

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

## Men's Perspectives on Gender-Based Violence and the Economic Empowerment Imbalances between Men and Women in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

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### Abstract

South Africa continues to grapple with one of the world's highest rates of gender-based violence (GBV). The #TotalShutdown marches marked a pivotal moment as women rallied against GBV, echoing the resounding call of "enough is enough" nationwide, and emphasising the urgency for collective action and robust leadership. In response to this call, and with KwaZulu-Natal being the leading province in the country in relation to GBV and other reported sexual offences, the provincial government under the Department of Social Development (DSD) held a men's colloquium in 2021 to listen to the voices of the men, who are often regarded as "perpetrators" of GBV, through a dialogue session. The DSD held these dialogues in all 11 districts of Kwa-Zulu Natal, with the aim of affording men in the province an opportunity to speak about their perspectives on what they considered as causes of GBV in the province. A total of 548 men from the 11 districts attended the dialogue session. Data from the dialogue was extracted for this paper. The paper adopts an exploratory qualitative approach, utilising data collected from the dialogues to delve into men's perceptions regarding the root causes of GBV in KwaZulu-Natal. The paper examines whether a correlation exists between government gender-specific economic empowerment initiatives and male resentment or anger towards women in the region. The study reveals that the exclusion of men in the execution of women empowerment programmes in the province, leaves men feeling disenfranchised, demonised and demoralised. While the findings are confined to the KwaZulu-Natal province and thus not generalisable, they offer valuable insights that can guide efforts to enhance the inclusivity of gender-related programmes, ultimately aiding in the ongoing battle against GBV.

**Keywords:** economic empowerment; GBV; gender mainstreaming; programmes and policies; South Africa

### Introduction

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) has emerged as a critical and deeply entrenched issue in South Africa, a nation often referred to as the "rape capital of the world" (Calvino and Matadi, 2023). The alarming prevalence of GBV in the country has garnered global attention, reaching levels reminiscent of a nation grappling with the aftermath of war (Jewkes *et al.*, 2003; Buqa, 2022; Isike, 2022; Resane and Mudimeli, 2023). In response to this crisis, South African women united in an unprecedented show of solidarity during the #TotalShutdown marches of 2018. Held on August 1<sup>st</sup>, these demonstrations echoed a resounding call of "enough is enough" as women across the nation stood against GBV. These marches coincided with a June 2018 Statistics South Africa (2018) report, which revealed a 17% increase in female homicide rates from 2015 to 2016–17. Additionally, there was a 53% rise in the number of reported sexual offences against women, escalating from 31 665 in 2015–16 to 70 813 in 2016–17 (Statistics South Africa, 2018; UN Women, 2018). This historic moment marked a turning point in the battle against GBV, highlighting the urgent need for

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collective action and strong leadership in order to address this pervasive problem (Enaifoghe *et al.*, 2021; Yesufu, 2022; Zinzombe, 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2022 further complicated the context in which GBV has thrived in South Africa (Leburu-Masigo and Kgadima, 2020). The isolation, quarantine and strict lockdown measures that were imposed, resulted in victims of GBV forced to be in proximity with perpetrators of GBV hence further exacerbating the scourge (UNFPA, 2020; Anwana and Aroba, 2022; Ndlovu *et al.*, 2022). This paper embarked on an exploratory qualitative investigation into men's viewpoints on GBV. At its core, the study examines whether government-led gender-specific economic empowerment programmes such as the 50/50 policy, "take a girl child to work" programme, as well as other gender-specific awareness campaigns are linked to the rise in resentment and anger amongst men towards women in the province. The paper delves into the potential correlation between government-driven gender-specific economic empowerment programmes and the emergence of resentment, and at times, hostility amongst men towards women within the unique context of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Although the paper is not an evaluation of the gender-specific economic empowerment programmes, it may contribute to a deeper comprehension of gender dynamics, fostering the advancement of inclusive and cohesive policy implementation for a more harmonious society.

