

Gender-based Violence Victim Support Policies in South Africa: An Intersectional Analysis from the Perspective of Indian Women in Chatsworth

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Abstract

This study aimed to assess the implementation of the KwaZulu-Natal 365 Days Policy Framework for the Eradication of Gender-Based Violence, particularly the Victim Support Programme, in the minority Indian community in Westcliff, Chatsworth in South Africa. A qualitative research design was adopted using Westcliff as a case study. Data was collected through interviews with the street-level bureaucrats directly implementing the Policy Framework and civil society organizations at the sub-national level. Data from beneficiaries was collected through an online survey and interviews with women from the community. All data was analyzed through thematic analysis using the 7Cs of content, context, commitment, capacity, clients and coalitions, communication, and coordination. This study found that Indian women who are aware of the victim support find it mostly unhelpful. Reasons for not using the services included stigma and fear of further abuse. The overall finding is that an interplay of the intersecting dynamics of gender, race, culture, and geography affects policy implementation at this level and poses a challenge for policy implementation if interventions are not context-specific. This study recommends that the Policy Framework ensures consultations at all of the lower levels and considers the context of the minority group of Indian Women in Westcliff for effective and efficient policy implementation on gender-based violence.

Keywords: Gender-based violence, Intersectionality, Minorities, Policy, Thematic analysis, Victim Support Programme, South Africa

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I. Introduction

This study assesses the implementation of the KwaZulu-Natal 365 Days Policy Framework for the Eradication of Gender-Based Violence (2014-2019), with a particular focus on victim support for the minority group of Indian women living in the flat-dwelling areas of Westcliff, Chatsworth in Durban, South Africa. Women in minority groups – and of particular interest to this study, Indian women – are underrepresented in research and this presents a gap in the literature for evidence-informed interventions. This study will bring into the spotlight learnings for improved policy implementation in a minority community.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive global challenge that affects individuals across diverse cultural, social, and geographic landscapes (Suzor et al., 2019). It encompasses various forms, such as physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse, as well as threats, coercion, and the deprivation of economic or educational opportunities (Afridi, 2023; Mitiku et al., 2023; WHO, 2021). Unfortunately, women and girls, particularly in Africa, bear a disproportionate burden of GBV, influenced profoundly by local institutions, cultures, and traditions (Enaifoghe, 2019; Enaifoghe et al., 2021; Ndinda. et al, 2027; Odeku, 2021; Okpara & Anugwa, 2022), with perpetrators often including intimate partners, acquaintances, and even strangers (WHO, 2005).

South Africa grapples with substantial challenges in promoting women's rights, rooted in complex sociocultural, economic, and psychological factors perpetuating power imbalances and harmful gender norms (Hossain et al., 2021; Raj et al., 2022). The historical legacy of apartheid and the liberation struggle has normalized violence against women, impacting the nation profoundly (Enaifoghe et al., 2021; Mofokeng and Tlou, 2022). While all women face the risk of violence, certain groups are particularly vulnerable (CSV, 2016; Degani and De Stefani, 2020; Rohwerder, 2016). The intersection of race, sexual orientation, class, and gender exacerbates the harm experienced by these groups (Carrim and Nkomo, 2016).

Addressing the high rates of GBV in South Africa requires comprehensive policy measures. Despite women's awareness of available victim support services, hesitation to seek assistance persists due to stigma and fears of repercussions (Rohn and Tenkorang, 2022; Ruiz et al., 2023; Saigal et al., 2023). Therefore, the implementation of context-specific and culturally sensitive GBV policies is imperative.

This study examined whether the Policy Framework and in particular the support for victims of gender-based violence (GBV), achieved its desired outcomes in the minority Indian community of Westcliff with these stakeholders using an intersectional lens. The interest of this study goes beyond measuring the efficacy of the Policy Framework as it examines the societal context and governance dynamics in the implementation of the Policy Framework in a minority community considering the intersectionality of race, location, and gender.

