



An Analysis into the South African Police Services' Role in Assisting Victims of Gender-Based Violence

Kagiso Nicholas Tlou

Doctor, Department of Police Practice, University of South Africa, Florida campus, South Africa

E-mail: TlouKN@unisa.ac.za

<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v6i10.1548>

Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a scourge that has affected the lives of many South Africans and has also become problematic in other countries around the world. This scourge has led to the loss of many people's lives. Studies show that, in most cases, it is women and children whose lives are most at risk. The South African Police Service (SAPS) is the first point of contact for victims when they seek recourse through the criminal justice system for GBV. This means that victims of GBV have to report to the SAPS if they want to open up a criminal case against the perpetrator; the SAPS are therefore the first respondents to a GBV offence. It is, therefore, important that the general public be informed about the services that the SAPS can offer to victims of GBV, so that people can know of these services and know what to expect when they approach SAPS. This can help to save lives. This paper has examined the effects that GBV-related attacks have on victims and the kind of services that victims of GBV can get from the SAPS. The paper has provided information that can benefit victims and people who wish to know more about the kinds of services that they can get from the SAPS. The research methodology that was used in this study is meta-analysis. This methodology was adopted to collect and analyse data, and make findings from the literature collected. The data that was collected and analysed, outline the importance of reporting a GBV case to the SAPS. The data also outlines the services that the SAPS can offer to victims of GBV once a case is reported. The paper further indicates that SAPS services to victims of GBV are not that well known by the victims of GBV or the general public. Hence, recommendations are provided that can be used to inform the public about the services that the SAPS can offer to victims of GBV.

Keywords: *Gender-Based Violence; South African Police Services; Victims; Services*

Introduction

Violence and crime in South Africa continue to put the country in a state of panic as many people that live in the country, live in fear of being attacked and even killed. The citizen's fear of being attacked

is experienced in both private and public spaces. This makes it hard for the citizens to live in peace in their own country. The high incidence of violent crime in South Africa, which includes among others murder, rape, armed robbery, car hijacking, common robbery, and serious and common assaults, contribute to the widespread insecurity and heightened fear that is experienced by the people living in South Africa. The response of the criminal justice system (CRJ) and other law enforcement associations and entities to victims of crime and violence can mitigate or exacerbate such insecurity and fear and can even assist in preventing further violence. On the contrary, the lack of suitable, and supportive services for victims of crime and violence can contribute to a vicious cycle of violence and often breeds popular contempt for human rights and which are at times seen as protective only of perpetrators. Furthermore, services that recognise and respond appropriately to the needs of victims of crime and violence can assist in halting this cycle and help to build a culture of respect for others and for human rights.

This paper directly looked into the violence of Gender Based Violence and the kind of services the victims can receive from the South Africa Police Services. The assessment of the services offered by the SAPS to victims of GBV can help the victims to know the kind of assistance they can get and also highlight a sense of restorative justice to the affected parties. GBV is not a crime that can be taken lightly because the effects of such a crime can be detrimental, to identify a few, effects can be physical, emotional, social and economic, and they are experienced not only by the victims themselves, but by their families and communities. The effects of GBV affect different people differently, Roure (2020) and Rapanyane (2021) describe GBV as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. These authors based their description of GBV in relation to most likely victims of GBV. It should be noted that such a description of GBV does send a message that males are the likely preparators of GBV, and women are not. It is important to highlight the important notion that males can be victims of GBV and should also be offered the same support as any victim of GBV by the SAPS or any other law enforcement agency or entity.

The distension of GBV attacks on men and women is something that has overtime not been discussed in detail. However, the extent in which women get affected by GBV attacks has over a period of time reached unspeakable spheres unlike those of men. Violence against women is understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following: physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, and in the community, including battery, sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution and violence perpetrated or condoned by the State. The likelihood of women being the most likely victims of GBV is something that should not be taken for granted and also, the prospect of men being victims of GBV is something that should also not be taken for granted. Hence, there is a need for victims of GBV to know the services that can be offered to them. Services that are comprehensive, intersectoral and integrated are urgently needed to ensure a victim friendly criminal justice and associated system and to make sure that the negative impact on victims is reduced.