According to Schutte (2020), violence against women is a persistent universal problem, and South Africa is no exception. President Ramaphosa described GBV as the "second pandemic" in the country after Covid-19 (Ellis, 2020). The President expressed frustration over the fact that statistics continue to indicate that GBV was on the rise in the country. According to the President, *'these statistics are shameful, we are in the grip of a relentless war being waged on the bodies of women and children, despite our best efforts, there are no signs of abating'* (Vellai, 2021). Although accurate statistics are difficult to obtain for many reasons (including the fact that most incidents of GBV go unreported) (SaferSpaces, 2020). South Africa has a high incidence of GBV crimes, which includes violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people (Government of South Africa, 2023). GBV encompasses various forms including physical, sexual, emotional, financial, or structural abuse, and it can be perpetrated by intimate partners, acquaintances, strangers, or institutions. The majority of instances of interpersonal gender-based violence involve men as perpetrators and women as victims, with the perpetrator typically being someone known to the woman, such as a partner or family member (Schutte, 2020). According to a study conducted by SaferSpaces (2020), between 25% and 40% of women in South Africa have faced sexual and/or physical Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) during their lifetime. The prevalence of rape in South Africa varies as between 12% and 28% of women have reported being raped at some point in their lives, with the KwaZulu-Natal province having the highest number of rape cases in the country (Government of South Africa, 2021; Statistics South Africa, 2023).

There is no commonly accepted definition of GBV (Schutte, 2020). The WHO (2021) defines it as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." SaferSpaces (2020) defines GBV as "the general term used to capture violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations associated with each gender, along with the unequal power relationships between [...] genders, within the context of a specific society". Schutte (2020) describes GBV as "violence against women based on women's subordinate status in society. It includes any act or threat made by men or male dominated institutions that inflict physical, sexual, or psychological harm on a woman or girl because of their gender". Just as there is an absence of a universal definition of GBV, there is also a lack of consensus regarding the specific manifestations of GBV. As noted by Schutte (2020) and SaferSpaces (2020), GBV encompasses various forms such as Domestic Violence (DV), Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Non-partner Sexual Violence (SV), Extra-partner Sexual Violence (SV), and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). Consequently, many scholars often use these terms interchangeably (Ellis, 2020; SaferSpaces, 2020; Ndlovu *et al.*, 2022; Government of South Africa, 2023). This paper adopts both the SaferSpaces (2020) and the World Health Organization (WHO) (2021) definitions, acknowledging that GBV can occur in both public and private spheres, and serves as a general term encompassing any form of violence associated with gender.

## **Key Factors Perpetuating GBV in South Africa**

Gender-Based Violence in South Africa is a multifaceted issue with a complex web of causative factors. Scholars such as Schutte (2020), Olalere (2022) and Zinyemba and Hlongwana (2022) identify factors such as patriarchy, low levels

of education, a childhood history of abuse, exposure to domestic violence, excessive alcohol consumption, adherence to unequal gender norms that tolerate violence, and a belief in entitlement over women, as well as poverty and gun ownership, as some of the factors attributing to and causing GBV in South Africa. This section of the study examines four key factors that are generally identified as the leading causes of GBV in South Africa.

