriarchal norms

GBV within HEIs is deeply rooted in institutional culture and patriarchal norms that perpetuate mistrust, victim-blaming, and inadequate responses to victims' experiences

(Mofokeng & Mofokeng, 2024). These systemic issues create an environment where survivors are discouraged from coming forward, fostering a culture of silence and impunity. The pervasive patriarchal culture within many HEIs further silences victims. According to Kabaya (2021), victims often internalise societal norms that prioritise institutional reputation over individual justice, leading to self-blame and reluctance to report incidents. Paull, Omari, Cruz, and Cangarli (2019) discuss how feelings of powerlessness and avoidance are cultivated within institutional settings, discouraging victims from challenging systemic inequalities. This internalisation of patriarchal norms results in victims doubting the legitimacy of their experiences and fearing disbelief or stigmatisation upon reporting (Randa & McGarry, 2023).

A significant factor contributing to the underreporting of GBV is the lack of confidence in institutional authorities and reporting mechanisms. De Klerk et al. (2007) highlights this issue, citing examples such as Rhodes University, where the failure to hold perpetrators accountable discouraged victims from reporting incidents. Victims often feel unsupported and unheard, a sentiment exacerbated by institutional responses that prioritise reputation over justice (Makhaye et al., 2023). This lack of trust in institutional mechanisms reflects a broader pattern of neglect and insensitivity toward survivors, perpetuating a cycle of silence.

Institutional responses to GBV play a pivotal role in shaping survivors' decisions to report. Smith and Thomas (2020) found that poorly handled cases, where victims were dismissed or blamed, significantly influenced students' perceptions of the reporting process. Witnessing or learning about such negative experiences leads to a lack of confidence in institutional support and contributes to a culture of silence. The social learning theory provides a framework for understanding this phenomenon, suggesting that survivors internalise the idea that reporting is futile when they observe peers being met with insensitivity or injustice (Johnson, Cerulli, & Romano, 2018).

The fear of retaliation or further harm is another critical factor that discourages reporting. According to Saferspaces (2022), when institutions fail to respond adequately to GBV cases, they inadvertently send a message that survivors' safety and well-being are not

priorities. Johnson et al. (2018) argue that ineffective institutional responses exacerbate survivors' fears, deterring them from seeking help. This perception of institutional apathy fosters an environment where survivors are left to navigate their trauma in isolation.

Moreover, South Africa's historical inequalities, rooted in its colonial and apartheid past, continue to shape the reporting and pursuit of justice for GBV. Hlatshwayo (2020) highlights how systemic discrimination, unequal access to resources, and entrenched patriarchal norms have left a lasting imprint on the institutional justice system, significantly influencing survivors' perceptions and experiences when seeking redress. This view aligns with George's (2020) analysis, which underscores that during apartheid, the justice system primarily served the interests of the ruling minority, often neglecting the needs and rights of marginalised groups, particularly women and people of colour. Such systemic bias created deep-seated mistrust in legal and judicial processes among historically disadvantaged communities (Gruber, 2014; Malatjie & Mamokhere, 2024).

For survivors of GBV, this mistrust persists as the justice system is often perceived as unresponsive or biased, particularly in cases involving vulnerable populations (Steyn & Steyn, 2008). Makhaye et al. (2023) argue that this disillusionment stems from the justice system's ongoing failure to adequately address and resolve GBV cases. Historical patterns of neglect, including the dismissal of survivors' accounts and mishandling of evidence, have perpetuated the belief that the system is incapable of delivering justice. This issue is particularly pronounced in communities where systemic inequalities have left survivors without access to adequate legal representation or support services, further entrenching barriers to justice (George, 2020). As a result, survivors within HEIs may internalise the broader societal mistrust in justice systems, perceiving institutional policies and reporting mechanisms as similarly ineffective or biased. This perception, coupled with inadequate support structures and fear of re-victimisation, discourages students from coming forward, perpetuating a cycle of silence and injustice.

2.7.4 Cultural norms and social stigmas

Cultural expectations and social stigmas surrounding sexuality and gender identity further complicate the reporting of GBV. Victims may fear social ostracisation or reputational

damage, particularly in environments that condone casual sexual relationships or stigmatise non-heteronormative identities (Kabaya, 2021). Heldman (2016) emphasises that victims often anticipate judgment from peers or authorities, deterring them from disclosing their experiences. LGBTQ+ individuals face additional barriers, as their experiences are frequently marginalised or dismissed within heteronormative institutional cultures, compounding their reluctance to report (Loh, Gidycz, Lobo, & Luthra, 2017).

Fear of reputation damage is another significant barrier that prevents victims, particularly female students, from reporting GBV. Kabaya (2021) highlights how women are often stigmatised and labelled as provocative, especially in cases of rape. Victims worry about being perceived as impure or tainted, a concern deeply rooted in cultural norms that prioritise women's chastity and morality (Malatjie & Mamokhere, 2024). This stigma amplifies the emotional burden on survivors, creating an atmosphere of silence and shame that discourages open discussions about GBV.

The pervasive culture of victim-blaming exacerbates the challenges faced by survivors of GBV, particularly women. Victims are often held accountable for the crimes committed against them, with societal focus placed on factors such as their dress code or behaviour at the time of the incident (George, 2020). This unfair attribution of blame is not only unjust but also psychologically damaging, discouraging victims from seeking justice or support. Studies by Richardson, Gabbay, and Lauterbach (2018) and Kilmartin and O'Donnell (2019) highlight the troubling association between sexist attitudes, acceptance of rape myths, and a greater tendency to blame victims. These attitudes create a hostile environment where survivors fear judgment, further silencing their voices.

2.7.5 Insufficient policy implementation

Nobanda, Nkosi, and Sibanyoni (2021) emphasise that institutional policies on GBV are critical in shaping the reporting environment within HEIs. These policies, according to DHET (2020) are designed to establish clear mechanisms for reporting, ensure survivor support, and promote accountability. However, significant shortcomings in the design and implementation of these policies often hinder their effectiveness, contributing to the underreporting of GBV (von Meullen, 2022). One major issue is the lack of specificity in

policies, as seen in the University of Zululand's GBV framework (UNIZULU Policy and Procedures on Sexual Harassment and GBV, 2019), which fails to clearly outline the designated reporting avenues, leaving survivors uncertain about the process (Dlamini & Olanrewaju, 2021). Poor communication further exacerbates this issue, with studies revealing that a significant proportion of students and staff remain unaware of available reporting mechanisms, highlighting a gap in information dissemination (Cranney, 2016).

Additionally, many policies fail to adopt a survivor-centered approach, neglecting to address the risks of re-victimisation during the reporting process. Survivors often face intrusive questioning, scepticism, or victim-blaming attitudes from authorities, which not only discourages reporting but also reinforces a culture of silence around GBV (Newman et al., 2021). Questions such as "Are you sure? Did it really happen?" or "What did he do? Only touched you? Is that a matter worth reporting to me?" or "Why are you so obsessed with this?" are often asked by authorities (Newman, Nayebare, Neema, Agaba, & Akello, 2021: 12). The intrusive nature of these inquiries, such as doubting the occurrence of violence and undermining the significance of the incident, exacerbates the sense of secondary victimisation the victim experiences and discourages any further reporting. Studies by Steyn and Steyn (2008) and Steinbrenner et al. (2017) reveal that the harsh interrogation methods employed by law enforcement officials discourage survivors from pursuing justice.

Police officers' unsympathetic and dismissive approaches to handling GBV cases can be attributed to systemic, cultural, and institutional factors, as supported by various studies. One systemic issue is the lack of comprehensive training on trauma-informed practices, which leaves officers ill-prepared to engage sensitively with survivors. For example, Myhill and Johnson (2016) highlight that many police officers lack an understanding of the dynamics of GBV, leading to victim-blaming attitudes and an underestimation of the harm caused by such incidents. This inadequate training perpetuates a culture where survivors are often met with scepticism rather than support.

Cultural norms within law enforcement institutions also contribute to dismissive attitudes. Police culture, which is often described as hyper-masculine and hierarchical, tends to

prioritise traditional crime-fighting roles over the provision of empathetic support to survivors of GBV (Loftus, 2009). This culture can foster stereotypes about victims, particularly women, that influence how officers perceive and respond to GBV cases. Research by Westmarland and Bows (2018) found that officers often internalise societal norms that question the credibility of survivors, particularly when cases involve IPV or sexual assault.

Institutional factors, such as high workloads and resource constraints, also shape police responses. Studies indicate that officers working in under-resourced environments may prioritise cases they perceive as more straightforward or pressing, leading to a lack of thoroughness in GBV investigations (Richards, Tillyer, & Wright, 2011)). Furthermore, weak accountability mechanisms within police institutions can allow unsympathetic behaviours to persist unchecked, as noted by Walklate, Fitz-Gibbon, & McCulloch (2017).

Similar issues are evident in South African HEIs, where systemic, cultural, and institutional factors contribute to unsympathetic and dismissive approaches to handling GBV cases. Research highlights that these challenges within HEIs mirror broader societal and law enforcement issues, exacerbating the underreporting of GBV (Makhanya, 2022). In many South African HEIs, the lack of comprehensive, survivor-centered training for staff responsible for addressing GBV is a significant concern. For instance, findings from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) indicate that institutional responses often lack sensitivity, with staff members ill-equipped to handle the psychological and emotional needs of survivors (DHET, 2019). This gap in training contributes to an environment where survivors are met with scepticism or victim-blaming attitudes, deterring them from reporting incidents.

Cultural norms within HEIs, shaped by broader societal attitudes, also play a role in perpetuating unsympathetic responses. An empirical study by Sikweyiya, Jewkes, and Morrell (2017) shows that gendered stereotypes and rape myths are prevalent within many South African institutions, influencing how GBV cases are perceived and addressed. For example, survivors may face judgment regarding their clothing or behaviour, which reinforces victim-blaming narratives and discourages reporting.

Institutional shortcomings, such as inadequate reporting mechanisms and lack of accountability, further contribute to dismissive responses. Research by Dlamini and Olanrewaju (2021) found that many HEIs lack clear and accessible policies for reporting GBV, leaving survivors unsure of where to seek help. Additionally, a culture of impunity within some institutions allows staff members who mishandle GBV cases to avoid consequences, perpetuating an environment of distrust. These findings suggest that institutional policies often fail to provide clear guidelines for ensuring sensitive and respectful treatment of survivors during the reporting process. The absence of these guidelines perpetuates a cycle of mistrust, as survivors perceive justice system as unsympathetic and unhelpful.

The lack of trauma-informed practices and adequate survivor support further undermines confidence in institutional responses. Moreover, inadequate accountability mechanisms within these policies allow for a perception of impunity, where perpetrators are not held responsible, further deterring survivors from coming forward (Chibango & Chibango, 2022). The cumulative effect of these shortcomings is a significant barrier to addressing GBV effectively within HEIs. Survivors who encounter unclear processes, poor communication, and unsupportive environments are less likely to report their experiences.

Addressing these issues requires institutions to recognise the diverse and intersecting identities of their community members and implement tailored strategies that foster inclusivity and trust. Establishing culturally sensitive support services, training staff to handle cases with empathy and professionalism, and ensuring accountability through transparent policies are critical steps toward mitigating underreporting (Chibango & Chibango, 2022; Rikhotso, 2022; Mbatha, 2023). By addressing these institutional failures and their intersectional impacts, South African HEIs can create safer environments that empower victims to come forward without fear of stigma, retaliation, or institutional neglect.

2.8 The Effects of GBV on Victims

The negative effects of GBV on students' ability to learn not only harm their academic performance and career prospects, but also have a negative effect on the institution

because it is their responsibility to ensure a safe atmosphere for both students and staff (Safer spaces, 2022). The current DHET (2020) framework confirms that every PSET institution must respect, protect, promote, and fulfil the rights of students, staff, and other people in all spaces. Thus, unreported GBV events that occur on an institution's premises ruin the institution's name. Such events can have several negative short- and long-term repercussions as GBV typically has emotional and psychological effects. Physical and emotional symptoms of the scars of GBV such as increased anxiety, low self-esteem, diminished focus, and low work productivity are all indicators associated with GBV of trauma and dread (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2021).

Furthermore, sexual assault victims run the risk of feeling hopeless, dealing with suicidal thoughts, and taking drugs. Misusing substances can be seen as a form of self-medication to dull the pain and try to cope (Clay-Warner, Boyle, and Oshri, 2020). Many victims of sexual violence that occurred on campuses struggled academically afterwards. For instance, Young (2021) argues that GBV has a wide variety of extra negative impacts such as physical injuries, sadness, anxiety, and vocational difficulties. Risk factors for these behaviours include substance abuse, interpersonal conflict, and risky sexual conduct. The effects of GBV are severe and may even lead to death. The effects of GBV are briefly explained in the following sections

2.8.1 Physical effects (injury and death)

The disturbing reality is that GBV can escalate to causing severe injuries and even death. The gravity of this issue is emphasised by WHO's assertion that GBV is the leading cause of death and disability among women on a global scale. WHO (2021) reveals the grim statistic that one out of every three women has experienced physical or sexual abuse during the course of her life. This statistic alone is a stark reminder of the ubiquity of GBV, which transcends geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic boundaries. However, what truly compounds the tragedy is the realisation that some of these incidents culminate in severe harm or even the tragic loss of life.

Within HEIs, the physical effects of GBV are particularly concerning, as they hinder students' ability to engage in their academic and campus life fully. Finchilescu and Dugard

(2021) highlight that injuries sustained during violent incidents often result in prolonged medical absences, limiting students' participation in coursework, group projects, and exams. Severe forms of GBV, such as physical assault and sexual violence, can cause long-term physical consequences, including chronic pain, disability, or reproductive health complications. For instance, survivors of sexual violence may suffer from untreated injuries or sexually transmitted infections (STIs), which can significantly impact their physical and emotional well-being over time (Enaifoghe et al., 2021).

The long-term consequences of GBV extend beyond immediate physical harm. Survivors may experience permanent disabilities, such as mobility issues or scarring, resulting from violent assaults (Warner et al., 2020). These physical limitations can hinder their ability to engage in academic activities, reducing their chances of completing their studies or pursuing career opportunities. Moreover, the psychological impact of such incidents often exacerbates these challenges, with conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression compounding the difficulties faced by survivors (Rikhotso, 2022).

In extreme cases (such as those mentioned in Chapter 1), fatalities resulting from GBV cause immeasurable loss within the student community, affecting the institution's morale and reputation (Saferespaces, 2022). This highlights the urgent need for HEIs to address GBV comprehensively, implementing preventative measures and providing robust support systems to ensure a safe and supportive environment for all students.

2.8.2 Psychological effects

There is a range of psychological effects that may impact victims of GBV, such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, and a variety of physical and emotional symptoms (WHO, 2021). These effects are particularly concerning in the context of HEIs, where students' mental health plays a critical role in their academic performance and overall well-being. The specific effects experienced by each victim can vary depending on the nature of the injuries and the individual's personal characteristics and coping mechanisms.

One psychological side effect of trauma is PTSD. According to the American Psychological Association (2022: para.1), PTSD is a “psychiatric illness that can arise in

people who have encountered or seen a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a major accident, a terrorist act, rape, or other violent sexual assault.” Symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, feelings of estrangement, and hypervigilance can severely disrupt a student’s ability to focus on their studies, participate in group activities, or maintain healthy social relationships (Mofokeng, Mofokeng, & Simelane, 2024). Makhanya (2022) argues that these effects are more severe in victims of sexual violence, a form of GBV prevalent on campuses. He further notes that many victims resort to substance abuse as a coping mechanism, which can lead to academic decline and further social isolation.

Another frequent psychological repercussion of trauma is depression. Karam, Friedman, Hill, Kessler, McLaughlin, Petukhova, and Koenen (2014) found that individuals who have encountered trauma face a significantly higher risk of developing depression compared to those who have not. This is especially relevant in HEIs, as depression can manifest in physical symptoms such as headaches and gastrointestinal issues, which may lead to absenteeism and reduced academic performance (Makhaye & Ajani, 2023). The study also highlights a correlation between the severity of trauma and the intensity of depressive symptoms, underscoring the profound impact GBV can have on students' mental and physical health.

The psychological effects of GBV can lead to poor social functioning, a low quality of life, and an increased risk of suicide (American Psychological Association, 2022). Victim-blaming, which is often prevalent in such cases, exacerbates these effects. Rikhotso (2022) explains that two of eight respondents in his study attempted suicide due to the trauma they experienced: one by using a razor to harm herself and another by attempting to hang herself. He further states that GBV victims often experience despair, loss of confidence, and low self-esteem, which can hinder their ability to succeed academically and socially.

These psychological consequences highlight the urgent need for HEIs to implement robust support systems for GBV survivors. Access to professional assistance, such as counselling and mental health services, is crucial to help victims manage these effects and foster healing. Addressing the barrier of underreporting is also vital to ensure that

students affected by GBV receive the support they need to recover and thrive in their academic environments.

2.8.3 Academic impact

GBV directly undermines academic success, posing a significant threat to the academic performance and overall well-being of university students. Von Meullen and Van der Waldt (2022) emphasise that the repercussions of GBV are far-reaching, leading to adverse outcomes such as reduced educational attainment, higher dropout rates, compromised cognitive and emotional development, and poorer health prospects. Female students who experience sexual violence are particularly vulnerable to these effects (Makhanya, 2022).

Makhanya (2022) further argue that the impact of GBV significantly hinders students' academic progress, often resulting in course failure and prolonged periods of study. This not only affects individual students but also contributes to high dropout rates, which in turn compromise institutional pass rates. Traumatic experiences associated with GBV can make it difficult for victims to focus on academic tasks, as they grapple with flashbacks of their victimisation. Even simple academic activities can become overwhelming, leading to poor academic performance (Makhaye & Ajani, 2023).

As a result, many affected students withdraw from attending classes altogether, further exacerbating their academic challenges. The pervasive nature of GBV creates a toxic and unhealthy campus atmosphere, instilling a constant fear among students of becoming the next victim. This highlights the urgent need for HEIs to implement effective measures to prevent GBV, support survivors, and foster a safe and inclusive learning environment.

2.8.5 Social isolation

GBV can have profound psychological effects on survivors, often leading to social isolation as a coping mechanism. Makhaye et al. (2023) highlight that survivors of severe sexual assault frequently experience communication difficulties. Many withdraw from social interactions, ceasing communication with friends and family (Rikhotso, 2022). This withdrawal is often driven by factors such as feelings of shame and stigma, fear of

judgment, emotional distress, distrust, and concerns about personal safety (Randa & McGarry, 2023).

According to Moletsane (2023), victims of GBV tend to confine themselves within their living spaces due to the sense of insecurity they experience outside their dwellings. Additionally, GBV victims exhibit noticeable mood swings that are characterised by heightened irritability and emotional sensitivity (Makhaye & Ajani, 2023). These emotional fluctuations result in their withdrawal from regular activities and a deliberate avoidance of social interactions.

However, adopting social isolation as a coping mechanism is not conducive to the well-being and recovery of victims as it can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and depression, thereby complicating the process of healing. Consequently, victims must receive comprehensive assistance and support to facilitate proper healing and foster the development of healthy relationships. This underscores the significance of addressing the issue of the underreporting of GBV cases, as increased awareness and accurate reporting can ensure that victims access the necessary resources and assistance to aid their recovery and promote their overall well-being.

2.8.5 Long-term consequences and impact of GBV on women

The long-term impact of GBV on female students at HEIs extends far beyond academic challenges, profoundly affecting their health, relationships, and future prospects. These consequences can persist for years, shaping victims' lives and perpetuating cycles of vulnerability.

Health implications

Victims of sexual violence frequently experience a range of physical and mental health problems, particularly sexual health issues. Sexual violence often results in sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended pregnancies, and sexual dysfunction (WHO, 2018; Makhaye & Ajani, 2023). Bacchus, Ranganathan, Watts, and Devries (2018) identify additional challenges, including pain during sexual intercourse, diminished sexual desire, and difficulties achieving orgasm. Survivors of GBV are also at heightened risk of

contracting HIV/AIDS, as evidenced in Rikhotso's (2022) study, which recounts the experience of a respondent who unknowingly acquired HIV/AIDS from her abusive husband.

Moreover, pregnant survivors of violence face elevated risks of miscarriage, preterm labour, and harm to or loss of the foetus (Enaifoghe et al., 2021). These health consequences not only compromise the immediate well-being of survivors but also have lasting effects on their physical and psychological health, limiting their ability to thrive in academic, professional, and personal spheres.

Psychological impact

The psychological effects of GBV often manifest as trust issues, fear, and an aversion toward men, particularly for survivors of IPV (Yesufu, 2022; Makhaye & Ajani, 2023). This mistrust can hinder survivors' ability to form intimate relationships, leaving them apprehensive about potential harm. Additionally, victim-blaming exacerbates these issues, as survivors are often unfairly held responsible for their victimisation, further isolating them and impeding their recovery (Mahabeer, 2021).

Career disruption

GBV has profound and far-reaching consequences for survivors, significantly disrupting their personal, academic, and professional paths. GBV-related trauma frequently interrupts students' academic progress, resulting in delayed graduations or, in severe cases, complete withdrawal from their studies (Makhanya, 2022). Such disruptions not only hinder the immediate educational goals of survivors but also have a cascading effect on their long-term career prospects, reducing their ability to secure stable employment and achieve financial independence (Malatjie & Mamokhere, 2024).

Moreover, Makhanya (2022) highlights how academic setbacks caused by GBV, such as poor performance or dropout, diminish survivors' potential to succeed in competitive job markets, thereby perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalisation. These challenges disproportionately affect survivors from disadvantaged backgrounds, where education is often a critical pathway to upward mobility (George, 2020). The inability to secure sustainable employment or achieve financial autonomy exacerbates survivors' economic

and social vulnerabilities, leaving them reliant on others or vulnerable to further exploitation (Enaifoghe et al., 2021).

However, it is important to note that this is not always the case. Some survivors, despite the immense challenges posed by GBV, demonstrate remarkable resilience and determination. This is evidenced by the study conducted by Machisa, Mahlangu, Chirwa, Nunze, Sikweyiya, Dartnall, and Jewkes (2023), which highlights how survivors often overcome significant adversity to excel academically and professionally. These individuals draw strength from their experiences, using them as a catalyst to fuel their aspirations and achieve success. While such cases are inspiring, they do not negate the systemic barriers faced by the majority of survivors. This reality underscores the need for targeted support mechanisms to ensure that all individuals affected by GBV have equitable opportunities to rebuild their lives and thrive.

2.9 The Effects of the Underreporting of GBV

Underreporting of GBV has significant implications for survivors, society, and the development of effective interventions and policies to address GBV. One of the most significant effects of the underreporting of GBV is that it leads to a lack of accurate data on the prevalence and nature of this problem (Fernández-Fontelo, Cabaña, Joe, Puig, & Moriña, 2019). Without accurate data, it is challenging to develop effective policies and interventions to address GBV. Moreover, it can be difficult to secure funding for GBV prevention programs without reliable data (Adams et al., 2013). For example, a conducted South African study found that only 5% of rape survivors reported the crime to the police, and such a low reporting rate makes it challenging for the government to develop effective policies to combat rape (Jewkes, Sikweyiya, Morrell, & Dunkle, 2011).

Moreover, Davids (2020) posits that underreporting of GBV can also lead to a culture of silence and impunity as perpetrators of GBV are not held accountable for their actions. This can prolong the circle of GBV and keep it alive. It can further create an unsafe and toxic environment for students, leading to a lack of trust in the institution and its ability to provide a safe and supportive environment for learning (de Klerk et al., 2007). Denner,

Meyer, and Chen (2019) argue that institutions have a dilemma which they refer to as an 'institutional culture' where they prioritise their reputation over serving the victims of GBV with justice. This manifests when cases of GBV are dealt with behind closed doors and the consequences for the perpetrator are swept under the carpet and not revealed (Makhaye & Ajani, 2023). This behaviour may create a culture of violence, where GBV is perpetrated without fear of reprisal, contributing to underreporting (Fernández-Fontelo et al., 2019).

Underreporting of GBV can also have a significant impact on victims' mental health and well-being (WHO, 2021). Many survivors of GBV may feel shame, guilt, or fear of retaliation, and these feelings may prevent them from reporting the abuse (Makhanya, 2022). Without access to support services such as counselling or legal aid, victims may suffer from long-term mental health problems that include anxiety, depression, and PTSD (WHO, 2013b). Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach that needs to involve the creation of safe reporting spaces for survivors, the implementation of educational programs for students and staff, and the establishment of policies that prioritise survivor safety and that holds perpetrators accountable (DHET, 2019).

2.10 Current Institutional Responses to Curbing GBV

2.10.1 Responses by various universities

According to Makhanya (2022), GBV at universities has an impact on students' learning environments because they frequently struggle academically in addition to dealing with the emotional and psychological effects of assault which, in some cases, may require them to take leave of absence or even leave the institution altogether. Hence, many HEIs have made meaningful strides in responding to GBV, and some responses are presented below.

1. **Education and prevention programs:** The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) has implemented an education and prevention program called 'It Stops Here' that aims to prevent and respond to incidents of a sexual nature and GBV. The program includes workshops, training sessions, and awareness campaigns that promote

respect, consent, and healthy relationships (University of the Witwatersrand, 2021).

2. **Collaboration with law enforcement:** Stellenbosch University works closely with local law enforcement agencies to report and investigate incidents of GBV. The university has established a partnership with the South African Police Service to share information, coordinate responses, and provide support to survivors (Stellenbosch University Campus Security, 2023).
3. **Policies and procedures:** The University of Pretoria has established a policy titled 'Anti-Discriminatory policy' that outlines how GBV incidents should be reported, investigated, and addressed. The policy includes information on reporting mechanisms, confidentiality, and disciplinary action (University of Pretoria Anti-Discriminatory Policy, 2019).
4. **Reporting and prevention:** The University of Zululand (UNIZULU) has also made significant progress in the fight against GBV through its '16 Days of Activism' campaign to inspire collaboration with civil society organisations in its efforts to respond to GBV (Gwebu, 2021).

HEIs worldwide have been dealing with cases of GBV, and the above are just a few examples of South African universities that use strategies to report and prevent such incidents. Each university may have its unique approach depending on its size, location, and resources. However, their efforts are undermined by underreporting which hides the true extent of the problem, and this perpetuates GBV at HEIs.

2.10.2 University of Zululand's GBV policy and procedures

According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2020), numerous HEIs (there are 26 such institutions in South Africa) lack adequate support structures to effectively address and respond to GBV. This deficiency includes the absence of clear reporting channels for survivors and leads to a culture of non-disclosure of GBV experiences and a lack of seeking assistance. The lack of proper regulations and mechanisms to prevent such incidents further contributes to the reluctance of individuals to come forward. The DHET (2020) holds all post-school education and training (PSET),

institutions accountable for safeguarding the rights of all individuals, including students, employees, and visitors who enter their premises. To fulfil this responsibility, these institutions are expected to adopt policies and procedures that are aligned with the current DHET (2020) policy framework to combat GBV effectively.

In response to this requirement, UNIZULU has established its own policy and procedures on sexual harassment and GBV with the aim of addressing, preventing, and eliminating this scourge on its campus. UNIZULU unequivocally declares a zero-tolerance stance towards all forms of GBV, irrespective of any societal, cultural, institutional, or religious practices that may support it (University of Zululand, 2019: 4). The university is dedicated to eradicating GBV through proactive measures, such as preventing incidents and managing the university's response to such cases promptly, efficiently, and fairly. The suspension of the lecturer who allegedly sexually harassed and assaulted students participating in the Cheer Leading sport highlights that the institution has zero tolerance against GBV (UNIZULU Notice issued by Management on 23 May 2024).

However, there is a notable loophole in UNIZULU's policy as it fails to specify the reporting facilities for students who wish to lodge a complaint. Mbatha's (2023) empirical study identified this loophole as a factor that contributes to the underreporting of sexual harassment and GBV. Dlamini and Olanrewaju's (2021) study revealed that 75% of respondents did not report their victimisation due to being unaware of reporting channels in the institution under study. Survivors/victims of GBV are thus left in the dark about where and how to seek help after an attack related to GBV. Outdated institutional policies should therefore be updated as a matter of urgency to be in line with the most recent DHET framework, which places significant emphasis on GBV reporting protocols (DHET, 2020). If they are not, it is inevitable that the underreporting of GBV incidents and, by extension, other crimes, will be perpetuated (Dlamini & Olanrewaju, 2021). Mbatha (2023) argues that all institutions must also review and link their policies with the National Plan for Post-School Education and Training 2021–2030 as required by the government.

2.11 South African Legislation on GBV

There are assorted reasons why the perpetrators of GBV do so with impunity. If students and staff lack a clear understanding of GBV or the South African legislation contesting and prohibiting it, they may continue to perpetuate GBV without realising that they are breaking the law (Saferspaces, 2022). All institutions of higher learning are responsible for upholding the rights of students, employees, and other visitors to their campuses (DHET, 2020). Hence, they should educate their students and staff about their rights and of instances when their rights may be violated. South Africa has a comprehensive legal framework that prohibits GBV and protects the rights of survivors. Below are summaries of some existing legislations and their contribution to understanding and curbing GBV.

2.11.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act No. 108 of 1996

The Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996) is central in prohibiting GBV in all its forms (DHET, 2019). More specifically, Chapter 2 of the Constitution, also referred to as the Bill of Rights, affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality, and freedom while enshrining the rights of every citizen of this nation. People's constitutional rights to equality, human dignity, life, freedom, and security are expressed in sections 9, 10, and 12(1c) (Enaifoghe et al., 2021). Section 9 ensures equality as it prohibits discrimination based on various grounds, including gender, but GBV undermines this right by disproportionately affecting women and girls (WHO, 2013a). Section 10 safeguards human dignity, but this is violated by acts of GBV that degrade and dehumanise victims. Section 12(1)(c) guarantees freedom from all forms of violence, which is also a right that is infringed upon by GBV as it threatens the security and safety of individuals. In essence, the Constitution emphasises gender equality, dignity, and personal security, while GBV contravenes these rights by imposing threats, fear, and insecurity upon victims and by curbing their freedom and perpetuating a cycle of abuse (United Nations, 1948; Saferspaces, 2022).

2.11.2 Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act No. 13 of 2021

The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act No 13 of 2021 introduces sexual intimidation as a new offense, expands the scope of the National Register for Sex Offenders, protects vulnerable people, and increases the period that sex offenders' particulars must remain on the Register. Rape, sexual assault, incest, and the sexual exploitation of children are all prohibited under this law. Also, it outlines strategies for assisting survivors, including offering medical attention, counselling, and legal help. This Act further strengthens the provisions of the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act and introduces new offenses and provides harsher sentences for perpetrators of sexual violence. It also includes provisions for the protection of vulnerable groups such as women, children, and people with disabilities.

2.11.3 Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Act No. 12 of 2021

The Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Act incorporates and amends the Magistrates' Courts Act of 1944, the Criminal Procedure Act of 1977, the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1997, and the Superior Courts Act of 2013 as it provides for the appointment of intermediaries and the giving of evidence through intermediaries in proceedings other than criminal proceedings. This Act amends various other Acts related to criminal law and procedure. It introduces new provisions for the expeditious handling of cases involving violence against women and children, strengthens the provisions for the granting of bail in cases involving serious and violent crimes, and introduces new measures to enhance the protection of victims and witnesses in criminal cases.

2.11.4 Domestic Violence Amendment Act No. 14 of 2021

The Domestic Violence Amendment Bill corrects deficiencies and challenges in the Domestic Violence Act of 1998. It adds new definitions, broadens current meanings, eliminates gender-binary terminology, enlarges the Act's coverage of electronic communication, and adds online protection order applications. Moreover, domestic abuse victims, including those who were subjected to physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse, are protected by this statute. Any action or inaction that causes harm or injury to,

or poses a threat of harm or injury to, a person with whom the accused has or has had a domestic connection is included in the broad definition of domestic violence. According to the law, protection orders can be requested from a magistrate's court to stop the abuser from inflicting more harm or frightening the victim. According to the Act, domestic relationships can also exist between persons who live together but do not have a romantic or sexual relationship. This means that the Act applies to both roommates and students living singly in residences (DHET, 2019).

2.11.5 The Protection from Harassment Act No. 17 of 2011

The Protection from Harassment Act No. 17 of 2011 outlaws harassment and stalking as such acts infringe on a person's constitutionally protected right to privacy and dignity. The Act creates a low-cost legal remedy to shield a person from possible non-criminal activities that nonetheless impair their rights. By seeking a court order forbidding the harasser from engaging in further harassment, it seeks to put an end to harassing behaviour. A harasser commits a crime that carries a fine or jail time when they disobey a protective order. The Act also contains vital protections from cyber-harassment.

These legislative provisions aim to safeguard individuals' rights while also outlawing and deterring GBV in South Africa. Those who are aware of and understand these laws are better able to defend themselves and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions by reporting GBV acts to the police.

2.12 Interventions to Encourage the Reporting of GBV Incidences

Despite the alarming rates of GBV, many victims do not report their victimisation due to shame, stigma, fear of retaliation, and lack of trust in the criminal justice system (Makhanya, 2022). Therefore, it is critical to implement effective campaigns, strategies, and innovations that encourage victims to report GBV victimisation and seek help.

Makhaya and Ajani (2023) posit that the effective eradication of the underreporting of GBV requires concerted efforts from various stakeholders, including the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), HEIs, leadership bodies, student bodies, and

affected others. The latter authors emphasise the importance of collaborative actions to address this issue successfully and to advocate for proactive measures in the form of awareness campaigns. Such campaigns play a crucial role in combating underreporting as they enhance students' knowledge about the reporting mechanisms available to them when they experience victimisation. By raising awareness, students are more likely to be informed about how and where to report incidents of GBV, which can lead to higher reporting rates.

Dube (2023) proposes an additional strategy to tackle GBV, suggesting the implementation of empowerment programs that target women. These programs aim to educate women about their human and legal rights and their sociocultural agency. By enhancing women's knowledge and understanding of their rights, they can be better equipped to adopt powerful leadership roles and actively participate in addressing the problem of violence. Makhene (2022) contends that campus awareness campaigns must effectively convey a clear and unequivocal message about the fact that GBV will not be tolerated in these spaces. They should also outline the consequences faced by students who engage in behaviour that perpetuates GBV norms. Moreover, these campaigns should offer comprehensive support and services to victims of GBV and be utilised to create a safe and encouraging environment so that such victims be encouraged to report incidents in which they were harmed.