GBV attacks can occur in private and public places, the commission of such acts have to be reported to the police in order for the police to be able to assist the affected parties. The South African Police Service is the initial point of entry to the criminal justice system, the SAPS are therefore responsible for ensuring that the victims of crime, especially sexual offences and other serious and violent crimes, are provided with the services that they can offer for victims of GBV. Victims of GBV must know that it is important to report cases of GBV to the SAPS and to also know the kinds of services they can get from the SAPS. This would allow for the SAPS to best assist these victims by means of compiling a proper case, keeping them safe and ensuring that their lives are not in danger.

Literature Review

GBV is a crime that has affected the lives of many people regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, or religion. Victims of GBV are in most cases only referred to when their ordeal is known and there is an activity taking place, i.e. 16 days of activism. Measures that can be used to curb GBV have to be accelerated on more than one occasion, this issue has to be prioritised so that many lives can be saved. However, what the government entities like the police do to create awareness on their services to the victims of GBV cannot go unrecognised. It is therefore important to promulgate the services offered by the SAPS to the people through different means and not only through the SAPS' Imbizos or social media platforms. This paper aims to create more awareness about the services that victims of GBV can get from the SAPS. Literature on how victims of GBV can be assisted is available and people can access it, however, there is not enough research on how the SAPS can assist victims of GBV. Furthermore, given the scourge of GBV in South Africa, research into SAPS's role in assisting victims of GBV can help the SAPS members, victims of GBV and general public to know how to address GBV related cases. The data that was collected for this study related to victim empowerment by the SAPS. The challenge during the collection of data was that of limited literature on the role of SAPS members when coming to assisting victims of GBV, the most common available literature speaks to news reports and SAPS pamphlets. There is thus a need for more research on the services rendered by the SAPS on victims of GBV. Such research will make it easy for the public to know that they can feel safe should they need to report a GBV case because they would know the kind of support they can get from the SAPS. It is therefore important that more research gets conducted around the kinds of services that victims of GBV can get from the SAPS. The importance of such an initiative is in the awareness that this research can create to sensitise people about GBV.

Conceptualisation of the Term Victim

The notion of making people understanding what a GBV victim is, can help people; particularly those who have been victimised to know what kind of action equates one to being identified as a victim of GBV. There are several criminals that attack people and get away with it because the victims are not aware of what actions actually amount to GBV attacks or, even worse, they do not know that they can be assisted by the police, should they report their case to the SAPS. Cubells and Calsamiglia (2018) identify a victim as any person who has suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of his or her fundamental rights, through acts or omissions that are in violation of the criminal law. Globokar, Erez and Gregory (2019) adds that a victim includes, where appropriate, indirect victims such as the immediate family or dependents or even neighbours or colleagues of a direct victim.

This entails that one can fall victim to a crime of GBV in a private or public space, depending on the attack and attacker. GBV is a crime that is, in most instances, committed on people that are known to the attacker (John & Walmsley, 2021; Cubells & Calsamiglia, 2018). Hence, the victims know who attacked them and they become lucky to be able to tell their story, even when having that chance, they live their lives with open wounds as victims of GBV.

According to Javaid (2018), victims of violent crimes experience not only the direct negative impact of the incident, but also other negative impacts that are secondary to the incident and that occur during contact with the criminal justice system and associated systems, which is also referred to as the 'second wound'. For example, a woman, who has been raped, may experience a "second rape" when asked, in public, to recount what happened at a police station's charge office, when being examined by a medical doctor who lacks empathy, and again when giving evidence in court. Secondary trauma may be reflected in a wide range of symptoms, ranging from relatively minor discomfort to severe physical, psychological and emotional trauma, which may result in social difficulties. The effects of secondary

trauma are, in most cases, the real reason why cases of GBV are not reported to the police by the victims (Javaid, 2018).

The effects of GBV on the victims and resources available to them are not generic. There are a number of factors that account for this variation, with the obvious reasons being age and access to resources. For instance, when an older person is raped and impregnated, they will have the option to terminate or keep the child; conversely, if the affected party is a young person who is not of the age to give consent, the parents, or guardian of the young girl have to be part of the decision making (Knight, Ranganathan, Abramsky, Polzer-Ngwato, Muvhango, Molebatsi, Stöckl, & Watts, 2020). Also, if the perpetrator is a trusted family member, it is, at times, hard for a child to alert the family that a trusted family member has violated them. Generally, victims may also find it difficult to get to the support services they require and to persist with what may become a long process in attaining justice. Similarly, a very young child is less likely than an adult to know how to ask for help or to resist a sexual attack and they may take much longer to recover. Javaid (2018) further highlights that victims of crime and violence, who are poor, by definition have the fewest resources with which to withstand victimisation and often have insufficient access to the criminal justice system. The impact of crime and violence may also be exacerbated by repeat victimisation, because of more than one exposure to crime and violence.