- **Patriarchy:** The concept of patriarchy, as outlined by Frieslaar and Masango (2021), encompasses the perception of women as subordinate to men within South African society. This ideology manifests through various social, religious and cultural structures, reinforcing the dominance of men and the marginalisation of women (Buqa, 2022). These frameworks often dictate gender roles, responsibilities and power dynamics, disadvantaging women and perpetuating their oppression (SaferSpaces, 2020). As noted by Graaff and Heineken (2017), sexual aggression is most common in patriarchal countries and societies, which have unyielding traditional sex roles and societal standards that include the acceptance of interpersonal violence as well as the need for men to be dominant and forceful.
- **Religious and cultural beliefs:** These beliefs frequently play a significant role in upholding patriarchal norms, with interpretations of texts or traditions often used to justify the subjugation of women. In South Africa, as in many other societies, these entrenched beliefs can be deeply ingrained and challenging to dismantle. Magezi and Manzanga (2021) contend that this perspective is particularly evident in some church settings, where women may be vulnerable and subjected to subservient conditions using religious texts as cover (Magezi and Manzanga, 2021).
- **Socio-cultural issues:** The patriarchal system and the resultant gender inequality it creates has been implicated as the root cause of socio-cultural violence against women (Graaff and Heineken, 2017). Research conducted by Moreroa and Rapanyane (2021) sheds light on how certain understandings of masculinity can reinforce and legitimise unequal and often violent relationships with women. The study, which focused on GBV in South Africa, identified specific cultural practices, such as *lobola* and *Ukuthwala*, as well as other traditional African norms, as contributing to the subjugation of women, and fostering an inferiority complex in their relationships with men (Muluneh *et al.*, 2020; Montle and Moleke, 2021). Furthermore, in a study by Zinyemba and Hlongwana (2022), socio-economic factors and evolving cultural dynamics were perceived to be amongst the key factors aggravating GBV. In addition, poverty and substance abuse have also been identified as main causes of violence towards women, a phenomenon tied to the growing frustration emanating from men's inability to provide for their families (Olalere, 2022).
- **Economic issues:** Poverty and unemployment are disproportionately endured by females, making them vulnerable and exposed to risks of abuse by their male providers. This argument is supported by SaferSpaces (2020), which underscores the shocking statistics that an average of just under 50 % of women account for having experienced emotional or economic abuse at the hands of their male intimate partners.

On the occasion of the announcement of the second-quarter crime data for 2020–2021, Police Minister, General Bheki Cele (MP), noted that gender-based violence continues to be a problem in most regions of KwaZulu–Natal (KZN). The Minister declared that Kwa-Zulu-Natal had the highest number of rapes per capita in the nation (Government of South Africa, 2021). Similarly, according to Statistics South Africa (2023), KwaZulu-Natal was the province with the highest number of rape cases (20.2%) in the 2019/2020 crime figures, ranking first overall in that year.

According to the quarter two crime statistics 2020/21, three KZN cities were in the top five rape-prone areas in the country, with Inanda being the rape capital for the second year in a row (Government of South Africa, 2021). Around 347 300 sexual crimes were reported in the province in the 2019/2020 financial year, with the 14 worst districts accounting for 46% of all crimes. Durban Central was the worst district, accounting for 7.5% of all crimes in the province (Government of South Africa, 2021, 2023). Furthermore, Minister Cele in his presentation indicated that educational institutions were becoming the “hotbeds of sexual violence” in the country. The Minister stated that according to the 2019/2020 crime data, 380 rape cases were reported in schools, universities, colleges and daycare Centre's across the country, with KZN recording the highest numbers of reported cases (News 24, 2020). The Minister emphasised the need for awareness campaigns on GBV to be stepped up, calling on the commercial sector and gender activist organisations to collaborate with the government to combat the problem and expose perpetrators. The next section of the paper examines the legislative framework of GBV in South Africa.

## **Legislative Framework on GBV in South Africa**

The South African government has implemented policies, legislative reforms, programmes, strategic plans, and project-level initiatives in response to GBV in the country. The first and most significant of the legislative reforms was in 1996 when the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) was promulgated. Section 12 (1) (c) provides that everyone has the right to personal freedom and security, which includes the right not to be detained arbitrarily or without justification; not to be imprisoned without a trial; the right to be free of all types of violence, whether public or private; not to be subjected to any form of torture; and not to be treated or punished in a cruel, inhumane, or degrading way (South African Government, 2023). Similarly, South Africa ratified the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which came into force in 2013 and was revised in 2016 to align its objectives with the various global targets and emerging issues such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union Agenda 2063 (SARDC 2018).

The adoption of the September 2021 Domestic Violence Amendment Act 14 of 2021 sought to make it simpler for victims to obtain protection orders. The amendment of a number of other laws—including the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007; the Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Act 12 of 2021; the Domestic Violence Amendment Act 14 of 2021; and the Criminal Law (Forensics Procedures) Amendment Act 8 of 2022 were further measures aimed at combatting SV and GBV. The South African government took another step forward on 14 April 2023 by passing the third set of what are known as the GBV Amendments Acts. The reforms are expected to strengthen the legislative framework in combating GBV by, amongst other things, improving victim protection and tightening sanctions against perpetrators (Calvino and Matadi, 2023). All the aforementioned legislation and their amendments are aimed at bolstering efforts to address GBV. However, the main criticism of the legislative framework is not in the laws themselves but in their enforcement and implementation. The next section analyses some of the challenges associated with the implementation of GBV legislation in the country.

