Resilience and gender-based violence: An interdisciplinary reflection on shaping stories of resilience from an institutional perspective

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Abstract

During the national lockdown in 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa voiced concern about the ongoing problem of gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa, calling it a pandemic alongside the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 intensified the occurrence of gender-based violence within South African communities which consequently highlighted the need for awareness regarding this phenomenon. South Africa is a predominantly Christian culture, yet the actions of community members seem to be defined by patriarchal cultures. There is therefore a need to rethink how we address social issues, especially GBV. This article aims at providing an interdisciplinary reflection on shaping stories of resilience relating to gender-based violence from the perspectives of both theology and social work at Hugenote Kollege[1].

Keywords

Resilience; gender-based violence; higher education institutions; resilient leadership; storytelling

1. Introduction

Stories help us to make sense of our reality. It conveys changes and experiences, values and emotions reaffirming and validating our identities (East et al 2010:17). It becomes the framework from which we perceive ourselves and the world around us, but also functions as a tool

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1   The name "Hugenote Kollege" is trademarked in Afrikaans.

to impart ethos. Stories play a vital role in leadership as it has the ability to manufacture new ways to think about a specific problem and instil the language to better confront adversity. The language we employ in talking and thinking about gender-based violence (GBV) becomes all the more under this scope. This is not a new problem that is being addressed. Rather, the urgency is coming more to the fore as during the first week of the national COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa in 2020, a disturbingly high number of GBV cases were reported to social service organisations or the South African Police Services (Mlambo 2020).[2] Even the President, Cyril Ramaphosa, voiced concern about the disquieting problem of GBV in South Africa referring to it as an additional pandemic (Ellis 2020). Gender-based violence remains a critical issue within the South African context.

In order to address the issue, the Department of Higher Education and Training developed and published a policy framework in July 2020 to address gender-based violence in the post-school education and training systems. Post-school education and training systems have an obligation to create an environment that safeguards all people but particularly those who are vulnerable due to race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disabilities (Department of Higher Education and Training 2020). There is a need to change the narrative, but moreover, to educate society on what to do with these stories that has become normal instead of being the exception. This includes but is not limited to Higher Education Institutions such as Hugenote Kollege.

The importance of the education of women forms part of the story of Hugenote Kollege since its inception as Huguenot Seminary in 1874. It is one of the first institutions where women could study to obtain university degrees.[3] Hugenote Kollege is a private higher education institution in the Western Cape, South Africa, which offers degrees in Social Work

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2   It is difficult to determine accurate numbers which may be much higher, as GBV cases are often not reported, due to various reasons by victims.

3   The story of Hugenote Kollege began with Andrew Murray's vision to educate the "daughters of South Africa" (Ferguson 1927:3). In 1898 it became one of the first institutions in South African where women could study for university degrees (Duff 2006:26). Hugenote Kollege was modelled on the Mount Holyoke system developed by Mary Lyon with an emphasis on the head, hand, and heart. For Mary Lyon, women should receive the best intellectual training to fill their place in society. For her she aimed at the highest mental culture; pupils should seek first the kingdom of God.

and Theology as well as various Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) courses for social service professions (Hugenote Kollege 2020/2021). Some of the goals of Hugenote Kollege include expanding ecclesiastic relationships; cooperating with partners and in networks; maintaining a Christian ethos of human dignity, inclusivity, transparency, equity, and harmonious relationships and developing and nurturing the spirituality, vocational commitment, and willingness to serve of both learners and staff. Furthermore, Hugenote Kollege recognizes academic education, research, and community service as primary activities.

This article is a collaboration between the Hugenote Kollege schools of social work and theology reflecting on higher education's GBV policy through the lens of the power of stories of leadership and resilience. This article is a unique attempt to investigate the role of social workers and theologians as change agents in their communities to address GBV. This starts with education. A holistic response combining the skills and resources of various key players is necessary to address GBV (Le Roux & Loots 2017:741). The article will map the current situation in South Africa with regards to the complexities of gender, illustrate the need of social leadership and propose ways forward to interact impactful in South African communities. Accordingly, social leadership in this regard becomes pivotal in establishing networks and ways to rethink our current attempts to curb this problem. In this regard, especially resilient leadership may be a valuable tool. "Resilience" is the ability to bounce back or rebound from adversity (Everly, Everly & Smith 2020:4), and addressing the pandemic of GBV requires 'resilient' leadership. According to Javed & Chattu (2020:33) the high level of investment going into the COVID-19 recovery plan is a unique opportunity to reshape patriarchal society and to coordinate across sectors and institutions to reduce gender inequalities. Leadership may play a pivotal role in restoring the fractures in South African communities, especially resilient leadership. Resilient leaders can foster the turning point that is required to invite changes in culture (Everly, Everly & Smith 2020:5).