GBV Victims to be Prioritised by the SAPS

The SAPS are expected to carry out their duties without fear or favour. However, the notion of prioritising a certain spectrum of GBV victims is based on the fact that those most affected are women and children (Maromo, 2019; McCarthy, Mehta, & Haberland, 2018). What is more troubling is the fact that the GBV attacks on women and children are conducted by men, particularly men that are known to the victim (Akter & Deeba, 2021; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021). Given that crime and violence are so widespread in South Africa, there is a tendency to regard some crimes as being less likely to result in damage or harm to the victim than others. In fact, Mbunge (2020) mentions that all victims of crime must be served according to their needs and on an equitable basis, and not according to a grading of the seriousness or not of the incident. Even though victims have to be treated equally, the kind of attention given to the victims may differ. For instance, a man that was raped by a women will undergo testing for viruses and given mental health support, while a female victim has to go through virus and a pregnancy test, and then be provided with mental health support.

Mahlori, Byrne and Mabude (2018) and Knettel, Robertson, Ciya, Coleman, Elliott and Joska (2019) suggest that different crimes will require that the victims receive different services. Thus, victims of sexual assault or rape will have different needs from victims of other violent crimes such as assault or fraud. Victims of GBV could have many different needs that include psychosocial or immediate medical care; while victims of a white-collar crime or car hijacking will have a very different set of needs. Similarly, different categories of victims must also be provided with services relevant to their particular set of needs (Knettel et al., 2019). For instance, the poor, those who living in rural communities, the elderly and young people may require special assistance in accessing and being served by the criminal justice and associated systems, but are, in most cases, the ones that get served late or even not served at all. Because different crimes affect different people differently, the SAPS have to, at times, prioritise certain victims by offering them their prompt services and these victims are outlined as follows:

- **Women and Children**

Women and children are known to be the most likely victims of GBV, as is the fact that they often encounter particular difficulties in their efforts to seek assistance and redress through the criminal justice system (Keynejad, Bentley, Bhatia, Nalwadda, Mekonnen, Parveen & McGarry, 2021; Ghosh, Daniels, Pyra, Juzumaite, Jais & Murphy, 2018). The South African government has tasked different government entities, including the SAPS, with the responsibility of protecting women and children.

Keynejad et al. (2021) highlights that, while the government has taken significant steps to improving the response to violence against women and children in South Africa, particularly those who have been the targets of sexual or other assault, women and children still face many obstacles in their quest for justice. It is important for the SAPS to be seen to be providing attention to the victims of GBV, because, not only is SAPS mandated by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa to ensure the safety of all citizens, but they are the first point of entry for the victim when they come to seek recourse through the criminal justice system.

- **Victims of Domestic Violence**

According to Dartnall and Channon (2020), domestic violence includes physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse between family members or partners. Women are far more likely than men to be the victims of domestic violence. Studies on domestic violence, conducted by Dartnall and Channon (2020) and Beyene, Chojenta, Roba, Melka and Loxton (2019), demonstrate that interpersonal crimes are not about the behaviour of the victim, but about the behaviour of the offender. Although violence, including the physical and sexual abuse and neglect of children and domestic violence, has received increasing attention in recent years, abuse of older persons remains relatively hidden. Research shows that abuse and neglect of older persons occurs worldwide and there is growing concern about the increasing number and severity of cases reported by the media and other sources.

- **Victims of Sexual Assault and Rape**

Rape is one of the crimes that is on the rise in South Africa, it is estimated that a person is raped every 5 minutes in South Africa, which makes it the rape capital in Africa (Colombini, Alkaiyat, Shaheen, García-Moreno, Feder & Bacchus, 2019; Tears, 2023). Though some men are also victims of sexual assault and require special assistance, the overwhelming majority are women and children. In South Africa, women and children live in dire fear of being victimised by men, every day. A number of cases wherein women and children have lost their lives at the hands of men have drawn extensive media attention and some of the court trials have been televised, and even made international news headlines. Sexual violence, and particularly rape, affects not only those who are directly victimised, but also the non-victimised population through the fear it generates and the consequent restrictive life-style choices made in response.