The implementation of GBV legislation in South Africa has faced considerable challenges, as highlighted by Calvino and Matadi (2023). A significant issue is the widespread lack of awareness amongst both perpetrators of GBV and the victims themselves. This means that potential perpetrators of GBV are often not aware of the legal consequences of their actions, resulting in the diminished effectiveness of legal consequences as a deterrent against GBV (Calvino and Matadi 2023). Luvo and Saunders (2022) contend that the cohabitation of customary and religious doctrines and beliefs, which often conflict with established legislation, generates confusion and reduces the power of legal protections on GBV victims because oftentimes, according to Resane and Mudimeli (2023), perpetrators of GBV may use the church or religious institutions as a cover to perpetuate their harmful activities against women. The authors contend that abusers often leverage church teachings and doctrines to assert their right to dominance over their families. They warn that this form of abuse can be particularly severe as it has the potential to isolate the victim from their social circles, including friends, family and the community (Resane and Mudimeli, 2023).

Calvino and Matadi (2023) further contend that the apprehension and successful prosecution of perpetrators of GBV and SV remains alarmingly low, hence weakening the legal framework's confidence. Scholars such as (Gouws, 2022) attribute the lack of apprehension of perpetrators to being associated with the societal stigma attached to GBV and SV, thereby preventing victims from reporting incidences to the police. Other reasons are associated with police handling and reactions to victims when they go to police stations to report GBV and SV incidents. Gouws (2022) opines that in order for GBV and SV to be eliminated or minimised in a society such as South Africa, with a history of extensive violence stemming from its apartheid past, crisis centres for victims of GBV and sexual assault should be established and adequately funded; training for service providers such as the police, judges and social workers should be a priority; and educating citizens about GBV should be extensively carried out in all schools and government media.

The National Gender Policy Framework (NGPF) in South Africa functions as a comprehensive roadmap for addressing gender disparities and advancing gender equality across various sectors of society (UNEP-LEAP 2024). Enacted to uphold the Constitutional principles of equality and non-discrimination, the NGPF aims to combat entrenched gender inequalities and promote a society where individuals of all genders enjoy equal opportunities and rights (UNEP-LEAP, 2024). Chapter 4 of the NGPF emphasises the need for establishing provincial machinery to drive women's empowerment and gender equality efforts at the provincial level. It calls upon the Premier's Office to establish an office

dedicated to the Status of Women; develop a provincial gender policy and action plan aligned with the national policy; coordinate the activities of other stakeholders; establish Gender Units within all provincial departments; form women's caucuses in provincial legislatures; and offer support for the development of civil society structures (Hills, 2015). The next section of this paper examines some of the initiatives undertaken by both the KZN provincial government and the national government to empower as well as raise awareness on GBV and other violence against women and girls.

The 50/50 national campaign in South Africa aims to address gender disparity in decision-making positions by advocating for the equal representation of women (Morna and Mbadlanyana, 2011). This initiative was sparked by the UN Women's organisation's "The Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step it up for Gender Equality" campaign, which was launched in 2015 during the Beijing+20 conference. This global campaign called on governments worldwide to make firm commitments to promote women's empowerment and gender equality (UN, 2016). Under the auspices of this international call to action, the South African government, represented by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the UN Women Executive Director, declared a commitment to significantly reduce gender inequality in the country. Mlambo-Ngcuka emphasized that 2015 should symbolize the commencement of the end of gender inequality in South Africa, with the year 2030 set as the target for achieving this ambitious goal (UN, 2016). The 50/50 national campaign, inspired by these global initiatives, seeks to challenge systemic barriers and biases that hinder women's access to decision-making roles. By advocating the equal representation of women in leadership positions across various sectors, the campaign aims to create more inclusive and gender-responsive governance structures. Ultimately, the goal is to foster a society where women have equal opportunities to contribute to and shape policies and decisions that affect their lives and the broader community (UN, 2016).