Campaigns are a powerful tool to raise awareness and change attitudes and behaviours towards GBV. Kabaya (2021) and Mutinta (2022) propose that universities should conduct awareness campaigns to promote gender equality. For instance, the 'No More' campaign is an effective example of an initiative that aims to address the root causes of GBV by questioning social norms and promoting positive views about consent, healthy relationships, and gender equality ('No More', n.d.). The campaign uses a range of media platforms to advertise its support, including social media, billboards, television commercials, and community activities. It encourages the public to be aware of GBV issues and engages them to act against GBV.

Another example of an effective campaign is the '16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence' campaign which is an annual international campaign that runs from

November 25 to December 10. The aim of this campaign is to raise awareness while it also advocates for policy changes and promotes community mobilisation (UN Women, n.d.). The campaign uses various strategies such as online activism, advocacy events, and public demonstrations to engage individuals, organisations, and governments in the fight against GBV. As these campaigns have proved to be effective, they can be utilised as a tool to fight GBV through encouraging survivors/victims to report the attacks against them.

In addition, Rikhotso (2022) suggests that government and community-based civil society organisations should collaborate to fight against GBV. The government is urged to invest more in programmes like these since they can positively encourage victims to speak up about their victimisation. Moreover, social media has proven to be influential in encouraging victims to speak out, as most of these programmes facilitate awareness about GBV. Chibango and Chibango (2022) suggest that local authorities and social institutions should promote awareness campaigns to report sexual abuse. For instance, the 'Start by Believing' campaign has been relatively effective in encouraging victims to report GBV as it is a strategy that aims to shift the 'blame and shame' from survivors to perpetrators by encouraging individuals, institutions, and communities to believe and support victims when they have disclosed their experiences of GBV (End Violence Against Women International, n.d.). This strategy emphasises the importance of building trust, validating experiences, and offering support to survivors to increase their likelihood of reporting an incident and seeking help.

Moreover, innovations such as technology and digital platforms can also play a crucial role in encouraging victims to report GBV and access support services. For example, the 'SafeCity' app is a mobile-based platform that allows users to report incidents of sexual harassment and violence in public spaces anonymously (Red Dot Foundation, n.d.). The app uses crowdsourcing to collect data on the locations, types, and frequency of incidents, and the data that are collected can inform policy and advocacy efforts. Similarly, the 'GBV Command Center' is a digital platform that provides a one-stop-shop for survivors to access emergency services, legal aid, and counselling through a toll-free number and SMS service (UN Women, n.d.). This platform also collects data on the types

and frequency of incidents to inform policy and programmatic interventions. Yesufu (2022) suggests that human rights education is essential for the entire population. This suggests that future campaigns for raising awareness should centre on educating people about their rights so they can find justice after being violated. Yusufu (202) is adamant that doing this will help victims speak up about being victimised as they will be much more aware of their rights.

Addressing the root causes of underreporting necessitates a multifaceted approach that should encompass various strategies, such as policy and institutional transformations, educational and awareness-raising campaigns, and endeavours to shape cultural norms and beliefs about GBV. The efficacy of these interventions in promoting reporting hinges upon the cooperation and collaboration between governmental bodies and civil society organisations (Rikhotso, 2022). Furthermore, according to Dlamini and Makhaye (2023), preventive measures and policy frameworks must complement and reinforce response mechanisms to effectively combat GBV. In this context, they propose the implementation of community policing as a viable strategy for countering GBV in South Africa.

Overall, tackling the underreporting of GBV will necessitate collaborative efforts that involve various stakeholders and the implementation of proactive strategies, such as awareness campaigns and empowerment programs. These approaches can contribute to creating a campus environment where GBV is not tolerated and where victims receive the support they need. The current study endeavoured to contribute to this multifaceted approach by identifying and developing empowering solutions for victims/survivors of GBV. It is envisaged that, by empowering the victims/survivors of GBV, it will fill them with a sense of agency and self-advocacy and enable them to break the cycle of silence and seek justice. Moreover, perpetrators will be held accountable for their reprehensible actions and a climate of deterrence and accountability related to GBV will be fostered in society.

2.13 Conclusion

This chapter provided a concise summary of the literature on GBV and clarified ideas related to the phenomenon under investigation. Related literature was reviewed to

understand the reasons for the underreporting of GBV and to explore interventions that have been used to promote reporting. The chapter also zoomed in on existing South African policies and legislation that intend to curb GBV and bring perpetrators of such crimes to book.

The next chapter will focus on the theoretical perspectives that underpinned this study.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

Theories are significant because they can be used to explain events and particular human behaviours and attitudes. Each theoretical approach has distinct implications for practitioner and policy-maker responses and interventions as, in the absence of a definitive theory, research responses will be inconsistent and prone to clash while analyses may blur clear understanding of the situation under investigation (Makhaye, 2016). They are therefore important in explaining the factors that influence individuals' engagement in certain behaviours. This chapter explores the theories that were used in this study to elucidate why victims are reluctant to report their respective experiences. The rational choice theory and the cultural acceptance of violence/culture of violence theories are discussed as they were the main theoretical approaches that were employed.

These two theories are complementary in explaining the dynamics around the underreporting of GBV in HEIs. The rational choice theory plays a significant role in explaining why victims of GBV choose not to report their victimisation, while the cultural acceptance of violence theory plays a significant role in explaining how cultural norms tend to normalise GBV and why victims are hindered from reporting their victimisation. These two theories also jointly explain the silence surrounding GBV.

3.2 The Rational Choice Theory

A substantial number of Criminology scholars have confirmed that Adam Smith's (1776) Rational Choice Theory (RCT) is central to our understanding why crime victims do not report their victimisation. For example, Kidd and Chayet (2010: 1) contend that crime victims rationally decide not to report their victimisation to law enforcement authorities as the result of three factors that act singly or in concert: "(a) victim fear, (b) feelings of helplessness and the perceived powerlessness of authorities, and (c) the threat of further

victimisation from law enforcement authorities”. These elucidate the fact that individuals have preferences and choose according to those, which means not to report being victimised becomes one of their preferences (Dietrich & List, 2013).

In the context of the current study, it can be argued that not reporting GBV to the authorities is a rational choice that individuals make after weighing the possible outcomes and the risk/s involved. The outcomes may include trauma, shame, stigmatisation, secondary victimisation from law enforcement, and lack of trust in the institutional authority. The RCT suggests that individuals make decisions based on rational calculations of the costs and benefits associated with their actions (Heath, 1976: 3). The following diagram illustrates how victims weigh the costs and benefits of reporting GBV:

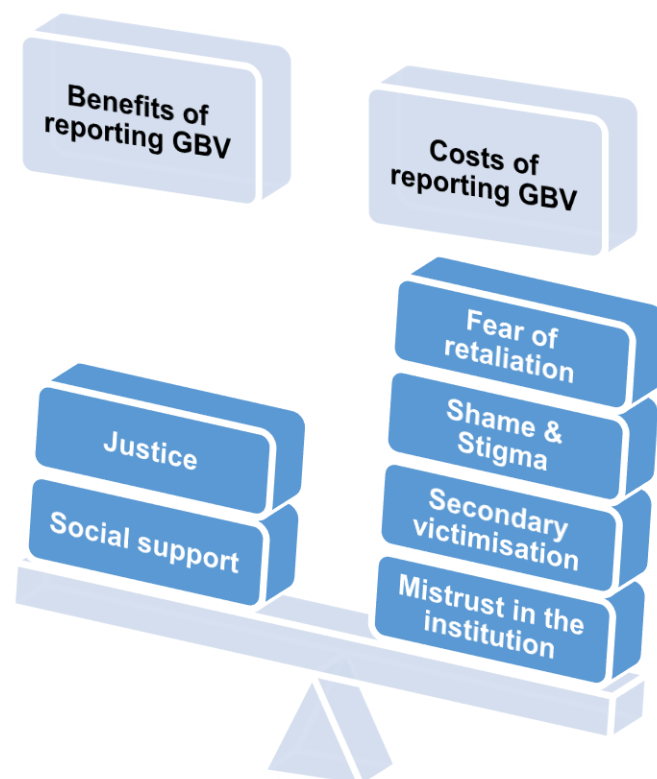


Figure 3.1: A rational choice model to explain the non-reporting of GBV

According to this model, victims weigh the potential costs and benefits of reporting the violence perpetrated against them and make a rational decision based on the perceived net outcome (Wittek, 2013). The costs may include the risk of retaliation, shame and stigma, secondary victimisation, and lack of trust in the institutional authorities (Kabaya, 2021). The benefits may include protection from further violence (justice) and social support (Spear, 2019). However, justice is not guaranteed. Moreover, most people have lost faith in the justice system as it has failed many survivors by not holding perpetrators accountable for their crimes (Steyn & Steyn, 2008). This means the costs of reporting are way greater than the benefits, which explains why GBV is underreported. In essence, the model suggests that individuals always make choices based on the greater of two outcomes (Wittek, 2013).

Carling (1992: 27) predicts that rational individuals will choose the alternative that gives them the greatest satisfaction. In situations where the costs of reporting outweigh the benefits, individuals may choose not to report their experiences of GBV. This decision may be influenced by factors such as fear of exposure to the offender and the potential ramifications thereof, a lack of faith in institutional response processes, and concern over how the institution or police would handle the case (de Klerk, Klazinga, & McNeill, 2007; Adams, Mabusela, & Dlamini, 2013).

Makhafola (2020) highlights a case involving a student who experienced sexual harassment by her lecturer, who also held the position of head of department (HOD). The student refrained from reporting the incident, fearing it would negatively impact her academic progress and future prospects. The lecturer's authority and influence placed the student at a significant disadvantage, exemplifying the misuse of power to exploit and silence victims. Brink, Mdaka, Matee, and Weppelman (2021) argue that the inherent power dynamics in such relationships render victims particularly vulnerable, as perpetrators often use their authority to intimidate and control. In this case, the student's silence was driven by fear of retaliation and concerns about not being believed, as the lecturer had the ability to create a hostile and untenable learning environment. Consequently, the student made a rational decision, as described by Wittek (2013),

weighing the potential risks and determining that the costs of reporting outweighed the benefits, thereby exacerbating her victimisation.

Victims of GBV often assess the likelihood of success before deciding whether to report their victimisation or not. When individuals perceive the legal system as biased or ineffective, they are less likely to come forward. For example, studies by Steyn and Steyn (2008) and Steinbrenner, Shawler, Ferreira, and Draucker (2017) highlight negative experiences of sexual assault victims, who reported being subjected to harsh and sceptical questioning by the police. Such treatment fosters doubt about whether their experiences will be believed, discouraging victims from reporting. Kidd and Chayet (2010) argue that victims often view the police as 'useless' or even 'expensive', citing instances where officers demand bribes before providing assistance. This erosion of trust in law enforcement contributes significantly to the underreporting of GBV on campuses.

Fear of secondary victimisation also plays a crucial role in silencing victims. Research by Newman, Nayebare, Neema, Agaba, and Akello (2021) reveals that police questioning can be intrusive and humiliating, often casting doubt on the legitimacy of victims' claims. Such interactions not only cause emotional harm but also discourage victims from seeking help. Faced with the prospect of further trauma, many victims choose to 'suffer in silence' rather than report their experiences to law enforcement or campus authorities.

A broader issue undermining reporting is the lack of faith in the criminal justice system (CJS). Many victims believe that perpetrators are not adequately punished, which diminishes the perceived value of reporting. Steyn and Steyn (2008) argue that the failure of the CJS to impose meaningful consequences on offenders leads to widespread disillusionment. Makhaye et al (2023) similarly note that this lack of trust fosters the belief that justice will not be served, further discouraging victims from coming forward.

Kabaya (2021) highlights that female students often refrain from reporting incidents of GBV due to concerns about their reputation. In cases such as rape, victims fear being labelled and judged by society, which frequently views them as impure (Kabaya, 2021). This demonstrates the significant social stigma faced by women who choose to disclose or report such assaults. The association of GBV with shame and stigma profoundly influences victims' decisions, as reporting may lead to further victimisation (Randa &

McGarry, 2023). These perceived risks deter many victims from coming forward, perpetuating a cycle of silence and underreporting.

Another critical barrier to reporting GBV is a lack of confidence in institutional responses. Makhaye et al. (2023) reveal widespread dissatisfaction among victims regarding how institutions handle GBV cases. Respondents in their study cited instances where institutions failed to support victims effectively or hold perpetrators accountable. In some cases, this lack of support led victims to attempt suicide. Furthermore, the study alleges that many institutions actively cover up GBV incidents, particularly when staff members such as lecturers are involved, prioritising institutional reputation over justice for victims (Makhaye et al., 2023). Such actions undermine victims' trust, leading to the perception that reporting is both futile and excessively burdensome (Kidd & Chayet, 2010). Consequently, victims often rationalise their decision not to report, believing that institutional mechanisms will fail to provide meaningful outcomes. This lack of confidence not only silences victims but also discourages others from reporting, as they anticipate similarly inadequate responses. Addressing these systemic issues is essential to breaking the cycle of underreporting and ensuring justice for survivors.

3.2.1 Rational choice intersectionality

The RCT provides a useful framework for understanding how intersections of gender, race, class, and cultural background influence victims' perceptions of the costs and benefits of reporting GBV. Victims' decisions are not made in isolation but are shaped by their social positioning and the systemic factors that impact their lived experiences. These intersections significantly affect how victims weigh the perceived risks and rewards of reporting.

Gender

Gender plays a pivotal role in shaping victims' decision-making processes. Female victims often face societal stigmas, such as being labelled "impure" or judged for their victimisation, particularly in cases of sexual violence (Kabaya, 2021). These stigmas amplify the perceived costs of reporting, as victims fear reputational harm, social ostracism, and victim-blaming. Male victims, on the other hand, are influenced by cultural

expectations of masculinity, which discourage vulnerability and reporting. The pressure to conform to ideals of strength and dominance may lead male victims to remain silent, contributing to underreporting (Mbandlwa, 2020).

Race and class

Race and class intersect to influence trust in institutional authorities. Victims from marginalised racial or socioeconomic groups may have a heightened mistrust of the criminal justice system (CJS) due to systemic biases and historical injustices. Studies show that victims often perceive the police as unhelpful or even harmful, particularly when they belong to disadvantaged communities (Steyn & Steyn, 2008; Kidd & Chayet, 2010). For instance, bribery and dismissive attitudes from law enforcement disproportionately affect students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who may lack the resources to navigate or challenge these systems effectively. These perceptions increase the costs of reporting for individuals from such backgrounds, as they may feel powerless to achieve justice.

Cultural background

Cultural norms and values further shape victims' perceptions of the reporting process. In patriarchal societies, where male dominance is normalised, women may internalise beliefs that reporting abuse is disrespectful or futile (Mkhize, 2015). Victims from such cultures may fear retaliation, shame, or being ostracised by their communities, which significantly outweigh the perceived benefits of seeking justice. Additionally, cultural acceptance of silence around GBV reinforces feelings of helplessness, as victims may believe that their reports will not be taken seriously or that institutional responses will be inadequate (Makhaye et al., 2023).

Institutional trust and power dynamics

Power dynamics within institutions also play a critical role. For example, when perpetrators hold positions of authority, such as lecturers in HEIs, victims may fear academic repercussions or believe that reporting will disrupt their education (Makhafola, 2020). Institutions that prioritise their reputation over addressing GBV incidents exacerbate this mistrust, leading victims to rationally conclude that the costs of reporting,

including secondary victimisation and institutional inaction, outweigh the potential benefits (Makhaye et al., 2023).

Implications for rational choice theory

The intersections of gender, race, class, and cultural background highlight the nuanced ways in which victims assess the costs and benefits of reporting GBV. While RCT posits that individuals make rational decisions based on calculated outcomes, these calculations are deeply influenced by structural inequalities and social pressures. For many victims, the perceived risks such as stigma, retaliation, and institutional failure overshadow potential benefits like justice and protection, making non-reporting a rational choice within their specific social and cultural contexts.

In conclusion, RCT offers a foundational understanding of victims' decision-making processes, but it must be applied with sensitivity to the intersecting factors that shape individual experiences. Addressing these barriers requires systemic changes to reduce the costs and enhance the benefits of reporting, particularly for marginalised groups. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that the decision to report or not report GBV is complex and may be influenced by a range of social, cultural, and psychological factors beyond the rational calculations of costs and benefits. Hence, the following theory was used to understand the topic beyond what the rational choice theory elucidates.

3.3 The Cultural Acceptance of Violence / Culture of Violence Theory

Marvin Wolfgang first proposed the culture of violence theory in 1967 to explain how cultures and societies can justify violent acts. It concerns the pervasiveness of certain violent inclinations on a societal level. WHO (2009) states that diverse cultural and social standards support various forms of violence, and this theory suggests that certain forms of violence are normalised and accepted in particular cultures or societies. For example, in several African cultures, women are conditioned to be submissive to men and 'receivers' of sex, whereas men are conditioned to be dominant and 'initiators' of sex (Kanjiri & Nomngcoyiya, 2021). Cultural beliefs such as this teach males to regard women as objects to be obtained and controlled as they are 'the weaker sex' and should be

subordinate to men (George, 2020). In communities that harbour such cultural beliefs, women are often exposed to sexual and other forms of violence. This societal normalisation of GBV makes it difficult for victims of these crimes to report their experiences because they fear being stigmatised or not being believed (Yesufu, 2022).

The theory suggests that societal attitudes towards GBV may be a significant factor in victims' reluctance to report being exposed to GBV. For instance, in societies and domestic settings where physical violence is seen as a way of resolving conflict, women who are victims of violence may be hesitant to report their experiences as they fear being blamed or ridiculed (George, 2020). There are unfortunately many societies and households where the belief persists that husbands and boyfriends should discipline their spouses/partners if they 'get out of hand' (Kanjiri & Nomngcoyiya, 2021).

The convergence of power and violence, particularly gender-based and sexual violence, exacerbates and normalises the concept that women are inferior to men (Makhafola, 2020). This means that men suffer no consequences when they assert physical, emotional, and mental domination over women (George, 2020). For example, a male student in Manik and Tarisayi's (2021) study admitted that he had physically assaulted his girlfriend for cheating on him as it was his prerogative to do so.

Many such cases of assault highlight the pervasive nature of IPV among students at HEIs, and it particularly occurs among students who cohabit with their partners (Workye, Mekonnen, Wedaje, and Sitot, 2023). In such cohabiting arrangements, there exists a gendered expectation that women should assume responsibility for all household chores, particularly cooking and cleaning. Failure to adhere to these expectations may result in men feeling entitled to resort to physical violence against their partners. Kabaya (2021) supports this observation, as a female respondent stated that her boyfriend resorted to physical violence when she refused to comply with his demands. Significantly, the respondent refrained from reporting him to the authorities due to her fear of losing this partner. This indicates that some female students may choose not to report victimisation as they feel compelled to protect the perpetrators even if their silence perpetuates the cycle of abuse. This is exactly what the Domestic Violence Act No. 116 of 1998 aims to

address, as it considers acts of violence between people sharing a residence as domestic violence that is punishable by law.

In certain societies, cultural norms may reinforce patriarchal values that perpetuate gender inequality and normalise various forms of violence. Mkhize (2015) argues that in such contexts, men are often socialised to assert dominance over women, while women are conditioned to accept subordination as part of their societal roles, contributing to the underreporting of abuse. The reinforcement of male dominance within patriarchal structures fosters a belief in male superiority, creating an environment where violent acts against those perceived as less powerful are more likely to occur. Similarly, Mbandlwa (2020) highlights that masculinity expectations and cultural beliefs, which pressure men to appear strong and dominant, can further complicate the decision of female victims to report their abusers, as these dynamics exacerbate power imbalances and societal stigmas surrounding victimisation.

It is an undeniable truth that students learn patriarchal standards and masculinity in their homes and adhere to these beliefs in the university context. Women learn to be helpless, whereas men learn to exert their masculinity. This was corroborated by one of Makhaola's (2020: 89) respondents who said, "We grow up seeing our mothers getting silenced about their abusive relationships as they believe they shouldn't air their dirty laundry". This illustrates that cultural and traditional values influence how women react to GBV in society. Patriarchal standards that are established through indoctrination at home and in society thus assert the silence surrounding sexual harassment and other acts of GBV (Mkhize, 2015). This explains the normalisation of certain forms of violence and their acceptance in particular cultures, societies, and households that leads to underreporting.

Respondents in Chibango and Chibango's (2022) study overwhelmingly concurred that cultural (73%) and religious (69%) beliefs are obstacles that prevent women from reporting GBV. The latter study argues that barriers to reporting violence are established by cultural normalisation and the perpetuation of a sense of shame, embarrassment, and fear of retaliation. Furthermore, respect, protection, and adherence to human rights are jeopardised by GBV survivors' lack of awareness of sexual abuse as a crime, their

persistent fear and humiliation, the poverty they live in, their cultural beliefs, and weak law enforcement response to such crimes (Chibango & Chibango, 2022).

In summary, the cultural acceptance of violence theory is a useful lens for understanding the underreporting of GBV. It highlights the importance of addressing cultural attitudes towards violence and improving the response of the legal system to curb GBV. By exposing the ills of GBV, the two theories in which this study was embedded may be utilised by policy makers and university management teams to create an environment in which victims of GBV will feel safe and supported and where no one will be afraid of reporting GBV.

3.4 Limitations of Theories

Both Rational Choice Theory (RCT) and the Culture of Violence Theory (CVT) offer valuable insights into understanding the underreporting of GBV, but each has notable limitations that must be acknowledged.

3.4.1 Limitations of rational choice theory

While RCT provides a framework for understanding the cost-benefit analysis victims may undertake when deciding whether to report GBV, it oversimplifies the complex and deeply personal nature of these decisions. The theory assumes that individuals make rational, calculated decisions based on clear evaluations of risks and benefits. However, this perspective neglects the emotional, psychological, and social factors that heavily influence victims' behaviour. For instance, trauma, fear, and societal stigma are not easily quantifiable and may not align with the purely rational decision-making model proposed by RCT. Additionally, RCT does not adequately account for structural and systemic barriers, such as inadequate institutional responses or societal norms that perpetuate silence around GBV. These factors often operate outside the scope of individual rationality, limiting the theory's explanatory power in this context.

3.4.2 Limitations of the culture of violence theory

The Culture of Violence Theory (CVT), which attributes the perpetuation and underreporting of GBV to cultural norms that normalise or trivialise violence, provides a

sociological lens for understanding the issue. However, its broad focus on cultural and societal factors can overlook the individual agency and nuanced decision-making processes of victims. By emphasising the role of cultural norms, CVT risks portraying victims as passive actors within an oppressive system, rather than individuals navigating complex personal and social circumstances. Furthermore, the theory does not sufficiently address how intersections of identity, such as gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation, influence the reporting behaviour of GBV victims. This lack of specificity limits its ability to account for the diverse experiences and challenges faced by victims in different contexts.

While both RCT and CVT contribute to the understanding of GBV underreporting, their limitations highlight the need for a more integrative approach. Combining these theories with psychological, structural, and intersectional perspectives can provide a more comprehensive explanation of the factors influencing victims' decisions to report or remain silent. Such an approach is essential for developing effective interventions that address both individual and systemic barriers to reporting GBV.

3.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter discussed two theories that helped elucidate the reasons for the underreporting of GBV in society and, more particularly, in university spaces. Amongst other theories, the rational choice theory has been used as pivotal in understanding victims' reluctance to report acts of GBV and victimisation. The discourse illustrated that individuals are 'rational actors' and that everyone makes choices based on calculated risks. The culture of violence theory was also elucidated as it is effective in explaining social and cultural norms that support and perpetuate GBV, thus contributing to the underreporting of such crimes. Both theories were used to unpack and understand the dynamics surrounding the underreporting of GBV. However, the limitations of both theories were acknowledged. Rational Choice Theory oversimplifies the decision-making process by focusing on rational calculations, while the Culture of Violence Theory, with its emphasis on cultural norms, may overlook individual agency and the diverse

experiences of victims. Despite these limitations, both theories provide valuable insights into the complex issue of GBV underreporting.

The research methodology that was utilised in this study is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research processes that were utilised to achieve the study's aims and objectives. The qualitative research methodology and data collection tools that were used are discussed in detail. The researcher explains which and how participants were selected and how data were generated and analysed. Moreover, details on how trustworthiness was assured are provided, and the ethical considerations that were relevant to the study are also briefly described.

4.2 Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative methodological approach within the hermeneutics paradigm to explore the perspectives of students and staff regarding the causes of underreporting of GBV at UNIZULU. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because it aligns with the research questions, which aim to uncover the underlying factors contributing to the underreporting of GBV, understand students' knowledge of reporting procedures, and identify strategies to encourage reporting. These questions require an in-depth understanding of the participants' subjective experiences, perceptions, and emotions, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods that focus on numerical data and statistical analysis.

As Cassim (2021a) asserts, the research methodology provides a framework for conducting the study, and for this study, a qualitative approach was essential to gain rich insights into the lived experiences of the participants. This approach enabled the researcher to examine the factors contributing to underreporting from the perspectives of students and staff, uncovering the nuances of their thoughts and feelings on the topic. Unlike a quantitative approach, which aims to generalise findings to a broader population,

a qualitative approach prioritises the depth and uniqueness of individual experiences, making it better suited for exploring sensitive and nuanced topics such as GBV underreporting.

By adopting a qualitative approach within the hermeneutics paradigm, the researcher was able to explore the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon and gather rich, detailed data that could not be reduced to mere numbers. This method was particularly fit for addressing the research questions of this study, as it enabled the researcher to uncover the complexities of human behaviour, emotions, and perceptions surrounding GBV reporting at this university.

4.3 Sampling

According to Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2015), a sample is a representative group of a few selected individuals that are drawn from a studied population. To comply with this requirement, the researcher used a non-probability sampling approach by utilising purposive and snowball sampling to select the participants for this study. Adopting these sampling methods helped narrow down the most relevant sample for this study. Postgraduate students and support staff members were the targeted participants. However, only those who had knowledge of the problem were purposively sampled from the Protective Services Department (PSD), the Pastoral Care Unit, and the Student Services Department (SSD). Sampled participants included guidance and counselling staff, clinic staff, members from the Office for Students with Disabilities, and members of the Housing Unit. The SSD comprises six divisions but only four divisions were sampled.

4.3.1 Non-probability sampling

The two types of sampling techniques identified by Neuman (2006) are probability (representative) sampling and non-probability (non-representative) sampling. Non-probability sampling does not accurately reflect the target population and is typically employed in experimental or trial research. Non-probability sampling makes use of a convenient selection of population units and relies on subjective judgment (Ayhan, 2011).

Non-probability sampling was therefore more appropriate for this study because the researcher aimed to draw a sample from a university population without aiming to generalise the findings but to better understand the topic under investigation.

4.3.2 Purposive sampling

Using purposive sampling, the researcher intentionally selected the variables that would address the purpose of this study (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995). This means that only individuals who had certain characteristics were selected, particularly those who were deemed to possess knowledge of the problem under investigation (Ayhan, 2011). Hence, only postgraduate students, PSD, Pastoral Care Unit, and Student Services Department (SSD) members, particularly guidance and counselling members, clinic staff, members from the Office for Students with Disabilities, and housing staff were sampled. The same technique was used to sample both students and support staff.

Postgraduate students: The researcher selected students who had achieved a postgraduate academic level because they had spent four or more years on campus and would thus be more compatible with the study than undergraduates. It was envisaged that their prolonged exposure to the campus environment and university life would have facilitated their comprehensive understanding of the various behaviours and incidents related to GBV that had transpired within the university context. It was also assumed that postgraduate students would be poised to offer valuable insights rooted in their lived experiences as students at UNIZULU and that they would be specifically knowledgeable about students' victimisation and incidences of GBV.

Postgraduate students were selected as representatives of the broader student population at UNIZULU for this study. While the researcher acknowledges that the experiences of postgraduate students may not fully capture the realities of undergraduates, their prior status as undergraduates at the same institution makes them a suitable population for this research. The study primarily targeted postgraduates residing inside the university due to its high student occupancy. However, this did not exclude students living off-campus or in private residences, as they were also included in

the study. Nonetheless, the majority of participants were from on-campus housing, specifically the East and West Residence.

To ensure a comprehensive representation of viewpoints, postgraduates from all four faculties were sampled. This approach aimed to encompass diverse epistemological perspectives in recognition of the fact that students may interpret phenomena through the lens of their respective academic disciplines. For instance, those in the field of education might offer insights that would be distinct from those in the humanities, law, or sciences disciplines. This means that all perspectives about the topic were regarded as valid. The contributions of the postgraduate participants were particularly insightful and enriched the study with valuable information.

Additionally, participants of both genders (female & males) were sampled to ensure equity and the age range of postgraduate students selected for the study was between 20 and 40 years. The age range of 20–40 years was selected to align with the typical demographic profile of postgraduate students in South African HEIs. This range encompasses individuals who are likely to be pursuing honours, master's, or doctoral degrees, thereby ensuring the inclusion of participants with varied academic experiences and levels of maturity.

This age group also reflects a critical stage in adulthood where individuals are likely to engage with complex social issues, including those related to GBV. By focusing on this demographic, the study aimed to capture insights from participants who are both socially and academically situated to provide meaningful perspectives on the reporting and underreporting of GBV. Furthermore, the inclusion of this age range allowed for diversity within the sample, as participants within this group may differ significantly in terms of their cultural backgrounds, lived experiences, and time spent at the institution. This diversity was essential to achieving a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing GBV reporting behaviours.

Support staff: The study focused on individuals directly involved in supporting victims of GBV when incidents are reported. Staff members were purposively selected from key departments and units within the institution that play critical roles in responding to GBV cases. The Protective Services Department (PSD) was included because it handles the

formal reporting of GBV incidents, while the Pastoral Care Unit was selected for its role in raising awareness about GBV and providing spiritual support to victims. The Student Services Department (SSD) offers guidance, counselling, and psychological support services to GBV victims, making its staff integral to the study. Similarly, clinic staff members were included due to their involvement in addressing victims' health concerns and offering counselling. The Office for Students with Disabilities was also represented, as its members actively facilitate GBV awareness campaigns aimed at protecting individuals with disabilities within the institution. Additionally, members of housing department were included because they also facilitate GBV awareness campaigns and incidents are often reported to them before being referred to PSD.

To ensure that participants had substantial experience and insight, only staff members with three or more years of service were sampled. These individuals were deemed more likely to have encountered and managed GBV cases, providing informed perspectives based on their interactions with victims and institutional processes. While new staff could potentially offer fresh perspectives, they were less likely to have directly dealt with GBV incidents due to their limited time within the institution. This criterion ensured that the study captured a depth of knowledge and experience from frontline personnel, thereby enhancing the richness and reliability of the data.

4.3.3 Snowball sampling

Snowball sampling was employed as part of the participant recruitment process, wherein initial purposively selected participants referred the researcher to other potential participants with the requisite knowledge and experiences (Ayhan, 2011; Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigam, 2013). These referees were approached, and most were pleased to participate in the study. This process continued until the research sample was saturated.

To mitigate the risk of homogeneity in participant selection, deliberate steps were taken to include a diverse range of perspectives. The sample comprised both female and male postgraduate students across multiple disciplines, including the faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences, Commerce, Administration and Law, Education, and Science,

Agriculture, and Engineering. Participants were drawn from various academic levels, ranging from honours to doctoral studies, ensuring representation from different academic backgrounds, social contexts, and lived experiences. To further enhance diversity, the researcher included participants from different age groups (20–40 years), cultural backgrounds, and varying lengths of time spent at the selected university. This inclusive approach allowed the study to capture nuanced insights into how factors such as gender dynamics, academic pressures, and cultural influences contribute to the reporting or underreporting of GBV.

Additionally, purposive sampling was employed to identify individuals with diverse experiences and perspectives on GBV. This was complemented by snowball sampling, which facilitated access to underrepresented voices that might otherwise have been overlooked. This strategy ensured that this study's findings reflect a multifaceted understanding of the issue, rather than being confined to a narrow or overly uniform participant pool.

4.4 Data Collection

The selection of data collection methods for this study was carefully considered to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives. Two instruments were employed: one-on-one interviews with twenty-two (22) postgraduate participants and a focus group discussion with seven (7) staff members. Each method was chosen for its ability to capture different facets of the research topic, providing both depth and diversity of insights for underreporting of GBV at the selected university.

The one-on-one interviews were essential for gathering in-depth, personal responses from postgraduate students. These interviews allowed the researcher to engage with participants on a more intimate level, fostering an environment of trust and empathy (Rabionet, 2011). This face-to-face interaction enabled the researcher to observe non-verbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions, which was crucial for understanding participants' true feelings and reactions to the subject matter. The personal nature of these interviews also provided an opportunity for participants to express their

views freely, without the influence of group dynamics, ensuring that their individual experiences and opinions were fully captured (Cassim, 2021a).

In contrast, the focus group discussion with staff members was chosen to explore collective perspectives and encourage a dynamic exchange of ideas (Solanki, 2022). This method allowed participants to engage in real-time discussions, where they shared their thoughts, challenge each other's views, and built upon one another's responses. The focus group discussion provided valuable insights into the collective understanding of the research topic, offering a broader perspective that complemented the individual interviews.

These methods provided a comprehensive approach to data collection. One-on-one interviews offered detailed, personalised insights, while the focus group enabled collective dialogue, revealing shared views and contrasting opinions. Together, they ensured depth, authenticity, and a thorough exploration of both individual and group dynamics, enhancing the rigor and scope of this study.

4.4.1 One-on-one interviews

The researcher conducted 22 one-on-one semi-structured interviews with postgraduate students. This method was selected for its ability to provide a focused and personalised exchange of information between the researcher and each participant. Semi-structured interviews are particularly effective in qualitative research as they combine a predetermined set of open-ended questions with the flexibility to probe for additional insights, enabling the researcher to explore complex issues in greater depth (Rabionet, 2011). The one-on-one format was deemed appropriate for this study because it created a private and comfortable environment where participants could openly share their thoughts without the influence of others. This approach was especially important for exploring sensitive topics like GBV, as it allowed participants to express themselves freely, fostering trust and a sense of safety (Cassim, 2021a).