- **Abused People with Disabilities**

Having a disability is difficult for the affected people to have to live with, but that does not make them less human, it actually makes them more special; hence, they are also called people with special needs (Aker & Deeba, 2021). One would think that people who live with a disability would be spared from GBV-related attacks. However, people with disabilities, particularly disabled women, are often victims of crime and violence and experience the same risk for emotional, physical, and sexual abuse as individuals without physical disabilities. However, people with special needs are more likely to experience the impact of the abuse for much longer than people who do not have disabilities. This is because people with special needs are more sensitive and already find themselves in challenging situations because of their disability, thus, being the victim of GBV puts more strain on them.

The South African Police Service (SAPS)

The SAPS is an institution that emanates from the Constitution of South Africa (1996), which is the supreme law of the land. The Constitution lays down that the South African Police Service has a responsibility to prevent, combat and investigate crime, maintain public order, protect and secure the inhabitants of the Republic and their property, uphold and enforce the law, create a safe and secure environment for all people in South Africa, prevent anything that may threaten the safety or security of any community, investigate any crimes that threaten the safety or security of any community, ensure criminals are brought to justice and participate in efforts to address the causes of crime (Constitution,

1996). With that being said, it is important to indicate that the SAPS have the power and responsibility to ensure that people, who have suffered because of GBV crimes, are well protected and taken care of. When offering their services to victims of GBV, the SAPS members must provide a professional, accessible and sensitive service to victims of crime and violence, during and after the reporting and investigation of crime.

In 2021, President Cyril Ramaphosa signed into law legislation aimed at strengthening efforts to end gender-based violence, with a victim-centred focus on combating this dehumanising pandemic (Odeku, 2021). The President has assented to the Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Act 12 of 2021, the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 13 of 2021 and the Domestic Violence Amendment Act 14 of 2021.

The purpose of the Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Act (Act 12 of 2021) is to amend the Magistrates' Courts Act, 1944, so as to provide for the appointment of intermediaries and the giving of evidence through intermediaries in proceedings other than criminal proceedings; the oath and competency of intermediaries; and the giving of evidence through audio-visual link in proceedings other than criminal proceedings (Odeku, 2021). In this case, SAPS members are mandated to assist victims by ensuring that the evidence is thoroughly collected, so that once it is presented in court, it would add substance to the court case.

The Criminal Procedure Act of 1977 was also amended, so as to further regulate the granting and cancellation of bail; the giving of evidence by means of closed-circuit television or similar electronic media; the giving of evidence by a witness with physical, psychological or mental disability; the appointment, oath and competency of intermediaries; and the right of a complainant in a domestic-related offence to participate in parole proceedings. This Act allows the police to detain a suspect longer should the suspect not be granted bail (Odeku, 2021). The police are also now allowed to refuse the withdrawal of a case by the victim, after they have laid a complaint.

The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1997, was amended to further regulate sentences in respect of offences that have been committed against vulnerable persons. This law warrants the SAPS members to specify the correct crime committed by the suspect. Sometimes, suspects are given minimum sentences for serious cases. The charge of rape should be clearly and accurately investigated, so that the victim does not end up seeing their rapist given a lesser charge and sentence, or even acquitted, due to a lack of sufficient evidence (Odeku, 2021). Such an experience would make it difficult for the victim to trust the police or even the entire criminal justice system.

The SAPS are also mandated by the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998. In terms of Section 18(5) of the Domestic Violence Act (Act 116 of 1998), the National Commissioner of the South African Police Service must, every six months, submit a report to Parliament regarding the number and particulars of complaints received against its members, in respect of any failure of the SAPS to assist victims of domestic violence (DVA, 1998). This means that SAPS members have to ensure that victims feel safe enough to open cases and that such cases are reported correctly.

Research Methodology

A meta-analysis is a statistical analysis that combines the results of multiple scientific studies, it is also considered to elaborate on the findings of a study (Cheung, 2019). For this study's meta-analysis, the implications of GBV attacks on victims and the role of the SAPS in the said matter were identified through systematically reviewing and synthesising relevant published research. A meta-analysis is a methodology employed to synthesise the outcomes of various studies related to the same topic or measured outcomes (Combs, Crook & Rauch, 2019). Meta-analysis is typically conducted as a

quantitative procedure, geared towards the comparison of effect sizes across a variety of research studies. Qualitative meta-analysis, also referred to as meta-synthesis, follows the same replicable procedures of a quantitative meta-analysis; however, it is interpretive rather than aggregative (Combs et al., 2019; Eisend, 2017).