This article begins with a discussion of gender-based violence and the policy environment in South Africa, including the 365 Policy Framework. It then engages with the concepts of intersectionality and minority identity, which form the lens of analysis. This is followed by a discussion of the findings, which center around the perceptions of gender-based violence and the causes of this violence in the unique context of Westcliff, and awareness and perceptions of the Policy Framework itself. These findings offer a thick description of the Westcliff context and point to how policy frameworks can become more sensitive and nuanced about the unique contexts of minority groups.

Overview of Gender-Based Violence and the policy environment in South Africa

South Africa faces a GBV crisis, ranking among the highest globally (Enaifoghe et al., 2021; Odeku, 2021; Sibando-Mayo et al., 2017). Predominantly affecting women, national surveys indicate alarming rates of physical violence, particularly in impoverished households (Department of Health, 2016). Disturbingly, intimate partner violence claims three women's lives daily, exceeding global estimations (Abrahams et al., 2013; Yesufu, 2022). Sexual violence rates are also disturbingly high, with an estimated 138 rapes per 100,000 women in 2017 (Sibando-Mayo et al., 2017). South Africa ranks fourth globally in GBV-related murders, with 12.5 murders per 100,000 women and girls (World Health Organization, 2016). Recent South African Police Service (SAPS) data (2023) indicates substantial arrests for GBV-related crimes, including 4,375 arrests from July to September 2023 and 822 life sentences for offenders in the past two fiscal years (SAPS Crime Statistics Report, 2023).

South Africa has proactively addressed GBV through legislative measures, institutional arrangements, and initiatives promoting gender equality and women's rights (Mmamabolo et al., 2020). Aligned with international commitments and the national constitution, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against

Women, Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, and the Maputo Protocol, the country has enacted robust legal frameworks and policies (Mmamabolo et al., 2020; Sibanda-Moyo et al., 2017). National regulatory frameworks to constrain GBV in the country include the National Development Plan 2030, National Gender Policy Framework, White Paper on Population Policy, Social Development Guidelines for Services to Victims of Domestic Violence, White Paper on Safety and Security, and National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (Mmamabolo et al., 2020; Sibanda-Moyo et al., 2017). Entrenched in the South African Constitution, these frameworks challenge patriarchal norms perpetuating male dominance over women (Smith, 1990; Becker, 1999).

Legislation such as the Domestic Violence Act, Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, Employment Equity Act, and Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act highlights the national will to fight GBV (Mmamabolo et al., 2020; Sibanda-Moyo et al., 2017). Efforts emphasize men's inclusion in prevention campaigns, not just as perpetrators but as potential advocates of change (Meyiwa et al., 2017). The regulatory framework has facilitated the establishment of support services, such as Thuthuzela Care Centers, offering comprehensive assistance to survivors of sexual violence (Bougard & Booyens, 2015; Randa et al., 2023). The National Shelter Movement provides temporary accommodation and support services, supporting victims in rebuilding their lives (John et al., 2023; Vetten et al., 2021). The South African Police Service's specialized units, including the Family Violence, Child Protection, and Sexual Offenses units, investigate GBV cases and contribute to increased conviction rates (Geldenhuys, 2019).

Government programs, including *Restorative Justice Programs*, *Women's Dialogues*, a *24-hour Gender-Based Violence Command Centre*, and specialized *Sexual Offenses Courts*, illustrate ongoing efforts to assist GBV victims (Mmamabolo et al., 2020). However, challenges persist, notably in providing sufficient specialized services for women and child victims of violence (South African Government, 2020).