Sample justification

The sample size of 22 postgraduate students was determined based on the principle of data saturation, where the collection of additional data no longer yields new themes or insights (Cassim, 2021b). The target sample was initially set at 20 participants, informed by prior studies in the field that demonstrated the adequacy of such a sample size for qualitative research. However, two additional participants were included to ensure that the data collection process captured a diverse range of perspectives and achieved saturation.

Preparation and ethical considerations during the interviews

Ethical protocols were meticulously observed throughout the data collection process to protect participants' rights and ensure the integrity of the research. Before the interviews, participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, objectives, and procedures. They were also informed about their rights, including the right to voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time without consequences, and the confidentiality of their responses.

Participants were required to sign a consent form before the interviews began. This document outlined the purpose of the study, the nature of the questions, the use of audio recordings, and the measures in place to ensure confidentiality. Obtaining written consent was a critical step in upholding ethical standards and fostering trust between the researcher and participants (Parveen & Showkat, 2017). To safeguard participants from potential emotional distress, a professional psychologist from the Guidance and Counselling Department was on standby throughout the data collection process. This precautionary measure reflected the study's commitment to upholding ethical standards and prioritising participants' mental well-being.

Implementation of one-on-one interviews

The interview process took place from 23 April to 31 May 2024, with a focus group discussion held on 30 April 2024. The interviews were conducted face-to-face at the University of Zululand's West Residence (Africa Block J), which also served as the researcher's accommodation. This location was chosen for its convenience and privacy,

ensuring an environment conducive to open and uninterrupted conversations. The availability of each participant was first confirmed before scheduling the interview. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes, allowing participants sufficient time to express their views while maintaining focus on the research objectives.

The researcher utilised a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix E) comprising open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses. The guide allowed for consistency across interviews while providing the flexibility to explore emerging themes through follow-up questions. This adaptability was essential for clarifying ambiguous responses and delving deeper into participants' perspectives on the underreporting of GBV (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). Language played a critical role in the interviews, as the guide was available in both English and isiZulu to accommodate participants' preferences. Although all participants opted for English, clarifications were provided in isiZulu when necessary to ensure thorough understanding. In addition to this, participants often alternated between English and isiZulu during the interviews, reflecting the bilingual nature of the context. This code-switching was accommodated seamlessly, as the researcher was proficient in both languages. This bilingual approach enhanced the inclusivity and accessibility of the data collection process.

Recording and data accuracy

The researcher recorded each interview and the focus group discussion on a mobile phone. The interviewees were asked to sign a form to give their consent for the conversations to be recorded on audio. The portable cell phone was not perfect in this circumstance, but it was available and useful. The use of an audio recorder accurately captured the conversation during each interview and facilitated verbatim quotations of the respondents' comments. These recordings were an accurate source of data collection. Moreover, notes were also taken during each interview and the focus group discussion. However, notes were not accurate enough at this stage as they did not capture every word of the participants. However, the researcher managed to jot down all the important themes that emerged from the interviews and conversation sessions. Notes served as a supplementary tool to highlight key themes and observations. The combination of audio

recordings and notes provided a robust foundation for subsequent data analysis, as recommended by Shenton (2004).

Challenges and mitigation strategies

Although the data collection process was general smooth, the researcher encountered a minor challenge when some participants who initially agreed to participate did not attend their scheduled sessions. This issue was resolved by recruiting additional participants, ensuring that the sample size remained adequate. The researcher's familiarity with the campus environment facilitated the recruitment process and minimised logistical challenges.

In summary, the one-on-one semi-structured interviews provided a reliable and effective method for capturing the unique perspectives of postgraduate students on the factors contributing to the underreporting of GBV in this institution. By combining rigorous ethical practices with methodological flexibility, the researcher ensured the collection of high-quality data that authentically represented participants' experiences. This approach not only aligned with the study's objectives but also contributed to the credibility of the research findings.

4.4.2 Focus group discussion

According to Solanki (2022), a focus group may be defined as a gathering of several people, usually six to twelve, in a formal setting to discuss and debate ideas and opinions on the subject a researcher explores. Isaacs (2014) observes it as a process of interviewing several people at once. He further emphasises that focus groups provide insights into complex thoughts and behaviours as individuals compare their experiences and observations. For this study, focus group participants were recruited from support staff units as discussed earlier. Due to a shortage of staff members who work directly with GBV victims in this institution, only seven (7) staff members were recruited. As a result, only one focus group discussion was conducted with seven (7) participants.

The researcher gave the participant staff members 5 days' notice for the focus group meeting so that they could schedule this commitment, as proposed by Powell and Single

(1996: 3). The participants were asked to suggest the time of the focus group session based on their availability. Using the time slot suggested by the participants, the researcher scheduled the meeting. All the targeted participants were present as promised.

The focus group was conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams, as suggested by some participants who cited their demanding schedules as a rationale for preferring an online format. Ensuring the inclusivity of all members was paramount, thus the researcher acceded to this preference to optimise participation and accommodate the diverse commitments of the attendees. Despite the researcher's inclination towards an in-person gathering, the virtual session proved to be advantageous in terms of convenience and time efficiency, obviating the need for logistical arrangements at a physical venue.

The discussion was held without any interruptions and participants were disciplined. Each would raise a hand whenever they wanted to say something. The researcher collected in-depth information about the problem at hand as the participants shared their perspectives and experiences about the non-reporting of GBV on the campus of the university under study openly and frankly. Rich information was garnered from this focus group.

According to Powell and Single (1996: 4), a moderator should be open, non-judgmental, and a good listener to encourage a free-flowing discussion. The ice was broken after introductions and a description of the study. The tone of the conversation became informative and honest as people began to open up and, eventually, closeness was achieved through the frank exchange of perspectives and experiences. The questions for the focus group were a bit different from those of the one-on-one interview guide as they were short and more straightforward (see Appendix F). However, they were related to the one-on-one interview guide. The session lasted approximately 60 minutes. When the session was over, the researcher stayed on Microsoft Teams to provide an opportunity for the participants who wanted to raise issues they had felt hesitant to address in front of the group.

In total, the sample size for this study was twenty-nine (29) as there were twenty-two (22) one-on-one interviews with postgraduate students and one focus group discussion with

seven (7) staff members. The sample size was sufficient to elicit rich data and to address the objectives of the study.

4.5 Thematic Data Analysis

Finding consistency in a data pattern is achieved through data analysis (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). This study used thematic analysis to inspect, purge, rework, and mode data to offer pertinent information in response to the research questions (Johnson, 2022). Thematic analysis was conducted manually to identify, categorise, and interpret themes within the data, ensuring rigor and reliability throughout the process. This systematic approach allowed the researcher to deeply engage with the data and extract meaningful insights relevant to the research questions and objectives. Guided by Steinbrenner, Shawler, Ferreira, and Draucker (2017), the following steps were used to analyse data for this study.

Step 1: Transcription and familiarisation

The process began with creating verbatim transcripts from the audio recordings of interviews. The researcher carefully listened to the recordings multiple times to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions. This step allowed the researcher to become fully immersed in the data, a crucial component of qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Any unclear segments were revisited repeatedly to ensure fidelity to the participants' words.

Step 2: Initial coding

Once the transcripts were complete, the researcher manually coded the data. This involved reading through the transcripts line by line and highlighting significant phrases, words, or sentences that appeared relevant to the research objectives. These segments were assigned preliminary codes, which represented the essence of the data. To ensure consistency, the researcher revisited the transcripts to confirm that the coding accurately reflected the participants' responses.

Step 3: Identification of themes

Using the initial codes, the researcher grouped similar codes into broader categories. These categories represented recurring patterns or concepts across the dataset. The researcher employed an inductive approach, allowing themes to emerge organically rather than imposing pre-determined frameworks. Each theme was carefully evaluated to ensure it was supported by the data and aligned with the research questions.

Step 4: Refinement of themes

After identifying the initial themes, the researcher reviewed and refined them to ensure clarity and coherence. Overlapping themes were merged, while others were split into sub-themes if they encompass multiple distinct ideas. This iterative process involved revisiting the original transcripts to confirm that the refined themes accurately captured the participants' perspectives.

Step 5: Ensuring rigor and reliability (trustworthiness)

To ensure the reliability of the coding process, the researcher employed several strategies. Detailed notes were meticulously taken during the coding and theme refinement stages to track decisions and create a clear audit trail. Feedback was sought from the researcher's supervisor to validate the identified themes and ensure they accurately reflected the data. Additionally, the researcher revisited the data multiple times to confirm that the coding and themes were consistent and firmly grounded in the participants' responses. These measures enhanced the credibility of the analysis.

Step 6: Cross-referencing with literature

The researcher compared the identified themes with existing literature on the underreporting of GBV in HEIs. This step provided additional context and demonstrated how the study's findings aligned with or diverged from previous research. The integration of literature also helped to validate the themes and situate them within the broader academic discourse.

Step 7: Reporting

Finally, the researcher produced a detailed report of the findings, including narrative summaries of each theme. These summaries were supported by verbatim quotes from participants to provide authenticity and illustrate the themes effectively. By documenting the entire process, the researcher ensured that the analysis was transparent, rigorous, and reliable while capturing the depth and complexity of the participants' experiences.

In summary, this manual approach, though time-intensive, allowed for a nuanced understanding of the data and ensured that the findings were firmly rooted in the participants' voices.

4.6 Achieving Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this study was assured by adhering to criteria as introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

4.6.1 Credibility

According to Stahl and King (2020), credibility ensures the truthfulness and accuracy of the research findings by asking "*How consistent are the findings with reality?*" However, credibility can be assured through various processes. In this study, persistent observation was implemented, which included identifying the characteristics and elements that were most relevant to the problem under investigation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This was accomplished by repeatedly reviewing the data, analysing them, developing theories about them, and revising the concepts until the final theory offered the desired level of insight. Moreover, triangulation of literature and theory was utilised to create a link between what had previously been found and what the current study was addressing. This was done to establish the trueness and accuracy of the findings.

4.6.2 Transferability

This term refers to how the findings apply to other contexts (Shenton, 2004: 7). Shenton further argues that transferability can be achieved by a "thick description" of all the processes within the study to demonstrate that the research study's findings apply to

other contexts, which can mean similar situations, similar populations, and similar phenomena. The thick description this study achieved is presented in each chapter that serves as a baseline understanding of how this study's findings should be compared with those of others.

4.6.3 Dependability

Consistency is a component of dependability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018), which means a study could be replicated by other researchers and that the results will be trustworthy. To achieve dependability, the researcher provided thorough descriptions of all the procedures (research methodology and its application) that were employed in the study to allow the reader to assess the extent to which proper research practices were followed (Shenton, 2004).

4.6.4 Confirmability

Confirmability relates to the idea of objectivity, which means the interpretation of the findings should not be based on a researcher's viewpoints or preferences but must be based on participants' responses (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher therefore used an audio recorder to accurately capture the conversations during the interviews and group discussion. This allowed verbatim quotations of the respondents' comments when presenting the findings (Shenton, 2004). The audio-recorded responses were safely stored and may serve as evidence of the study's findings.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

The researcher had to secure approval from gatekeepers to conduct the study on the KwaDlangezwa campus of UNIZULU. First, the researcher had to apply for ethical approval from the university's ethical committee, which took more than a year (15 months) to approve, including all the proposal processes. The reasons for this delay were unknown as all the submission deadlines were met and this interrupted the timeline of the researcher as she anticipated to finish her master's degree (dissertation) in record time. Upon ethical approval, the researcher requested approval from the Registrar to conduct

this study and it was granted. The Registrar thus provided gatekeeper's approval, which was mandatory as a researcher is not allowed to commence with data collection without it. Finally, a letter of approval was received from the institution that authorised, among other things, the research project's sampling phase.

In addition, the researcher requested the presence of a professional psychologist from the Guidance and Counselling department during the data collection phase. The request was granted, and the psychologist agreed to be available to support any participant should the need arise. This measure aimed to address potential emotional challenges and uphold the participants' mental well-being while also enhancing the overall quality and ethical integrity of the study.

The rights to informed consent, voluntary participation, the ability to withdraw from the study at any time, confidentiality, and anonymity were all upheld as per the university's Code of Research Ethics. Hence, the participants willingly and voluntarily signed a form to confirm their consent to participate in the study and be audio-recorded before any interview session commenced.

A researcher must ensure that all the rights of the participants are respected and protected (Parveen & Showkat, 2017). In consideration of the Protection of Personal Information Act No. 4 of 2013 (POPIA), pseudonyms were used to mask the participants' identities, and any information that could have revealed particulars about their personal lives was excluded. Their identities also remained hidden on the transcripts and all the data were stored on a computer with a password. Moreover, the information collected for this study will be destroyed after five (5) years, as POPIA (section 14 on record retention) emphasises that records containing personal information should not be kept for longer than is required to fulfil the purpose for which they were collected.

For a study involving human subjects, informed permission is a moral and legal obligation and this requires a procedure where a participant is informed of all trial-related facts that are crucial before voluntarily confirming their willingness to take part in a particular study (Nijhawan, Janodia, Muddukrishna, Bhat, Bairy, Udupa, & Musmade, 2013). Before taking part in this study, individuals were given information regarding its nature and purposes.

The participants were made aware that notetaking and recording equipment would be used throughout the interview and their consent was obtained. The researcher assured them that all information acquired, audio recordings of group talks, and the generated data would be subject to stringent protection measures to ensure the confidentiality of the study. Each participant's written informed consent was obtained and they were assured of their present and future anonymity and the confidentiality of the information acquired. Also, it was made clear to the participants that the information discussed during the session was private and was not to be disclosed to anyone else, including their friends, families, and partners. All the participants permitted to partake in the study by signing the informed consent.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research methods that were used to achieve the aim and objectives of the study. It discussed the specific focus of the investigation and expounded the sampling methods and the procedures so that pertinent data could be collected and analysed, and explained how these processes were conducted. Additionally, the steps that were taken to ensure the reliability and credibility of the findings were clearly presented. The ethical considerations that were relevant to the research were also discussed. In the next chapter, the data are presented and analysed.

CHAPTER 5

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the methodology that was used to gather data for the study. The data were generated by conducting twenty-two (22) individual interviews with postgraduate students and one focus group discussion with seven (7) staff members. This chapter offers a detailed analysis of the interview data, which were thematically analysed and interpreted to address the following research questions:

- What factors contribute to the underreporting of GBV cases at the selected university? Q1
- What information do students have regarding the reporting procedures for GBV and what facilities are available for them to report GBV at the selected university? Q2
- What strategies can be recommended to encourage the reporting of GBV by victims at the selected university? Q3

Given the above research questions, the purpose of this study was to examine the underlying factors contributing to the underreporting of GBV in the UNIZULU under study, with the ultimate goal of recommending interventions that can effectively mitigate the problem of underreporting. Specifically, the study intended to establish potential solutions to overcome the underreporting of GBV at this South African HEI, while it was envisaged that other institutions might also consider the findings in their efforts to mitigate this problem.

5.2 Demographics of the Participants

Data reflecting the postgraduate students' gender and levels of academic qualifications are presented in Figure 5.1 (PivotChart). These data show that all four support units and levels of postgraduate qualifications at the selected university were sampled to avoid the risk of a too limited sample size. Thus, a comprehensive representation of viewpoints was achieved as diverse epistemological perspectives were elicited. The researcher was aware that individuals would interpret the phenomenon under study through the lens of their respective academic disciplines. Both females and males were involved with their ages ranging from 20 to 40 years. The researcher is aware of the study's focus on female students as victims of GBV. However, including both genders in the sample size was considered for:

- **Holistic understanding of underreporting:** while females are disproportionately affected by GBV (WHO, 2013a), males may also experience or witness GBV, and their perspectives can provide valuable insights into the broader societal, cultural, and institutional factors that contribute to underreporting of GBV.
- **Intersectional analysis:** including both genders allows for an intersectional understanding of the issue, revealing how gender norms and expectations influence reporting behaviours differently for males and females.
- **Identifying systematic barriers:** by analysing the experiences of both genders, systematic barriers to reporting can be identified and may be common across genders or unique to each. This can help in formulating comprehensive and inclusive solutions.

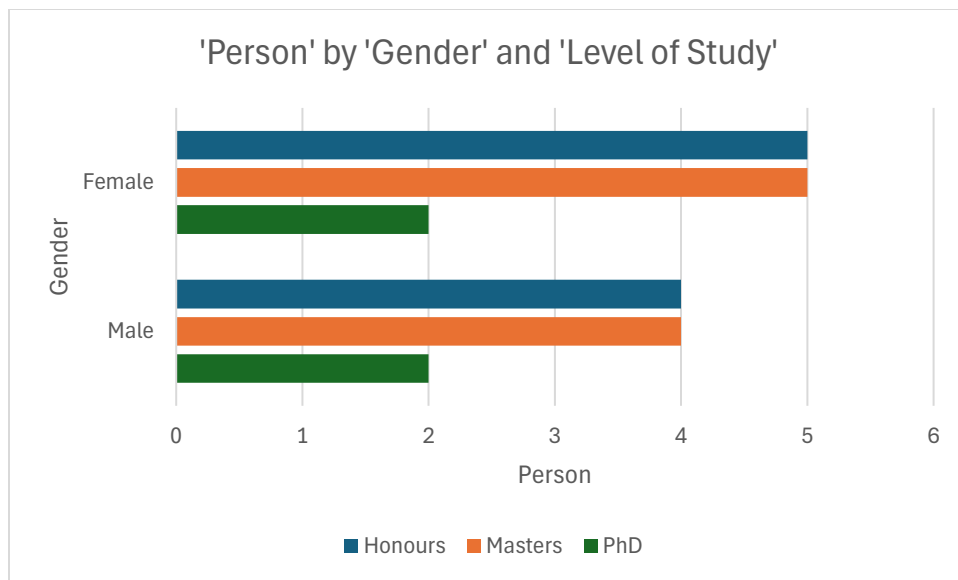


Figure 5.1: PivotChart of students' gender and levels of academic achievement

The data in Table 5.1 indicate a notable gender disparity among the support staff members, with a higher representation of male participants compared to their female counterparts. This disproportionality reflects the predominant male composition within the Protective Services Department (PSD) and Student Services Department (SSD). In the focus group, more males participated than females as five (5) of the seven (7) staff members were male. The males were more outspoken than the females and possibly dominated the conversation unconsciously. This means that the females might have felt less confident or less encouraged to share their views in a male-dominated environment.

Table 5.1: Gender representation of support staff members

Gender	Count of Gender
Male	5
Female	2
Grand Total	7

The conversations (interviews and focus group discussion) were conducted in both IsiZulu and English, translated into English, and presented verbatim in the latter language.

Limited editing of the transcribed conversations was done to retain the authenticity of the responses. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms are used in the text to maintain the anonymity of the participants. Students are referred to as S1 to S22 and staff from the Protective Service Department are referred to as PSD1 and PSD2 while staff from the Student Services Department are referred to as SSD1 to SSD5.

5.3 Findings

The findings of this study are discussed under the following main themes:

- Factors that contribute to the underreporting of GBV
- The impacts of GBV and underreporting on the student community
- Students' lack of awareness of the nature of GBV and support structures
- Recommendations

The main themes and various supporting subthemes are discussed, and each theme is presented and discussed separately. The participants' exact spoken words are utilised as evidence to support the themes that emerged from the data. The participants voiced their perspectives on factors contributing to the underreporting of GBV, its effects on victims and others, and students' awareness of reporting procedures and facilities. Additionally, the participants provided recommendations on how to address the issue of underreporting. Some participants shared their lived experiences and observations, while some shared what they had heard.

5.4 Theme 1: Factors that Contribute to the Underreporting of GBV

This section presents and interprets the findings under the theme 'contributory factors'. This theme addresses the first objective of the study which was to investigate the contributory factors of the underreporting of GBV cases. Intimidation emerged as a dominant theme in conjunction with the themes mentioned in the diagram below.

This diagram (Figure 5.2) summarises the rationale for underreporting and reveals intimidation as the dominating factor that contributed to the underreporting of GBV.



Figure 5.2: Factors that contribute to the underreporting of GBV

5.4.1 Intimidation

Finchilescu and Dugard (2021) and Thusi and Mlambo (2023) contend that there is a significant level of underreporting of GBV within South African universities, arguing that this results in a dearth of data on GBV in HEIs in this country. Similarly, Hilda and Pilot (2015) highlight the pervasive issue of underreporting in cases of sexual assault on a global scale. This reveals the widespread nature of underreporting, which impacts not only universities but society at large in both national and international contexts. The findings of this study support the assertion that underreporting is a prevalent issue at

South African universities and beyond, as evidenced by the following responses by both students and staff:

S2 (female): *“The underreporting is what happens throughout the border, even outside people are not reporting. Here at the university, we are the reflection of what is happening outside and here it is going to be hard for a kid to report because of [lack of] courage.”*

A support staff member shared a similar sentiment:

SSD1 (male): *“GBV is prevalent in all institutions of higher learning; in fact, in South Africa especially when people are grouped together like we are in this institution.”*

The participants also argued that GBV was not only underreported, but that people were prevented from reporting due to intimidation. Intimidation may happen in many ways, which can include threats either from the perpetrator or people close to the perpetrator. Moreover, even if victims wish to report a case, friends and family might influence them to withdraw the case due to fear of stigma and shame attached to GBV, lack of awareness of support structures, financial dependence, and patriarchy. The participants believed that, in any GBV context, there was intimidation, and if there was intimidation people would hide the truth of the abuse. This finding is supported by D’Agostino, Vakharia, Bawa, Sljivic, and Natoli (2019), who argue that intimidation plays a major role in contributing to the underreporting of GBV.

The concept of intimidation as a factor for underreporting also emerged predominantly in the focus group discussion:

SSD2 (male): *“Yes, any violation of human rights across the world unfortunately gets underreported because of intimidation. We get intimidated particularly when we report. For example, if you go and report the case of rape, the issue will be where you go and report. People are going to laugh at you and you will end up deciding not to continue with the case.”*

The participants collectively argued that the decision to report incidents of GBV hinged on the dynamics of the violator and the violated. The findings thus indicate that individuals may desire to report such incidences, yet they encounter obstacles in doing so, particularly when they are subjected to coercion or intimidation by powerful individuals who seek to suppress their voices during the reporting process.

The power dynamics between the violator and violated were further substantiated by a participant's following response:

SSD2 (male): *“There is a very sad story about violators. They have powerful positions and the violated, unfortunately, are very vulnerable. They are in a position where, in fact, they can’t even report because along the way of reporting they are silenced.”*

During the individual interviews, participants were asked about factors that deter victims from reporting incidents of GBV. Some responses were as follows:

S9 (male): *“It could be intimidation. It happens sometimes that a person is threatened...uhm...and the lack of dependence. They lack the sense of self to fight for themselves.”*

The above arguments confirm that cases of GBV are underreported as people are prevented from doing so due to intimidation. This highlights the notion that the vulnerable will always be exposed to danger and violence because they lack the power to protect themselves and fight back. According to Mbatha (2023), this occurs as a result of power relations where victims are socialised to suffer in silence because they are more vulnerable than the perpetrator and lack the power to fight for themselves. A member of the focus group stated:

SSD2 (male): *“I suppose I want to be very strong on this to say it is not underreporting; it is the fear that has been instilled in students because they don’t have people who can stand up and represent them.”*

Another factor that inhibits victims from reporting GBV is that their fear is exacerbated by the fact that the victim is economically dependent on the perpetrator who is usually the

breadwinner of the family or in the relationship. In such cases, familial pressure is often exerted on victims to refrain from reporting incidents of GBV, as the family's livelihood may be contingent upon the continued support of the perpetrator. Moir, Gwyther, Wilkins, and Boland (2022) state that financial dependence is a barrier that prevents victims from reporting GBV as they fear losing financial support if they report a case of abuse. This dynamic perpetuates the cycle of GBV.

Furthermore, intimidation often results in cases being withdrawn by the victim. The following comment substantiated this assertion:

SSD2 (male): *"I've got some cases where students will come in and say, 15 years ago this is what happened to me but I am not sure what to do and I will give them all the steps. But eventually, the family becomes powerful and says, 'If you report this, the breadwinner is not going to help us.'"*

It is a fact that certain cases of GBV are withdrawn from the police docket and the institutional Protective Services Departments (PSDs). This underscores the significant role intimidation plays in deterring individuals from reporting such incidents. In these circumstances, it has come to light that the victim's decision to drop the charges or withdraw the case is often influenced by family and friends. This aligns with the argument by Jennings (2013) that intimidation induces fear and causes victims to feel powerless, isolated, and demoralised; consequently, this leads to case withdrawal. Furthermore, according to Wentz and Keimig (2019), this compels victims to cooperate with authorities and withdraw cases, particularly in GBV instances. A participant from the focus group verified this finding by making the following statement:

PSD1 (male): *"We tend to experience a couple of withdrawal of cases. People report these cases and then immediately after maybe...perhaps after the families, perpetrator, and the victims have met after reporting and then they come back and decide that they withdraw these cases. That is very common. So....uhm... at times it goes to a point where these issues are withdrawn not from the police, but here at PSD and from the police [repetition]. A female student would come and say, 'As a family we decided that we should not carry on with this case. So, I am withdrawing the case'".*

Additionally, a support staff member stated:

SSD1 (male): *“The third thing is that families meet behind the scenes and convince each other that the student must withdraw the case”.*

The repetition of ‘the police’ in PSD1’s statement revealed the limitation faced by the institution when cases are withdrawn from their purview, signifying their consequent inability to take further action. Such circumstances serve to constrain their capacity to intervene effectively. This study argues that intimidation plays a pivotal role in victims’ refusal to report a case and sometimes even withdrawing already reported cases from the docket in the university.

5.4.2 Fearing the perpetrator

According to McGuire, Evans, and Kane (2021), a significant proportion of GBV victims refrain from reporting incidents due to the intimidation inflicted upon them by their perpetrators. Similarly, this study revealed that individuals often chose not to disclose instances of GBV out of concern for their safety, fearing potential retaliation from the perpetrators. Such apprehension is rooted in the profound fear that reporting the abuse may exacerbate the situation by leading to further harm or violence inflicted upon the victim. As a result, the dominance of power dynamics favouring perpetrators ultimately suppresses victims’ inclination to report incidents of GBV, thereby exacerbating the underreporting phenomenon. The following assertions were articulated by some students:

S6 (male): *“The victims fear that the perpetrator will come back again to abuse them after they are not arrested. So, I think that is the thing why people don’t see the need to report.”*

S20 (female): *“Maybe they fear that they will report, and their perpetrators come back to threaten them.”*

Other participants confirmed the above notions:

S7 (female): *“I think most time, most women are overpowered by fear. They fear that what if I report this person and when he comes back from jail, maybe he will do something to me.”*

S13 (female): *“Maybe fear is what discourages them; maybe, if they report, the abuse is going to get worse if the perpetrator finds out. Most of the time, the perpetrators intimidate victims or threaten them in some way.”*

S18 (female): *“Most of the victims fear threats from the perpetrator that’s why they end up not reporting; they just let it go and live with the trauma”.*

A considerable body of this study's findings supports earlier findings that most victims opt to endure their suffering silently and refrain from reporting their abuse due to the apprehension that disclosure may exacerbate the situation if the perpetrator becomes aware he (or she) will be exposed. Gonultas (2023) argues that victims may not report instances of abuse to avoid worsening the situation. Additionally, it emerged that perpetrators are not the sole intimidators of victims as it was argued that individuals close to the perpetrators also engaged in intimidation tactics through threats and social pressure. This assertion finds support in the research conducted by Cakal (2021) and Tordjman (2022), who argue that perpetrators are not the only intimidators as individuals close to perpetrators also engage in intimidation tactics. In support of this notion, some participants stated:

PSD2 (female): *“In some cases, you find that the victim is threatened by the friends of the perpetrator, not the perpetrator himself or herself. There are cases where we found that the victims were males, and you would find that the group of girls will threaten the male to come and withdraw the case”.*

SSD1 (male): *“I believe that peer pressure as well whereby the friends of the perpetrator would collude with his/her friends into saying, ‘Please go and plead with him or her to withdraw the case’”.*

SSD4 (female): *“Generally, GBV is underreported and to share my story that I have experienced. I at some point assisted someone in reporting that she was violated. And by assisting, I ended up being a victim of being harassed and then to say why did I not alert the guy that this person was saying that.”*

The experience shared by SSD4 highlights how secondary victimisation manifests and perpetuates fear. SSD4 recounted how assisting a GBV victim in reporting a violation led

to her own harassment, as she was blamed for not alerting the perpetrator about the victim's intentions. This response underscores how institutional and societal attitudes can shift blame away from perpetrators and place it on those seeking justice. Such actions serve to protect the violator while isolating and intimidating victims and their supporters, thereby reinforcing a culture of silence around GBV (Jennings, 2013).

This can also be associated with institutional failures, which refers to the inadequacy, ineffective structures, or policies designed to protect individuals and promote justice (Mahabeer, 2021). The experience shared by SSD4 suggests that institutions are failing to provide adequate protection to victims and their allies, leaving them vulnerable to threats, coercion, and retaliation. These institutional shortcomings enable perpetrators to exploit their positions of power, further silencing victims and perpetuating a climate of fear, powerlessness, and systemic inaction.

This study argues that institutional failures exacerbate intimidation by fostering an environment where victims and those who assist them are discouraged from reporting incidents of GBV. This aligns with research by Wentz and Keimig (2019), who argue that inadequate institutional responses amplify victims' fear of retaliation and stigmatisation, ultimately deterring them from seeking justice.

5.4.3 Fear of not being believed

The data affirmed that sexual violation devalues, degrades, and severely harms female student victims, especially if they are not believed. Disbelieving their confession obviously creates frustration and strain and ultimately results in poor academic achievement (Makhaye et al., 2023). Makhafola (2020) suggests that individuals often harbour concerns about the credibility of their claims, particularly in instances where no witnesses were present, thus their case might lack substantial evidence to affirm their allegations. This phenomenon is frequently observed in scenarios where the perpetrator holds a position of authority and dominance over the victim. In Makhafola's (2020) investigation, one participant admitted that she had refrained from reporting an incident of GBV because the alleged perpetrator occupied the role of Head of the Department, and this led the

participant to anticipate a lack of belief and support. To amplify these kinds of incidences, the participants of the current study mentioned the following:

S19 (female): *“Others are afraid to report because maybe the person has some power and is well known, even at PSD. So, no one will believe them anyway and the case won’t go anywhere.”*

S16 (female): *“I have an instance where I was sexually abused, and I told my friends at that time. And my friend at that time was a friend of the guy [perpetrator]. So, they were like, ‘We don’t believe you. Obviously, you’re not gonna report because even your friends don’t believe you, so, who’s gonna support you if you report?’”*

Makhaye, Mkhize, and Sibanyoni (2023) also found that when students try to report their ordeal to support staff, they are often confronted with a lack of caring and empathy and support staff often blame the victim for the incident. This suggests that the absence of trust and support from one's close friends may indeed deter individuals from reporting incidents of GBV.

5.4.4 Distrust in law enforcement agents and institutions’ support services

The findings indicate that a lack of trust in law enforcement and institutional bodies constitutes a primary factor that contributes to the underreporting of GBV. The rationale for advocating collaboration between law enforcement agencies and institutions stems from the recognition that institutions serve as microcosms that reflect broader societal dynamics. Consequently, issues prevalent within law enforcement contexts are often mirrored by institutional authorities. This perspective is articulated by Rikhosto (2022), who posits that universities serve as a mirror of society. This sentiment was also reflected by Participant S2 (female), who remarked,

“What happens in the university is informed by what is happening outside the university.”

The statement by S2 suggests that the dynamics within HEIs are shaped by broader societal, cultural, and political contexts as asserted by Rikhosto (2022). Meaning,

universities do not exist in isolation; they are influenced by the norms, values, and issues prevalent in the wider community. These external factors can affect how GBV is perceived, addressed, and responded to within the university setting.

The participants stated that the university frequently referred GBV cases to the SAPS, possibly due to their inadequacy in addressing such serious cases. A significant majority (25 of the 29 participants) asserted that the primary cause of underreporting was due to the failure of both law enforcement and institutional authorities to adequately protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. This sentiment was shared by both students and staff members, thus indicating a widespread recognition of the issue. Students and staff participants had the following to say:

S10 (male): *“I can say lack of trust. I think lack of trust is caused mostly by student politics, you see. Because if I have been violated by a person from SASCO, I know that SASCO has power. So, if I report my case, these people are well connected so my case could disappear and I end up not getting justice.”*

SSD2 (male): *“Some of the major reasons people do not report are exactly the spaces where we report because people do not get protected. And if you look at GBV in particular, generally it is done by well-known people in the community, and those well-known individuals are actually feared by the members of the community. And how much more if I had to go and report at the police station and the police also actually laugh at me? And you come back you are not safe and, in a nutshell, GBV, like any other violation of human rights, is because of the intimidation and the lack of law in our societies across the world.”*

The assertions made by S10 and SSD2 referred to a political perspective of crime as they argued that the law favoured those who are in power. This suggests inequality in legal protection, violating the rights of victims who are vulnerable and marginalised. This right is enshrined in Section 8 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa which guarantees equality and human dignity for all citizens and explicitly prohibits GBV in any form. It can therefore be argued that law enforcement violates the rights of GBV victims by failing to protect them and ensure that they receive justice. This lack of support has contributed to people feeling unsafe in any space (Yu, 2021). This sentiment resonates

with a growing body of literature that explores the challenges and barriers faced by victims when engaging with the CJS and institutions. Palmer and Kutateladze (2021) highlight that when institutions fail to respond adequately to GBV cases, it sends a message that the safety and well-being of survivors are not prioritised. The following statement by a participant reflected on the distrust people have in law enforcement in South Africa:

SSD2 (male): *“I am going to cite a case that unfortunately has nothing to do with the institution. But the case highlights who violates and who is violated. The issue has come to a stage where the person is saying, unfortunately, that South Africa is not safe. ‘I have been violated several times and the perpetrator is known and nothing is done about the perpetrator.’ In fact, even the bigger community is afraid of the perpetrator. If you look at that kind of scenario, you will also even see a situation where somebody says, ‘I think I rather die because there is no space where somebody can hear me. Even if I can be heard, if I come to counselling, I can be heard, but beyond counselling there is no safe space’.”*

The student participants referred the issue of distrust in the South African CJS:

S20 (female): *“I think South African law contributes to discouraging people from reporting because we never heard of any case solved in South Africa. So, how can they report if they haven’t seen anyone succeed in their case? Obviously, they will think reporting will be useless because the case won’t go anywhere.”*

S19 (female): *“Mina, here in this institution, report? I don’t think so, because I just feel like the justice system here in the institution has failed in a lot of things. So, I feel like it won’t do me any justice. I have seen a lot of things happening in front of me. So, I don’t feel like they would do me justice; rather, I would be just traumatising myself even more, going up and down attending cases, being unable to heal and finding peace with this... So, no.”*

The responses by participants S20 and S19 resonate with the rational choice theory as discussed in Chapter 3. This theory posits that individuals will engage in a cost-benefit analysis when they determine the validity of reporting a case of GBV. According to Wittek

(2013), if the perceived costs of reporting outweigh the expected benefits, individuals are less inclined to report incidents of GBV.