Different literatures were collected and included in the literature review section of the article. The data collected was used to investigate the topic in question. Of the literature collected, some were from government papers and others were from literature that contains information about the services that the SAPS offer to victims of GBV. The findings show that there is a lot of information written about the services that the victims of GBV can get from the SAPS, but this information is not effectively communicated to the public. This then means there is a need for more research on the topic and better distribution of information for the benefit the general public. Several steps were followed in the process of synthesising the facts presented in the various studies. Firstly, information on GBV was extracted. Secondly, the services that the SAPS can offer to victims of GBV were outline, examined and discussed. Finally, discussions were provided and recommendations were proposed. Below is a diagram that illustrates how information was extracted and analysed:



Source: Authors own illustration

Findings and Discussion

Empowerment of GBV Victims

GBV is a serious crime that can take a person's life or even make it challenging for a person to live. It is critical that victims be informed of the help they can get, particularly from the first respondents in the criminal justice system, which are the SAPS. Victim empowerment refers to access to a range of services for all people who, individually or collectively, have suffered harm, trauma and/or material loss through violence, crime, natural disaster, human accident and/or through socio-economic conditions (Rapanyane, 2021). Reid, Kron, Rajakulendran, Kahan, Noble and Stergiopoulos (2021) explain that victim empowerment is the process of promoting the resourcefulness of victims of crime and violence by providing opportunities to access services available to them, as well as to use and build their own capacity and support networks, and to act on their own choices. Empowerment is defined by Maglione (2017), as well as Alangea, Addo-Lartey, Chirwa, Sikweyiya, Coker-Appiah and Jewkes (2020), as having (or taking) control, having a say, being listened to, being recognised and respected as an individual and having the choices one makes respected by others (moving from victim to survivor). This practice, however, is never easy to understand, especially to people who have been victimised for the first time. It is therefore important for people to be informed of the kinds of services one can get, even before one becomes a victim.

According to Schwark and Bohner (2019), victim empowerment aims to restore the loss or damage caused by criminal acts and their consequences through a variety of actions intended to empower the victim to deal with the consequences of the event, to leave it behind and suffer no further loss or

damage. Odeku (2021) and Rapanyane (2021) further indicate that victims of GBV tend to find it difficult to report their ordeals, because they feel as though they will be going through their ordeal once more, if they were to report it to the police. This is because most victims are victimised by people that they know, and in private or public spaces. These places can be in the home, the workplace or even at schools. The protection and services of the police can make the victims realise that individuals, families, and communities have the right to privacy, safety and human dignity, and that support for the victims should play a more central role in the criminal justice process. Victim support is the empathic, person-centred assistance rendered by the SAPS to victims of GBV following an incident of victimisation. Through victim support, through victim empowerment interventions, is aimed at restoring the victim to a state as close as possible to that which existed prior to the offence and, ideally, to a state where the person has been able to learn and grow.

According to Reid et al. (2021), victims of GBV do not all have the same degree of need for empowerment interventions and support; there is a diversity of needs. In order to enable the disempowered victim to recover from the exposure to crime and violence, such needs must be met through a well-managed, integrated, multidisciplinary team approach. Schwark and Bohner (2019) further note that it is generally accepted that the holistic empowerment of victims reduces secondary victimisation, encourages co-operation with the criminal justice process, reinforces socially desired behaviour, and acts as a deterrent to offenders or potential offenders. Victim empowerment, thus, has the potential to prevent and reduce crime and violence, and to enhance the effectiveness of the criminal justice system (Maromo, 2019). The kind of support provided to victims of GBV depends on the gravity of the attack: should one be physically assaulted, the person can open a case and be offered psychological aid, if they need it; should it be that the victim is grievously assaulted and lives with the person that attacked them, such an individual will be provided with medical and psychological care, and shelter.

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice offers an opportunity for mediation, dialogue and problem solving, which could lead to healing, a greater sense of safety and security, and enhanced offender reintegration into the affected community (Kirkwood & Hamad, 2019; Walgrave, Ward & Zinsstag, 2019). Ward and Durrant (2021) further observe that restorative justice, in essence, is based on the idea that what truly empowers a victim is the acknowledgment by the offender, who caused the harm, that harm has been done and that there is recognition of the victim's needs. According to Doak and O'Mahony (2018), the restorative processes should not go ahead if the victim feels unsafe and may be suspended or ceased if the risk of harm surfaces. Practitioners are keen to avoid re-victimising the person harmed by the offence. Restorative justice often involves a risk assessment, careful planning, and specialist training or expertise in relation to complex and severe crimes, such as domestic abuse and sexual offences (Cooley & Sample, 2018; Hansen & Umbreit, 2018). Of course, it is not only the person harmed who is at potential risk of further harm; the restorative justice process will ensure that the process is safe for all participants. The services of SAPS should focus on restorative justice. The perpetrator should be held accountable for his/her actions and, where possible, should make amends to the victim. This approach is based on an understanding of crime as an act against the victim, the family and the community. It advocates for more active involvement in the justice process by victims and the community.