Ferguson writes, "the initial aim of the college had been the intellectual; the moral and spiritual elevation of the daughters of South Africa" (1927:12).

2. The shape of the South African story

South Africa has a volatile history embedded in violence and this in turn has developed a culture of violence within many South African communities (Enaifoghe et al. 2021:124). Violence and in particular GBV can have devastating effects on women and children in particular but also communities as a whole. GBV not only implies violence perpetrated by men against women but also violence perpetrated by women against men. The argument is often made that South Africa is a violent country. This is true, as the country does have high levels of violence, and it is an important problem to discuss. However, GBV is a particular problem and unlike violence in general, the perpetrators are often those closest to the survivor. Dlamini (2021:583) avers that GBV is prevalent in all societies, social classes and cultural groups affecting one in three women in their lifetime. Both Eurocentric and Afrocentric cultures in South Africa are deeply influenced by the idea of the supremacy of the fathers, and so struggle with patriarchy (Coetzee 2001:300). The problem remains that patriarchal societies are especially susceptible to GBV violence (Javed & Chattu 2020:33). In patriarchy, no one comes out as a winner. This impacts the way children are raised and the role models that are modulated to them about what it means to be a woman and what it means to be a man. Dlamini (2021:584) lists studies indicating that children growing up with violence are more likely to become perpetrators of violence in the future or survivors of GBV. The impact of GBV also goes beyond the suffering of survivors and their families as the estimated cost to the economy can go up to 3.7% of some countries' GDP (Dlamini 2021:584).

South Africa is a country fraught with inequality and disparity. Javed and Chattu (2020:33) highlight that it is the abuse of authority, dominance, and power that especially prevail and become intensified in the face of inequality as the nonexistence of protective mechanisms leaves women and girls more vulnerable. This is supported by Ott (2017) who maintains that "gender-based violence can have serious physical, mental, economic, and social repercussions". Other effects may include unwanted pregnancies which may lead to unsafe abortions and sexually transmitted infections (Enaifoghe *et al.* 2021:124). In addition, Enaifoghe, *et al.* (2021:124) maintain that GBV can result in isolation and various mental health struggles including depression and anxiety.

According to Enaifoghe, *et al.* (2021:122), GBV is considered a general term to describe violence against women and children. However, because GBV is violence directed towards a person due to their gender; both men and women may be victims of GBV. Javed & Chattu (2020:33) define GBV as: "sexual and gender-based violence is any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships. It includes threats of violence and coercion, which can be physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual and can take the form of a denial of resources or access to services". To concur, Ott (2017) describes GBV as "physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse, threats, coercion, and economic or educational deprivation". In addition, the World Health Organization (2005:34) highlights that the vulnerability of women to certain types of violence increases where factors such as age, disability and poverty are prevalent. Often these vulnerabilities are exacerbated in a patriarchal society where women may be denied or have limited access to education and economic and leadership opportunities.

3.   Gender-based violence as a form of adversity

The problem of GBV is not a new problem nor something that only started during the pandemic. GBV is seen worldwide as one of the most significant human rights violations (Javed & Chattu 2020:33). The increase of GBV during COVID-19 was also not unexpected, as it is linked to dominance, power and abuse of authority which is exacerbated whether it be a pandemic, conflict or disaster, as structured inequalities and power hierarchies fail (Javed & Chattu 2020:33). How resilience precipitates in the global North in comparison to the global South is different as the global South is more likely to experience chronic adversity due to war, poverty, and natural disasters (Van Breda 2018:4). These conditions are a breeding ground for GBV, as GBV is closely associated with power.