The responses that were cited align with an expanding body of literature that emphasises the significant role institutional responses to GBV cases play in shaping individuals' reporting decisions. Instances where previous cases were mishandled or resulted in unsatisfactory outcomes serve as deterrents for victims and survivors to disclose their experiences. Students disseminate information within the campus community, and if one experienced victimisation without receiving adequate assistance, he or she is likely to air their dissatisfaction and sense of betrayal, and this will dissuade others from seeking support from anyone in the future. Additionally, a lack of trust may stem from investigation procedures that frequently fail to result in justice being served (Steyn & Steyn, 2008). When individuals who were sexually victimised see that perpetrators face no consequences, it causes disappointment and frustration that erode their trust and potentially diminish the utilisation of other institutional support services (Makhaye et al., 2023). This is particularly evident in cases where the CJS demonstrated a historical pattern of failing to deliver justice, thus fostering a perception of futility regarding future attempts at seeking redress (Makhaye et al., 2023).

The historical context of institutional responses thus becomes instrumental in shaping victims' expectations and attitudes about reporting GBV. Essentially, victims do not report such cases because they do not trust that the university's support structures will assist them. This is a result of previous cases that were not handled appropriately. This contention is confirmed by the Chibango and Chibango (2022), who posit that negative encounters with the reporting process dissuade others from seeking assistance or pursuing justice. The participants reciprocally articulated the following viewpoints that validated Chibango and Chibango's (2022) findings:

S19 (female): *"I can say the institution is not taking GBV seriously. Last year there was a gay who was beaten by a straight guy and the case did not go anywhere. This gay was beaten very badly, and it was also posted on social media. People were tagging the scope but nothing happened...nothing happened. So, the seriousness of GBV in this institution is overlooked, you see."*

During the one-on-one interviews, I asked if students reported GBV. One participant stated:

S21 (male): *“According to me, no, I don’t think so because some of the students don’t have trust in the university, especially in how they will respond or handle their cases. They don’t believe the institution handles the cases of GBV effectively, and they don’t trust it. Even me, I don’t trust it.”*

Makhaye et al. (2023) refer to the perspective of respondents who experienced the shortcomings in the CJS, pointing out that its response has failed to provide a sense of closure and satisfaction for victims in many cases. Similarly, some participants in the current study questioned the authority of law enforcement agencies, arguing that they were notorious for failing people in terms of providing justice:

SSD2 (male): *“We want to know what happens at the point of reporting because we have seen several times that people are actually failed at the places where they report the cases. Where we report is actually the main cause.”*

S12 (male): *“They also worry about the designated reporting offices in terms of providing assistance. Yes, counselling is available but would they hold that person accountable? I think that is why they are not reporting; they get worried about whether accountability will happen or not.”*

S6 (male): *“Another thing that contributes to underreporting is the fear of reporting someone and they don’t take that issue seriously. At the end of the day, nothing is done to hold that person accountable, like they don’t get arrested.”*

There was a prevailing sentiment among the participants that confidence in the South African CJS had been significantly eroded, thus leading to the perception that reporting incidents of GBV would be futile and was a waste of time and energy due to the absence of favourable outcomes. This resonated with Yu’s (2021) argument that people perceive reporting to law enforcement as ineffective and time-consuming. The participants alluded to this viewpoint as follows:

S6 (male): *“I think the law in South Africa is flexible. You beat a person today and they get you arrested, only to find that tomorrow that person has been released. You come back to the same society where your victim is.”*

S16 (female): *“I think people have lost faith in the justice system”.*

The participants further affirmed that the institution (UNIZULU) failed to adequately address the issue of GBV, emphasising this point as follows:

S10 (male): *“Another thing is that the Disciplinary Committee (DC) is not addressing GBV cases effectively. Because...uhm...if I violated you, then I go to the DC. They will say I must pay a fine of R2 000, then that’s it. That means the person who has violated me will go on with his or her life after paying R2 000, then they go on to victimise other people because they know that they will just pay a fine.”*

In the one-on-one interviews, I asked the participants if they would report a case of GBV if they were ever victimised. The following responses were quite an eye-opener:

S1 (Female): *“I wouldn’t report, maybe I would confide to a family or someone I trust. I don’t think I will go through those formal routes of having to go to PSD or going to the institution therapist and going to the Disciplinary Committee (DC). Because already I am going through a lot. The chances are, there is this shame that comes with what has happened to me. Sometimes I don’t want people to know that this is what has happened to me. Because people will start thinking less of you because you were beaten by your boyfriend or something like that. So, I think I would prefer confiding to a friend, maybe a very close friend, someone I trust. Because in the end, emotions are battling with this thing inside. So, you have to speak to someone.”*

S2 (female): *“For me, I think it will depend on the severity of the GBV. I feel like if you broke my arm and leg, I would report. But if it just bruises, it will depend honestly. Even the time of going up and down in courts for a bruise, naaaah!!!! (no), wasting my own money because nobody gives you money or funds you to keep up with all these processes”.*

S7 (female): *“Of course, because I have this belief that I won’t allow a man to do anything to me”.*

The views expressed by the female students highlight critical factors contributing to the underreporting of GBV and its normalisation within certain contexts. The reluctance to report due to shame, stigma, or fear of judgment reflects the societal pressures that silence victims and perpetuate a culture of acceptance around GBV. This aligns with the findings of Moir et al. (2022), who argue that societal stigma and victim-blaming are significant barriers to reporting. The preference for confiding in trusted individuals rather than engaging in formal reporting systems suggests a lack of trust in institutional mechanisms or a perception that these systems may not adequately support survivors. This is consistent with Mbatha's (2023) assertion that institutional failures and a lack of victim-centered support structures discourage victims from utilising formal reporting channels in HEIs. Furthermore, the minimisation of certain forms of GBV, such as bruises, as "not severe enough" to warrant reporting, underscores a dangerous trend of trivialising abuse. This normalisation of violence can lead to its recurrence and the continued suffering of victims, as highlighted by Jennings (2013), who suggests that downplaying the severity of GBV contributes to its perpetuation. This mindset not only discourages victims from seeking justice but also emboldens perpetrators, as they may perceive their actions as inconsequential or unlikely to result in accountability, thereby perpetuating the circle of silence and violence.

In addition to the above responses, the male participant responded as follows:

S21 (male): *“Okay [laughing], If I was a victim of GBV, me, because I am a man, I don’t wanna lie [laughing], I don’t think I would report. As I said earlier, I don’t trust the institutional response in dealing with GBV cases. I don’t trust that it will respond effectively as they might do if a female reports a case. Because I am a man...no, no, I would rather die in silence than report.”*

This response was reflective of a common sentiment among some male participants who admitted that they would be hesitant to report incidents of GBV. They believed that the CJS prioritised female cases and neglected male cases. They also highlighted the point that a sense of stigma and shame was associated with being a male victim of GBV. The

person above preferred to suffer in silence rather than seek help or report an incident, possibly due to his concern about being perceived as weak or emasculated. This sentiment aligns with the rational choice theory, which emphasises that rational individuals will opt for an alternative that maximizes their satisfaction (Carling, 1992: 27). Another student participant confirmed this perspective as follows:

S16 (female): *“I feel like if it was a man who was abused, the PSD wouldn’t take it seriously because it is a man. They would be ‘uyindoda’, so you are the man, why didn’t you defend yourself?”*

These participants obviously overlooked the reality that men are also susceptible to GBV, which are acts that do not discriminate based on gender. Thusi and Mlambo (2023) argue that GBV against men is often disregarded in South Africa, with governmental efforts primarily focusing on women and children. This bias suggests a lack of support for male victims, leading them to feel neglected in this context.

However, despite widespread loss of faith in the CJS and a reportedly poor institutional response to GBV, a few participants maintained faith in the institution’s efforts to address the issue. When questioned about the seriousness and nature of GBV in the institution, they offered the following insights:

S16 (female): *“GBV is taken seriously here in the institution because there was a case when a couple was fighting. The guy hit his girlfriend. He was caught by a camera and was arrested.”*

S17 (male): *“They do take it seriously because I also have a friend, I think it was last year. He hit his girlfriend...ay zamkhalela!...and was arrested. I had to attend his case at Mthunzini police station until it was resolved.”*

The findings suggest that the underreporting of GBV is significantly influenced by a lack of trust in both law enforcement and institutional responses. This distrust stems from perceptions of inadequacy and failure of these systems to protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable. Participants expressed concerns about the connections between power dynamics, political influence, and the perceived biasness of law enforcement agencies and institutional bodies. They feared that reporting GBV incidents

might result in further victimisation or lack of effective action, and their views reflected a broad scepticism toward the CJS. Instances of mishandled cases and unsatisfactory outcomes reinforced this lack of trust and discouraged victims, and more pertinently potential victims, from seeking support or reporting future incidents. According to Brink, Mdaka, Matee, and Weppelman (2022), this is due to a lack of effective action by the CJS. Additionally, societal bias and stigma, particularly regarding male victims, further complicate reporting dynamics. Despite some instances where actions were reportedly taken against perpetrators, the overall erosion of confidence in the system seemed to persist, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to address GBV effectively.

5.4.5 Lack of awareness of the nature of GBV

The study found that the phenomenon of underreporting of GBV stemmed, among other factors, from a lack of awareness regarding GBV. If students and staff lack a clear understanding of GBV or the South African legislation that contests and prohibits it, they may continue to condone GBV behaviours without realising that they are affected by it. Given the diverse backgrounds from which individuals come, it is evident that perceptions vary. Cultural and societal conditioning shapes our understanding and responses to situations, which are subsequently reflected in institutional contexts. For example, regarding IPV, some individuals may have been taught that expressions of love involve submission and obedience and that any deviation from these norms warrant punishment. Conversely, others may perceive such actions as abusive, and these discrepancies arise from differing worldviews. Essentially, if individuals are not equipped with knowledge about GBV, they may normalise abusive behaviours. In line with this argument, the student participants stated the following:

S21 (male): *“Firstly, I would say lack of awareness because some students might be abused while they are not aware that they are being abused. In other words, not knowing the definition of GBV such as what is regarded as GBV and how it occurs. Some people stay in an abusive relationship believing that if their partners hit them or if he or she demands sex they should give in because sex forms part*

of the relationship. All these things might happen but because I don't have the knowledge, I would not report".

When asked whether students reported GBV, a student participant said:

S5 (female): *"I don't think so...I don't think so. I think they have a belief that when their partners hit them, it's because they love them. You find that they don't report because they don't see it as GBV. They feel like, my boyfriend is reprimanding me so that I can be right. You will find this person spending months and months staying in an abusive relationship and they hide this, even amongst their friends. She thinks it is a procedure that you need to go through when you are in a relationship."*

This phenomenon has been predominantly prevalent among first-year students due to their limited experience of relationships and their inherent inclination towards exploration during this phase as their sense of self is still inconstant (Kabaya, 2021). The following was said regarding this:

S5 (female): *"It is rare to find a first-year student in a relationship with other first-year students; it is always older men dating kids and they do as they please with them. You will find a kid submitting to everything that is said by this man because they lack knowledge, thinking it is the right thing to do."*

Some individuals may perceive their situation as insufficiently serious to warrant reporting abuse and many endure this, particularly when they are in intimate relationships. A participant stated:

S8 (female): *"If something happens, some people have this humanity of saying, 'I wouldn't report somebody for doing this to me due to the fact that they will be expelled and they will never get a chance to be at any university. So, let me just leave it'."*

Some participants held the belief that it was love that influenced non-reporting:

S14 (female): *"I think some are blinded by love because they think if they report it, that person won't love them as he used to. They even endure all the abuse just because they want that person to see that they really love them."*

S6 (male): *“Because of love, they keep on believing that the person will change. But in the end, it will end with the person hurting you more than he ever did before.”*

It is clear that lack of awareness about what constitutes GBV contributes to the underreporting of such crimes. This lack of knowledge has also been cited by Mbatha (2023), who argues that students lack knowledge about what constitutes sexual harassment. This lack of understanding leads to instances where individuals may unknowingly tolerate abusive behaviour in a relationship, believing it to be normal or even an expression of love. This is often due to cultural and societal conditioning and, as a result, these victims may not recognise the need to report such incidents. According to Rikhotso (2022), gendered attitudes, roles, and norms play a major role in silencing women as they are required to be submissive even in matters that violate their human rights. Many also believe that they can moderate their partners' behaviour with 'love'. This study thus affirms that some individuals may choose not to report abuse out of fear or because they believe that reporting the perpetrator will jeopardise their relationship, which highlights the significant influence of being in love and societal expectations on their decisions.

5.4.6 Fear of being tainted by stigma and shame

Randa and McGarry (2023) argue that societal stigma surrounding GBV constitutes a substantial impediment for GBV victims to disclose their experiences, thereby perpetuating their entrapment in abusive relationships. Their study uncovered widespread apprehension among individuals about being labelled as GBV victims, fearing that their vulnerability might be exploited to undermine them. This study found a similar result, as the responses provided by both students and staff participants corroborated this notion:

SSD1 (male): *“I would say what really makes students struggle with reporting is the fear of stigmatisation and some of them fear that everybody will know ‘my business’ and ‘I don’t want them to know my business’.”*

S2 (female): *“The chances are, there is this shame that comes with what has happened to me. Sometimes I don’t want people to know that this has happened to me because people will start thinking less of you because you were beaten by*

your boyfriend or something like that. So, I think I would prefer confiding in a friend, but not just any friend, a very close friend; someone I trust.”

S7 (female): *“What I can say is that people are living in this thing of thinking ‘what will people say?’. This is what hurts them the most because they think people will know what happened in their relationship.”*

S4 (male): *“Yes, people don’t report it. Maybe they are afraid that others will see that they are victims. It is not easy, especially for someone who has been raped. Everyone will know that this person is vulnerable and stuff. It’s courage and fear of being seen by people as a victim. It is not easy to be a victim, you see.”*

S3 (male): *“I think what makes people to not report is the fear. Fear comes in different ways. One may fear that people they are close to will know about their problem.”*

SSD1, S2, S7, S4, and S3 collectively expressed the perspective that individuals are impacted by the fear of, and actual societal stigma and shame. They agreed that victims tend to confide in friends rather than seek assistance from law enforcement agencies. This suggests the existence of a psychological phenomenon related to the *Abantu Bazothini* syndrome, which is the ‘What will people say?’ syndrome that influences students’ reluctance to report abusive incidents. This reluctance renders them more susceptible to continued abuse and perpetuates the cycle of victimisation.

This study uncovered the fact that males may lack the inclination to report abuse due to the need to preserve their image of masculinity. The responses thus confirm the contention in the literature (Chapter 2) that patriarchal norms significantly influence male behaviour as societal expectations of masculinity dictate a constant display of strength (George, 2020). The latter author avers that disclosing instances of harassment or abuse may subject men to ridicule and potentially compromise their sense of dignity, which prevents them from taking the first step after abuse, which is reporting it. This study affirmed the latter finding as the participants admitted that they would prefer keeping silent over seeking assistance due to the fear of being subjected to ridicule:

S3 (male): *“Since I am a man, if I get raped, I won’t report because they will laugh at me. The gents will know that I was laid by another guy, you see. This is what will make me want to kill myself because people will make me the laughing stock.”*

S12 (male): *“I think this thing differs in terms of gender. With girls it is easy to report but with gents, it is too deep with gents. Gents don’t report because even facilities like the police, if you come and report as a man, they will laugh at you. So, others feel like they will be ridiculed if they report. So, that is why they don’t report.”*

S15 (male): *“Some fear being ridiculed and being made a joke in society.”*

This study’s findings highlight that societal stigma surrounding GBV serves as a significant barrier for victims to come forward, thus they will be trapped in abusive situations. Fearing stigmatisation and shame, the participants admitted that they would rather tolerate exploitation of their vulnerability than disclose any GBV experiences. The fear of judgment may also encourage many to confide in friends rather than seeking formal help, which may perpetuate the cycle of victimisation.

Additionally, the societal view that IPV is not a crime contributes to underreporting, as affirmed by Mkhize (2015). Furthermore, the male participants were concerned about preserving their masculinity and avoiding ridicule, which is a factor that encourages the culture of silence over seeking assistance, thus further inhibiting reporting. These findings confirm the complex interplay of societal norms and gender dynamics that contribute to the underreporting of GBV.

5.4.7 Bound to the perpetrator by financial dependence

Institutions of higher learning have students who are both financially stable and financially needy. The financially needy students are the ones who lack resources to sustain themselves such as paying for their tuition and maintaining their lifestyle. Such students have a higher possibility of facing economic pressure to sustain themselves. Therefore, they may resort to dating older people for money, which is very common at tertiary level. In situations where there is an imbalance of power within the relationship, economic

dependency can increase the risk of experiencing GBV, including IPV. The argument suggests that poor regions are more susceptible to witnessing acts of violence, including homicides, severe assaults, and IPV, owing to the presence of financial disparity and limited economic development (Yesufu, 2022). In support of this factor, the student participants stated:

S12 (male): *“Mmm, they don’t report as far as I can say. You should remember that we are having older people. You will find a student in a relationship with an older person, people who are working in places like Richards Bay. Maybe when she gets beaten by this person, she won’t be able to report because maybe she is depending on him financially. You should remember that not every student is funded, and may be experiencing GBV from people who support them financially.”*

S15 (male): *“Some are financially dependent on the people who abuse them, so they fear losing financial support if they report GBV. So, they don’t have a choice.”*

The participants shared similar perspectives about financially unstable students, revealing that lack of financial stability exposes some individuals to different forms of violence. This resonates with the growing body of literature such as the study by Jasor (2020) that argues that poor students often find themselves at the mercy of their financially supportive partners because they lack the means to support themselves. Their support thus grants them authority and control over the dependent student.

5.4.8 The impact of patriarchy on GBV perceptions and behaviours

It was evident from the responses of the students that the patriarchal beliefs that were learned at home manifested in the university context. This observation aligns with the learning theory cited in Chapter 3 that people internalise patriarchal standards within their homes and subsequently practise them within the university context. For instance, women may learn a sense of helplessness while men learn to embody traditional notions of masculinity, and these learnings influence their willingness to report cases of GBV. This was evident in the following three responses of the student participants:

S2 (female): *“My take on this is, that even university is the reflection of the larger society and outside out there we have kids that grow up at home with domestic*

violence, only to find that the parent or a mother is not doing anything about it. Or they heard that the mother next door is being beaten and you see bruises, but the father never gets arrested. So, how can we expect people growing up in a society like that to be willing to come forward with such issues and report for themselves if it is something that we don't see outside?"

S12 (male): *"Some students experience this thing of GBV at a young age while they are at primary school level. But now, maybe the father is abusing the mother...maybe that matter is not reported, then that person is going to think, you know....if you are subjected to such instances in the future, there is no need to report them."*

S3 (male): *"It depends. When you grow up at home where, if something is happening, they say do not talk about it [vala umlomo] as nobody should know. So, you grow up with this thing. So, when I experience a problem similar to GBV, I grew up being told that I should not talk about those things. So, what will make me now report an incident like that?"*

The behaviours referred to above are explained by the culture of violence theory (Chapter 3), which posits that cultures and societies justify acts of violence. The theory suggests that societal attitudes towards GBV may be a significant factor that strengthens victims' reluctance to report victimisations. For instance, in cultures where physical violence is seen as a way of resolving conflict, women who are victims of domestic violence may be hesitant to report their experiences in fear of being blamed (George, 2020). This societal normalisation makes it difficult for victims of GBV to report their experiences because they feel that keeping silent is the right thing to do. For instance, a participant stated:

S6 (male): *"What contributes to GBV is that we are from different societies with some places believing that women must be punished whenever they do wrong. They see it as an act of love to hit a woman. To them, hitting a woman is all about discipline. So, when they come to university, they come with that perspective and apply it."*

Another participant stated:

S22 (male): *“As for me, relationship-wise I don’t think I would ever become a victim of GBV because I am a man, and the woman should know her place. I have that mentality, finish.”*

The above statement affirms some men’s perception of their masculinity as superior and their mentality to constrain a woman’s ability to assert authority within relationships. Such men tend to condition women to accept their subordinate roles. This, according to Mkhize (2015) and Hadi (2017), is entrenched in the system of patriarchy where men hold all the power and dominate women.

In summary, the findings suggest that intimidation is a dominant factor that contributes to the underreporting of GBV. This is accompanied by fear of the perpetrator or people close to the perpetrator, fear of not being believed, distrust in law enforcement and institutions’ ability to offer support, fear of the stigma and shame attached to GBV, lack of awareness of what GBV entails, financial dependence, and patriarchy. These are the factors that contribute to the underreporting of GBV in HEIs. The next section discusses the effects of underreporting on both victims and the institution in question.

5.5 Theme 2: The Effects of the Underreporting of GBV

Experiencing violence within educational communities significantly impacts victims’ lifelong outcomes in terms of education, health, and overall well-being, and these experiences are significantly related to enduring cognitive, emotional, and social challenges (Mofokeng et al., 2024). All 29 participants shared their perspectives concerning the effects of underreporting of GBV on both victims and the institution. It is evident in the responses of the participants that both victims and the institution suffer the consequences when GBV is not reported. Hence, this theme is categorised into two sub-themes, namely effects on victims, and effects on the institution.

5.5.1 Effects on victims

The underreporting of GBV has significant effects on victims and leads to a lack of access to complete care from the health system (Anyanwu, Uro-Chukwu, & Obuna, 2022). Makhaye and Ajani (2023) also argue that previously victimised individuals tend to suffer from long-lasting negative experiences that trail them for the rest of their lives. This study's findings affirm the significant ramifications of underreporting on the health and overall well-being of victims. It elucidates that refraining from reporting incidents of GBV yields enduring consequences, including diminished self-esteem, heightened risk of suicidal ideation, increased propensity towards substance abuse, adverse impacts on physical health such as weight loss, decreased academic proficiency, and lack of interpersonal trust. A support staff participant stated:

SSD1 (male): *"I would say it affects them in the long run if a person has something that bothers them that they haven't shared with anyone or reported in cases like GBV. It affects them in the future until they get to talk about it."*

One of the effects noted by participants is that people who were victimised previously have a greater chance of being constantly abused as they attract bad luck. To support this, a student participant said:

S5 (female): *"To some people, GBV becomes a chain. You will find that a person gets out of an abusive relationship and enters another abusive relationship. She ends up attracting the same people."*

5.5.1.1 Low self-esteem and suicide

GBV undermines a person's sense of self-worth and self-esteem. When participants were asked what the effects of underreporting are, they responded as follows:

S8 (female): *"Umm, what I know of it is that those people lose self-esteem of knowing their worth as a person and of knowing who they are. They would become like...eehh...mentally and physically disturbed and too emotional."*

S6 (male): *"You develop low self-esteem if you are the victim of GBV."*

The participants also believed that low self-esteem can lead to suicide. The following highlighted this point:

S5 (female): *“GBV also affects self-esteem. You feel worthless and as if you are never strong. So, that can cause the mental health of the student to deteriorate to the point where the student kills herself. So, suicide is possible.”*

S22 (male): *“Some people end up committing suicide and you only find out after they died that they had issues of being abused by their partners and so on.”*

The participants also averred that the victims of GBV usually withdraw from social activities due to the low self-esteem they develop after being victimised. The reasons are that some of them are labelled by community members or they avoid being mocked by the community (Makhaye & Ajani, 2023). Consequently, such individuals may exhibit defensive tendencies and, in extreme cases, resort to violent behaviour towards others. The statements provided by the participants support this assertion.

S12 (male): *“I think it has a tremendous effect if you can check...hmmm...like...that person will start having low self-esteem. Also, that person will be uncomfortable being around people and become violent towards people because they have unhealed wounds. Sometimes, a person intends to take revenge.”*

S10 (male): *“I think if a person has trauma, they end up taking it out on people who live with them like a roommate or whatever...”*

The following participants shares similar perspectives about individuals who suffer from low self-esteem:

S4 (male): *“The way you behave around people also gives the sign that something is eating you. The way you behave will change; socialising with people will be hard.*

S20 (female): *Not getting mental assistance is what drives most people to act strangely as some stay indoors, isolating themselves from people. Sometimes, they become emotional over small things.”*

These comments refer to an association between low self-esteem and self-blaming when individuals blame themselves for what happened. According to Makhaye and Ajani (2023), self-blame leads individuals to withdraw socially and to stay indoors to avoid human interaction, thereby heightening the risk of suicidal tendencies. Engaging in social isolation as a coping strategy is not conducive to well-being and recovery as it can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and depression, thereby complicating the process of healing and even resulting in suicide.

5.5.1.2 Substance abuse

The participants referred to a notable propensity for individuals subjected to GBV to resort to substance abuse as a means of alleviating stress. Such individuals often find themselves in a state of desperation and they seek avenues to mitigate their distress. Consequently, they turn to substance abuse as a coping strategy, utilising it to dull their pain or evade recollection of their victimisation. This is evident in the following responses:

S14 (female): *“Some people, if they don’t report or talk, end up giving themselves more to alcohol just to cope with the situation or what they are going through.”*

S15 (male): *“Most of the victims use drugs after they have been victimised as they believe that it is the only solution to cope and forget about their situation, forgetting that this thing will come back to haunt them when they are sober.”*

S15’s assertion highlights the reality that resorting to substances such as drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms for GBV constitutes a temporary resolution that fails to address the root issue, which is a notion that Moir, Gwyther, Wilkins, and Boland (2022) support. This reveals that neglecting to confront the psychological dimensions of the problem perpetuates its recurrence, as the underlying issues resurface once sobriety has been regained.

Some participants stated that people drown in substances because they are depressed:

S20 (female): *“Just because they never get mental assistance, they start using substance abuse such as alcohol and drugs, and some suffer from depression.”*

The findings thus affirm that the utilisation of substances as a coping mechanism for the consequences of GBV may exacerbate harm, potentially leading victims to transition into perpetrators. The altered mental state induced by substances can prompt individuals to exhibit erratic and violent behaviours towards others. Consequently, victims may unintentionally perpetrate violence themselves:

S15 (male): *“After using drugs as a coping mechanism, no one knows what I may do to other students. I might just eat drugs and become violent, hurt others in some way...or cause havoc because when you are on drugs you don’t care about anything. I might just drink more alcohol and make noise on my block because I am drunk and trying to forget my problems...I will disturb other students and if they try to stop me, I become violent towards them.”*

This study highlights a concerning trend where individuals who experience GBV may turn to substance abuse as a coping mechanism to alleviate the stress and trauma associated with their victimisation. The study further revealed that resorting to drugs and alcohol serves as a temporary escape from their distress, as it fails to address the root problem. The underreporting of GBV and lack of mental health support contribute to this cycle, as individuals may spiral deeper into substance abuse and depression without intervention, and this imposes risks not only on themselves, but also on others around them. This is because an altered mind induces erratic and violent behaviour (Shiva, Shukla, & Chandra, 2021).

5.5.1.3 Poor academic performance

Makhaye and Ajani (2023) argue that the repercussions of violence hinder students' academic progress as they may culminate in course failure and extended stay within the institution. The study corroborated this as the participants stated the following:

S11 (male): *“I think a person lives with the trauma of becoming a victim, and because of that they become affected mentally, and when they are affected mentally, they also fail in their studies.”*

Another participant shared a similar sentiment:

S5 (female): *“First, it is the academic performance of the student. The academic performance may cause the person to deregister, with some dropping out, while others end up murdered. So, it is possible that GBV can go to that extent.”*

S19 (female): *“Maybe they would also perform poorly academically.”*

According to Makhaye and Ajani (2023), such poor performance can be attributed to the recurrence of traumatic experiences, as victims often grapple with flashbacks of their victimisation, rendering even simple academic tasks insurmountable.

5.5.1.4 Lack of trust

Individuals who have experienced prior victimisation encounter difficulties in establishing trust, thereby impeding their ability to engage in meaningful relationships. Persistent self-blame further exacerbates their struggles. This highlights the enduring impact of unaddressed trauma on victims’ psychological and physical health, as articulated by some participants:

S19 (female): *“People deal with trauma in many different ways. If that person didn’t talk to anyone or find justice, there would always be that thing of saying, ‘I am afraid to do this and that...’ or ‘If something like this happens again, maybe I should stand back’. So, they live with the trauma. They will always blame themselves for what happened. Be afraid to fall in love or trust people.”*

S17 (male): *“I think victims live with the trauma, so if you were sexually harassed, you will even fear being around males. Even building a relationship will be hard because you already lost trust in men.”*

In essence, this study established that individuals who experienced GBV often struggle to establish trust due to prior victimisation experiences, and this hinders their ability to form meaningful relationships. Persistent self-blame compounds these difficulties as it has an enduring impact on the victim due to unaddressed trauma and both psychological and physical well-being. The participants were aware that untreated trauma leads to perpetual fear of engaging with others, and this affects their ability to trust and form sound

relationships. The failure to report GBV incidents not only perpetuates these struggles, but also results in emotional, psychological, and physical consequences for victims.

5.5.2 Effects on the Institution

According to the DHET (2020), institutions of higher learning must protect the rights of students and staff in their institutions. The underreporting of GBV cases conveys an unfavourable message about the institution. This phenomenon has the potential to detrimentally impact the institution's reputation, foster a culture conducive to violence, and distort GBV statistics.

5.5.2.1 Bad reputation

According to the findings, underreporting can damage the reputation of an institution, particularly if GBV incidents are later discovered or reported in the media. This can negatively impact the morale and well-being of the campus community and reduce enrolment and retention rates. Below are responses in support of this argument:

S21 (male): *“I could say it causes a bad image for the university. For instance, a person was abused and he/she committed suicide. So, now at other universities, this university will look bad. They will be like, “In that university students kill themselves.... don’t go there!” and all that stuff.”*

S18 (female): *“Some students may end up committing suicide or murder just because they did not report, which affects the institution's name.”*

S10 (male): *“People will be encrypted by wrong information such as in this or that institution this or that is happening. And if they are not taking this thing seriously, that institution is [deemed] bad. So, everyone will know this institution as a bad institution just like with this thing of parasites (amadabuka).”*

One of the staff participants in the focus group added to this by saying:

SSD3 (male): *“The effects that underreporting may have on our institutions is that it may create a bad perception, a very bad perception...a perception that the university does not care about the rights of others, especially the vulnerable groups*

such as women and the LGBTQI community. Because I believe those are the most affected, although some males do experience GBV, but I say it would create a perception. The students will take this conversation to social media and start talking about these things. We cannot control the narrative there, and the narrative will be, we do not care. Even all these things that we are talking about, the SSD and PSD have done a lot of work. It will be like all these offices are there for nothing and not doing anything.”

The above statement emphasises the critical significance of reporting cases of GBV to effectively combat such incidents within the institution. Failure to report these cases not only jeopardises the effort to tackle GBV, but also renders their diligent efforts futile. This phenomenon can be comprehended through a broader lens which reveals that the prevalence of one negative instance overshadows numerous positive actions.

Some participants argued that underreporting may affect the institution's pass rate which is not good for the image of the institution. A student participants stated:

S17 (male): *“If the victims did not report and they have resorted to drugs for coping, obviously, the attendance rate and academic performance will decrease, which may result in students taking longer to complete their courses than anticipated or dropping out of the institution. And that is bad for institutions because that means their pass rate will decrease, while the number of students dropping out also increases.”*

Another participant said:

S10 (male): *“Since students become affected in their academics, it is impossible for a person who has trauma to participate well in academic activities. So, that will decrease the number of students who perform well.”*

The failure to address GBV not only undermines institutional efforts to combat it, but also perpetuates a negative perception of the institution's commitment to safeguarding the rights of students. Thus, the importance of reporting such cases is crucial not only in the quest to address GBV, but also to uphold the institution's integrity and to foster a safer environment for all.

5.5.2.2 *Breeding a culture of violence*

A culture of violence manifests in the normalisation of behaviours that deviate from societal norms (WHO, 2009). This research affirms that unreported instances of GBV within academic institutions contribute to a lack of awareness regarding the true prevalence of such occurrences, consequently impeding institutional responses. This fosters an environment where GBV is both pervasive and disregarded, and potentially signals to potential perpetrators that their actions will go unpunished. When acts of GBV occur without repercussions, they become normalised. In the context, Protective Service Department staff and student participants offered the following comments:

PSD1 (male): *“If we look at prevention to report, it gives us an answer to the question you asked. If this thing [GBV] is prevented from being reported, then it continues. It gives the perpetrator a feeling or an idea that nothing will happen to them as they violate people and all that.”*

S1 (female): *“I think accountability...at the end of the day people who are abusing other people are not held accountable and this thing of accountability is really hard because GBV become normalised if people are not held accountable for their actions.”*

S5 (female): *“There would be gender differences whereby men treat women as objects that can be used and abused anyhow. It also sends the wrong message to the perpetrators that there are no consequences for abusers. Therefore, they feel free to harass anyone.”*

S5's response contains a gendered label, suggesting that only women are impacted by GBV. This assertion disregards the reality that males can also fall victim to GBV and does not challenge the prevailing assumption that only women are affected. GBV, by its nature, does not discriminate based on gender. Mbandlwa's (2020) study supports this assertion as it critiques the scholarly research narratives that consider only women as victims of GBV. Relatedly, Thusi and Mlambo (2023) contend that it is imperative to remember that men, regardless of their masculinity, can be mistreated by men or women, thus affirming that men also fall victim to GBV.