There are various ways of measuring the involvement of SAPS in restorative justice to GBV victims. The SAPS have to ensure that they are supportive of and cooperate with the victims of GBV, to be able to generate reports on how they have helped victims of GBV. The anticipated reports from the SAPS are mandated in terms of section 18(5) of the Domestic Violence Act (Act 116 of 1998), which requires that the National Commissioner of the South African Police Service must, every six months, submit a report to Parliament, regarding:

- The number and particulars of complaints received against its members, in respect of any failure contemplated in subsection (4)(a);
- The disciplinary proceedings instituted, as a result thereof and the decisions emanating from such proceedings; and
- Steps taken, as a result of recommendations made by the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service (Victim Empowerment Service in the South African Police Services 2022).

In addition to the legislated reporting requirements, the Select Committee on Security and Justice of the SAPS should report on matters regarding members as victims and perpetrators of the crime, as well as firearms seized in the process and the number of police stations where members are deployed. The SAPS should also report on the broader management of the domestic violence programme. One of the programmes that the SAPS have to monitor, is The Domestic Violence National Instruction 7 of 1999, which provides clear direction to SAPS members on how to respond to a complaint of domestic violence, in order to comply with the obligations imposed upon him or her, in terms of the Domestic Violence Act of 1998 (Victim Empowerment Service in the South African Police Services, 2022).

The functioning of victim-friendly rooms (VFRs) at police stations

The SAPS has, since the marked increase of GBV attacks in the country, committed to improving their services to the victims of GBV attacks at all police stations. As part of the Performance Plan of the National Commissioner, all police stations should have a victim-friendly room. To ensure the establishment of victim-friendly rooms (VFRs), a multi-year plan has been adopted, by both the Supply Chain Management Division and the Visible Policing Divisions of the SAPS, to establish VFRs at the police stations with no VFRs from 2011 to date. A VFR must provide the victim of intimate violence (gender-based violence, child abuse, sexual offences and domestic violence) to make their statements in private, in a non-threatening environment. The following are the advantages of establishing a victim-friendly room (VFR):

- Provides some privacy and comfort to the victim
- Provides a secure environment, where statements can be taken from victim
- Provides a venue where other relevant support services can be rendered, for example, where a victim support volunteer can provide the victim with information

(Source: Victim Empowerment Service in the South African Police Services, 2022)

It was highlighted that GBV attacks can severely affect the lives of victims and such people need to receive help from the first respondent of the criminal justice system, which is the SAPS. Hence, there is a need for the general public to be informed of the services they can get from the SAPS, so that they do not hesitate reporting GBV cases to the police, because this may result in them losing their shelter because they are reporting on their violent partners.

It is therefore recommended that more research be conducted on the effect of GBV attacks on victims and the kind of services they can get from the SAPS. Before SAPS communicate to the public about the specialised GBV services they offer, more research into the importance of such services have to be investigated and addressed. Future research should focus on providing information on the effects of GBV attacks on victims and the services that those affected by GBV can get.

Limitations

Although this paper attempted to include as much literature as possible in the analysis, this study had some limitations, which need to be taken into consideration when reviewing this study. Firstly, the study was based on content analysis, conducted as desktop research for a doctoral inauguration lecture, with constrained time and budget; hence, mostly academic open-access papers were considered. Secondly, the research considered keywords such as “gender-based violence”, “South African Police Services”, “victims”, and “services”, which pose the possibility that some sources might have been disregarded, because the keywords are not included in those studies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has outlined the importance of providing services to victims of GBV. It has noted the important role that SAPS members can play in providing support for GBV victims by directing them to and advising them about these support services that are at their disposal and that they have access to. The scourge of GBV can only be overcome if people come together and collaborate to address this problem. It is without doubt that a research paper can make a difference in people’s lives and it can even shape them. Sharing of information is a tool that can seem so useless, but once it is utilised accurately, good results can be seen. Informing the public of the services that the SAPS can offer to victims of GBV can assist to restore the image of the SAPS and place them in a good position, as allies, in the fight against this heinous crime, and help the victims to make their voices heard and stop living in fear, but to be empowered to take control of their lives.