Whilst literature indicates that there remains a lack of consensus on one definition for resilience, the authors of this article will provide a range of definitions to provide the reader with an idea of the term (Luthar, *et al,* 2000:543). Van Breda (2018:2) maintains that some authors describe resilience as something that is inherent to the individual, whilst other authors define it more holistically. In addition, Van Breda (2018:2)

highlights that some authors link resilience with the capabilities or competencies of people whereas others perceive it as the ability to respond positively to adversity. Luthar *et al* (2000:543) describes resilience as both a process and an outcome and maintains that it is the ability for individuals to adapt and respond positively to adverse conditions. Van Breda (2018:4) explains that "multi-level process" refers to resilience processes taking place on multiple levels instead of only within the individual. This means that resilience processes take place in the individual but also within the individual in their environment. "Systems" suggests various systems for instance individuals, families, organisations, and communities but also includes systems such as geology, the weather, or the economy (Van Breda 2018: 4–5). "Better-than expected outcomes" as one definition of resilience highlights a few aspects: firstly that context is important and one should define resilience outcomes according to specific aspects; secondly, that there may be a range of outcomes of how a person responds when faced with adversity and thirdly that resilience outcomes should be measured on a more continuous scale rather than saying someone is either resilient or not resilient. (Van Breda 2018:5–6). Lastly, according to Van Breda (2018:5) 'in the face of' implies ongoing adversity whilst "in the wake of" suggests that the adverse conditions have passed.

The occurrence of adversity can generally be divided into acute adversity and chronic adversity (Bonanno and Diminich 2013:380). Acute adversity has a specific starting point and ending point and continues for a relatively shorter period of time (Bonanno & Diminich 2013:380). An example of acute adversity may include an accident or an assault (Van Breda, 2018:5). On the other hand, chronic adversity refers to adverse conditions continuing over a longer period of time and may have a significant impact on an individual's life. Examples of chronic adversity may include poverty and family violence (Van Breda 2018:5). It is therefore likely that GBV would be considered a chronic form of adversity for many women and children in South Africa.

4. Resilience, gender-based violence and South African communities

Whilst many resilience studies have focused on individualised resilience processes, resilience studies have usually put emphasis on the significance of relationships (Van Breda 2018:8). This highlights the role that relationships within families, communities, organisations etc. play within resilience processes. These relationships can be referred to the 'social environment' and the social work theory of the person-in environment can be used as a framework to holistically understand its impact on the individual (Van Breda 2018:8). Ungar (2012:15) highlights that "resilience is as, or more, dependent on the capacity of the individual's physical and social ecology to potentiate positive development under stress than the capacity of individuals to exercise personal agency during their recovery from risk exposure". This means that resilience processes of individuals are a consequence of a both personal and environmental factors.

Resilience should be approached from a critical standpoint. It does not endeavour to proffer easy solutions in particular to GBV. However, understanding resilience processes and the importance of relationships in enhancing resilience can be linked to the role of leadership in addressing GBV in South African communities. South Africa has diverse cultures which should be respected. There is a vast network of knowledge already prevalent in communities, which should be drawn from. Van Breda (2018:12) rightly states that: "resilience theory celebrates local and indigenous knowledge."

5. Resilience, leadership and reframing

When disregarding the important role that government plays within resilience processes, one takes the responsibility away from them to address adverse social issues such as poverty, racism, lack of access to resources, and poor-quality education. This also applies to inequality which has strong ties to GBV within the South African context where individuals continue to be treated unfairly and unequally due to aspects such as gender, sexual orientation, race, and disabilities. The government have a role to play in terms of developing and implementing relevant legislation and policies pertaining to equality. Van Breda (2018:7) has highlighted the neoliberal agenda in many resilience studies which put emphasis on the

individual being responsible for their personal development with minimal support from government systems. Resilience to chronic adversity such as GBV also utilises resources that are not unlimited (Van Breda 2018:7) and that are often either provided by the government or community members. Therefore, resources play a significant role in the resilience process of individuals and communities when it comes to GBV.