Some participants believed that underreported cases might perpetuate GBV:

S20 (female): *“I think the cases of GBV will be prevalent whereas the institution is not aware of those cases just because the students did not report them.”*

S6 (male): *“If GBV is not reported, it becomes prevalent and escalates to something big in such a way that people hurt or kill each other within the institution. Thus, it could have been prevented if it had been reported on time. As a result, GBV will increase instead of decrease.”*

Failure to report cases of GBV obscures the true prevalence of this scourge, hinders institutional responses, and fosters an environment where such violence is pervasive and disregarded. This potentially signals to perpetrators that their actions will go unpunished and thus emphasises the importance of effectively deterring GBV cases to foster a safe environment that is free from violence.

5.5.2.3 Inaccurate data

According to von Meullen (2021), the absence of formal statistics on GBV at HEIs worsens the situation as it hides the true picture of GBV. Relatedly, the study participants stated the following:

S6 (male): *“If they don’t report [GBV], the statistics remain the same while people become more prone to abuse.”*

S12 (male): *“I think it affects the institution because, at the end of the day, they don’t get the exact number of GBV cases that occurred among students.”*

Another participant contended that underreporting could distort statistics concerning GBV, thereby failing to accurately project the extent of the issue. The student participant stated:

S8 (female): *“I wouldn’t really know. But one thing I know for sure, if students do not report, the PSD will claim that there are no GBV cases happening within the university. So, their stats will be wrong because we are aware that there are cases that are taking place on campus.”*

However, some participants expressed the view that the absence of reporting might be viewed favourably by the institution, as it could give the impression that the situation is well managed. One participant articulated this perspective by sharing the following insights:

S9 (female): *“Phela, for them it's a good thing...[laughing]. An institution always has to keep the good name. So, it is a win for them...because clearly things are well. They think they are controlling the system very well...that people are behaving well and that they are not inflicting pain on other people. So, they think that everything is under control if there is nothing that is reported.”*

The above participant's response contains elements of sarcasm as indicated by the laughter. This suggests a mocking tone in which the lack of attempts to foster GBV reporting was ridiculed by this participant.

Another participant shared a similar sentiment as the one shared by S9:

S13 (female): *“Does it affect the institution? I don't think it does. If it is not reported that means there won't be any record of abuse in this institution.”*

In summary, the data suggest that a significant correlation exists among the three identified effects, namely bad reputation, culture of violence, and inaccurate data to reflect the true prevalence of GBV. Underreporting of GBV undeniably hides the true prevalence of GBV in any tertiary institution. This concealment fosters the belief that GBV is not a prevalent issue and this discourages proactive intervention. Consequently, the absence of intervention contributes to the establishment of a culture wherein GBV is normalised. Once normalised, GBV poses a substantial threat to the institution's reputation, particularly when instances are eventually disclosed or gain traction on social media platforms.

5.6 Theme 3: Low level of awareness of reporting facilities and procedures

Objective two of this study aimed to assess the level of students' awareness regarding GBV reporting facilities and procedures. The findings indicate a concerning lack of

awareness among the students regarding the reporting procedures. Of the 22 student participants, 21 were found to be unaware of the reporting procedures at the University of Zululand, with one participant expressing uncertainty. Among these 21 participants, 16 indicated that they were only familiar with the Protective Services Department (PSD) as the reporting facility within the institution. This suggests that while the majority of participants knew where to report instances of GBV, they lacked awareness of the specific procedures to follow should they become victims. The following responses highlight the participants' level of awareness:

S12 (male): *“No....no....no, I am not aware, I would be lying. So, you see, if I was abused, I wouldn’t know where to report it. That is why I was saying the university is not making enough effort in giving a full roadmap on where to.... how to go about. The only thing I know is that I can report at PSD. Information like this should be known to every student registered in this institution...where to go in instances when a person experiences GBV.”*

S8 (female): *“They don’t have, because if we knew, then if you have any case you report to PSD. But about the procedures, we were never told.”*

S13 (female): *“No, actually no, that is something that the university never addressed. And that can be a contributing factor because the university doesn’t say where can you go if you experience abuse. Maybe some people do want to report, but where do they go?”*

These narratives indicate that lack of awareness about reporting procedures is a contributory factor to the underreporting of GBV. Reporting channels are the formal mechanisms through which incidents of GBV can be reported to authorities or support services (Cranney, 2016). However, if students and staff are not aware of these channels, they may not know where to go for help or may not feel comfortable reporting incidents of GBV. Hence, a lack of knowledge about reporting procedures acts as a barrier to reporting, contributing to underreporting. It can be argued that the rationale for recognising PSD as a reporting facility emanates from this unit’s well-known major role of maintaining safety within the institution. In support of this assumption, a participant said:

S6 (male): *“The first one is PSD because they are the ones who are responsible for everything that concerns safety here in the institution. Also, the securities, those guiding the residences, they will be able to assist. Students can report to them, and they will pass the issue to the PSD. PSD should be able to arrive 10 minutes after the incident and the students' cards have the PSD number. So, students can use that number to report whenever they encounter problems.”*

This narrative avers that some of the participants believed in the efficacy of the PSD service as they deemed it ideal for reporting any crime within the institution, including GBV.

As cited in the literature, some institutions lack policies that outline the reporting channels for survivors of GBV, which is a barrier to reporting (DHET, 2020). In both the one-on-one interviews and the focus group discussion, the participants were asked about implemented policies on GBV within the institution. It was revealed that the participants were not aware of any existing policy on GBV. Of the 22 student participants, 19 indicated that they were not aware of any policy, while 3 were not sure whether it existed or not. The following were responses when asked if they knew about a GBV policy:

S8 (female): *“Hay, no, I would be lying. Never ever heard of any policies that the university has. Like I told you before, if ever they had, they would have shared it. If they never advertised themselves, that this is what we have...if they have not broadcasted themselves that there are policies, that means they have nothing.”*

S11 (male): *“I don't know any. Maybe they have them, it's just that we don't know them. This is supposed to be things that are put upfront so that people know that if they do something, there are consequences.”*

S12 (male): *“As a scholar, I always think universities should have such [policies]. But I am not sure. I have never observed or heard of it.”*

These assertions confirm the argument in the DHET (2020) framework that many institutions are not in line with its requirements, which places strong emphasis on the need for policies that have clear reporting channels and procedures. This also highlights the absence of a clear policy on GBV that needs to delineate the consequences for

perpetrators. If not, acts of GBV will not be curbed as perpetrators will continue their harmful actions without fearing any repercussions. The absence of institutional policies indicates a lack of clear pathways for GBV survivors to seek support and report incidents. These policies serve as an essential framework to direct survivors towards appropriate channels and procedures for the reporting GBV incidents. Without established policies, the prevalence of GBV is likely to persist, and underreporting will be widespread due to survivors' uncertainty about where to seek assistance and report incidents.

While students expressed unawareness regarding a GBV policy, a staff member affirmed the existence of such a policy within the institution:

SSD1 (male): *“We do have a sexual harassment and GBV policy that is being reviewed at the moment because you know, things evolve in this world. So, as things evolve, we must review the policies that we have. But we have a policy in place and it is enforced at this university.”*

This study revealed a significant lack of awareness among students about the reporting procedures for incidents of GBV in this institution. This lack of knowledge acts as a barrier to reporting and undeniably contributes to the underreporting of GBV.

5.7 Theme 4: Participants’ Recommendations

The participants indicated that they were aware of efforts by the institution to fight or raise awareness about GBV. For instance, they referred to units such as Pastoral Care, the Protective Services Department, the Campus Clinic, and counselling services that are available to support the university community, particularly students. However, the participants acknowledged that there were gaps in these measures and proposed the following recommendations to enhance the reporting rate on GBV.

SSD4 (female): *“We as the institution, as practitioners of the students. We do try to reach students. We try to have an open-door policy for students, we do awareness campaigns, and we do one-on-one [counselling] to really assure them that whatever they want to share with us is going to be confidential and then we*

will hold their hands. So, the institution is really trying to reach students so that they can be aware that these things happening, and they don't have to keep quiet about it. They just have to report the matter."

SSD5 (male): *"I want to believe that the institution is in the right direction in terms of campaigning against GBV. The fact that we now have a pastoral care unit is good, as it is solely responsible for taking care of GBV cases, especially even after the case has been reported and dealt with by the police. They also engage the students in terms of recharging the spiritual person in a student. Because you may engage a student in terms of assisting them legally, there is also this person who needs to be revived."*

These assertions demonstrate that the institution has made some meaningful strides towards addressing GBV in recent years as asserted by Gwebu (2021). However, their efforts have been rendered futile because of the underreporting of GBV incidents.

5.7.1 Awareness campaigns

Most participants recommended launching awareness campaigns to address the issue of GBV and underreporting at the university. Campaigns are a powerful tool to raise awareness and change attitudes and behaviours towards GBV. Makhaye and Ajani (2023) contend that awareness campaigns play a crucial role in combating underreporting as they enhance students' knowledge about the reporting mechanisms when they experience victimisation. By raising awareness, students will remain informed about how and where to report incidents of GBV, which can lead to higher reporting rates. Some participants elaborated on the importance of creating awareness of the issue of GBV:

S12 (male): *"GBV is the major thing that is dominating across the globe or in all institutions of higher learning and we are experiencing it in our local communities. I think the university should make an effort to expose every student to awareness programs. Educate students about GBV! I think through awareness and education they can always reach a point of enriching several students."*

S21 (male): *"Awareness is very important because many people lack information on what GBV really is. So, now they should be taught how it happens, what it is,*

and where you can report it if it has happened. They must make sure once a month there is an event that aims to create awareness about GBV. They should also emphasise the importance of being aware of GBV and its seriousness.”

S9 (female): *“Create more programs to educate us about these things. Those programs that they do for fun and stuff should be substituted by things like this...awareness about GBV! Eh...if you have a problem, be vocal about it. It shouldn’t be a thing that is done once a year, but it should be a tradition that once a month it is done just to remind people that they are in a safe space. It should be normalised in such a way that people start believing that...mmm...it is possible, you know, so let me just go and report [the incident].”*

S5 (female): *“The institution needs to make students aware of GBV because they don’t recognise GBV. One may think my boyfriend loves me if he beats me. We need to be addressed constantly.”*

SSD3 (male): *“I think there should be an awareness about GBV. As a health promotor, I engage students on issues pertaining to their health, and what I often get from the students is their understanding. Because they come from different backgrounds, their understanding of sexual violation is different. Someone coming from an urbanized area may not understand certain things that are done in rural areas and see them as sexual assault or sexual harassment.”*

These supporting assertions indicate that the institution does engage in awareness campaigns on GBV; however, they are not doing it consistently and frequently. This suggests that awareness campaigns on GBV should be a norm within the institution so that everyone will recognise its seriousness. There is also a lack of awareness about what constitutes GBV and that underreporting should be addressed, as indicated by Mbatha (2023). Therefore, awareness campaigns should be part of educational programmes to inform both students and staff about this issue, and this will diminish the prevalence of underreported cases.

Some participants argued that all events that are organised by the institution should be affiliated with GBV information, especially entertainment events that have high attendance rates. One participant stated:

S18 (female): *“To all the events they host, not specifically for GBV awareness, they should come and educate people about GBV. They should start at an early stage, maybe during orientation. This should be done at all events, even at bashes where you are drunk.... because that is where students attend the most. Even at exam prayers, because attendance of entertainment events is much better rather than calling them specifically for GBV awareness...they won’t come. This should be done more frequently so that people don’t forget about it.”*

The participants agreed that awareness campaigns should be directed at both students and staff as staff members are also involved in the perpetration and victimisation of acts associated with GBV, as was referred to earlier. In that incident, it was alleged that the lecturer involved was a coach of the Cheer Leading sport and that he used his position as to assert his power and sexually harass students. This is an example of how those in power may use it to abuse others (Makhafola, 2020). This incident also highlights the significance of having staff members who conduct GBV awareness campaigns, as was urged by a participant:

SSD2 (male): *“I think during the awareness campaigns that is where we need to talk to both students and staff because I am telling you that the victimisation targets the vulnerable. Remember, students will always be vulnerable. And I want to emphasise that SSD is actually standing for the vulnerable.”*

SSD2’s statement suggests that staff members are sometimes complicit in the perpetuation and perpetration of GBV. Yesufu (2022) proposes the implementation of human rights education among the general population, and such an educational initiative could play a pivotal role in GBV awareness campaigns. By ensuring the participation of all staff members on campus, such a campaign can effectively communicate the message that the violation of rights or the law carries consequences and that such behaviour will not be condoned.

This study further suggests the removal of gender in the facilitation of awareness campaigns that address GBV. It advocates for the prioritisation of fair equity and the acknowledgement that GBV can affect individuals irrespective of their gender. The following articulation substantiates this standpoint:

S11 (male): *“On their GBV awareness, they should make it clear that GBV can happen in both genders, males and females. They must not cater for women only.”*

S5 (female): *“The institution does events on many fronts. So, there should be events that empower both genders. For example, they would say this time we are speaking to females, and next time we are speaking to males. We need to be empowered. Women need to stand up for themselves.”*

S18 (female): *“That means the institution still has more to do pertaining GBV. They need more awareness and this awareness should not be one-sided as it should not focus on women only as victims but they should emphasise that GBV happens on both sides. Even if you are a man, you can still be victimised, even you are old, young, at school, or working...anyone can be affected by GBV. So, yeah...I think there is a lot to do.”*

Chibango and Chibango (2022) suggest that local authorities and social institutions should promote awareness campaigns to report sexual abuse. Similarly, this study suggests that the awareness campaigns should include all stakeholders dealing with GBV, so that they may also become orientated on how to deal with such cases.

S8 (female): *“I think we should have the awareness that includes securities or anyone who is dealing with GBV within the institution to have the campaign”.*

The participants essentially argued that the institution was not doing enough to raise awareness about GBV; instead, it seemed to focus on ineffective and invisible campaigns. The participants' suggestions included informing students about GBV electronically so that this information would be available even on social media, as was one participant's contention:

S2 (female): *“As much as the Pastoral Care unit has an office or has been engineered to deal with GBV, I feel like when it comes to campaigning, they are lacking a lot. I am not going to lie, there has been an invitation to attend a meeting in the Bhekuzulu Hall (BZ). But to appeal to students, you need to start campaigning, have pamphlets, go around, preach. I feel like they are lacking there. They don’t have campaigns, but they do have an office. They are not visible to students.”*

PSD1 (male): *“Yearly we do orientation in this institution as students come in. But because it is something that happens maybe at the beginning of the year and then we forget about it. It is not effective. Maybe we should look at introducing a trial of campaigns which will start with an orientation and then from there, it’s continuous pop-ups in the emails of students. In everything they do, they should be faced with this information which talks about these things.”*

PSD1 argued that the institution was using an outdated strategy to campaign by using flyers. The participant suggested electronic media as a tool to campaign against GBV as follows:

PSD1 (male): *“When we do campaigns, some of the things we do, we talk about flyers. Flyers are no longer effective these days but students use electronic media. So that is where we need to go, that is where they are hiding most of the time. Students walk up and down here, carrying their phones, and looking at their phones. This is where we need to go in and push in this information of what they need to know, what they can do, and where they should report these things.”*

This argument indicates that there is still more to be done by the institution to embark on the journey of addressing GBV. Kabaya (2021) and Mutinta (2022) suggest that universities should engage in awareness campaigns aimed at fostering gender equality. However, in this instance, such campaigns should primarily focus on educating individuals about GBV and offering comprehensive guidance on reporting procedures and available support services. This assertion was supported by the participants as follows:

S1 (female): *“I think people should be aware of the Disciplinary Committee (DC).”*

S20 (female): *“Maybe the institution should always remind us about GBV in terms of reporting, where to go, and all of that. They should always make us aware of these things.”*

S2 (female): *“I feel like if the processes were clear from the get-go, we wouldn’t have a problem like this. People need to be aware of the processes. They should know that there are processes for these things”.*

Educating students and staff about policies and ensuring their visibility should be integral components of awareness campaigns. This sentiment was reinforced by a participant who stated:

S10 (male): *“The policies they have should be visible to everyone because even now we don’t know them, but we stay here on campus and we have been here for a long time. On those policies, they should highlight castigation or punishment mostly so that the perpetrators could see them.”*

Both students and staff propagated awareness campaigns to make the university community feel confident about reporting GBV. However, it is noted that awareness alone is not enough, as justice is also needed to create confidence. Mishandled cases give the impression that reporting in the future will yield similar results (Makhaye et al., 2023). Hence, students need to be assured that their safety is prioritised. A participant articulated this point as follows:

SSD3 (male): *“So, creating that awareness that if you experience this and if you are going to report GBV...these are the things that you need...this is how you can prove your case....and when things happen to you...this is what we need going forward in terms of proving your case. Create that confidence that...yes, you do report cases. Yes, cases get resolved. Yes, perpetrators are getting the punishment that they deserve.”*

While awareness campaigns are essential, they must evolve to address current challenges effectively. This study therefore proposes that modern, inclusive, and informative campaigns, coupled with transparent justice mechanisms, are vital in creating a safer environment and empowering individuals to report GBV.

5.7.2 Ensuring justice for GBV victims

It was evident that on-campus security measures primarily catered for on-campus students only as the presence of security cameras, personnel, and a designated reporting system (PSD) are aimed at safeguarding students against criminal activities. In contrast, off-campus students lack similar protection and can only rely on campus security measures when they are within the premises. According to Hodgkinson, Andresen, and Saville (2018), a lack of security measures significantly contributes to crime by creating opportunities for criminal activities to thrive. This suggests a higher rate of crime off-campus where such protective measures are absent, leading to the risk of the underreporting of GBV incidents among off-campus students. The participants suggested that the institution should prioritise extending protection measures to students residing outside university or in private accommodation (off-campus students). One participant expressed this as follows:

S8 (female): *“They need to take measures in terms of accommodating both on-campus and off-campus students in terms of protection. And what I have seen, GBV is happening to off-campus students compared to on-campus students because on-campus students have securities and cameras. Those who are off campus, nobody is taking care of them, they don’t know anything. Let’s say here my boyfriend hit and almost killed me, then I will be helped by people in the community because there is no one else there to protect me. And it is too far to go on campus to report the incident. I would rather stay and speak to my friend, and it ends there. So, I really think that the university really owes students a lot. They really need to do a lot for students. Not just cater for those that stay on campus, but also for off-campus students.”*

The study revealed that providing justice for any case reported can encourage individuals to report as the students will have confidence in the institutional responses. This notion was supported by the participants:

SSD3 (male): *“What we could do is that, if there are cases that do come, they must be resolved successfully. So that students start to have so much more confidence*

in the system and that they don't fear reporting. Because something that may discourage some students is that they may report, but nothing will be done. I will report, but I will not have proof."

S12 (male): *"I think the institution has to give a clear roadmap that says like how do they intend to deal with GBV and what the consequences are. I think that can encourage individuals to report because others have this thing of saying, 'I will report, then what?' You see? You find that some people are victimised by people who are in top positions like politicians. I may report, but still only to find that they are not held accountable."*

S13 (female): *"It is really hard to convince victims to come because most of them are really scared to report. So, other than bringing awareness, they should also hold perpetrators accountable."*

These statements infer that holding perpetrators accountable could be a game-changer for institutions in addressing and encouraging students and survivors to report GBV. Relatedly, Wafula (2018) believes that accountability is a game-changer in fighting GBV. This suggests that providing justice can bring back the confidence people have lost in the justice system. In support of this argument, the participants stated the following

S19 (female): *"Honestly, I don't know but I feel like they should do something. At least provide justice, maybe that can set an example and others will be encouraged to come forward."*

S7 (female): *"They should hold perpetrators accountable and serve justice. If they do that, others will learn that behaviour and be encouraged to report. They will report only if they have seen that and that they were helped."*

This study discovered that addressing GBV effectively can serve as a deterrent to potential offenders by signalling that there are tangible consequences for violating the rights of others. Moreover, it can encourage survivors to come forward to relate their experiences. Nightingale (2022) supports this view, affirming that holding perpetrators responsible can promote the reporting of GBV incidents on institutions' campuses,

thereby fostering a culture of transparency and accountability within educational institutions.

The findings further exposed the necessity of having a proximate police station to address emergencies and severe cases that are beyond the capacity of the institution. The presence of a police facility close to campus will serve as a deterrent against criminal activities, as potential perpetrators will be aware of the potential repercussions. This assertion was substantiated by the participants:

S6 (male): *“I think a nearby police station will help. Because a person who has a serious problem like violence or GBV only gets help from the Skhawini or Mthunzini police stations, that are very far from here. I think it is 15 km away from here. The police should be at least at the main gate so that people with serious cases can be assisted easily. It can only take them five minutes to come to the scene. So, that can discourage people from perpetrating GBV because they will know that the police are here, and they can be arrested quickly.”*

Ensuring justice for victims of GBV will not only foster confidence in institutional responses but will also serve as a deterrent to would-be perpetrators. By extending its protection measures and collaboration with the SAPS, the institution will ensure accountability and facilitate access to emergency services. This will create a culture of zero tolerance for GBV while reporting any such case can be normalised, thus ultimately fostering a safer and more supportive environment for all students.

5.7.3 Creating a safe space for victims

According to Hariyanto and Shalihah (2023), maintaining the visibility of victims that perpetrators may target compromises the efficacy of justice for victims. This phenomenon is exemplified by instances where victims hesitate to report due to fear of retaliation by perpetrators (Adams et al., 2013). The argument posits that the pursuit of justice alone is insufficient if victims remain exposed to potential harm from their perpetrators. Thus, this study proposes a safe space for the victims of GBV to ensure that they are not repeatedly victimised, even in their homes. The participants argued that this would protect victims and allow them to pursue their academic endeavours:

SSD2 (male): *“We might at a later stage need a safe space where we can send the victims because there are victims who are violated in their own homes, and they cannot go back. The question is, can we get a safe distant shelter for these individuals so that they can recover and continue with their education?”*

SSD2 highlights that the institution currently provides various support services for GBV victims, including pastoral care units, clinics, and guidance and counselling services. However, there is a pressing need to establish a shelter specifically for victims. For SSD2, such a facility would offer a safe and secure environment for survivors, addressing an essential gap in the institution's support system and ensuring holistic care for those affected by GBV.

The participant went on to propose that the space for victims be anonymised to maximise protection and full support for victims:

SSD2 (male): *“So, I am looking at something that will add to the safe shelter and anonymity place for the victims because I really want to take a position of the victims. Say I were to report and still be visible, what will happen to me? I think I really want to emphasise the fact that the additional factor that needs to be addressed is to find a safe space when all other activities continue because it is not the perpetrator, but it is the victim that is affected.”*

It seems undeniable that justice for victims is useless if they are still going to be visible to their perpetrators. The suggestion for a safe space where victims can shelter seems relevant, as they need to be shield from further harm by separating them from their perpetrators, especially when their own homes have become sites of abuse. This will also allow victims to continue their academic pursuits without fear. By prioritising the well-being and safety of victims, the institution can ensure that survivors of GBV have the necessary resources to recover and thrive beyond their traumatic experiences.

5.7.4 Establishing an anonymous reporting service

An anonymous reporting service can effectively decrease the prevalence of unreported cases, as individuals tend to be more forthcoming when their actions are not observed.

Anonymity can serve as a catalyst for individuals to disclose information they might otherwise withhold due to apprehension or privacy concerns (Faulkner, 2022). This highlights the potential of anonymous online confessionals in inspiring individuals to share their experiences of victimisation. By ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, such platforms establish a secure environment for individuals to divulge information, thereby fostering a culture of openness in reporting and potentially mitigating the occurrence of unreported cases of GBV (Gøtzsche, 2022).

This approach will enable individuals to confess their traumatic experiences, accessing support mechanisms, and alleviating their psychological distress. Keeping silent about victimisation can have profound repercussions, so reporting a case anonymously can initiate the healing process and enable individuals to resume their normal lives. It is essential to recognise that this alternative can be used by people who do not want to go public about their victimisation. In support of this notion, the participants offered the following:

S20 (female): *“Maybe the institution should create space for victims, maybe a social media page where the victims can anonymously report and speak freely about whatever is bothering them. In that case, their identities won’t be revealed.”*

S16 (female): *“There is this thing called ‘Confession’ on Instagram where you anonymously confess. I feel like the institution can do a page like that where they offer support anonymously, you know. If people are uncomfortable about going public about it, they can anonymously report [an incident].”*

S15 (male): *“Sharing stories anonymously can motivate others to come forth with their victimisation. They would be like, ‘Eish, I also have similar problem!’ Then other victims get a chance to also write about their stories. In that way they get this thing off and they heal.”*

S22 (male): *“I think they should strengthen their campaigns; they should provide more campaigns. There should be a way where you can report anonymously without compromising your identity. And if it is serious, maybe they can have a way*

of doing a follow-up because in the end, they need to see you so that you can get assistance.”

Students who have the option to report anonymously can also have access to a complaint box in which they can report mistreatment, harassment, and other forms of misconduct. Possibly, this could assist in bystanders reporting as well. The participants suggested that these complaint boxes should be regularly monitored and accompanied by a suggestion box. This proposal emphasises the importance of institutions employing comprehensive strategies to address the issue of GBV and prioritise the safety and well-being of their students and staff. This assertion was supported as follows:

S4 (male): *“There is no place to report a staff member or worker who did not treat you well. Everywhere they are not welcoming and friendly. In other places they have a place where you may complain when you are mistreated. They have a complaint box in which people place recommendations on how they can improve some things, just like in the clinics where they have a box for suggestions. Here they don’t have it.”*

The study suggests that the institution should systematically assess every module within its curriculum. The participants indicated that this could be achieved through the implementation of an anonymous submission system that students can use to provide feedback via designated evaluation forms. It was argued that such an approach would enable the institution to identify instances of human rights violations or GBV effectively:

S22 (male): *“I think they should evaluate all modules whereby students can be given evaluation to comment about their lecturers and those forms should be submitted in a box. That is when they can tell if there is GBV going on between students and their lecturer. In that way, students will be able to report anonymously about any harassment occurring.”*

This statement proposes that the institution should consider implementing practices observed in other organisations to enhance and refine its services. Such a measure could potentially boost productivity among staff members and can deter GBV as perpetrators will be aware that they are reported anonymously.

Anonymous reporting can reduce the fear of intimidation or backlash from perpetrators, families, or communities, which are common barriers to reporting GBV (Jennings, 2013). By removing these fears, victims may feel more comfortable seeking help and accessing available support services, such as counselling or legal assistance. Furthermore, anonymous reporting can help institutions identify patterns of abuse and take proactive measures to address systemic issues, even when victims are not ready to come forward publicly. From a recovery perspective, the ability to report anonymously can validate a victim's experience and affirm their need for justice, even in a private capacity as established by Faulkner (2022), that anonymity provides a sense of security and encourages individuals to speak openly about their experiences without fear of judgment or repercussions. This will allow survivors to begin their healing process without the added burden of public scrutiny or pressure, fostering a sense of safety and encouraging them to take further steps toward emotional and psychological recovery.

5.7.5 Student parliament

Murati (2014) argues that a 'student parliament' promotes democratic values, fosters dialogue, and enhances student engagement in decision-making processes. However, this study proposes a student parliament that will address the issue of GBV. Both students and staff members proposed the establishment of a student parliament where Law and Criminal Justice students could be actively involved in addressing GBV cases that occurred on or off campus. This suggestion stems from a strong belief that such an initiative could significantly enhance the institution's capacity to effectively combat GBV as it will supplement the efforts of the PSD to hold perpetrators accountable. Specifically, Law students are anticipated to contribute their expertise in matters of jurisdiction and court proceedings, while Criminal Justice students could utilise their skills in investigation and evidence gathering. Kabaya (2021) believes that collaboration such as this is imperative in combating GBV. Similarly, the participants in this study believed that the collaborative efforts of these stakeholders would yield substantial benefits in tackling the pervasive issue of GBV. Khan and Zaman (2020) concur, as they confirm that a student parliament provides a platform for students to collectively combat institutional crimes. This proposition was offered by a support staff member:

SSD2 (male): *“That is why I would propose to say, the Law department of UNIZULU should also be part of us. I worked at a particular university where we used to have more trials with the legal departments, nursing departments, and medical students. And it gave us a very clear situation.”*

The participant also proposed the participation of the Department of Criminal Justice in deterring GBV cases:

SSD2 (male): *“I want to know what Criminal Justice is actually doing with this. I know that this is a study, but beyond the study, for me it is about visible intervention because the stronger these units are in the university...the less we will see the so-called underreporting and the continuation of violation among our students.”*

The above participants' suggestion that students of the Department of Criminal Justice and the Department of Law should actively engage in addressing cases of GBV seems realistic as they form an integral part of the justice system. The inquiry raised by a participant regarding the responsibilities of these departments underscores the expectation for proactive measures to address crimes that occur on campus, including GBV. Given their designation as justice officers, their mandate inherently involves combating criminal activity. This confirms the necessity for collaboration between the Department of Criminal Justice, the Department of Law, as well as relevant student support units such as the PSD and SSD to collectively combat the pervasive issue of GBV.

In corroboration of the above suggestion, another participant contended that the absence of a student parliament at UNIZULU was a factor that contributed to the prevalence of criminal activities and the underreporting of GBV on campus:

S19 (female): *“This thing of not having a student parliament messes things up. A student parliament will be useful somewhere, somehow, because if you talk to a person of your age, it is much more beneficial than going to the PSD. So, I think going through the SRC [Student Representative Council] will be beneficial”.*

The establishment of a student parliament could serve as an effective mechanism for addressing GBV and other acts of misconduct on campus. This body will be expected to

operate as a judicial court where all involved parties collaborate to ensure that equitable justice is pursued for all crimes that were committed on campus.

5.7.6 Visible GBV offices

The participants indicated that the institution had offices to deal with GBV. However, the accessibility of these facilities reportedly remained a challenge as the participants complained that their location was not easily visible to students. To address this issue, visible GBV offices should be established to promote reporting among students, enhance their awareness of GBV, and allow easy access to reporting resources. This proposition aligns with the findings of Stauffer (2021) and Moir et al. (2022), who assert that visible offices offer secure environments for survivors seeking assistance while simultaneously raising awareness and facilitating reporting. The participants recommended that these offices be easily identifiable, with their logos prominently displayed in bold to attract the attention of students and victims, thus clarifying their function as places for assistance:

S6 (male): *“There should be visible offices (built or mobile) for GBV around or all over the campus...so that people don’t have to ask where the offices are. They should be seen everywhere. Maybe they should be located in the student centre and “GBV” should be written in bold so that it can be clear to everyone. Even people who are passing by can find themselves going in unintentionally to find help. [But now] this office is hidden....”*

S5 (female): *“There should be visible structures just like the HIV tents that are always available. If they can have something like that, even if it is no longer a tent but offices. Maybe each department should have a counselling office which is designed to help students who have problems with GBV.”*

S13 (female): *“I think encouraging those who have experienced abuse to come forward, like having places where they can go such as counselling and PSD and these places should have a section that deals with the abuse.”*

This study revealed that making GBV offices visible on campus is crucial for encouraging reporting among students. The proposed solution emphasises the need for prominently

located GBV offices that are easily identifiable by bold signage. This will ensure that everyone, including survivors and passers-by, knows where to seek assistance. Visible offices not only facilitate reporting but also signal the institution's commitment to addressing GBV and supporting survivors.

5.7.7 The appointment of designated personnel to investigate GBV cases

The participants suggested that special investigators be employed who are specifically tasked to address cases of GBV at this and even other educational institutions. Such appointments will serve as a means to mitigate embarrassment and scepticism when GBV cases are reporting. Lorenz, Hayes, and Jacobsen (2022) assert that the presence of dedicated investigators for GBV cases at HEIs serves to diminish reluctance to report and fosters a more conducive reporting environment for affected students. Supporting this notion, Wafula (2018) contends that investigators assigned to handle GBV cases should undergo specialised training to effectively manage the sensitive nature of these cases. Furthermore, the participants in the current study advocated for the impartiality of such investigators, emphasising the necessity for them to remain free from any affiliations or biases that could potentially influence their handling of cases. It is recommended that all cases be treated with fairness, irrespective of the gender or status of the individuals involved. This principle of impartial treatment is articulated in the comments below:

S11 (male): *“They should allocate the investigator or PSD that will be responsible for GBV, not that if you are going to report a case like this, you should stop there at the reception and talk in a room full of PSDs about your problem.”*

S16 (female): *“There should be a specific person or department where GBV can be reported because maybe I will go to PSD and find an older man who doesn’t care and I will be sceptical speaking to him about my victimisation.”*

Another participant asserted that the investigators should not be biased:

S11 (male): *“They should make it clear that GBV can occur on both sides (female and males). The whole institution should know that. Also, the investigators should not be biased in terms of attending cases, like taking female cases more seriously*

than male cases. I think the institution should recruit people who won't be biased when treating GBV cases and treat all genders equally in terms of proving justice. Because victimisation is the same, it should be like that with punishment and treatment."

The appointment of designated investigators for cases of GBV at HEIs seems crucial for several reasons. First, such people will help reduce the likelihood of embarrassment and scepticism among students when reporting such cases. The participants emphasised the importance of having investigators who are not prejudiced or biased will ensure that all cases are treated equally and fairly regardless of gender or position. This will ensure a safe and supportive environment for survivors to come forward and seek help. The participants also stressed the need for clear protocols and a specific person or department where GBV can be reported, to avoid encountering individuals who may not take the issue seriously or may exhibit bias. This signifies the importance of recruiting unbiased individuals who prioritise justice and equality in their approach to GBV cases

5.8 Discussions of the Main Findings

GBV remains a pervasive issue globally, with underreporting presenting a significant challenge in addressing its prevalence. Despite efforts to encourage reporting, many incidents of GBV go unreported due to various contributory factors. This study aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted nature of underreporting in GBV and focused on the role of intimidation as a primary deterrent. The discussions of the main findings represent the core thematic statements rather than the themes themselves.