The following suggestions and recommendations are made:

Promote the SAPS Victim Empowerment Programme

The SAPS are the first port of call for GBV victims who seek recourse through the criminal justice system. This means the SAPS is the first law enforcement agency that the victims of GBV approaches, to get help. If people were informed that they can gain access to more services when they report GBV offences, they would be more than willing to report such cases. We can see from the article that some GBV victims, who live with their partners, often choose not to report the crime, because they fear they will be left homeless. Should the victims be aware of the victim empowerment services that are offered by SAPS, they would know that they can be provided with shelter, should they wish to leave their abusive partner.

Train SAPS Members to Respond to Victims of GBV Accordingly.

SAPS members need to be fully conversant with what is expected from them when responding to reported GBV cases and be able to tell the victims of the services that they can offer to them. If the SAPS members are not trained to offer the victim empowerment services to the victims, they would be failing the victims.

Community Engagements

There should be scholars that write about the services that the SAPS can offer to victims of GBV. This practice should be done through academic research, whereby researchers visit communities and work with communities to measure their experience with the SAPS services to victims of GBV.

References

- Akter, F., & Deeba, F. 2021. Psychological reactions to different types of gender-based violence in women survivors of violence in the context of a developing country. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(21-22), NP19961-NP19982.
- Alangea, D., Addo-Lartey, A., Chirwa, E., Sikweyiya, Y., Coker-Appiah, D., & Jewkes, R. 2020. Evaluation of the rural response system intervention to prevent violence against women: Findings from a community-randomised controlled trial in the Central Region of Ghana. *Global Health Action*, 13(17), 113-136.
- Beyene, A.S., Chojenta, C., Roba, H.S., Melka, A.S., & Loxton, D. 2019. Gender-based violence among female youths in educational institutions of sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Systematic Reviews*, 8(1), 1-14.
- Cooley BN and Sample LL (2018) The difference between desistance from sexual offending and not reoffending. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 41(5): 483–503.
- Cheung, M.W.L. 2019. A guide to conducting a meta-analysis with non-independent effect sizes. *Neuropsychology Review*, 29(4), 387-396.
- Colombini, M., Alkaiyat, A., Shaheen, A., García-Moreno, C., Feder, G., & Bacchus, L.J. 2019. Exploring health system readiness for adopting interventions to address intimate partner violence: A case study from the occupied Palestinian territory. *Health Policy and Planning*, 35(3), 245-256.
- Combs, J.G., Crook, T.R., & Rauch, A. 2019. Meta-analytic research in management: Contemporary approaches, unresolved controversies, and rising standards. *Journal of Management Studies*, 2(1), 1-18.
- Cubells, J., & Calsamiglia, A. 2018. Do we see victims' agency? Criminal justice and gender violence in Spain. *Critical Criminology*, 2(6), 107-127.
- Dartnall, E., & Channon, A. 2020. Gender-based violence in South Africa. Available at: <https://www.saferspaces.org.za/understand/entry/gender-based-violence-in-south-africa>. (Accessed: 14 August 2022).
- Doak J., & O'Mahony D. 2018. Evaluating the success of restorative justice conferencing based approach. In: Gavrielides T (ed.), *Routledge International Handbook of Restorative Justice*. London: Routledge, 211–223.
- Eisend, M. 2017. Meta-analysis in advertising research. *Journal of Advertising*, 46(1), 21-35.
- Ghosh, M., Daniels, J., Pyra, M., Juzumaite, M., Jais, M., & Murphy K. 2018. Effect of chronic sexual abuse and depression on inflammation and wound healing in the female reproductive tract of HIV-uninfected and HIV-infected women. *PLoS ONE*, 3(1), 16-29.
- Globokar, J.L., Erez, E., & Gregory, C.R. 2019. Beyond advocacy: Mapping the contours of victim work. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 3(4), 38-53.
- Hansen T and Umbreit M (2018) Regenerative justice, beyond restoring. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 21(2): 185–207.