5.1. Department of Higher Education and Training and GBV

The problem with power is that those who do not have it, do not have access to resources or the ability to influence decisions that are institutionalized through policies, regulations, and laws (Javed & Chattu 2020:33). The concerns around the GBV pandemic in South Africa led to the development and publication of a policy framework to address GBV in the post-school education and training systems (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020). Policies around serious social issues are important in higher education institutions as Johnson (2021:235) maintains that universities should provide an example of how an ideal society should function and this means that there should be measures in place to ensure the inclusion of all citizens and protection of those who are vulnerable. This highlights the need to educate and inform communities on the problem of GBV.

Whilst post-school education and training systems have a responsibility to ensure the safety of students and staff as well as education and awareness activities, they are also responsible for engaging the community in these projects and programmes. The policy framework aims at assisting post-school education and training (PSET) to ascertain operative solutions to address GBV and to put systems in place to:

1. Creating awareness programmes to prevent the occurrence of gender-based violence

2. Providing staff with training on GBV and vulnerable populations

3. Providing the necessary support to victims of gender-based violence at the institution

4. Strengthening the application of national legislation through improved collaboration between Higher education institutions and

the community (Department of Higher Education and Training 2020).

5.2. Post-school education and training (PSET) and gender-based violence

Example: *Hugenote Kollege and gender-based violence*

The GBV office at Hugenote Kollege was established in September 2021 as a requirement from the Department of Higher Education and Training. The purpose of this office is to provide education and create awareness around gender-based violence for students and staff as well as to provide an enabling environment and the necessary support for the reporting of incidences at Hugenote Kollege. In addition, the GBV office was obligated to involve the community in GBV initiatives in order to increase the impact. Competent and passionate staff members from the various departments at Hugenote Kollege were nominated to form the part of the GBV office and who planned various initiatives in line with the policy framework by the Department of Higher Education and Training. Since September 2021, the GBV office has developed a policy framework and has arranged various educational and awareness campaigns for both staff and students. These campaigns included various stakeholders from the community including Wellington South African Police Services, Norsa Community Care, and The Haven Night Shelter. The campaigns included several workshops lead by GBV experts, marches within the Wellington community and a colloquial between staff and students. In addition, social media was used as a means of creating awareness.

Leadership plays a pivotal role within the GBV office at Hugenote Kollege, given that the responsibility does not form part of their job descriptions of staff, and is instead an additional task that is fulfilled. Therefore, leadership and passion for the eradication of GBV are needed for the success of the office. Furthermore, the GBV office was not allocated a budget which creates challenges around the implementation of campaigns. Furthermore, staff needed to overcome various challenges linked to limited resources to ensure that the aims of the GBV were reached.

5.3. Resilience and the story of Hugenote Kollege

Hugenote Kollege is a private higher education. The story of Hugenote Kollege began with the vision of Dr Andrew Murray. He had the dream to educate woman and used the head, heart, and hand motto from Mount Holyoake. The college in its current form is registered as a non-profit making company (NPC) and has strong ties with the DR Church since 1951.[4] The General Synod of the DR Church, the General Synod of the Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa, the synod of the DR Church Western Cape, with the DR Congregation Wellington and the URCSA Congregation Wellington are all members of the company.

However, the story of Hugenote Kollege is also a story of resilience. The college had a working relationship with the University of South Africa with students enrolling through the college to Unisa. Initially, from 1951–1959 admission students from Huguenot missionary institute obtained degrees via Unisa, but this was stopped and from 1975 a new arrangement was made allowing Hugenote Kollege students to obtain degrees and diplomas in Social work, missionary work, youth work and Community Development from Unisa. This agreement was ended in 2012 as a collaboration between public and private institutions were no longer permissible by the government. Accordingly, Hugenote Kollege repositioned itself as a Christian training institution with SAQA-accredited degree courses in Missional Theology and Social Work as well as skills courses in Early Child Development, Community Development, Child and Youth Care Work and Social Auxiliary Work. The concept of "lifelong learning" was a fundamental building block of the repositioning strategy and the continuous integration of faith, knowledge and skills of the students and staff remains a core matter for the college.