5.8.2 Factors that contribute to underreporting

The study found that underreporting of GBV was not solely the result of victims' reluctance to do so, but that it seemed to be exacerbated by intimidation tactics employed by perpetrators and their associates. Intimidation manifests in diverse forms, including threats, social pressures, and fear of repercussions, thereby impeding victims from seeking recourse through formal reporting channels. Moreover, other factors such as fear

of the perpetrator, fear of not being believed, distrust in law enforcement and institutional support structures, lack of awareness of what GBV entails, stigma and shame attached to the victims of GBV, financial dependence, and patriarchal beliefs.

5.8.2.1 Intimidation

The literature and study findings underscore the impact of underreporting on the perpetuation of GBV not only at South African universities, but at such institutions globally. Intimidation emerging as a key factor that hinders reporting efforts (D'Agostino et al., 2019). According to the data, the violation of students' rights can generally be associated with intimidation, and if there is intimidation people hide what has happened. The prevalence of underreporting can thus be attributed to various forms of intimidation, including threats from perpetrators or their associates, societal pressures, stigma, financial dependence, and fear of repercussions. These findings emphasise the multifaceted nature of intimidation as a barrier to reporting.

The participants also affirmed that fear is pervasive among the GBV victims, particularly as they fear that reporting GBV incidents may not only lead to further harm, but also result in social ostracization or ridicule. This fear is deeply rooted in power dynamics that favour perpetrators and suppress the voices of victims, making it difficult for them to come forward. It is evident that, while some survivors express a desire to report an incident, they encounter silencing mechanisms wielded by those in positions of authority throughout the reporting process, thereby perpetuating underreporting. This confirms the perpetual vulnerability of marginalised individuals to danger and violence due to their lack of agency to safeguard themselves or challenge oppressive structures (George, 2020).

Hence, the underreporting of GBV emerges not merely from victims' reluctance but rather from the exacerbating influence of intimidation. This notion resonates with the assertion made by SSD2, who lamented the imbalance of power between violators (people in positions of authority) and the violated (the vulnerable and voiceless victims) throughout the reporting journey by saying: *“There is a very sad story about violators; they have powerful positions and the violated, unfortunately, are very vulnerable. They are in a position where they can't even report because along the way of reporting they are*

silenced". These power differentials have been extensively documented in the literature as key contributing factors to underreporting (Makhafola, 2020; Pratto & Stewart, 2020). Pratto and Stewart (2020) explicitly correlate the underreporting of GBV with these entrenched power imbalances, elucidating how hierarchical structures perpetuate silence and cycles of abuse. Furthermore, Makhafola (2020) contends that individuals in positions of authority often exploit their power to coerce compliance from vulnerable individuals, thereby perpetuating a culture of intimidation and silence.

Moreover, the participants referred to incidences where victims faced pressure from friends and family to withdraw their cases, particularly in instances where economic dependence on perpetrators was involved. This aligns with previous research that highlights the role of familial and societal pressures in deterring victims from seeking help or reporting abuse (DeGue, Valle, Holt, Massetti, Matjasko, & Tharp, 2014). Individuals may face social pressure from their immediate social circles, including friends and family, to withdraw their cases of GBV, and this pressure is particularly pronounced in cases where the victim is economically dependent on the perpetrator. The participants shared their knowledge of cases where victims felt compelled to prioritise financial stability and familial cohesion over seeking justice or protection from abuse. The prospect of jeopardising familial relationships or livelihoods often weighs heavily on victims, exacerbating feelings of isolation and powerlessness (Jennings, 2013).

The findings highlight the complex interplay of familial expectations, financial dependency, and social norms in creating a formidable barrier for victims seeking help against GBV. In many cases, victims may feel compelled to comply with the wishes of their family or community, even at the expense of their own safety and well-being. The decision to withdraw cases of GBV is often influenced by a combination of external pressures, including fear of retaliation, social coercion, and economic dependence. These factors emphasise the pervasive nature of intimidation and the systemic challenges faced by victims seeking justice in the aftermath of abuse (Wentz and Keimig, 2019).

In conclusion, the findings of this study shed light on the intricate dynamics surrounding the underreporting of GBV, emphasising the central role of intimidation as a barrier to reporting. By understanding the various forms of intimidation and their impacts on victims

and those close to them, efforts to address underreporting and support survivors must therefore encompass strategies to mitigate these sources of intimidation and empower victims to assert their rights and seek redress without fear of reprisal.

5.8.2.2 Fear of the perpetrator

The fear of retaliation from perpetrators or their associates was a recurring theme in the participants' narratives, which further reinforced the notion that intimidation acts as a significant deterrent to reporting GBV incidents. D'Agostino et al. (2019) shed light on this phenomenon, emphasising that a substantial number of GBV survivors opt to remain silent about their experiences due to the intimidation tactics employed by their abusers. The fear of potential retaliation looms large in the minds of victims, and this deters them from seeking help or disclosing their abuse to authorities (Adams, Mabusela, & Dlamini, 2013). The reluctance to report stems from a deep-seated apprehension that any action taken against the perpetrator may worsen the situation. Participants in the study stated these sentiments, sharing victims' concern about potential repercussions if they were to report the abuse. They feared that not only would the abuse persist, but it could escalate into more severe forms of violence if the perpetrator learned of their disclosure. This fear is underscored by power imbalances favouring perpetrators, which further diminish victims' confidence in seeking justice.

The fear of retaliation, whether physical or psychological, also serves as a powerful deterrent and compels victims to reconsider pursuing legal action. This fear emanates from a lack of trust in law enforcement, which has proven ineffective in providing adequate protection to victims after reporting (Steyn & Steyn, 2008; George, 2020; Makhaye et al., 2023). This failure to ensure safety exacerbates the fear experienced by survivors, as victims expressed concerns that reporting their abuse may exacerbate the situation and lead to further violence or harm. Victims often face direct threats or coercion from perpetrators, and this instils a profound sense of fear and vulnerability in them. This finding stresses the pressing need for reforms to bolster victim support systems and enhance the responsiveness of law enforcement in addressing such concerns.

Moreover, intimidation tactics extend beyond the direct threats from perpetrators as victims often also face pressure from individuals in the perpetrator's social circle, including friends and acquaintances, who coerce them into silence through various means (Adams et al., 2013). This aspect highlights the pervasive nature of fear and intimidation in GBV cases, where victims may feel isolated and unsupported in their decision to report abuse. A poignant example was provided by SSD4, and this illustrates the complexities surrounding reporting GBV incidents. Despite intending to assist a survivor in seeking justice, the individual ended up becoming a victim as she was subjected to harassment as a consequence of her involvement. This illustrates the intricate web of power dynamics and intimidation tactics that perpetuate the underreporting of GBV. Fearing the perpetrator plays a pivotal role in the underreporting of GBV cases and is a significant deterrent for survivors who would otherwise have sought assistance and justice. Addressing this issue necessitates dismantling power imbalances and providing robust support systems to ensure that fear does not silence those in need of help.

5.8.2.3 Fear of not being believed

In the realm of GBV, the fear of not being believed significantly contributes to the underreporting of such incidents. Makhafola's (2020) research underscores this phenomenon, indicating that many victims hesitate to report instances of GBV due to concerns surrounding the credibility of their claims. This apprehension is particularly pronounced in cases where no witnesses were present, leaving victims without substantial evidence to prove their allegations. Moreover, the reluctance to report abuse is exacerbated when the perpetrator holds a position of authority or dominance over the victim, as noted in Makhafola's investigation where one participant refrained from reporting GBV due to the perpetrator's position as Head of the Department. The participant's account in Makhafola's study echoes this sentiment, revealing how individuals anticipate disbelief or lack of support when reporting GBV, especially when the alleged perpetrator wields power and influence. This statement highlights the perceived futility of reporting when the perpetrator is well-known and influential, suggesting that such cases may not be taken seriously or adequately addressed.

Similarly, this study illustrates how the absence of belief and support in close relationships can dissuade victims from reporting GBV. In this instance, the participant's friends, who were acquainted with the alleged perpetrator, doubted the victim's account, which further reinforces the notion that reporting may lead to isolation and disbelief rather than support. This reluctance to report GBV due to the fears of not being believed underscores the broader issue of a lack of trust and support within social networks and institutional contexts. When victims lack confidence in the credibility of their claims and anticipate disbelief or dismissal, they are less likely to seek help through formal reporting channels (Makhaye & Ajani, 2023). Consequently, underreporting persists, thus perpetuating a cycle of silence and impunity that undermines efforts to address GBV effectively.

In conclusion, this study was conceptualised to shed light on the complex interplay between fear of disbelief, power dynamics, and lack of social support that impact victims' decision not to report incidents of GBV. By understanding these dynamics, stakeholders can develop interventions and support mechanisms that empower victims to come forward without fear of retribution or disbelief, thus ultimately fostering a culture of accountability and justice in combating GBV.

5.8.2.4 Distrust in law enforcement and institutions

The underreporting of GBV is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by various factors, one of which is the pervasive distrust in law enforcement and institutional support bodies. This lack of trust constitutes a significant barrier to victims and survivors coming forward to report incidents of GBV. Understanding this issue involves recognising that institutions, including universities, are reflections of broader societal dynamics, as articulated by Rikhosto (2022). Consequently, the challenges faced within law enforcement contexts are often mirrored within HEIs.

Participants in various studies consistently highlighted their lack of confidence in law enforcement and institutional responses to GBV cases (Makhaye et al., 2023). This distrust seemed to stem from the perceived inadequacy of these bodies to address serious cases and hold perpetrators accountable. Notably, the participants in this study expressed concerns about unequal power dynamics within institutions where well-

connected individuals may escape justice, as illustrated by Makhafola (2020). This perspective reflects a political interpretation of crime as the law may favour those in positions of power, and thus is a serious violation of the principles of equality and human dignity that are entrenched in the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

Furthermore, Palmer and Kutateladze (2021) highlight that negative encounters with the criminal justice system contribute to the perception that the safety and well-being of survivors are not prioritised. This means that instances of mishandled cases or unsatisfactory outcomes serve as deterrents for future reporting and foster a sense of futility among victims and survivors. The historical context of institutional responses has also shaped expectations and attitudes towards the GBV reporting system. For instance, negative experiences of the reporting process, as discussed by Chibango and Chibango (2022), dissuaded individuals from seeking assistance or pursue justice. This phenomenon was echoed by the participants who expressed doubt about the effectiveness of institutional responses to GBV cases, and most cited examples of past failures to prove their point.

5.8.2.5 Lack of awareness of what GBV entails

Many individuals, particularly students, lack a clear understanding of what GBV entails and which laws prohibit such actions in South Africa (Mbatha, 2023). This deficiency in understanding fosters the normalisation of abusive dynamics within intimate relationships. The findings clearly suggest that certain individuals may endure abusive behaviours due to their unawareness of being victimised and that they misconstrue abusive behaviours as a demonstration of affection or culturally accepted disciplinary measures. These factors seem to be particularly evident among first-year students who lack substantial relationship experience (Kabaya, 2021; Makhanya, 2022). They also confirm their vulnerability as their transition to independent living away from familial guidance exposes them to an increased risk of abuse that is facilitated by newfound opportunities for experimentation. Given their youth and relative inexperience, they are predisposed to heightened vulnerability and often lack the requisite skills to mitigate such risks.

Moreover, some individuals choose not to report GBV as they fear adverse repercussions or harbour the belief that the abuse was not severe enough to warrant intervention. Their reluctance to report incidences of GBV may also stem from their concern about damaging the perpetrator's future prospects or a misguided belief that enduring abuse is a necessary aspect of romantic love. This lack of awareness leads individuals to misinterpret abusive behaviours within relationships and they thus hesitate to seek help or report incidents of GBV, thereby perpetuating the cycle of violence and victimisation.

5.8.2.6 Stigma and shame

The phenomenon of societal stigma and shame also contributes to underreporting of GBV. This fear may be understood through the lens of the “*Abantu bazothini*” syndrome (“What will people say?”). This psychological phenomenon influences individuals to prioritise the opinions of others over their own well-being, deters them from reporting incidents, and perpetuates the cycle of victimisation. The findings thus affirm that societal stigma surrounding GBV deters victims from disclosing their experiences due to fear of being labelled or judged. This fear of stigma and shame was evident in the responses of both the students and staff members who referred apprehension about the repercussions of disclosing GBV experiences, citing fear of being judged, pitied, or ridiculed by others. According to the participants, this fear leads to a preference for confiding in trusted friends rather than seeking formal assistance. The preference to confide in a friend is a clear indication that individuals may suffer from the “*Abantu zothini*” syndrome (i.e., fear of stigma and shame). These findings corroborate those of Randa and McGarry (2023), who argue that fear of being labelled as a GBV victim is prevalent among individuals and that this leads to concerns about the potential exploitation of their vulnerability if they were to disclose an incident of abuse.

Moreover, a societal perception that sexual harassment that occurs in an intimate relationship is not a crime further discourages reporting. This is exacerbated by the misconception that has been identified by Richardson, Gabbay, and Lauterbach (2018) and Kilmartin and O'Donnell (2019) that sexual intercourse is an inherent aspect of such relationships, leading to the normalisation of abusive sexual behaviour and a reluctance to seek legal recourse.

This study also uncovered gender-specific factors that influence reporting behaviour, especially those associated with males. The male participants expressed concern about preserving their masculine identity and feared being ridiculed or emasculated if they were to report incidents of GBV. This reluctance stems from societal expectations that men should be strong and impervious to vulnerability, which is a belief that is entrenched in patriarchy and that renders them hesitant to disclose experiences of abuse (Brink, Mdaka, Matee, & Weppelman, 2022; Rikhosto, 2022). This study therefore highlights that fear of stigma and shame contributes significantly to the underreporting of GBV as it creates a barrier to victims' willingness to disclose abuse, perpetuates societal misconceptions, and reinforces gendered norms that discourage help seeking.

5.8.2.7 Financial dependence

Economic disparities and financial dependency of one partner on the other in a relationship exacerbate the risk of experiencing GBV, especially when financially unstable individuals are involved. The participants highlighted how some students, particularly those who relied on their partners for financial support, might feel trapped in abusive relationships due to fear of losing economic stability if they were to report the abuse. Mutinta's (2022) empirical study highlights that financial dependence among students, particularly those lacking sufficient resources to sustain themselves, contributes significantly to the underreporting of GBV in HEIs. These financially vulnerable students often face economic pressure that compels some to engage in relationships with older individuals for financial support, which is a phenomenon that has been frequently observed at HEIs (Mgijima, 2014). Consequently, these students may become heavily reliant on the more affluent partner for financial stability.

An imbalance of power often exists in such relationships as the economic dependency of one partner on the other increases the risk of the eruption of GBV, particularly IPV. This dynamic is exacerbated in regions that are characterised by financial disparity and limited economic development and where the prevalence of violence, including homicides and severe assaults, is heightened (Yesufu, 2022). The views and insights of the participants in the current study underscored the impact of financial dependence on the underreporting of GBV cases. Married students, particularly women, may find themselves

constrained from reporting an incident due to financial reliance on their spouses. Additionally, students in relationships with older individuals who are often their financially supportive partners may hesitate to report abuse in fear of losing their only financial resource.

These insights align with earlier research findings that highlight how financial instability can render individuals, particularly women in intimate relationships, vulnerable to GBV. Jasor (2020) contends that financially dependent students are often subject to the authority and control of their partners, which limits their ability to seek help or report abuse. This indicates that financial dependence within the student population contributes significantly to the underreporting of GBV at institutions of higher learning. The finding also highlights the need for interventions that address economic disparities and empower students to seek support regardless of their financial circumstances.

5.8.2.8 Patriarchal norms

The analysis of the findings revealed that the influence of patriarchal norms that are acquired within familial settings extends into the university environment where they become a barrier to individuals' decision to disclose GBV. Makhafole's (2020) research study also underscores how societal and domestic silences serve to perpetuate and facilitate GBV, subsequently manifesting within educational institutions. Participants in the current study articulated how prevailing societal perceptions regarding gender roles and violence, alongside deeply ingrained cultural teachings, contribute to the reluctance of victims to report instances of GBV. Notably, men expressed apprehension over potential ridicule and emasculation should they disclose experiences of abuse, thereby perpetuating a cycle of silence. This observation finds corroboration in Rikhotso's (2022) investigation, which elucidates that men often refrain from reporting GBV incidents to safeguard their perceived dignity, and that this is influenced by societal expectations of constant strength. Cultural indoctrination thus emerges as a significant determinant that shapes individuals' readiness to report abuse, as men are conditioned to maintain stoicism under all circumstances.

In the university environment, the perpetuation of patriarchal norms that were learned within familial settings contributes to the underreporting of GBV. This phenomenon is rooted in the observation that students internalise and subsequently replicate patriarchal standards, as expounded by the learning theory. For instance, women may internalise a sense of helplessness, while men may adopt traditional notions of masculinity. Consequently, these gendered norms influence individuals' decision to report incidents of GBV or not. Makhafola (2020) cites this as a challenge that institutions of higher learning face regarding GBV, arguing that it needs much attention. The participants' responses confirmed this dynamic. They described how experiences of domestic violence witnessed or experienced in their upbringing had shaped their attitude towards reporting GBV. In essence, the normalisation of violence in households inhibits individuals from recognising and addressing GBV. The participants, especially the males, expressed reluctance to report incidents due to learned behaviours of silence and inaction that had been ingrained in them since childhood. This attitude aligns with the culture of violence theory, which posits that societal attitudes toward GBV can deter victims from reporting their experiences (WHO, 2009). Furthermore, Dlamini and Makhaye (2023) support this argument as they attest to the fact that, in cultures where violence is normalised as a means of conflict resolution, victims may fear blame or retribution for speaking out. Consequently, victims of GBV may internalise these societal norms and refrain from reporting acts of abuse as they may perceive this as the expected course of action.

Furthermore, this study's findings highlight how patriarchal beliefs perpetuate GBV within relationships. Men may assert dominance and control over women as they may view violence as a means of discipline and/or of a way to assert their power (Kabaya, 2021). This mindset is entrenched in the patriarchal system where men hold all the power and exert dominance over women. This dominant attitude constrains their agency and perpetuates unequal power dynamics within relationships (Diko, 2023). The study thus affirmed that the underreporting of GBV in the university setting under study was intricately linked to the perpetuation of patriarchal norms that had been learned and internalised in familial and societal contexts. The study thus argues that understanding these dynamics is essential for the implementation of effective interventions to address GBV and create a safer environment for all individuals in HEI settings.

5.8.3 The effects of underreporting

The effects of underreporting of GBV on victims are significant and long-lasting. When victims choose not to report GBV, they may continue to endure physical, emotional, and psychological harm without receiving the necessary support. By not reporting such acts, victims may also unintentionally allow perpetrators to continue their abusive behaviour, thus potentially putting themselves and others at risk (Saferpaces, 2022). Additionally, the underreporting of GBV can perpetuate a culture of silence and normalise violence, thus hindering efforts to effectively address and prevent GBV. It is crucial to recognise and address the detrimental effects of underreporting on victims and the broader community to effect meaningful change. When GBV goes unreported, both victims and institutions face significant consequences. Victims endure long-term repercussions, whereas institutions risk tarnishing their reputation and image due to undisclosed incidents.

5.8.3.1 *Effects on victims*

The reluctance to report incidents of GBV has profound and enduring effects on the health and overall well-being of victims. These effects include diminished self-esteem, increased risk of suicidal ideation, a heightened propensity towards substance abuse, adverse impacts on physical health such as weight loss, decreased academic proficiency, and a lack of interpersonal trust. Victims who refrain from reporting such cases often suffer from prolonged emotional distress and mental health challenges, which can exacerbate their well-being over time if left unaddressed.

Low self-esteem and suicide: One significant consequence of underreporting is the erosion of self-esteem in the victim. GBV undermines an individual's sense of self-worth and identity, leads to a feeling of worthlessness, and causes emotional distress. The participants in the current study highlighted how low self-esteem resulting from GBV could escalate to suicidal tendencies because most victims struggle to cope with the psychological trauma inflicted upon them by GBV, as highlighted by WHO (2013). Additionally, low self-esteem may manifest in defensive behaviours and even violent

tendencies toward others as victims grapple with unhealed emotional wounds and unresolved trauma.

Substance abuse: Heinzerling (2019) and Moir, Gwyther, Wilkins, and Boland (2022) aver that substance abuse is used as pain management to cope with the consequences of GBV. The current study agrees, as it became clear that substance abuse was used as a coping mechanism for victims of GBV to alleviate stress and numb their pain. The participants noted that individuals might turn to drugs or alcohol as a means of escaping their traumatic experiences. However, they agreed that such coping strategies only served to mask the underlying issues and could exacerbate harm, potentially leading victims to transition into perpetrators themselves due to their altered mental states induced by substance use. The literature states that the altered mental state induced by substance abuse can prompt individuals to exhibit erratic and violent behaviour towards others, which may transition them to perpetrators rather than victims (Shiva et al, 2021).

Poor academic performance: The literature reveals that the repercussions of violence impede students' academic progress and may culminate in course failures, extended tenure as students, and even dropping out (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2018; Makhaye & Ajani, 2023). The current study revealed similar results as the participants argued that victims of GBV might struggle to perform well academically. They attributed this to the psychological burden of GBV that can impair cognitive functioning and hinder academic progress which, in turn, exacerbate the cycle of victimisation and result in slow or no recovery.

The continuous cycle of abuse: The findings revealed that victims of GBV might be repeatedly victimised as they might find themselves in similar abusive relationships due to underlying psychological factors, particularly in cases of IPV. According to Saferspaces (2022), victims who do not report abuse may unintentionally allow perpetrators to continue their abusive behaviour, thus putting themselves and others at risk of harm. This perpetuates that cycle of abuse from which victims struggle to break free.

Isolation and emotional distress: Rikhotso (2022) posits that individuals who experienced GBV tend to withdraw from social interactions and engagements. The participants in this study noted that victims often isolated themselves and displayed

emotional instability, which frequently manifested as outbursts towards others or resorting to violence as a coping mechanism. This social withdrawal is influenced by various factors such as feelings of shame and stigma, apprehension about judgment from others, lack of trust, emotional strain, and concerns about personal safety (Moletsane, 2023). Additionally, Makhaye and Ajani (2023) contend that these victims commonly experience mood swings marked by heightened irritability and emotional sensitivity. As a result, these emotional fluctuations lead to their disengagement from routine activities and a deliberate avoidance of social interactions. However, this behaviour exacerbates their distress and hinders the process of recovery.

Lack of trust: The study discovered that the lack of trust resulting from unaddressed trauma might make it difficult for victims to establish meaningful relationships and engage with others. This finding supports Makhaye and Ajani's (2023) contention that women who experienced or are experiencing intimate partner violence often develop trust issues that cause them to fear and have an aversion towards men. This psychological impact may hinder their prospects of engaging in intimate relationships as they may harbour apprehensions about potential harm from all men. Persistent self-blame exacerbates these struggles and results in social withdrawal and a reluctance to trust or build other intimate connections.

In summary, the failure to report incidents of GBV not only perpetuates the cycle of violence, but also exacts a heavy toll on victims who experience emotional, psychological, and physical ramifications that can endure long after the initial trauma. Addressing GBV requires comprehensive support systems that prioritise victim empowerment, access to mental health services, and the creation of safe spaces for reporting and seeking justice.

5.8.3.2 Effects on the institution

HEIs are mandated to safeguard the rights of all students and staff members against GBV and other crimes as outlined by the DHET (2020). However, the underreporting of incidents of GBV in these institutions can significantly tarnish their reputation, perpetuate a culture that is conducive to violence, and distort the accurate representation of GBV statistics. The failure to report such cases not only undermines the institution's efforts to

combat GBV effectively, but also sends a message of disregard for the well-being and rights of its members.

The underreporting of GBV cases can have a detrimental effect on the reputation of HEIs. Instances of GBV that go unreported may later surface through media exposure which will damage the institution's image and affect the morale and well-being of the campus community. This negative perception may further impact enrolment and retention rates, as prospective students and stakeholders may view the institution unfavourably due to its perceived inability to address GBV effectively (Saferpaces, 2022).

Moreover, the normalisation of GBV behaviours on campus contributes to a culture of violence that allows such incidents to be overlooked or disregarded. This study indicates that unreported GBV cases hinder awareness of the true prevalence of such occurrences and foster an environment where perpetrators may feel emboldened by the lack of consequences for their actions. The participants noted that, without accountability, GBV might become increasingly prevalent and escalate to more severe forms of violence. This normalisation is corroborated by Davids (2020), who avers that it perpetuates the cycle of abuse and undermines efforts to hold perpetrators accountable, ultimately posing a threat to the safety and well-being of all members of the academic community.

The absence of formal statistics on GBV further exacerbates the issue by obscuring the true extent of the problem (von Meullen, 2021). Without accurate data, institutions cannot fully grasp the scope of on- and off-campus GBV, which hinders efforts to implement effective prevention and intervention strategies. Additionally, distorted statistics resulting from underreporting may give the false impression that the situation is well managed, and this will potentially mislead institutions who will then overlook the severity of the issue. Ellyson, Ortega, and Bedard-Gilligan (2023) support this notion, arguing that underreporting hinders the acquisition of accurate data that are necessary for effective prevention strategies. In the same vein, Mambo and Omusilibwa (2020) affirm that underreporting contributes to the persistence of violence and the prevalence of unsafe environments.

5.8.4 Awareness of reporting facilities and procedures

Another objective was to assess students' awareness of GBV reporting facilities, procedures, and institutional policies at the University of Zululand. Hilda and Pilot (2015) argue that South African universities lack formal reporting procedures for sexual assault. Relatedly, findings in this study revealed a notable lack of awareness among the participants regarding the formal procedures for reporting GBV incidents. While students generally knew that they could report such incidents to the Protective Services Department (PSD), they lacked clarity on the specific steps to take when faced with GBV. Dlamini and Olanrewaju (2021) state that lack of awareness of serious campus matters can be caused by poor communication and information dissemination in HEIs. The participants' narratives highlighted the consequences of this lack of awareness, as many indicated that it contributed to the underreporting of GBV incidents on campus. This suggests that the institution fails to effectively communicate the existence and functioning of reporting channels to its students and staff members, which is a finding that is supported by Kivelä, Arminen, and Keskinen (2018) and de Matos, Tomé, and Camacho (2020).

Underreporting is clearly exacerbated by a lack of clear policies that explicitly explain the reporting procedures and facilities (DHET, 2020). In relation to this concern, this study revealed a parallel lack of awareness regarding institutional policies on GBV. Most participants were unaware of any existing policies within the university, which aligns with broader concerns that some institutions may not have adequate policies in place to address GBV effectively (DHET, 2020). The lack of visibility of policies and reporting mechanisms in universities constitutes a significant institutional failure, which not only hinders the effective addressing of GBV but also perpetuates a broader culture of silence.

This invisibility is particularly concerning because, without clear communication about what the institution offers in terms of support and procedures, students may be left in the dark, unsure of how to report incidents or even if reporting is worth the effort. As Dlamini and Olanrewaju (2021) argue, this lack of awareness can be attributed to poor communication and inadequate dissemination of information, which are systemic failures that leave students vulnerable and unsupported.

When policies are not easily visible or well-communicated, they become less effective in fostering a safe environment for students. The absence of prominent, easily accessible information regarding GBV reporting procedures creates an institutional culture that undermines accountability and perpetuates silence. If victims and potential bystanders do not know where to go or what the reporting process entails, they may either not report at all or feel that the process is too opaque and difficult to navigate, leading to the underreporting of GBV. Testimonies from the participants underscored this knowledge gap and many emphasised the necessity for the university to provide comprehensive guidance on reporting processes to all registered students, just as Cranney (2016) and Mbatha (2023) proposes. While one staff member confirmed the existence of a GBV policy under review, the general lack of awareness among the students of such a policy urges the need for improved communication and dissemination of institutional policies to ensure that students are informed about the consequences for perpetrators and the support available to survivors.

5.8.5 Participants' recommendations

The participants acknowledged the efforts made by the institution to combat GBV and raise awareness about it as they acknowledged the availability of support services such as Pastoral Care, PSD, the Campus Clinic, and Counselling Services which all aim to assist members of the university community, especially students, who may be affected by GBV. However, despite these measures, the persistent issue of underreporting of GBV seems to have undermined the effectiveness of these initiatives.

To address the issue of underreporting, the participants offered several recommendations and stressed the need for additional interventions to tackle this issue effectively. This may involve improving and extending support services and providing comprehensive training for staff and students to recognise and respond to GBV. Fostering a culture of accountability and transparency within the institution stood out. The following recommendations are briefly summarised:

5.8.5.1 Awareness campaigns

All the participants (29) strongly recommended the establishment of awareness campaigns to address GBV at the higher education institution under study. Such campaigns were recognised as potent tools for raising awareness, altering attitudes, and prompting behavioural change regarding GBV. Scholars like Makhaye and Ajani (2023) also argue that such campaigns are pivotal in combatting underreporting by enhancing students' understanding of reporting mechanisms when they encounter victimisation.

The participants proposed that GBV awareness campaigns should be pervasive and consistent to become a normalised part of campus life. They proposed that the institution should disseminate GBV information at all events, especially at entertainment events where attendance is high. Mbatha (2023: 191) argues that students do not attend awareness campaigns because they are not properly marketed. This calls for institutions to devise a different approach to campaigning. It may be argued that a lack of consistent awareness contributes to underreporting, as many individuals may not recognise an abusive act or know where to seek help. This highlights the importance of regular campaigns to educate both students and staff. Moreover, the participants proposed inclusivity during these campaigns, advocating for the inclusion of both genders and all stakeholders involved in addressing GBV. They argued that campaigns should not focus solely on women as victims but should make it clear that GBV can affect anyone regardless of their gender. This notion is supported by Kabaya (2021) and Mutinta (2022), who suggest that universities should launch awareness campaigns that foster gender equality. The study participants further stressed that staff members should also participate in these campaigns, as they can also be perpetrators or become victims of GBV.

Moreover, the participants suggested moving beyond traditional methods such as disseminating flyers and, instead, utilise electronic media to reach students effectively. They stated that electronic media such as students' emails, Facebook, and Instagram should be used as platforms to inform students about such campaigns. Technology has become a valuable tool of the 4th industrial revolution, and people can be readily reached and persuaded from remote platforms. They further proposed that such awareness campaigns should ensure the visibility of GBV policies and reporting procedures and

provide clarity on disciplinary processes to encourage reporting and ensure that justice is served for victims.

5.8.5.2 Ensuring justice for the victims of GBV

This study found a disparity in the protection afforded to on-campus versus off-campus students. It seems that, while on-campus students benefit from security measures such as cameras and security personnel, off-campus students lack similar protection, which potentially leads to the underreporting of GBV incidents. This finding is supported by Hodgkinson, Andresen, and Saville (2018), who argue that lack of security measures creates many opportunities for crimes to occur. The participants in the current study emphasised the need for the institution to prioritise the safety of off-campus students, citing instances where victims were reluctant to report a case due to the lack of protection and their distance from campus resources.

Moreover, the findings underscore the importance of providing justice for victims of GBV to instil confidence in the institutional response system. The participants expressed that successful resolution of cases would encourage students to report incidents, as it would demonstrate the institution's commitment to addressing GBV and holding perpetrators accountable. They suggested that clear protocols that outline how GBV cases will be handled and the consequences for perpetrators could alleviate the fear of reporting and increase trust in the justice system.

The study consequently emphasises the role of accountability in deterring future GBV incidents and encouraging reporting. Holding perpetrators accountable was also seen as crucial in restoring confidence in the justice system and setting an example for others to come forward about their experiences of abuse. Nightingale (2022) supports this notion, arguing that holding perpetrators responsible can promote the reporting of GBV incidents on campuses. The current study perceives the effective handling of GBV cases not only as bringing justice to survivors, but also as sending a message to potential perpetrators about the consequences of their actions. Wafula (2018) attests to the fact that accountability is a game-changer in fighting GBV.

In addition to institutional measures, the participants proposed the establishment of a police station near the campus to address emergency and serious cases that the institution may not be equipped to handle. Having law enforcement in close proximity was viewed as a deterrent to GBV, as perpetrators would be aware of a swift response to curb their actions and bring them to book. The presence of a nearby police station was seen as vital in providing timely assistance to victims and preventing further incidents of violence and the violation of rights.

5.8.5.3 Creating a safe space for victims of GBV

The participants suggested the establishment of a safe space for victims of GBV, particularly those who faced or continue to face repeated victimisation even in their own homes. Such a safe space should provide refuge and protection for these victims and allow them to continue their academic pursuits without fear of further harm. The participants emphasised the need for a secure location where victims can seek shelter away from their perpetrators. It was also suggested that this safe space should be kept anonymous to ensure maximum protection and support for the victims.

This study endorses the importance of anonymity in providing a sense of security for victims who may fear the consequences of reporting their abuse. By anonymising such a safe space, victims will feel more empowered to come forward without fearing retaliation or further harm. This proposal by the participants recognises the unique challenges faced by victims of GBV, particularly in cases where their own homes may not provide a safe haven, and it advocates for proactive measures to address this issue.

5.8.5.4 An anonymous reporting system

The participants recommended that victims should be allowed to report incidents of GBV anonymously, arguing that such anonymity could lead to a reduction in the number of unreported cases. According to Faulkner (2022), anonymity provides a sense of security and encourages individuals to speak openly about their experiences without fear of judgment or repercussions. Online platforms that enable anonymous confessions can serve as channels for individuals to share their experiences and seek support. Moreover,

an anonymous reporting system may inspire victims to inspire others who face similar challenges to come forward, and this chain reaction will foster a supportive community where victims can talk about their traumatic experiences, leading to psychological healing.

The participants also supported for the idea of creating social media pages or confession platforms where individuals can anonymously report incidents and receive assistance without revealing their identities. They emphasised the importance of maintaining anonymity to protect the privacy and safety of victims. This option can be particularly valuable for those who are reluctant to publicly disclose their victimisation. Additionally, the participants suggested the implementation of complaint boxes in educational institutions. Students and staff can then anonymously submit their complaints related to mistreatment, harassment, or GBV in these containers. They stated that these complaint boxes should be frequently monitored and be accompanied by suggestion boxes to encourage feedback and improvement.