The government of KwaZulu-Natal adopted the national strategy of affirming the 365 Days policy framework for the eradication of GBV as an urgent need to combat GBV in the province. The KwaZulu-Natal 365 Days Policy Framework is a crucial initiative in the provincial's broader strategy as it aligns with the national strategy (Moletsane, 2018). This framework was

developed in collaboration with provincial stakeholders and strategically guides GBV programming at various levels, aligning with national and international legal frameworks and policies, including the 365-Day National Action Plan (South African Government, 2007). Representing the commitment of the Provincial Legislature, the KwaZulu-Natal 365 Days Policy Framework advocates a unified, multi-stakeholder approach to eradicate GBV, encouraging government departments and civil society organizations to adopt it as the foundation for their plans (South African Government, 2007).

Aligned with international regulations such as CEDAW, BPFA, AU SADC Protocol, and South African commitments, the framework adopts an integrated, multi-sectoral approach to promote zero tolerance for GBV, specifically tailored to the context of KwaZulu-Natal (South African Government, 2007; Moletsane, 2018). The plan addresses many issues, including poverty reduction, access to safe shelters, education, health services, and gender equality, focusing on equal rights, economic opportunities, and political empowerment for women (South African Government, 2007). The framework is structured around three strategic goals—Preventing, Reducing, and Eliminating GBV—and involves collaborative efforts from multiple departments, including DSD, DOH, DOJ, NPA, and SAPS, along with civil society organizations (South African Government, 2007). As the initial point of contact within the criminal justice system, SAPS plays a crucial role, following the guidelines outlined in the National Policy Guidelines for Victim Empowerment (Department of Social Development, UNODC, EU, 2012).

In the context of this paper, the KwaZulu-Natal 365 Days Policy Framework is vital in addressing GBV within the minority Indian community in Chatsworth, South Africa. This paper aims to comprehend its features and evaluate its implementation, contributing to the broader discourse on effective policy frameworks tailored to protect women from violence and promote gender equality.

Challenges and barriers faced by minority communities

Despite the widespread impact of GBV on women across South Africa, it is crucial to accentuate the distinct experiences and barriers faced by minority communities like the Indian population in Chatsworth. Unique challenges within these communities hinder full access to support and protection services, emphasizing the need to address these issues for inclusive

and effective GBV policies and initiatives (Shalev, 2000). Minority women often encounter limited educational, employment, political, and financial opportunities, impacting their access to essential social services (Hulley et al.,2023; Shalev, 2000).

Cultural norms within minority or ethno-cultural communities may deter survivors from seeking assistance or reporting incidents of GBV (Gill & Walker, 2020). While some Indian women in South Africa have made socio-economic progress, those in areas like Westcliff flats may still face patriarchal structures and GBV. Limited proficiency in official languages also hampers access to information and services related to GBV (Gregory et al.,2022).

The lack of education further contributes to a diminished understanding of rights and available support services, perpetuating a cycle of victimization (Van der Heijden et al.,2020; Cervantes & Sherman, 2021). Economic vulnerability, driven by high unemployment rates, exacerbates challenges for minority communities (Nguyen & Mogaji, 2021). The isolation and lack of support networks, often due to geographical separation from extended families, contribute to victims' difficulty accessing needed assistance (Parry & Gordon, 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, isolation increased exposure to GBV, highlighting the additional challenges faced by minority communities (Sapire et al.,2022). Seeking assistance may bring about community judgment and ostracism, deterring victims from reporting GBV due to fear of stigma or damage to their reputation (Sheikh & Rogers, 2023; Maphosa, 2021). In a nutshell, minority communities, including the Indian women population in Chatsworth, encounter unique challenges in addressing GBV. These challenges, rooted in cultural, linguistic, economic, and social contexts, necessitate tailored and culturally sensitive policy responses and support systems to ensure the protection and assistance of minority communities against GBV.

Positioning Intersectionality as a framework to unpack women's vulnerabilities.