6.   GBV and the Bible

The Bible is an influential document in shaping culture, especially concerning the place of women and the relationship between the sexes (Klopper 2010:653). Religion and specifically the Christian religion play

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4   Its origins hark back to the Huguenot Seminary (1874), the Mission Institute (1877) and Friedenheim (1904).

an important role in South Africa as the majority of Christians identify
as Christian (Schoeman 2017:3). The role of religion with regards to GBV
is contentious as, on the one hand, faith leaders are recognised as having
the potential and ability to address GBV, but on the other hand, they are
also often the culprits in condoning and perpetuating beliefs and practices
that facilitate GBV (Le Roux & Loots 2017:735). The role of religion is
however integral. In times of crisis and adversity, people turn to religion
for guidance, explanation, and spiritual comfort (Venter & Tolmie 2021:1;
Bentzen 2020:26). Using daily data obtained from Google searches for 95
countries, Bentzen (2020:1) indicates that the searches for prayer were the
highest Google has ever recorded during the period of the pandemic. The
incorporation of an individual's religious beliefs and community of faith
can offer a support system for the individual and his/her family and crisis
(Javed & Chattu 2020:34).

6.1. The story of Dinah in Genesis 34

The story of Dinah is a difficult text to read. We usually assume the
Bible offers an ethically beneficial hermeneutic (Parry 2002:1), but when
encountering the story of Dinah there are some hard questions that need
to be asked. The story of Dinah is a story of disruption. Dinah is date-raped
by the leader of a tribe, Shechem. Shortly after the rape, we read Shechem is
in love with Dinah and wants to marry her. The marriage is arranged with
the brothers of Dinah being unhappy with the decision. Jacob approves
the marriage with the condition: the tribe of Shechem is asked to undergo
circumcision. Whilst they are still weak from the circumcision, the brothers
of Dinah murder all the men of Shechem, removed Dinah from Shechem's
house, plundered the city, and seized all flocks and herds and took all the
children and wives as captives. When Jacob asks his sons why they did that.
They replied: "Should our sister have been treated like a whore?"

Shechem was a leader in his tribe. His actions affected his people. Dinah,
on the other hand, is the daughter of a chieftain; what happened to her,
reflected on her family. The reactions to Dinah's rape are from a male
perspective. Her rape is the catalyst for a massacre, but her voice in this
violence is unheard and silenced. We do not know anything about what
Dinah experiences or her feelings. We only read about her in Genesis 34:1–
3. In these three verses, she is initially presented as the daughter of Leah

and indirectly Jacob, who goes out to visit the daughters of the land. The fact that she is identified as Leah's daughter, the unloved wife of Jacob, is no coincidence. Already the reader is prepared for Jacob's lacklustre concern for Dinah's disgrace (Wenham 1994:310). But moreover, a case of "like mother like daughter" is also prevalent in the text as Gen 30:16 depicts Leah going out to Jacob (Wenham 1994:310). Accordingly, Leah is following in her mother's footsteps by going out with other daughters of the region. Already an excuse for what follows in verse 2 is portrayed.

In verse 2, Shechem, the son of Hamor, and a chief in the region saw her, took her, and raped her. Klopper (2010:655) describes this incident as clearly date rape. After this incident, Shechem's "soul stuck to Dinah" (Gen 34:3) and he declares to love her (Wenham 1994:311). Fausset & Brown (1997:36) mentions that Dinah "being a simple, inexperienced, and vain young woman, had been flattered by the attentions of the ruler's son." They continue to surmise that there would have been time and opportunities for Shechem to develop feelings for her. The commentary is biased, and the language of love is quickly picked up, reading over the rape of Dinah. However, love and rape are not mutually-inclusive concepts and cannot be harmonized.

The father of Shechem, Hamor, enters negotiations with Jacob for Dinah's hand in marriage to her rapist. Jacob heard that his daughter was raped but did not do anything. Parry (2002:20) rightly points out that Dinah is silenced again by the men who decide over her body. Dinah's brothers heard about the rape and expressed anger. However, the marriage is allowed, becoming a transaction between Shechem and Jacob for land and joining two tribes.

It becomes clear that the leaders of the tribes' reactions affect the whole society. The assault of Dinah becomes a mass assault on the woman of Shechem along with violence and plundering. Dinah is not vindicated. However, Klopper (2010:663) argues it is possible to read the story of Dinah in a manner that restores her honour and values her choices by permitting her to break the silence and tell her story. The story of Dinah has the potential to demonstrate liberation for rape victims can come from within as raped women can refuse to remain silent. What is more, rape is rarely the subject matter of sermons or discussions in classrooms (Klopper 2010:663).