The participants further suggested that the institution should implement a comprehensive evaluation system of all academic modules so that students can anonymously submit evaluation forms for each module. They argued that such a facility might expose instances of human rights violations or GBV within the academic environment. This seems a logical proposal as, by enabling students to provide feedback about their lecturers, the institution can potentially uncover cases of GBV involving students and faculty lecturers. This approach will not only facilitate anonymous reporting of harassment, but will also serve as a mechanism for detecting and addressing instances of GBV. For example, Participant S22 emphasised the importance of evaluating all modules to allow students to express their concerns about the lecturer's conduct. The student proposed that suggestion boxes could be placed strategically to ensure anonymity. He believes that this measure would empower students to report incidents without fear of retribution, thus contributing to a safer and more inclusive academic environment.

This study revealed the importance of providing multiple avenues for reporting and addressing incidents of mistreatment and GBV. By adopting strategies used by other organisations and institutions, such as anonymous reporting mechanisms and

complaint/suggestion boxes, educational institutions can enhance their services and ensure the safety and well-being of students and staff. This approach can also promote accountability among staff members, leading to improved productivity and a more supportive environment.

5.8.5.5 Student parliament

Both students and staff proposed the establishment of a student parliament. They suggested that this parliamentary body should include students from the Law and Criminal Justice departments to enhance the institution's capacity to address GBV effectively. It was suggested that Law students could contribute their expertise in legal jurisdiction and facilitate the handling of cases within a judicial framework, while Criminal Justice students could assist in investigations and evidence gathering. Collaboration among these stakeholders was seen as pivotal in combating the pervasive issue of GBV within the institution. The idea was supported by anecdotal evidence, as one participant (SSD2) cited experiences from a previous institution where interdisciplinary cooperation between legal, nursing, and medical departments yielded positive outcomes in addressing similar challenges. Such an approach is supported by Khan and Zaman (2020), who confirm that a student parliament provides a platform for students to collectively combat institutional crimes.

There was also a call for the greater visibility of the Department of Criminal Justice and its role in deterring GBV. Participant SSD2 urged the importance of these students' and lecturers' engagement in interventions to reduce the underreporting of GBV cases. They argued that these departments should actively engage in practical interventions to reduce underreporting and prevent further violations.

The researcher agrees that the absence of a student parliament at this institution may be deemed a factor that contributes to the prevalence of criminal activities on campus and the underreporting of GBV. Such a parliamentary body may provide an accessible avenue for students to seek assistance and support and it may potentially circumvent barriers associated with reporting GBV to official channels like the PSD. Overall, the establishment of a student parliament will be a proactive measure to address GBV and

other institutional challenges. This parliamentary model is expected to function as a court, where all relevant stakeholders collaborate to ensure that justice is pursued for every crime committed within the institution.

5.8.5.6 Visible GBV offices

The institution has established offices to address GBV, yet their visibility is limited, and the participants argued that this invisibility was instrumental in a lack of awareness of GBV among the student body. For this reason, they proposed the establishment of visible, accessible GBV offices to promote reporting and to foster a culture of awareness and support. According to the participants, these offices should be prominently located across the campus to ensure easy identification for all students. Their suggestions included integrating these offices within the student centre and prominently displaying the acronym "GBV" in bold signage for clear identification. They argued that this would facilitate easy access to assistance for survivors and encourage reporting even among those inadvertently passing by. Additionally, parallels were drawn with existing support structures such as HIV initiatives, and the participants suggested a similar model for GBV offices, arguing that they should be integrated with academic departments to enhance accessibility and tailored assistance. Furthermore, the establishment of counselling services in these offices was recommended to provide a dedicated space where individuals affected by GBV could seek support and assistance. Should this proposal be implemented, a supportive environment that will actively encourage survivors to seek assistance will be created, and this will in turn contribute to the prevention and mitigation of GBV on campus.

5.8.5.7 The appointment of designated personnel to investigate GBV cases

The participants emphasised the necessity to appoint designated investigators who can address GBV cases on campus. They advocated for this measure to mitigate potential feelings of embarrassment and scepticism among students when reporting such incidents. Central to their suggestion was the imperative that these investigators should remain impartial and unbiased to ensure the equitable treatment of all individuals involved, irrespective of their gender or position. One participant highlighted the

inadequacy of the current system, expressing discomfort with the prospect of discussing sensitive issues in a potentially unwelcoming environment such as a room full of PSD staff. This sentiment underscores the need for a more confidential and specialised approach to handling GBV cases within the institution.

The participants stressed the importance of non-prejudicial treatment by investigators, and they pertinently articulated concerns that biased attitudes could lead to unequal consideration of cases based on the gender of the victim or perpetrator. This sentiment reflects a broader call for institutional awareness of the possibility of GBV that affects individuals of any gender, as well as a demand for fair and impartial treatment in the pursuit of justice.

In conclusion, it is argued that, while the institution has made significant progress in addressing GBV, the problem of underreporting such cases remains a significant barrier to effective intervention. Should the recommendations proposed by the participants be implemented, the institution can work towards mitigating the impact of GBV both on and off campus.

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented insightful analyses of the causes and effects of the underreporting of GBV within the context of a selected university. The discourse commenced with an elucidation of the diverse interpretations of GBV by the participants, and this revealed a discrepancy in their understanding of the nature and scope of what such acts entail. Most perceived such acts to occur only in intimate partner relationships and were unaware of its broader scope. This lack of consensus and awareness emphasises the need for comprehensive education to raise awareness and recognition of abusive behaviours. Intimidation emerged as a primary factor that contributes to underreporting, and the findings revealed that it encompasses threats, societal pressures, fear of repercussions, financial dependence, and the impact of ingrained patriarchal norms. It was concluded that persistent intimidation tactics perpetuate the cycle of silence and impunity, with

victims prioritising economic stability or fearing social ostracization and disbelief in their claims.

Furthermore, the chapter highlighted the significant repercussions of underreporting on both victims and the institutional environment. Victims of GBV often endure consequences such as diminished self-esteem, mental health issues, adverse physical health effects, academic setbacks, and challenges in forming trusting relationships. Meanwhile, institutions suffer reputational damage and perpetuate a culture of violence when GBV incidents remain unaddressed. The chapter also uncovered a lack of awareness among students regarding reporting facilities, procedures, and institutional policies, and affirmed that this gap exacerbates the issue of underreporting. This knowledge gap emphasises the necessity for universities to provide comprehensive guidance on reporting processes, coupled with improved communication and dissemination of institutional policies, to empower students to act against GBV and address the root causes of underreporting within the academic setting under study, and even within those beyond its scope who experience similar challenges. In addition, the chapter presented various insightful recommendations that were offered by the participants to address the issue of underreporting of GBV in the HEI setting under study. The key findings were summarised and corroborated by references to the findings of similar studies.

The next chapter will conclude this study by summarising it and offering recommendations based on the findings.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the researcher discussed the study's findings in relation to four themes that emerged from the data. This chapter draws conclusions based on the analysed data and recommends interventions to address the underreporting of GBV in a selected institution of higher learning. The chapter further acknowledges the limitations of the study and offers recommendations for future research.

The study was conceptualised to examine the perspectives of selected students and staff members on the causes of the underreporting of GBV at the selected university. To achieve the aim of this study, the following research questions guided the investigation:

- What factors contribute to the underreporting of GBV cases at the selected university?
- What information do students have regarding the reporting procedures for GBV and what facilities are available for them to report GBV at the selected university?
- What strategies can be recommended to encourage the reporting of GBV by victims at the selected university?

6.2 Analytical Conclusion

The researcher agrees with the finding reported in similar studies that the underreporting of GBV is not only pervasive in South African universities, but that it is a matter of global concern. It is clear that intimidation is a dominant factor that contributes to GBV. The participants' responses implied that every violation of human rights will be exacerbated by intimidation. This means that, where there is intimidation, people hide what has happened. The participants understood that intimidation silences many victims of GBV

and they mentioned that they were aware of some victims who had wished to report GBV but they had been silenced by either the perpetrators or people associated with them. The participants referred to cases where the victims had been targeted by powerful people who had used their power to threaten the victims so that they would refrain from reporting or exposing them. These narratives highlighted the existing power dynamics between violators and the violated. This finding suggests that the violated will always be vulnerable because they lack the power to fight back, while violators remain dominant as they use their power to coerce the violated to comply with their demands. Moreover, some people become secondary victims of GBV when they try to help others in their efforts to report and bring the perpetrator to book. This phenomenon was highlighted by one of the supporting staff members who articulated that she had received threats from a perpetrator for assisting a victim to report him. This indicates that some people want to report an act of GBV but are prevented from doing so due to intimidation.

The participants agreed that some cases of GBV might be reported to the SAPS and the PSD, but they argued that many would be withdrawn as a result of intimidation. The participants averred that it was usually family and friends who coerced the withdrawal of these cases as they convinced the victim to drop the case, possibly as they fear the loss of dignity and family honour. Parental involvement in pressuring victims to withdraw a case is a clear indication of the power of patriarchy that still exists in our society. Parents who tell a child that it is better to be abused than to sacrifice family honour endorse the culture of violence and hinder the reporting of GBV cases. This also sends the wrong message to perpetrators who continue to commit acts of GBV with impunity. Sometimes, families of victims protect the perpetrator as they rely on him for financial support. The financial hold that perpetrators have on their victims is also observed when female students date older men (commonly known as 'sugar daddies') for financial gain. As a result, these women fall victim to GBV and refrain from reporting abuse because they simply cannot afford to lose their financial support. This normalisation of GBV is explained by the learning behaviour theory, which posits that young people learn helplessness and dependency in the home. This highlights the complex interplay of familial expectations, financial dependency, and social norms that create a formidable barrier when victims try to seek help. The culture of violence theory (Chapter 3) was thus effective as a theoretical

perspective to reveal how violence is normalised in some societies, and particularly at the HEI under study.

The above argument highlights the significance of financial independence if the issue of GBV is to be addressed effectively. Young people, and especially young women, should be empowered to be independent and financially literate so that people can stop normalising what should not be deemed normal. To understand and address GBV, it is important to realise that this phenomenon is multifaceted and requires multifaceted interventions. Several factors compel victims to remain silent about their experiences of GBV. For instance, fearing the perpetrator is one of these factors. Some people choose not to report a case of GBV because they think it will exacerbate the situation of abuse when the perpetrator finds out or that they might not be believed, and this position exposes them to more danger. To understand this, the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies and institutional units in handling GBV cases should be examined. The participants cited lack of trust in law enforcement and institutional responses as a factor that contributes to the underreporting of GBV. This means that law enforcement (the SAPS) and even the security company that operates on campus are ineffective in providing adequate protection for victims before and after an incident of GBV. This lack of effective response drives the unwillingness of other victims to report cases in the future as they weigh the success of reporting against the cost to their security and reputation. The rational choice theory (Chapter 3) was pivotal in explaining the fact that individuals engage in a cost vs benefits calculation. In instances where the cost of reporting outweighs the benefits, victims tend not to report victimisation as they always maximise their advantage in every situation and go with the result that gives them the most satisfaction. It can be said that the decision not to report because of fear of the perpetrator and lack of trust in the justice system emanates from the calculation of cost and benefit, where reporting can threaten victims' safety and can perpetuate the abuse. This illustrates the need to protect survivors throughout the reporting process. Therefore, victim support systems and responsiveness by law enforcement to address such concerns should be enhanced.

The study revealed that both victims and the institution suffer when GBV is not reported. Victims who do not report GBV victimisation suffer long-lasting emotional distress and mental health challenges. In such instances, unaddressed trauma infuses victims with a low self-esteem and many withdraw from daily activities and social engagements. This withdrawal exacerbates feelings of loneliness and helplessness and leads to depression that results in suicidal tendencies. At this stage of their mental disorientation, some victims resort to the use of substances such as drugs and alcohol to numb their pain and deal with their miserable lives. These substances often cause victims to engage in violent behaviours and some even become the perpetrators of crimes because the altered mental state induced by substances can prompt individuals to exhibit erratic and violent behaviours. The mental challenges victims experience are more severe in sexually harassed victims than those who have 'normal' relationships as they find it hard to engage in new relationships or trust men as a result of the aftermath of trauma, generally because they constantly blame themselves for the crimes inflicted upon them. The repercussions of violence also affect their academic performance as they fail courses, drop out, or end up taking longer to complete their courses than anticipated. According to Makhaye and Ajani (2023), these outcomes are caused by the recurrence of traumatic experiences.

The above arguments highlight the importance of addressing the issue of underreporting to ensure that victims feel free to report their victimisation and find the necessary support to heal them. On the other hand, institutions risk their reputation when GBV is not reported, and when this happens it means that they failed in their mandate to uphold the rights of students and staff as emphasised in the DHET (2020) framework. It also sends the message that GBV is acceptable and that there are no consequences for violent and abusive behaviours. According to some participants, ignoring cases of GBV sustains the good image of the institution as it appears that they are managing such situations. This means that underreporting hides the true prevalence of GBV, thereby supporting the culture of violence as people continue to perpetuate instances of GBV without fear of reprisal. This makes it hard for the institution to develop interventions to effectively deal with the problem as management is not aware of the extent of GBV within the institution's area of responsibility. This lack of knowledge contributes to an unsafe environment for the university community, especially where students are concerned as they are quite

vulnerable. Addressing underreporting at HEIs is therefore imperative as it is necessary to confront the pervasive issue of GBV and to create a culture of accountability and safety within the targeted as well as all other educational institutions.

It is noteworthy that the institution did not have a disseminated policy on GBV at the time of the study as it was reportedly under revision. Hopefully, the gap in the previous GBV policy (UNIZULU Policy and Procedures on Sexual Harassment and GBV, 2019), which was inadequate as it failed to specify the reporting facilities for those who might wish to pursue their complaints, will be filled in the new policy. The participants also referred to this gap as they articulated that they were unaware of any GBV policy. This identified knowledge gap necessitates the institution to have a GBV policy that clearly outlines reporting facilities and procedures for the victims of GBV. This policy should emphasise the sanctions for perpetrators so that both potential and active perpetrators are aware that they will suffer the consequences of their actions. Moreover, the institution should ensure that everyone knows about these policies through awareness campaigns. According to Makhane (2022), awareness campaigns should convey a clear message to all that GBV will not be tolerated, and the implementation of this policy should affirm this warning. The policies should be a guideline or map for survivors of GBV that guides them throughout the reporting process. It should thus also address the issues of punishment, justice, and support. In essence, the process should be spelled out clearly and unambiguously.

6.3 Recommendations

It should be noted that the recommendations are based on the findings of the study. The researcher offers the following recommendations in the knowledge that they are pertinent to the scope of the study and hence to the institution under investigation. However, other institutions of higher learning may also be informed by the findings and may apply these recommendations if they are pertinent to their challenges concerning the underreporting of GBV.

- Awareness campaigns are paramount in circulating pertinent information. By raising awareness and providing information, campaigns can alter attitudes

towards GBV and foster a culture of intolerance towards such behaviours. In these campaigns, the concept of GBV should be emphasised so that the populace is informed about its nature and the dangers it poses

- Nonetheless, it is important to note that awareness alone is insufficient; ensuring justice and support for survivors is crucial to instil confidence in reporting and addressing GBV effectively.
- To ensure justice for the victims of GBV, the institution should deal with such cases with fairness, sensitivity, and transparency. They should solve cases successfully and provide feedback to the entire university community to prove that they have zero tolerance for GBV.
- A student parliament will be effective in dealing with this matter as it can be used as a space where solved and unsolved cases are presented and discussed. This will ensure transparency and fairness while providing justice for the entire university community.
- Collaboration among the Criminal Justice, Law, SSD, and PSD units should be maintained to solve GBV cases effectively as 'many hands are better than one'. Therefore, teamwork that involves all stakeholders can facilitate strong intervention measures to address and combat GBV and other crimes that occur commonly on campus.
- The collaboration between HEIs and law enforcement (specifically the SAPS) should be enforced to ensure the protection of the entire university community. This will ensure that off-campus students are protected as they are also the responsibility of the institution.
- Visible GBV offices. This means that the institution should move the unit to a visible area and have enough trained staff to work in these offices to ensure that the victims of GBV receive the best support services.
- The GBV personnel should be well-trained and exposed to workshops and orientation sessions so that they will be equipped with the necessary skills to deal with GBV survivors.

- An anonymous reporting facility should be implemented. By providing an anonymous reporting option, universities can create a safe space for survivors to come forward without fear of retaliation or judgment.
- The appointment of designated personnel to investigate GBV cases

Overall, this study emphasises the importance of the equitable protection of all students, the effective handling of GBV cases, and collaboration between the institution and external authorities to ensure justice and safety for all. Collectively, the recommendations underscore the need for comprehensive strategies to address GBV on and off campus, and such strategies should include unambiguous preventative measures, victim support services, and mechanisms for holding perpetrators accountable.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

According to Cassim (2021a), every study has its shortcomings which may pose some disadvantages, and this study was no exception.

In terms of knowledge construction, there was a shortage of staff members who could participate in the study. This limitation was due to the limited number of staff members who work hand in hand with GBV victims in this institution. The researcher initially aimed to have two focus groups and to involve 10 support staff members in each group, but the reality was that only one focus group of 7 members could be recruited. Therefore, instead of the 40 participants envisaged by the researcher, a sample size of 29 participants was achieved that included 22 postgraduate students for individual interviews and 7 staff members who formed one focus group. This limitation suggests that the institution should employ more professional personnel to attend specifically to the threat of GBV on campus.

The researcher initially aimed to examine the causes of underreporting of GBV in all South African HEIs, but due to lack of resources and time the study could focus on only one institution. Therefore, the aim was not to generalised the findings but to understand the studied phenomenon as it manifested at the study site. This means that the study was constrained by its delineated scope as it allowed only a limited breadth of information to be gathered. The researcher acknowledges that the underreporting of GBV is a pervasive

issue that affects HEIs as well as societies globally and therefore, by sampling only one institution, the researcher's ability to acquire comprehensive data was restricted.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research studies should aim to encompass a broader spectrum of HEIs and larger study samples to eventually include all South African universities and affected societies. This approach is essential as student behaviour and practices within institutions often mirror societal trends. While universities can undertake measures to mitigate GBV or promote reporting mechanisms, the effectiveness of these efforts may be compromised if they are not synchronised with societal-level interventions. This requires a holistic approach that should involve both universities and broader societal structures for meaningful progress in combating GBV.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the key conclusions and recommendations based on the study's findings, while it also highlighted the limitations it faced. The core aim of the study was to understand the factors that contribute to the underreporting of GBV, its effects, and students' awareness of the availability of reporting facilities and procedures. The intention was to offer recommendations regarding interventions that may be employed to encourage the reporting of GBV.

The discourse highlighted intimidation as a dominant factor that contributes to the underreporting of GBV. This factor is associated with victims' fear: fear of the perpetrator or people close to the perpetrator, fear of not being believed, fear of and distrust in law enforcement and support units at the targeted institution, and fear of stigma and shame attached to GBV. Other factors that were highlighted are lack of awareness of the nature of and the threat GBV poses, the dangers of financial dependence, and the debilitating and prejudicial impacts of patriarchal beliefs. The study further revealed that both victims and the institution suffer adverse consequences when GBV is not reported. Moreover, failure to report cases of GBV causes victims to suffer from low self-esteem which often leads to poor academic performance, isolation, the use of substances as a coping

mechanism, lack of trust, and even suicide. This emphasises the importance of regulating effective interventions that will encourage the reporting of GBV cases and empower victim support. Furthermore, the findings affirm that underreporting tarnishes the institution's reputation, perpetuates a culture that is conducive to violence, and distorts the accurate representation of GBV prevalence. Lack of awareness about reporting procedures was also highlighted as a contributing factor to the underreporting of GBV.

To address this issue which, in the researcher's view, has become a pandemic, the researcher urges this and other institutions with similar challenges to establish policies that will explicitly outline reporting mechanisms and procedures, that will encourage reporting, and that will have serious repercussions for perpetrators. Furthermore, the researcher asserts that institutions should improve communication and dissemination measures to ensure that these policies are familiar to all, that students are aware of the consequences for offenders, and that they are aware of the support services available to all. Moreover, the institution must uphold the principles of justice, fairness, and transparency to encourage the reporting of GBV cases. Prioritising the health, safety, and mental well-being of victims is also paramount. This should be demonstrated by believing them when they come forward; it is thus crucial as their pain is acknowledged and that their voices are heard. A supportive attitude will facilitate a welcoming environment and foster a culture of reporting. In essence, the institution under study should cultivate an environment that is conducive to learning and that is free from the fear of GBV and other forms of victimisation.

REFERENCES

- Abbey, A., Zawacki, T., Buck, P.O., Clinton, A.M., & McAuslan, P. (2004). Sexual assault and alcohol consumption: What do we know about their relationship and what types of research are still needed? *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 9(3), 271-303.
- Acharya, A.S., Prakash, A., Saxena, P., & Nigam, A. (2013). Sampling: The why and how of it. *Indian Journal of Medical Specialities*, 4(2), 330-333.
- Adams, D.J., Mabusela, M.S., & Dlamini, E.T. (2013). Sexual harassment: The 'silent killer' of female students at the University of Ayoba in South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 27(5), 1149-1163.
- Adonis, C. K., & Silinda, F. (2021). Institutional culture and transformation in higher education in post-1994 South Africa: a critical race theory analysis. *Critical African Studies*, 13(1), 73-94.
- Advisory Committee. (2022). South Africa: President signs trio of GBV laws. Available at: <https://altadvisory.africa/2022/02/07/south-africa-president-signs-trio-of-gbv-laws/#:~:text=On%2028%20January%202022%2C%20President%20Cyril%20Ramaphosa%20signed,Amendment%20Act%2C%20and%20the%20Domestic%20Violence%20Amendment%20Act> [Accessed on 07 October 2022].
- Ajayi, A.I., Mudefi, E., & Owolabi, E.O. (2021). Prevalence and correlates of sexual violence among adolescent girls and young women: Findings from a cross-sectional study in a South African university. *BMC Women's Health*, 21-299.
- Akhtar, D.M.I. (2016). Research design. Available at: SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2862445> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2862445>.
- American Psychological Association. (2022). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Available at: <https://www.apa.org/topics/ptsd> [Accessed on 9 April 2023].
- Anderson, B., & Naidu, C. (2022). 'Fresh meat': First-year female students negotiating sexual violence on campus residences. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 36(1), 41-58.
- Anwana, E., Dlamini, N., & Reddy, M. (2024). Men's perspectives on gender-based violence and the economic empowerment imbalances between men and women

- in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies*, 6(1), 1-15.
- Anyanwu, O.U., Uro-Chukwu, H.C., & Obuna, J. (2022). A case of restricted disclosure due to anticipatory stigma and shame in an 11-year-old survivor of sexual assault. *Journal of Nepal Paediatric Society*, 42(3), 64-66.
- Armstrong, E., Hamilton, L., & Sweeney, B. (2006). Sexual assault on campus: A multilevel, integrative approach to party rape. *Social Problems*, 53(4).
- Asencio, E.K., Merrill, M., & Steiner, M. (2014, September). Self-esteem, the fear of crime, and the decision to protect oneself from victimization. In *Sociological Forum* (Vol. 29, No. 3, pp. 587-606).
- Athuman, A. & Munishi, E. (2022). Exploration of male partners' gender-based violence by female partners in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. *East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 3(6), 189-197. <https://doi.org/10.46606/eajess2022v03i06.0250>.
- Australian Government. (2021). National plan to reduce violence against women and their children. Available at: <https://www.womenssafety.gov.au/national-plan> [Accessed on 6 April 2023].
- Ayhan, H.Ö. (2011). Non-probability sampling survey methods. *International Encyclopaedia of Statistical Science*, 2(14), 979-982.
- Babbie, E., & Mouton, J. (2001). *The practice of social research*. Cape Town, South Africa: Oxford University Press.
- Bacchus, L.J., Ranganathan, M., Watts, C., & Devries, K. (2018). Recent intimate partner violence against women and health: A systematic review and meta-analysis of cohort studies. *BMJ Open*, 8(7), e019995.
- Bhandari, P. (2020). Data collection: Definition, methods & examples. Available at: <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/datacollection/#:~:text=Data%20collection%20is%20a%20systematic%20process%20of%20gathering,knowledge%20and%20original%20insights%20into%20your%20research%20problem> [Accessed on 13 August 2022].
- Bogle, K.A. (2008). *Hooking up*. New York: NY University Press.

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp0630a.
- Brink, J. G., Mdaka, Q., Matee, L., & Weppelman, K. (2021). Practitioner's perspectives on a national South African higher education institution policy framework mitigating gender-based violence at a South African University. *International Journal of Critical Diversity Studies*, 4(2), 47-60.
- Buiten, D., & Naidoo, K. (2020). Laying claim to a name: Towards a sociology of gender-based violence. *South African Review of Sociology*, 51(2), 61-68.
- Cakal, E. (2021). Perception, practice and proximity. Qualifying threats as psychological torture in international law. *Torture Journal*, 31(1), 19-36.
- Cantor, D., Fisher, B., Chibnall, S., Townsend, R., Lee, H., Bruce, C., & Thomas, G. (2015). *Report on the AAU campus climate survey on sexual assault and sexual misconduct*. Association of American Universities.
- Carling, A. (1992). *Social divisions*. London: Verso.
- Cassim, L. (2021a). An overview of research design and methodology (4th ed.). s.l.: ERS Consultants CC.
- Cassim, L. (2021b). Introduction to research and how to write a research proposal (4th ed.). s.l.: ERS Consultants CC.
- Caulfield, J. (2022). How to do thematic analysis: A step-by-step guide & examples. Available from <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology> [Accessed on 01 April 2022].
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). Intimate partner violence: Consequences. Available from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/consequences.html> [Accessed on 7 April 2023].
- Central Statistical Agency [Ethiopia] and ICF International. (2016). Ethiopia demographic and health survey 2016: Key indicators report. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: CSA and ICF.
- Chauke, P., Dlamini, N., Kiguwa, P., Mthombeni, A., Nduna, M., & Selebano, N. (2015). Half of the picture: Interrogating common sense gendered beliefs surrounding sexual harassment practices in higher education. *Agenda*, 29(3), 106-177.

- Chibango, C., & Chibango, S.T. (2022). Prevalence and under-reporting of sexual abuse in Ruwa: A human rights-based approach. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 78(2), a7976. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i2.7976>.
- Chikwesigha, E.C. (2019). Sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Nigeria: Understanding the issues. *Gender and Behaviour*, 17(4), 13992-14002.
- Chitsamatanga, B.B., & Ntlama, N. (2020). Is naming and shaming the perpetrator of sexual violence a sacrilege? The nascent voices of senior female students at a South African university. *Gender & Behaviour*, 18(3).
- Collins, P. H. (2000). **Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment**. Routledge.
- Connor, S. (2020). Underreporting of dietary intake: key issues for weight management clinicians. *Current Cardiovascular Risk Reports*, 14, 1-10.
- Cranney, S. (2016). Dangerous colleges: Associations between school-level factors and the risk of sexual victimisation of female students. *Violence and Gender*, 3(2), 100-106.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). **Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color**. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
- Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. London: Sage.
- Culatta, E., Clay-Warner, J., Boyle, K.M., & Oshri, A. (2020). Sexual revictimization: A routine activity theory explanation. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 35(15-16), 2800-2824.
- D'Agostino, J.P., Vakharia, K.T., Bawa, S., Sljivic, S., & Natoli, N. (2019). Intimidation and sexual harassment during plastic surgery training in the United States. *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery–Global Open*, 7(12), e2493.
- Daniels, K. (2023). TUT student, Ntokozo Xaba, was stabbed to death by ex-boyfriend. Available from <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/news/tut-student-ntokozo-xaba-stabbed-to-death-by-former-girlfriend-6-february-2023/> [Accessed on 01 March 2023].
- Davids, N. (2020). Gender-based violence in South African universities: An institutional challenge. *Council on Higher Education*, 10, 1-13.

- Dawson, M., Sutton, D., Zecha, A., Boyd, C., Johnson, A., & Mitchell, A. (2020). #CallItFemicide: Understanding sex/gender-related killings of women and girls in Canada. *Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability*. Retrieved from <http://femicideincanada.ca>.
- De Klerk, V., Klazinga, L., & McNeill, A. (2007). The habitus of the dominant: Addressing rape and sexual assault at Rhodes University. *Agenda*, 27(74), 115-124.
- De Matos, M., Tomé, G., & Camacho, I. (2020). The role of education in preventing gender-based violence. In *Handbook of Research on Gender and Economic Life* (pp. 309-324). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- De Wet-Billings, N., & Billings, B. (2024). Experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) among females with same-sex partners in South Africa: what is the role of age-disparity? *BMC Women's Health*, 24(1), 168.
- DeGue, S., Valle, L. A., Holt, M. K., Massetti, G. M., Matjasko, J. L., & Tharp, A. T. (2014). A systematic review of primary prevention strategies for sexual violence perpetration. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 19(4), 346-362.
- Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). (2017). *Addressing gender-based violence in the post school education and training sector: Draft policy and strategy framework*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). (2019). *Policy framework to address gender-based violence in the post-school education and training system*. [For public comments]. 15 April 2019. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). (2020). *Policy framework to address gender-based violence in the post-school education and training system*. Pretoria: DHET. Available at: <https://www.dhet.gov.za/Social%20Inclusion/DHET%20GBV%20Policy%20Framework%2030July2020.pdf>. Accessed on 07 October 2022.
- Devries, K. M., Mak, J. Y., Bacchus, L. J., Child, J. C., Falder, G., Petzold, M., ... & Watts, C. H. (2013). Intimate partner violence and incident depressive symptoms and suicide attempts: A systematic review of longitudinal studies. *PLoS Medicine*, 10(5), e1001439.

- Dietrich, F., & List, C. (2013). *A reason-based theory of rational choice*. *Nous*, 47(1), 104-134
- Diko, M.L. (2023). Gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa: An interdisciplinary discourse analysis of one selected isiZulu and one selected isiXhosa literary text. *African Journal of Inter-Multidisciplinary Studies*. doi:10.51415/ajims.v5i1.1147
- Dlamini, N., & Olanrewaju, O.A. (2021). *An investigation into campus safety and security*. South Africa, Durban: IEOM Society International.
- Dlamini, S., & Makhaye, M. (2023). Community policing as a panacea for gender-based violence impasse. *African Journal of Gender, Society and Development (formerly Journal of Gender, Information and Development in Africa)*, 12(2), 7-29.
- Dube, S. P. (2023). Sports as a Gender Based Violence (GBV) mitigation strategy in higher education institutions. *Journal for Educators, Teachers and Trainers* *Journal for Educators, Teachers and Trainers*, (141).
- Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (2012). Social role theory. *Handbook of theories of social psychology*, 2, 458-476.
- Edwards, K.M., Sessarego, S.N., & Gidycz, C.A. (2015). Risk factors for sexually victimizing college men: Identifying those at greatest risk. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 30(16), 2884-2906.
- Ellyson, A. M., Ortega, A., & Bedard-Gilligan, M. A. (2023). Institution of higher education substance use amnesty policies and sexual violence reporting. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 38(1-2), 212-236.
- Enaifoghe, A., Dlelana, M., Durokifa, A.A., & Dlamini, N.P. (2021). The prevalence of gender-based violence against women in South Africa: A call for action. *African Journal of Gender, Society & Development*, 10(1), 117.
- End Violence Against Women International. (n.d.). Start by believing. Available at: <https://www.startbybelieving.org/>. Accessed on 10 April 2022).
- England, P., Shafer, E.F., & Fogarty, A.C. (2008). Hooking up and forming romantic relationships on today's college campuses. *The Gendered Society Reader*, 3, 531-593.

- Etikan, I., Musa, S.A., & Alkassim, R. (2015). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistic*, 5(1), 1-4.
- Faulkner, M. (2022). Current trends with anonymous reporting: Lessons learned from Duluth, Minnesota. In *Sexual assault kits and reforming the response to rape* (pp. 221-234). Routledge.
- Fernández-Fontelo, A., Cabaña, A., Joe, H., Puig, P., & Moriña, D. (2019). Untangling serially dependent underreported count data for gender-based violence. *Statistics in Medicine*, 38(22), 4404-4422.
- Fielder, R.L., & Carey, M.P. (2010). Prevalence and characteristics of sexual hook-ups among first-semester female college students. *Journal of Sex Research*, 47(1), 1-9.
- Finchilescu, G., & Dugard, J. (2021). Experiences of gender-based violence at a South African university: Prevalence and effect on rape myth acceptance. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(5-6), NP2749-NP2772.
- Finkelhor, D., Shattuck, A., Turner, H. A., & Hamby, S. L. (2014). The lifetime prevalence of child sexual abuse and sexual assault assessed in late adolescence. *Journal of adolescent Health*, 55(3), 329-333.
- Fisher, B.S., Daigle, L.E., Cullen, F.T., & Turner, M.G. (2003). Reporting sexual victimisation to the police and others: Results from a national level study of college women. *Criminal Justice and Behavior: An International Journal*, 30(1), 6-38.
- Fouché, A., & Francois Fouché, D. (2024). *Legislation and gender-based violence in South Africa: What is the problem represented to be? In Families and gendered violence and conflict: Pan-Continent Reach* (pp. 1-18). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Garcia, J.R., Reiber, C., Massey, S.G., & Merriwether, A.M. (2012). Sexual hookup culture: A review. *Review of General Psychology*, 16(2), 161-176.
- García-Moreno, C., Jansen, H.A.F.M., Ellsberg, M., Heise, L., & Watts, C.H. (2015). Prevalence of intimate partner violence: Findings from the WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence. *The Lancet*, 368(9543), 1260-1269.