The "take a girl child to work" programme, inaugurated in 2003, emerged as a collaborative effort amongst like-minded organisations that aimed at providing female learners with exposure to the professional work environment (Baloyi, 2017). The primary objective of the initiative is to broaden the horizons of young girls by acquainting them with a diverse range of career possibilities beyond the conventional and commonly known ones. Since its inception, the programme has evolved into an annual event held on the last Thursday of May, where female children are invited to spend a day at various workplaces. This immersive experience offers participants a first-hand glimpse into the daily operations of different industries, professions and roles. By shadowing professionals, engaging in hands-on activities and participating in discussions, the girls gain valuable insights into various career paths and the skills required to pursue them (Bangani, 2024). At its core, the "take a girl child to work" programme seeks to empower young girls by instilling in them the belief that their aspirations and dreams are attainable. By exposing them to diverse career options and fostering confidence in their abilities, the initiative aims to inspire and motivate girls to pursue their passions and ambitions with determination and conviction (Bangani, 2024). Through this exposure, the programme endeavours to break down gender stereotypes, challenge societal norms, and pave the way for a more equitable and inclusive workforce in the future.

The National Women's Day and Women's Month, observed annually on August 9<sup>th</sup> with the entire month of August declared as women's month, is a significant public holiday in South Africa that commemorates a pivotal moment in the country's history (Mbandlwa, 2022). The day holds profound significance as it marks the occasion when women organised a historic march on the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest against the oppressive Urban Areas Act of 1950 amendments. These amendments mandated that all black South Africans carry internal passports, perpetuating segregation, controlling urbanisation and managing migrant labour during the apartheid era. The courageous and united protest by women against this unjust legislation symbolised the strength, resilience and activism of South African women in the fight against oppression and injustice and remains a poignant reminder of the vital role that women played in the struggle for freedom and equality in South Africa (Government of South Africa, 2024). In recognition of the importance of Women's Day and to honour the contributions of women to the nation's history and development, the entire month of August is celebrated as Women's Month in South Africa. During this month, various campaigns, workshops, seminars and programmes are organised to raise awareness on GBV and other issues that disproportionately affect women (Mbandlwa, 2022). These initiatives aim to empower women, promote gender equality, and advocate for the realisation of women's rights in the South African society (Thusi and Mlambo, 2023).

## Research Method

The paper adopts an exploratory qualitative approach which is a useful research tool that allows researchers to investigate complicated phenomena in depth (Rendle *et al.*, 2019). Its adaptability, in-depth comprehension, contextualisation and emergent design contribute to the generation of rich and nuanced insights. The provincial government, particularly the Department of Social Development (DSD), took a decision to listen to the voices of the people regarded as “perpetrators” of GBV in South Africa through dialogues. The dialogues were conducted in all 11 municipalities of Kwa-Zulu Natal to give men an opportunity to speak about their concerns on the issues of GBV. A total of 548 men attended the dialogue sessions. Their responses were recorded and later transcribed and reported in the DSD (2022) reported titled “Men’s Dialogue on why men are angry”. The authors, with permission from the DSD, extracted data from the dialogue report for this paper. Table 1 details the municipalities where the dialogues were held, along with the dates, venues and number of men who attended in each municipality.

**Table 1:** Men’s dialogue on why men are angry

Municipality	Date of dialogue	Number of present men	Venue
King-Cetshwayo	26 JULY 2022	40	Eshowe Town Hall
UMkhanyakude District	27 July 2022	41	Machibini Hall, Jozini
UMzinyathi	2 August 2022	60	Nquthu, V.A Makhoba hall, Nquthu
Amajuba	3 August 2022	48	Newcastle town hall
UThukela	4 August 2022	80	Ladysmith indoor sports complex, Ladysmith
Harry-Gwala	16 August 2022	38	Ixopo Disaster Boardroom
UGu	17 August 2022	40	Port-Shepstone Ray Nkonyeni council chamber
Zululand	19 August 2022	45	Phongolo Belgrave, community hall
ILembe	14 Sept. 2022	48	Kwadukuza Ilembe District disaster boardroom
UMgungundlovu	15 Sept. 2022	60	UMgungundlovu council chamber,
EThekwini	20 Sept. 2022	48	Pinetown Civic Center

Source: Kwa-Zulu Natal Department of Social Development (DSD) (2022)

## Findings and Discussion

The qualitative data collected from the study was categorised and coded. Two themes emerged, namely Theme 1: Men’s perceptions towards government’s gender-specific initiatives and GBV; and Theme 2: Patriarchy and its influence on men’s perceptions towards government gender-based initiatives.