From a disruptive leadership perspective, this becomes especially vital that church and Christian-related institutions become a space where we also voice the problem of gender-based violence.

7.   Storytelling in social work

Because of its cathartic qualities and capacity to assist individuals and communities in dealing with and managing traumatic events, storytelling has gained acceptance as a useful intervention tool among those in the helping profession (Bamidele 2016:1). Storytelling allows one to become more aware of reality through storytelling and according to Chaitin (2003), the Kalahari Bushmen, who are indigenous to South Africa, have said, "A story is like the wind. It comes from a far-off place, and we feel it. Those things that are the most personal are most general, and are, in turn, most trusted. Stories bind. They are connective tissues. They are basic to who we are". In fact, Hilder (2005:164) maintains the connection between our emotions and storytelling aids our memory. Several techniques could be used when engaging in storytelling (Bamidele 2016:41). The medium used to tell stories depends on the societal setting, the storyteller's preferences, and the needs and cognitive capabilities of certain audiences. Examples include the spoken word, writing, gestures, art, theatre, music, documentaries, and movies (Barton and Booth 2000:76).

In addition, whilst sharing one's story requires bravery, doing so in supportive environments may be a highly beneficial experience that may aid healing and a sense of empowerment (Gachago, Condy, Ivala & Chigona 2014:6). Storytelling, therefore, allows individuals to gain insight into the stories of others and this may result in an increase in awareness and consequently empathy (Gachago, Condy, Ivala & Chigona 2014:5). People can share their understanding of an experience and align their understanding of the world through the sharing of stories (Chaitin 2003). Consequently, different ideas can be heard, thought about, compared, interpreted, and acted upon through the telling of stories. Burk (1997:3) highlights that the art of storytelling fosters the development of qualities such as "social responsibility, self- and cultural awareness, recognition of social roles, and opportunity for reflection".

According to Brison (2002:52) the art of storytelling can be empowering. The memory of traumatic events often leaves the individual experiencing a feeling of passive suffering; however, storytelling provides individuals with a sense of control as they choose when and how to share their stories. Perpetrators and communities regularly disregard the stories of GBV survivors and for this reason, storytelling can be viewed as a proactive method of recovering control over one's memory and acknowledging the wrongfulness of the perpetrator's actions (Bamidele 2016:42).

It is therefore evident that the art of storytelling is linked to the resilience of GBV survivors. By choosing to share their stories and also when and how to share their stories, survivors are empowered and have the ability to move forward. Moving forward will look different for each individual and this supports van Breda's (2018:5–6) claims that there may be a range of outcomes of how a person responds when faced with adversity.

8. Conclusion

The government and people need to do something different but suitable for the African context, different approaches towards addressing the prevalence of this scourge, specifically femicide. In this regard, communities and change agents within these communities have a contribution to make by disrupting toxic stories that keep South Africans from flourishing. Stories play an important role in the way understand ourselves. In patriarchal societies, women internalize GBV (Javed & Chattu 2020:33), and often do not talk about what is happening to them. Storytelling has the possibility to reveal experiences (East et al 2010:20). It becomes especially important for settings where culture, faith, and faith communities play a critical role in people's lives and their safety (Le Roux &Loots 2017:742), to disrupt the narrative that GBV is normal and part of culture. Disruption is part and parcel of what it means to be human (Niemandt 2019:169). From a religious perspective, Jesus disrupted the social and religious norms of his day and challenged his followers to do the same (Bryant 2017:145). From the vantage point of Hugenote Kollege's education model, the notion of Jesus as being an agent of change is fundamental in its teaching methods and the Jesus forms part of an ethos of being leaders. Leaders should model the way to disrupt adverse conditions and implement change

(Bryant 2017:145). Johnson (2021:236) highlights that "leadership needs to include thinking about humility, distributed leadership, trust and open-mindedness recognising our fragility and the need to know how to work with uncertainty and adaptability." Resilience theory enables an awareness of a person's holistic life experience which entails the negative as well as the positive, both the vulnerable and strength and their attempts to deal with the challenges in their own social environment (Van Breda 2018:11). This article highlights the need for resilient leaders who facilitate stories as a step one in tackling this systemic and complicated phenomenon of GBV.

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