- George, L. (2020). Gender-based violence against women in South Africa. Ballard Brief.
- George, T. (2022). Semi-structured interview: Definition, guide & examples. Available at: <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/semi-structured-interview/> [Accessed on 13 August 2022].
- George, T., & Merkus, J. (2021). Explanatory research: Definition, guide, & examples. Available at: <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/explanatory-research/> [Accessed on 13 August 2022].
- Gonultas, B. M. (2023). Relationship Between The “Sexual Abuse Whirlpool” and Gender, Type of Abuse, Victim-Perpetrator Relationship, Disclosure, Psychological Reactions, and Revictimization of Sexual Abuse Victims. *International journal of offender therapy and comparative criminology*, 67(15), 1493-1508.
- Gøtzsche, P. (2022). Anonymous authorship may reduce prescription drug deaths. *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics*, 7(3), 189.
- Gouws, A. & Kritzing, A. (2007). Dealing with sexual harassment at institutions of higher learning: Policy implementation of a South African university. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 21(1), 68-84.
- Government of South Africa. (2022). *Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Act No. 12 of 2021*. Available at: https://static.pmg.org.za/Crim_and_Related.pdf [Accessed on 11 April 2023].
- Government of South Africa. (2022). *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 13 of 2021*. Available at: https://static.pmg.org.za/Crim_Law.pdf. [Accessed on 11 April 2023].
- Government of South Africa. (2022). *Domestic Violence Amendment Act of 2021*. Available at: https://static.pmg.org.za/Domestic_Violence_Act.pdf. [Accessed on 11 April 2023].
- Government Offices of Sweden. (2016). Gender equality policy in Sweden. Available at: <https://www.government.se/contentassets/efcc5a15ef154522a872d8e46ad69148/gender-equality-policy-in-sweden-240229.pdf> [Accessed on 12 July].
- Green, D. P., & Shapiro, I. (1995). Pathologies of rational choice theory: A critique of applications in political science. Yale University Press.

- Gruber, J.E. (2014). Victim decision-making in intimate partner violence cases: Exploring the role of police and prosecutorial discretion. *Violence Against Women*, 20(1), 71-94.
- Gwebu, M.D. (2021). 16 Days of activism against gender-based violence: Novel approaches for Higher Education. [Opinion Piece]. Available at: <http://www.unizulu.ac.za/opinion-piece-16-days-of-activism-against-gender-based-violence-novel-approaches-for-higher-education/> [Accessed on 21 April 2023].
- Hadi, A. (2017). Patriarchy and gender-based violence in Pakistan. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(4).
- Hariyanto, H., & Shalihah, F. (2023). The purpose of crimination against perpetrators and victims in the perspective of restorative justice. *Corruptio*, 4(1), 1-12.
- Heath, A. (1976). *Rational choice and social exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heinzerling, K.G. (2019). Applying best practice guidelines on chronic pain in clinical practice: Treating patients who suffer from pain and addiction. doi: 10.1016/B978-0-323-54856-4.00009-2.
- Heldman, C. (2016). *Campus sexual assault: A reference handbook*. ABC-CLIO.
- Hilda, N. L., & Pilot, M. (2015). Reporting and preventing sexual assault among students at a selected university in South Africa. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 44(1), 95-100.
- Hlatshwayo, M. N. (2020). Being Black in South African higher education: An intersectional insight. *Acta Academica*, 52(2), 163-180.
- Hodgkinson, T., Andresen, M.A., & Saville, G. (2018). "Staying out of that public housing": Examining the role of security measures in public housing design. *Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, 20, 99-112.
- Human Rights Campaign (HRC). (2022). LGBTQ+ Intimate Partner Violence Statistics.
- Isaacs, A.N. (2014). An overview of qualitative research methodology for public health researchers. *International Journal of Medicine and Public Health*, 4(4).
- Ison, J., Forsdike, K., Henry, N., Hooker, L., & Taft, A. (2023). "You're just constantly on alert": Women and gender-diverse people's experiences of sexual violence on public transport. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 08862605231186123.

- Jasor, O. (2020). Transforming African masculinity: A transnational approach to gender justice in South Africa. *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 46(2).
- Jennings, P. (2013). *Melting the iceberg of fear: A collective response*. Dublin: Safer Blanchardstown.
- Jewkes, R., Flood, M., & Lang, J. (2015). From work with men and boys to changes of social norms and reduction of inequities in gender relations: A conceptual shift in prevention of violence against women and girls. *The Lancet*, 385(9977), 1580-1589.
- Jewkes, R., Sikweyiya, Y., Morrell, R., & Dunkle, K. (2011). The relationship between intimate partner violence, rape and HIV amongst South African men: A cross-sectional study. *PloS ONE*, 6(9), e24256.
- Johnson, D. (2022). What is data analysis? Research types, methods, and techniques. Available at: <https://www.guru99.com>what-is-data-analysis> [Accessed on 29 April 2022].
- Johnson, R.B. & Onwuegbuzie, A.J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *American Educational Research Association*, 33(7).
- Johnson, S.K., Cerulli, C., & Romano, E. (2018). "That's what makes people nervous around here": Campus and community perceptions of institutional response to intimate partner violence. *Violence Against Women*, 24(2), 171-194.
- Kabaya, S. (2021). *First-year female university residence students' experiences and constructions of gender and sexuality in the context of gender-based violence in South Africa* (Doctoral dissertation). University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Kanjiri, N.K., & Nomngcoyiya, T. (2021). The feminisation of gender-based violence at an institution of higher learning in South Africa. *African Journal of Social Work*, 11(3), 132-138.
- Karam, E.G., Friedman, M.J., Hill, E.D., Kessler, R.C., McLaughlin, K.A., Petukhova, M., & Koenen, K.C. (2014). Cumulative traumas and risk thresholds: 12-month PTSD in the World Mental Health (WMH) surveys. *Depression and Anxiety*, 31(2), 130-142.

- Kgatle, M.O. & Mafa, P. (2021). Absent voices: Help-seeking behaviour among South African male victims of intimate partner violence. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 24, 717-728.
- Khan, H.U., & Zaman, S. (2020). Prospects and implications of students politics in educational institutions of Pakistan. *Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ)*, 4(1), 161-170.
- Kidd, R.F & Chayet, E.F. (2010). Why do victims fail to report? The psychology of criminal victimization. *Journal of Social Issues*, 40(1), 39-50.
- Kilmartin, C., & O'Donnell, E. (2019). The role of female victims' dress and sex-role attitudes in victim blaming for sexual harassment. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 28(3), 274-284. doi:10.1080/09589236.2018.1490738
- Kivelä, J., Arminen, I., & Keskinen, S. (2018). *Gendered and sexual violence in higher education*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lang, J.C., Lloyd, S., & Cutts, T. (2021). "It happens to all of us": A qualitative exploration of student experiences of sexual harassment in a South African university. *Gender and Education*, 1-19.
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry* (Vol. 75). London: Sage.
- Loftus, B. (2009). *Police culture in a changing world*. Oxford University Press.
- Loh, C., Gidycz, C.A., Lobo, T.R., & Luthra, R. (2017). A prospective examination of fear of retaliation as a predictor of sexual assault reporting. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 32(11), 1694-1714.
- Lorenz, K., Hayes, R., & Jacobsen, C. (2022). "Keeping the wound open": Survivor experiences with title IX investigations. *Women & Criminal Justice*, 1-21.
- Luborsky, M.A., & Rubinstein, R.L. (1995). Sampling in qualitative research: Rationale, issues, and methods. *Res Aging*, 17(1), 89-113. doi:10.1777/0164027595171005.
- Lynch, A. (2023, March 20). The Violence Against Women Act. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Violence-Against-Women-Act>. [Accessed on 6 April 2023].
- Machisa, M.T., Mahlangu, P., Chirwa, E., Nunze, N., Sikweyiya, Y., Dartnall, E., ... & Jewkes, R. (2023). Ntombi Vimbela! Sexual violence risk reduction intervention:

- Pre- and one-year post assessments from a single arm pilot feasibility study among female students in South Africa. *BMC Public Health*, 23(1), 1242.
- Magaldi, D. & Berler, M. (2020). Semi-structured interviews. In: V. Zeigler-Hill, & T.K. Shackelford (Eds.), *Encyclopaedia of personality and individual differences*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24612-3_857.
- Mahabeer, P. (2021). "Powerless and afraid, I felt they let me down": Reflections of a first-year student on gender-based violence at a university in South Africa. *Agenda*, 35, 1, 29-41. doi:10.1080/10130950.2020.1843839.
- Makhafola, K.P. (2020). *Hidden narratives of sexual harassment in South Africa's academy: Exploring women students' experiences at the University of Johannesburg* (Master's Dissertation). Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg.
- Makhanya, M.T. (2022). Pastoral care for gender-based violence affected South African university students. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 103(2). [Online]. ISSN 2414-3324.
- Makhaye, M. S. (2016). Exploring students' perceptions on the nature and incidence of crime on university on-campus residence (Master's dissertation). Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Makhaye, M.S., & Ajani, O.A. (2023). A scourge of sexual victimisation of female students: Experiences and perceptions from selected university communities in South Africa. *Multicultural Education*, 9(1).
- Makhaye, M.S., Mkhize, S.M., & Sibanyoni, E.K. (2023). Female students as victims of sexual abuse at institutions of higher learning: Insights from KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *SN Social Science: A Springer Nature Journal*, 3, 40.
- Makhene, A. (2022). Gender-based violence in higher education: An integrative review. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 10(3), 234-247.
- Malatjie, T., & Mamokhere, J. (2024). The Intricacies and Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa: Forms, Causes and Mitigation Measures. *E-Journal of Humanities, Art and Social Sciences*, 1059–1070. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2024571>

- Mambo, S.F., & Omusilibwa, M. (2020). Effects of Coronavirus pandemic spread on science, technology, engineering and mathematics education in higher learning institutions. doi: 10.1109/WEEF-GEDC49885.2020.9293679
- Manik, S., & Tarisayi, K.S. (2021). "What happened to I'm my sister's keeper?": A case of abuse at a university in South Africa. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 7(1), 2001142. doi: 10.1080/23311886.2021.2001142.
- Mathews, S., Abrahams, N., Jewkes, R., Martin, L.J., & Lombard, C. (2013). The epidemiology of child homicides in South Africa. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 91, 562-568.
- Mbandlwa, Z. (2020). Analysis of a one-sided narrative of gender-based violence in South Africa. *Solid State Technology*, 63(6).
- McGuire, J., Evans, E., & Kane, E. (2021). Victim and witness retraction and disengagement: A systematic review of contributing factors. *Evidence-Based Policing and Community Crime Prevention*, 313-359.
- Mgijima, M.N. (2014). Violence in South African schools: Perceptions of communities about a persistent problem. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(14), 198.
- Mkhize, N.M. (2015). *Causes of gender-based violence against women at Nseleni Community*. KwaDlangezwa: University of Zululand.
- Mofokeng, J.T., Mofokeng, L., & Simelane, N.N. (2024). A sustainable future for all towards reduction of gender-based-violence and femicide in communities of learning: A strategic perspective. *Khazanah Sosial*, 6(1), 84-109.
- Moir, E.S., Gwyther, S., Wilkins, H.S., & Boland, G. (2022). Hidden GBV: Women and substance use. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, doi:10.3389/fpsyt.2022.939105.
- Moletsane, R. (2023). Using photovoice to enhance young women's participation in addressing gender-based violence in higher education. *Comparative Education*, 59(2), 239-258.
- Mphaphuli, M., & Smuts, L. (2020). "Give it to him": Sexual violence in the intimate relationships of black married women in South Africa. *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 46(2).

- Mudimeli, L.M., & Khosa-Nkatini, H.P. (2024). Cultural dynamics of gender-based violence and pastoral care in South Africa. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 80(2), 9353.
- Murati, R. (2014). Student parliament in function of training for democratic action. *International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering and Education (IJCRSEE)*, 2(1), 97-99.
- Mutinta, G. (2022). Gender-based violence among female students and implications for health intervention programmes in public universities in Eastern Cape, South Africa. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8(1), 2079212.
- Myhill, A., & Johnson, K. (2016). Police responses to domestic violence: Insights from a systematic review. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 16(1), 3–20.
- Nakayiza, C. (2024). Gender-based violence ranks as top women’s-rights issue that Ugandans want government and society to address. Afrobarometer: Dispatch No. 792.
- National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence & Femicide (GBVF). (2020-2030). Human dignity and healing, safety, freedom & equality in our lifetime. South Africa. Retrieved from: www.women.gov.za
- Nduna, M., & Tshona, S.O. (2021). Domesticated poly-violence against women during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa. *Psychological Studies*, 66(3), 347-353.
- Neuman, W.L. (2006). *Research methods: Qualitative and quantitative* (6th ed.). USA: Pearson International Edition.
- Newman, C., Nayebare, A., Neema, S., Agaba, A., & Akello, L.P. (2021). Uganda’s response to sexual harassment in the public health sector: From dying silently to gender-transformational HRH policy. *Human Resources Health*, 19:59. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12960-021-00569-0>
- Ngcobo, S.E. (2024). Popular South African music on dominant local masculine ideals and their influence and societal response to the gender-based violence (GBV) pandemic. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 11(1), 2325680.

- Ngulube, P. (2015). Mixed methods research in the South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences: An Investigation of trends in the literature. *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences*, 18(1).
- Nickerson, C. (2022). Interpretivism paradigm & research philosophy. Available at: <https://simplysociology.com/interpretivism-paradigm.html> [Accessed on 13 August 2022].
- Nightingale, S.D. (2022). An exploratory analysis of factors related to reporting sexual assault to college officials by LGBTQ student survivors. *Journal of American College Health*, 1-9.
- Nijhawan, L.P; Janodia, M.D; Muddukrishna, B.S; Bhat, K.M; Bairy, K.L; Udupa, N. & Musmade, P.B. (2013). Informed consent: Issues and challenges. *Journal of Advanced Pharmaceutical Technology & Research*, 4(3), 134.
- Nkanjeni, U. (2020). 16 days of activism: 11 GBV cases that captured SA's attention this year. Available at: <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2020-11-25-16-days-of-activism-11-gbv-cases-that-captured-sas-attention-this-year/> [Accessed on 09 March 2023].
- No More. (n.d.). About 'No More'. Available at: <https://nomore.org/about/> [Accessed on 10 April 2023].
- Nobanda, L., Nkosi, S.L., & Sibanyoni, E.K. (2021). A possible explanation of violence against women during the COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa: A systematic review. *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology & Victimology*, 34(3).
- Palmer, N.A., & Kutateladze, B.L. (2021). What prosecutors and the police should do about underreporting of anti-LGBTQ hate crimes. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, doi:10.1007/S13178-021-00596-5
- Paul, E.L., & Hayes, K.A. (2002). The casualties of "casual" sex: A qualitative exploration of the phenomenology of college students' hookups. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 19(5), 639-661.
- Paull, M., Omari, M., D'Cruz, P., & Güneri Çangarli, B. (2019). Bystanders in workplace bullying: Working university students' perspectives on action versus inaction. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources* 58(3), 1–22.

- Powell, R.A. & Single, H.M. (1996). Focus groups. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 8(5), 499-504.
- Pratto, F., & Stewart, A. L. (2020). Power dynamics in intergroup relations. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 33, 250-255.
- Rabionet, S.E. (2011). How I learned to design and conduct semi-structured interviews: An ongoing and continuous journey. *Qualitative Report*, 16(2), 563-566.
- Raborife, M. (2020). Femicide 'Uyinene Mrwetyana, Mother': We are gripped by hurt, sadness, anger, and frustration. *News24*. Available at: News24.com [Accessed on 31 March 2022].
- Rahi, S. (2017). Research design and methods: A systematic review of research paradigms, sampling issues, and instruments development. *International Journal of Economic & Management Sciences*, 6(2). Doi:10.4172/2162- 6359.1000403
- Ranapurwala, S.I., Berg, M.T., & Casteel, C. (2016). Reporting crime victimisation to the police and the incidence of future victimisations: A longitudinal study. *Plos ONE*, 11(7), e0160072.
- Randa, M.B., & McGarry, J. (2023). Experiences of healthcare staff in forensic care facilities supporting sexual violence survivors in Tshwane, South Africa. *Curationis*, 46(1).
- Red Dot Foundation. (n.d.). SafeCity. Available at: <https://safecity.in/> [Accessed on 10 April 2022].
- Republic of South Africa. (1997). Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Republic of South Africa. (1998). Employment of Educators Act No. 76 of 1998. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Rice, S., Oliffe, J., Seidler, Z., Borschmann, R., Pirkis, J., Reavley, N., & Patton, G. (2021). Gender norms and the mental health of boys and young men. *The Lancet Public Health*, 6(8), e541-e542.
- Richards, T. N., Tillyer, M. S., & Wright, E. M. (2011). Intimate partner violence and the decision to prosecute: Examining the impact of offender and victim characteristics. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 26(10), 2317–2338.

- Richardson, L., Gabbay, J., & Lauterbach, D. (2018). Blaming the victim of sexual harassment: Impact of provocation and gender on victim blaming. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 33(12), 1881-1901. doi:10.1177/0886260516654627.
- Rikhotso, R. (2022). *Exploring the psychosocial impact of gender-based violence among silenced and marginalized women in Vhembe district municipality, Limpopo Province*. (Master's dissertation). University of South Africa.
- Saferspaces. (2022). Gender-based violence in South Africa. Available at: <https://www.saferspaces.org.za/understand/entry/gender-based-violence-in-south-africa> [Accessed on 12 August 2022].
- Saini, R. (2021). College faculty's narratives of addressing gender-based violence at a higher education institution in Delhi (India). *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education*, 13(5S).
- Shiva, L., Shukla, L., & Chandra, P.S. (2021). Alcohol use and gender-based violence. *Current Addiction Reports*, 8, 71-80.
- Sikweyiya, Y., Jewkes, R., & Morrell, R. (2017). Talking about rape: South African men's responses to questions about rape in a research environment. *Social Science & Medicine*, 191, 14–20.
- Smith, L.A., & Thomas, K.A. (2020). Institutional betrayal and college student reporting of gender-based violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 0886260520952031.
- Solanki, K. (2022). What is [sic] research approaches? Meaning and types of research approaches. Available at: toppers4u.com [Accessed on 12 August 2022].
- South African Government. (1996). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act No. 108 of 1996. Available at: <https://www.gov.za/documents/constitution/chapter-2-bill-rights> [Accessed on 10 April 2023].
- South African Government. (1997). *Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997*. Available at: <http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/Act101of1997s.pdf> [Accessed on 02 September 2022].
- South African Government. (2011). *The Protection from Harassment Act No. 17 of 2011*. Available at: <https://www.wylie.co.za/wp-content/uploads/protection-from-harassment-act-no.-17-of-2011.pdf> [Accessed on 11 April 2023].

- South African Police Service (SAPS). (2019). *Annual Crime Report 2013–2019*. Pretoria: SAPS.
- Southern African Development Community (SADC). Gender-Based Violence. Available at: <https://www.sadc.int/pillars/gender-based-violence> [Accessed on 10 October 2022].
- Spear, A.M. (2019). Teachers as change agents? Assessing teachers' perceptions of and responses to sexual gender-based violence in schools in Burkina Faso. *Fire: Forum for International Research in Education*, 5(2), 195-213.
- Statistic South Africa (StatsSA). (2018). Crime against women in South Africa: An in-depth analysis of the victims of crime survey data (p. 12). Pretoria: StatsSA.
- Statistics South Africa (StatsSA). (2019). *Victims of crime survey 2018*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.
- Statistics South Africa (StatsSA). (2020). *Gender statistics in South Africa 2019*. Available at: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182019.pdf>. Accessed on 8 April 2023.
- Statistics South Africa. (2023/2024). Crime Statistics from South African Police Services.
- Stauffer, C. (2021). Undocumented Latina GBV survivors: Using social capital as a form of resistance. *Social Sciences*, 10(12), 456.
- Steinbrenner, S.Y; Shawler, C; Ferreira, S., & Draucker, C. (2017). The lived experience of help-seeking by South African women after sexual assault. *Health Care for Women International*, 38(5), 425-438.
- Steyn, E., & Steyn, J. (2008). Revictimisation of rape victims by the South African Police Service. *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology & Victimology*, 2008(sed-1), 41-60.
- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). (2015). Preventing and responding to gender-based violence: Expressions and strategies. Sweden: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Available at: www.sida.se/publications [Accessed on 27 February 2022].
- Thobejane, T.D., Luthada, N.V., & Mogorosi, L.D. (2018). Gender-based violence against men: A muted reality. *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies*, 28(1).

- Thorne, S. (2000). Data analysis in qualitative research. *Evidence-Based Nursing*, 3, 68-70.
- Thusi, X., & Mlambo, V.H. (2023). South Africa's gender-based violence: An exploration of a single-sided account. *EUREKA: Social and Humanities*, 2, 73-80.
- Tordjman, S. (2022). School bullying and group violence: How to occupy a place in the group by exclusion. *Encephale-revue De Psychiatrie Clinique Biologique Et Therapeutique*, doi:10.1016/j.encep.2022.08.002
- UCT suspends student following sexual assault... (2022). UCT suspends student following sexual assault rape allegations. *News24*. Available at: <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/uct-suspends-student-following-sexual-assault-rape-allegations-20220209> [Accessed on 15 April 2023].
- UN Women. (n.d.). 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/take-action/16-days-of-activism> [Accessed on 10 April 2023].
- UN Women. (n.d.). What we do to end violence against women? GBV Command Center. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violencagainstwomen/flagship-programmes/gbv-command-centre> [Accessed on 10 April 2022].
- United Nations Human Rights. (2022). South Sudan: UN report highlights widespread sexual violence against women and girls in conflict fuelled by systemic impunity. [Press Release]. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/03/south-sudan-un-report-highlights-widespread-sexual-violence-against-women> [Accessed on 7 April 2023].
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). (2019). *Gender-based Violence: UNFPA Global Report 2018*. Available at: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA_GBV_Report_web_final.pdf [Accessed on 5 April 2023].
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). (2022). *Gender-based violence*. Available at: <https://www.unfpa.org/gender-based-violence#readmore-expand> [Accessed on 10 October 2022].

- United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>. Accessed on 23 April 2023.
- United Nations. (1993, 20 December). *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*. New York: United Nations.
- University of Pretoria. (2019). Anti-Discriminatory Policy. Pretoria. Available at: https://www.up.ac.za/media/shared/1/ZP_Files/r34_19-anti-discrimination-policy-with-annexures-approved-by-council-amended.zp180351.pdf [Accessed on 04 October 2023].
- University of the Western Cape suspends man... (2023). University of the Western Cape suspends man caught allegedly stabbing CPUT student. *The Citizen*. Available at: <https://www.citizen.co.za/news/uwc-suspends-man-caught-allegedly-stabbing-cput-student/> [Accessed on 14 November 2023].
- University of the Witwatersrand. (2021). Remember GBV victims. Available at: <https://www.wits.ac.za/news/latest-news/general-news/2021/2021-08/remember-gbv-victims.html> [Accessed on 15 April 2023].
- University of Zululand (UNIZULU). (2019). Policy and procedures on sexual harassment and gender-based violence. [Internal document]. KwaDlangezwa: UNIZULU.
- University of Zululand (UNIZULU). (2024). Notice by Management Issued on 23 May 2024. [Internal document]. KwaDlangezwa: UNIZULU.
- UNIZULU abandons rape probe. (2017). *News24*. Available from <https://www.news24.com/News24/unizulu-abandons-rape-probe-20170610>. [Accessed on 25 August 2022].
- Vandenhoe, W. (2014). *The human rights-based approach to international law: Towards a theoretical framework*. Routledge.
- Vehovar, V., Toepoel, V. & Steinmetz, S. (2016). Non-probability sampling. In *The Sage handbook of survey methods* (Vol. 1, pp. 329-45).
- Vincent, W., Gordon, D.M., Campbell, C., Ward, N.L., Albritton, T., & Kershaw, T. (2016). Adherence to traditionally masculine norms and condom-related beliefs: Emphasis on African American and Hispanic men. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 17(1), 42.

- Von Meullen, N. (2021). *Promoting gender-based violence awareness in higher education institutions: The case of student representative councils in selected South African universities* (Master's dissertation). Northwest University.
- Von Meullen, N., & Van der Walddt, G. (2022). A model for gender-based violence awareness: The case of student representative councils in selected South African universities. *Administration Publica*, 30(1), 34-35.
- Wafula, J. A. (2018). Addressing GBV in educational institutions: The Countiesâ Involvement. *International Journal of Advances in Social Science and Humanities*. ISSN: 2347-7474.
- Walklate, S., Fitz-Gibbon, K., & McCulloch, J. (2017). Is more law the answer? Seeking justice for victims of intimate partner violence through the reform of legal categories. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 18(1), 115–131.
- Ward, C.L., Artz, L., Leoschut, R., Kassanjee, P., & Burton, P. (2018). Sexual violence against children in South Africa: A nationally representative cross-sectional study of prevalence and correlates. *The Lancet Global Health*, 6(4), 460-468.
- Weiss, S.J. (2019). To hook up or not to hook up: A comparative study of men and women who participate in casual sexual encounters. *Sociological Forum*, 34(2), 394-413.
- Wentz, E., & Keimig, K. (2019). Arrest and referral decisions in sexual assault cases: The influence of police discretion on case attrition. *Social Sciences*, 8(6), 180.
- Westmarland, N., & Bows, H. (2018). Protecting victims of sexual violence: Precarious lives and institutional responses. *Violence Against Women*, 24(15), 1819–1838.
- Witteck, R. (2013). *Rational choice theory*. United States: Sage Publications.
- Workye, H., Mekonnen, Z., Wedaje, W., & Sitot, A. (2023). Prevalence and predictors of gender-based violence among Wolkite University female students, southwest Ethiopia, 2021: Cross-sectional study. *Frontiers in Reproductive Health*, 5, 978808.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2009). *Violence prevention: The evidence* (p. 20). Switzerland: WHO Press.

- World Health Organization (WHO). (2013a). Global and regional estimates of violence against women: Prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2013b). Understanding and addressing violence against women: Intimate partner violence. Available at: <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9789241548595/en/> [Accessed on 5 April 2023].
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2018). The health responses to gender-based violence in emergencies. [Webinar]. 17 August 2018.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2021). Violence against women. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women> [Accessed on 6 April 2023].
- Yesufu, S. (2022). The scourge of gender-based violence (GBV) on women plaguing South Africa. *EUREKA: Social and Humanities*, 1, 96-100.
- Young, W. (2021). Prevention and intervention for victims of violence in occupational therapy. *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 51(3), 96-98.
- Yu, H.H. (2021). Intersectionality and non-reporting behavior: Perceptions from women of color in federal law enforcement. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*. doi:10.1177/0734371X211006189.
- Zinyemba, K.G. & Hlongwana, K. (2022). Men's conceptualization of gender-based violence directed to women in Alexandra township, Johannesburg, South Africa. *BMC Public Health*, 22(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-14616-5>.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Permit to Collect Data

T: +27 35 902 6434
E: MothilalD@unizulu.ac.za
Office of the Registrar

12 April 2024



**UNIVERSITY OF
ZULULAND**

Our ref: Permit: 10/2024

Your ref:

PERMIT TO COLLECT DATA

The University of Zululand hereby permits L C Mdletshe to conduct research and collect data in accordance with the Ethics Clearance Certificate UZREC 0691 - 008PGD2023/123 issued by the University of Zululand on 10 April 2024 and the UNIZULU's POPI Declaration and Indemnity form dated 10 April 2024.

The Researcher may commence with data collection from the date of this Permit. This permit is valid for 12 months from the date of issue.

UNIZULU retains the right to withdraw or amend this permit if:

- Any unethical conduct is revealed or suspected.
- Relevant information has been withheld or misrepresented.
- Regulatory changes of whatever nature so require.
- The conditions contained in the Declaration have not been adhered to.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Mothilall'.

**D MOTHILALL
REGISTRAR**

APPENDIX B: Ethical Clearance Certificate



UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (Reg No: UZ-REC 0691-008)

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER

Certificate Number	UZ-REC 0691-008 PGM 2023/123						
Project Title	Perspectives of students and staff on the causes of underreporting of Gender-Based Violence at a selected university						
Principal Researcher/ Investigator	L.C Mdletshe						
Supervisor and Co- supervisor	Dr M Makhaye						
Department	Criminal Justice						
Faculty	Humanities and Social Sciences						
Type of Risk	Medium Risk – Data collection from people						
Nature of Project	Honours/4 th Year		Master's	X	Doctoral		Departmental

The University of Zululand's Research Ethics Committee (UZREC) hereby gives ethical approval in respect of the undertakings contained in the above-mentioned project. The Researcher may therefore commence with data collection from the date of this Certificate, using the certificate number indicated above.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS:

- (1) This certificate is valid for 1 year from the date of issue.
- (2) Principal researcher must provide an annual report to the UZREC in the prescribed format [due date- 18 April 2025]
- (3) The UZREC must be informed immediately of any material change in the conditions or undertakings mentioned in the documents that were presented to the meeting.
- (4) Under the Protection of Personal Information Act, 04 of 2013 ("POPIA"), researchers have a general legal duty to protect the information they process. They must ensure the security and protection of any personal information processed through the research and provide a compliant and consistent approach to data protection. The information collected via interviews must be for research purposes only. No personal information such as opinions, views, and academic background may be linked to the respondents' identity or shared with anyone for marketing purposes or otherwise.

The UZREC wishes the researcher well in conducting research.

Prof. Nokuthutha Kunene
Chairperson: University Research Ethics Committee Deputy Vice-
Chancellor: Research & Innovation 18 April 2024

RESEARCH & INNOVATION OFFICE
Website; <http://www.unizulu.ac.za>
Private Bag X1001
KwaDlangezwa, 3886
Tel: 035 902 6374/6324

Email;

APPENDIX C: Editors Certificate



lindac@skytec.co.za | 083 344 0706

SARS Income Tax No. 9249355208; CC Founding Statement No. CK94/16841/23 SARS; Tax Clearance Certificate No. 1994/016841/23
SACE REGISTRATION NUMBER: N.D. COERTZE – 1082433 (2003)

DECLARATION OF PROOF-READING

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, Nicolina D. Coertze, declare that I meticulously perused the Master's dissertation referred to below for language editing and proof-reading purposes. I identified and corrected linguistic and stylistic inaccuracies to the best of my knowledge and ability. Using the *Word Tracking* system, I kept track of the changes that I made. I also offered additional annotations for consideration by the author should she deem it necessary to address areas that I considered might need attention. I declare that I adhered to the general principles that guide the work of a language editor and that I remained within my brief as had been agreed with the author of the manuscript.

Details:

TITLE: PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS AND STAFF ON THE CAUSES OF UNDERREPORTING OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AT A SELECTED UNIVERSITY

NAME OF CANDIDATE:	Lungelo Cynthia Mdletshe
STUDENT NUMBER:	201719785
PROPOSED QUALIFICATION:	Master of Arts in Criminology
DEPARTMENT:	Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Department of Criminal Justice
TERTIARY INSTITUTION:	University of KwaZulu-Natal
SUPERVISOR:	Dr Mandisa S. Makhaye

Respectfully submitted on: 12 August 2024

(MRS) N.D. COERTZE
LANGUAGE EDITOR

DISCLAIMER: The Editor was not responsible for the final presentation of this manuscript. It was the author's/supervisor's prerogative to format the manuscript and to make additional changes after editing without referring the document back to the language editor.

APPENDIX D: Turnitin Report

Perspectives of Students and Staff on the Causes of Underreporting of Gender-Based Violence at a Selected University

ORIGINALITY REPORT

SIMILARITY INDEX	12%	10%	6%	3%
		INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za	Internet Source	1%
---	--------------------------	-----------------	----

2	repository.nwu.ac.za	Internet Source	<1%
---	----------------------	-----------------	-----

3	uir.unisa.ac.za	Internet Source	<1%
---	-----------------	-----------------	-----

4	ujcontent.uj.ac.za	Internet Source	<1%
---	--------------------	-----------------	-----

5	www.researchgate.net	Internet Source	<1%
---	----------------------	-----------------	-----

6 vital.seals.ac.za:8080 Internet Source

<1%

7 repository.up.ac.za Internet Source

<1%

8 ulspace.ul.ac.za Internet Source

<1%

9 hdl.handle.net Internet Source

<1%

10 www.saferespaces.org.za Internet Source

<1%

11 wiredspace.wits.ac.za Internet Source

<1%

12 commerce.nwu.ac.za Internet Source

<1%

APPENDIX E: Interview Schedule

TITLE: Perspectives of Students and Staff on the Causes of Underreporting of Gender-Based Violence at a Selected University

Biographical Information

Level of study:

Years of study:

Faculty:

Gender:

Age:

Interview Questions

Factors contributing to underreporting Cases of GBV

1. Can you describe the seriousness and nature of GBV within this campus?
2. What are the reasons/causes of underreporting of GBV cases?
3. Do students report GBV?
 - 3.1 What is discouraging them from reporting their GBV victimisations?
4. If you were ever to fall victim of GBV, would you report?
5. Has the institution made efforts to encourage reporting of GBV?
6. In your opinion, if victims do not report to university authority, who do they disclose this to?

Effects of GBV and underreporting

7. What are the effects of underreporting on the victims?
8. Are there any counselling programs available for GBV victims? If yes, how to access them?

9. What effects does underreporting have on the institution?

Awareness of GBV reporting procedures/facilities

10. What are the specific services that aim to create awareness of GBV within the institution?

11. Are you aware of any reporting procedures and where you can report GBV victimisation?

Preventive measures

12. What are the effective measures that have been put in place by the institution to prevent GBV?

12.1 Would you say that these measures are effective? If yes, how so?

Intervention on GBV

13. What are the implemented policies that address the GBV within the institution?

14. In your opinion, how can the issue of underreporting be addressed to encourage reporting?

15. What further recommendations do you have for addressing the issue of underreporting?

APPENDIX F: Focus Group Questions

TITLE: Perspectives of Students and Staff on the Causes of Underreporting of Gender-Based Violence at a Selected University

1. Can you describe the seriousness and nature of GBV within this institution?
2. What are the reasons/causes of underreporting of GBV cases?
 - 2.1. What is discouraging students from reporting their GBV victimisation?
 - 2.2. In your opinion, if victims do not report to university authorities, who do they disclose this to?
3. What are the effects of underreporting of GBV on the victims?
4. How does underreporting affect the institution?
5. In your own opinion, do you think students are aware of any reporting procedures and where to report GBV victimisation?
 - 5.1. If yes, what are the specific services that aim to create awareness of GBV within the institution?
6. What are the effective measures that have been put in place by the institution to prevent GBV?
7. In your opinion, how can the issue of underreporting be addressed to encourage reporting?