### ***Theme 1: Men’s perceptions towards government’s gender-specific initiatives and GBV***

This theme examined men’s perceptions towards government’s gender-specific initiatives and GBV with the aim of determining if there is a nexus between these programmes and men’s resentment towards women. Data from the dialogue were categorised under sub-themes as presented in Table 2 below:

**Table 2:** Extracts from respondents’ statements

Emergent Sub-themes	Extracts from Respondents’ Statements
Economic inequalities	<p>“We are poor we cannot find employment; things are very difficult for us men in this country, it seems like the government is only concerned about women.”</p> <p>“If you cannot provide for your family, you lose the respect of your wife and children, they will no longer respect your authority in the home, we also need economic empowerment programmes.”</p> <p>“As men it is very difficult to realise that you have failed your family by not being able to provide for them due to how the economy of the country is, the frustration will make you resort to drinking and substance abuse which can cause problems between you and your partner. Government should empower us too not only women.”</p>

<p>Exclusion of men from government programmes</p> <p>Unequal implementation of policies</p>	<p><i>“Please look at all government programmes across all levels of government no one is talking about men’s programs. We don’t have any budget that is taking care of men’s programmes, even in our men’s forum we have no budget, no one is helping us. We are orphans, no one to talk to, however societal expectations still remain the same. We are expected to be providers.”</i></p> <p><i>“Look at the ‘Extended public works programme’ (EPWP). Municipalities only employ women and men will only be employed if it involves physical work, government is unfair, why are men excluded? We also need to work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Government run programmes to empower the girl child. Where is the boy child? The boy child is left behind and you forget that this well empowered girl will eventually marry this boy that is angry and not economically empowered. The first person to experience the anger is the partner, Government is the one that should be blamed for the violence.”</i></p> <p><i>“Hayi this 50/50 policy has created a lot of problems for us because government including the private sectors are not implementing the 50/50 policy as stipulated, instead they employ more women. We know that women are more than us however the policy is not well implemented.”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t get us wrong here we support women empowerment however we are saying balance the equation, close the gap and the imbalances of the past by implementing the 50/50 policy correctly. We are all in need, that’s all we ask from our government.”</i></p> <p><i>“We are also against those men who are killing women and children as much as the situation is bad, but government should implement its empowerment policies equally and fairly, government cannot spend all its empowerment budget on women only, what about we men?”</i></p>
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**Source:** Authors compilation (2024) – extracted from Kwa-Zulu Natal Department of Social Development (DSD) (2022) reported titled “Men’s Dialogue on why men are angry”.

Economic inequalities and perceived exclusion from government initiatives and policies, as well as the seeming bias in policy implementation, were cited as the primary causes of resentment and anger amongst men, which could result in GBV in the province. Respondents complained about the lack of interest in gender mainstreaming in government; the focus on women; and how they were left behind with no one to care for them while societal expectations for them to support their families remained the same. This paper sought to answer the question of whether there is a nexus between men’s resentment or anger towards women and the various government funded gender-specific initiatives in KZN. Although this study cannot definitively claim that there is such a correlation, or that the resentment is directly associated with GBV, from the responses from some of the men interviewed in this study, there seems to be some feeling of resentment from men being excluded from these programmes. According to a study conducted by Meth (2009), men who felt marginalised due to their sexuality or race were especially susceptible to violence. According to the author, the fears of humiliation and social stigma can result in toxic masculinity, leading such men to become violent. Some scholars have called for the inclusion of men in government-initiated gender empowerment programmes, whilst others have argued against such inclusion. According to the authors advocating for men’s inclusion in programmes aimed at ending GBV, the following arguments are canvassed: Ending GBV is a collective effort because since men are the main perpetrators of GBV, it is only right to work with them to end it through education; eradication of destructive models of masculinity; changing gender roles; and changing societal norms in relation to gender roles. These authors further contend that policies and programmes should be framed with men within an agenda that promotes human rights and social justice, including women’s rights (Barker and Peacock ; Peacock 2013; Peacock and Barker 2014). On the other hand, according to Britton (2006), some women’s organisations feel that they cannot work with men as men are perceived as the perpetrators of GBV. Hence, working with male perpetrators would compromise and undermine the feminist philosophy and move resources and energy away from the majority of survivors of violence, who are mainly women.