- Javaid, A. 2018. Male rape, masculinities, and sexualities. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 5(2), 185-210.
- John, L., & Walmsley, R. 2021. The latest treatment interventions improving mental health outcomes for women, following gender-based violence in low-and-middle-income countries: A mini review. *Frontiers in Global Women's Health*, 2(1), 1-8.
- Kirkwood, S., & Hamad, R. (2019). Restorative justice informed criminal justice social work and probation services. *Probation Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0264550519880595>.
- Keynejad, R.C., Bentley, A., Bhatia, U., Nalwadda, O., Mekonnen, F.D., Parveen, A., & McGarry, J. 2021. Research, education and capacity building priorities for violence, abuse and mental health in low- and middle-income countries: An international qualitative survey. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology: The International Journal for Research in Social and Genetic Epidemiology and Mental Health Services*, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-021-02061-5>
- Knettel, B., Robertson, C., Ciya, N., Coleman, J., Elliott, S., & Joska, J. 2019. I cannot change what happened to me, but I can learn to change how I feel: A case study from Effect, an intervention for women with a history of sexual trauma who are living with HIV in Cape Town. *South Africa. Psychotherapy*, 5(7), 90-96.
- Knight, L.M., Ranganathan, T., Abramsky, T., Polzer-Ngwato, L., Muvhango, M., Molebatsi, H., Stöckl, S., & Watts, C. 2020. Intervention with microfinance for AIDS and gender equity (IMAGE): Women's engagement with the scaled-up IMAGE programme and experience of intimate partner violence in rural South Africa. *Prevention Science*, 12(2), 268-281.
- Maglione, G. 2017. Embodied victims: An archaeology of the 'ideal victim' of restorative justice. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 17(4), 401-417. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895816677172>.
- Mahlori, X.F., Byrne, D.C., & Mabude, L.A. 2018. Perceptions of gender-based violence among university staff: Interim results. *SAGE Open*, 8(3), 84-98.
- Maromo, J. 2019. Justice system blamed for failing gender-based violence victims. *IOL*, 19 November. Available at: <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/justice-system-blamed-for-failing-gender-based-violence-victims-37569942>. (Accessed: 5 January 2022).
- Mbunge, E. 2020. Effects of COVID-19 in South African health system and society: An explanatory study. *Diabetes & Metabolic Syndrome: Clinical Research & Reviews*, 14(6), 189-199.
- McCarthy, K.J., Mehta, R., & Haberland, N.A. 2018. Gender, power, and violence: A systematic review of measures and their association with male perpetration of IPV. *PLoS One*, 13(11), 105-126.
- Odeku, K.O. 2021. Exponential increase in endemic gender-based violence during COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa. *Gender & Behaviour*, 19(2), 17918-17926.
- Oparinde, K., & Matsha, R.M. 2021. Powerful discourse: Gender-based violence and counter-discourses in South Africa. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 1(1), 1-15.
- Rapanyane, M.B. 2021. Women in trouble? A critical reflection on the major hindrances to addressing gender-based violence in South Africa. *African Journal of Gender, Society and Development*, 10(4), 209-225.

- Reid, N., Kron, A., Rajakulendran, T., Kahan, D., Noble, A., & Stergiopoulos, V. 2021. Promoting wellness and recovery of young women experiencing gender-based violence and homelessness: The role of trauma-informed health promotion interventions. *Violence Against Women*, 27(9), 1297-1316.
- Roure, J.G. 2020. The re-emergence of barriers during crises & natural disasters: Gender-based violence spikes among women & LGBTQ+ persons during confinement. *Journal of Diplomacy & International Relations*, 21(2), 23-50.
- Schwark, S., & Bohner, G. 2019. Sexual violence – “victims” or “survivor”: News images affect explicit and implicit judgements of blame. *Violence Against Women*, 25(12), 14-29.
- South Africa. 1996. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, No. 108 of 1996. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- South Africa. 1998. The Domestic Violence Act, No. 116 of 1998. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Tears. 2023. Interpol has named South Africa the “Rape Capital of the World” Rape & sexual abuse affects men, women and children from all walks of life. Online. Available: <https://tears.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/presentation.pdf>. Accessed: 01/05/2023.
- Victim empowerment service in the south African police services. 2022. Online. Available: [amended_victim_empo_service.pdf](https://saps.gov.za/amended_victim_empo_service.pdf) (saps.gov.za). (Accessed: 01 May 2023).
- Walgrave L., Ward, T., & Zinsstag E. 2019. When restorative justice meets the good lives model: Contributing to a criminology of trust. *European Journal of Criminology*. First published online 6 June 2019: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370819854174>.
- Ward, T., & Durrant, R. 2021. Practice frameworks in correctional psychology: Translating causal theories and normative assumptions into practice. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2021.101612>.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).