## Theme 2: Patriarchy and Its Influence in Men’s Perceptions towards Government Gender-Based Initiatives

South Africa is one of many highly patriarchal societies where masculinity, or being a man, is associated with dominance, assertiveness and aggression (Sathiparsad *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, South Africa has traditionally been a patriarchal society, with men occupying positions of power and authority (Bassey and Bubu, 2019). However, the country has witnessed a gradual shift towards gender equality and women's empowerment. Women have increasingly asserted their rights and challenged societal norms, leading to greater recognition and representation (Beebeejaun 2017). However, this is building up resentment amongst men. This theme sought to examine whether the various government-led economic empowerment initiatives for women have resulted in unintended consequences of resentment and anger amongst men. Below are some of the comments extracted on this theme.

**Table 3:** Extracts from respondents statements

Theme 2	Extracts from Respondents’ Statements
Patriarchy and its influence in men’s perceptions towards government gender-based initiatives	<p><i>“Women of today lack respect and no longer recognise the role of men in society and in the home. Because government only empowers women and not men. This is causing a lot of problems in the family”.</i></p> <p><i>“We blame our government for the women not adhering to traditional and cultural norms. It is the government that makes a lot of noise about women empowerment and thereby causing women to forget their traditional roles and responsibilities”.</i></p> <p><i>“We have good policies but poor implementation. Look at the Affirmative Action Act of 1998. This Act refers to equal employment in the workplace, but the way it is now being implemented it is oppressing us as men and creating new imbalances instead of solving the problems of the past. We are now being subordinate to women both in the workplaces and they also expect that at home.”</i></p> <p><i>“Men are being demonised by the system; we are seen as monsters. There is no distinction between a good hardworking man and a criminal as long as you are a man you are blamed for GBV”.</i></p> <p><i>“We as men feel neglected. For example, government has set up the department for women and children, but nothing for men. All these measures although good but they make us men angry”.</i></p> <p><i>“We are expected to pay lobola as men, but we are not recognised as heads of the family”.</i></p>

**Source:** Authors compilation (2024) – extracted from Kwa-Zulu Natal Department of Social Development (DSD) (2022) reported titled “Men’s Dialogue on why men are angry”

The responses above indicate that deeply ingrained patriarchy has fostered resentment among some men towards government-led initiatives aimed at economically empowering women. In some cases, men in the province perceive these initiatives as threats to their masculinity, leading to feelings of disrespect from women. Research has shown that efforts to address GBV maybe hampered when men are not actively engaged in seeking solutions. Proponents of this notion believe that since men are often the main perpetrators of violence against women and girls, a significant change in mindset is crucial for long-term behavioural transformation (Peacock and Barker 2014; OCHA 2022). According to OCHA (2022), it is essential to acknowledge that marginalising men in efforts to empower women may worsen the problem of GBV.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive issue in South Africa, with unacceptably high levels that have earned the country the shameful distinction of being one of the most unsafe places in the world for women (Calvino and Matadi 2023). Addressing this issue requires comprehensive strategies and actions to prevent violence and protect the rights and well-being of individuals. According to Gouws (2022), there is no easy solution or “one-size-fits-all remedy”. However, certain solutions can be adopted, ranging from providing safe places for victims of GBV to significant improvements to law enforcement and the prosecution of offenders and perpetrators of GBV. The following are other recommendations that could prevent the build-up of resentment or anger of men towards gender-specific initiatives for women:



- i. **Engaging traditional institutions on cultural re-socialisation:** Traditional institutions often play a significant role in shaping societal norms and values. Engaging these institutions can help facilitate a shift in the cultural norms that perpetuate patriarchal attitudes (Moreroa and Rapanyane, 2021). This could involve dialogues, workshops and initiatives aimed at challenging and re-shaping harmful gender stereotypes and practices.
- ii. **Religious institutions involvement:** Religious institutions should be supported and encouraged to play a role in changing the mindsets of men in their organisations. The stereotype of seeing men as breadwinners and heads of their homes and the women as helpmates and subservient partners should be re-directed to considering both parties as equal partners in the family (Magezi and Manzanga, 2021; Resane and Mudimeli, 2023).
- iii. **Engaging men and boys in GBV prevention efforts:** Engaging men and boys in preventative initiatives is critical for tackling the underlying causes of gender-based violence. Men can have a huge impact in challenging negative macho norms and promoting gender equality. This can be accomplished through focused public awareness campaigns, educational programs, and community mobilization efforts. Men's involvement should be centred on supporting healthy relationships, consent, and respect, as well as tackling issues like toxic masculinity and masculine entitlement. By actively enlisting men and boys in preventative initiatives, a culture of non-violence and gender equality can be developed (Isike, 2021; Isike, 2022).
- iv. **Involving men in promoting gender equality and empowerment:** Promoting gender equality and empowering women economically is essential in preventing gender-based violence. However, these programmes can involve men who can help to challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes that perpetuate violence and discrimination. In empowering women economically, men and boys should not be seen as being excluded from government programmes as this could arouse the feelings of resentment and anger towards women and inadvertently worsen GBV prevalence (Meth, 2009; OCHA, 2022).
- v. **Strengthening legislation and law enforcement:** One crucial aspect of preventing gender-based violence is strengthening legislation and ensuring effective law enforcement. South Africa has made significant strides in this regard with the adoption of the National Strategic Plan on GBV 2020, with its subsequent amendments. However, there is still a need for further action in order to ensure that laws are effectively implemented and enforced. This includes providing adequate resources to law enforcement agencies, improving training on gender sensitivity, and establishing specialised units to handle GBV cases. Additionally, efforts should be made to close existing legal loopholes and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions.
- vi. **Enhancing support services and access to justice:** Ensuring that survivors of gender-based violence have access to comprehensive support services is vital. This includes establishing and strengthening shelters, counselling services, and helplines that are easily accessible and culturally sensitive. It is essential to provide survivors with a safe space where they can seek refuge, receive counselling, and access legal support. Furthermore, efforts should be made to improve the responsiveness of the justice system to GBV cases, ensuring that survivors can access justice without fear of re-victimization. This requires specialised training for judicial officers and prosecutors, as well as the establishment of specialised courts to handle GBV cases (Ncube, 2021).

The above suggestions acknowledge the complexity of addressing deeply rooted perceptions and behaviours while promoting a holistic approach to GBV. Involving men in the fight against GBV can contribute to the re-socialisation of boys and men, leading to more positive gender relations that reject violence. In essence, the aim is to create a society where gender equality and respect are valued by all members.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study illuminate the multifaceted and deeply ingrained nature of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in South Africa, shedding light on the critical role of patriarchy in South African society, and the anger that men have towards government policies and how they are being implemented. Through an exploration of men's perspectives, this paper provides valuable insights into the underlying causes and potential pathways for change. This study has catalysed the dialogue around this critical social issue. The way forward, as outlined in this paper, demands a

comprehensive approach. It involves challenging and transforming patriarchal norms, addressing economic disparities, promoting women's political empowerment, while at the same time actively engaging men as allies in the fight against GBV. Comprehensive education, economic empowerment programmes for all, and increased political representation are key components of a strategy that can drive sustainable change. In conclusion, this paper not only brings to the forefront the complexities surrounding GBV in South Africa, but also offers a roadmap for action. The findings emphasise the necessity for a coordinated, multi-pronged approach that involves individuals, communities, policy-makers and institutions in the fight against GBV. It is through these collective efforts that South Africa can progressively move towards a society that is free from the scourge of GBV, where the rallying cry of "enough is enough" becomes a reality, and the rights and safety of all its citizens are safeguarded.

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