Effectively addressing Gender-based Violence (GBV) policy dynamics in South Africa requires an examination of the interplay among gender, race, culture, and geography, as these factors significantly shape the experiences of local communities (Nnawulez et al., 2022). The concept of intersectionality, which has gained traction in global policy debates, emphasizes the complex connections between multiple inequalities and related social attributes within society (Verloo, 2013). Rooted in black feminist thinking, intersectionality is based on

discourses of diverse identities that collectively influence experiences of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989; Overstreet et al., 2020). The concept of intersectionality, pioneered by the black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, is rooted in her seminal work within critical legal studies and feminist theory in the United States (Crenshaw, 1989) in which she highlighted the “intersectionality of vulnerabilities” whereby disadvantage, inequality, or privilege is not a function of a single strand of inequality but rather the result of the multiple sites of exclusion and how these interact in the lives of the marginalized to shape their position in society. This framework was prominently featured in two critical articles: "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989) and "Mapping the Margins" (1991). Crenshaw conceptualized intersectionality as both a metaphor and a 'provisional concept' to illustrate the shortcomings of interventions that compartmentalize systems of oppression, favoring certain groups while overlooking others within the community (Carastathis, 2014).

Greenwood (2008) associates intersectionality with collective consciousness, emphasizing the consideration of shared social identity or experiences within groups. The intersectional framework in this paper is important because it foregrounds the idea of not homogenizing and essentializing men's and women's social identities, categories, or labels that often circulate in social science discourse (Anthias, 2012). An intersectional framework allows us to understand and explicate the positionality of diverse South African women's lived experiences and how multiple forms of oppression/privilege, exclusion/inclusion, and structural inequality interact in their lives to shape their experiences. The value of an intersectional analysis lies in the recognition that disadvantage or inequality is not a function of a single strand of inequality but rather the result of the multiple sites of exclusion and how these interact in the lives of diverse women (including Indian women in this study) to shape their position in society.

Drawing from intersectionality as a framework this paper postulates that the experiences of Indian women sampled in this study are not just a function of gender but rather the result of how their different locations in the South African context interact to shape their experiences of access, autonomy, and rights both in the private and public spheres. This suggests that the position of Indian women in the South African context is mediated by a range of factors of which race, gender, sexuality, location, national origin, ability, age, socio-economic status, and other markers of difference intersect and mutually shape each other (Ghasemi et al., 2021).

Study methodology and design¹

This study adopted a qualitative approach and case study design to understand the implementation of the Policy Framework. The study was conducted in Chatsworth, officially established in 1964, encompassing eleven neighborhood units with 7,000 sub-economic and 14,000 economic houses. The research targeted Indian women residing in the flat-dwelling areas of Westcliff, Chatsworth, located in the eThekweni Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal Province. This selection is informed by the area's demographic composition, characterized by a higher concentration of Indian populations and the prevalence of reported GBV among women. Chatsworth predominantly houses the Indian community in the Southern Durban basin, originating from the relocation of around 70,000 Indian families due to the Group Areas Act of 1950 (No. 41). Enacted by the apartheid government, this legislation enforced urban segregation by assigning specific areas to different racial groups (Crankshaw, & Hart, 1990; Mabin, 1992). Chronic issues like unemployment, economic deprivation, violence, gang-related activities, and substance abuse are prevalent in Chatsworth (Vahed & Desai, 2012). Focusing on Chatsworth allows the research to address a bias often present in province-wide reports, where population group-specific and demographic characteristics of social issues and intervention outcomes are overlooked. This bias is particularly notable concerning the Indian minority population, especially Indian women. Moreover, within Chatsworth, Westcliff remains an area that has received limited research attention regarding GBV.

The first author's background (a woman racialized as Indian within the South African context) significantly influenced the study's design as an insider/outsider, including considerations for the nuances of the Indian cultural context. According to Liu and Burnett (2022:2) knowledge and understanding of context in ethnographic studies bequests researchers to be cognizant of their roles not only as spectators but also as actors in the research encounter. Thus, being an insider/outsider entails a reinvention of roles in which the researcher straddles between being objective and subjective as his/her lived experiences both enable and hinder certain kinds of insight during the research encounter. In this case, the first author's knowledge of the community and context assisted in formulating research questions, selecting research methods, and integrating a theoretical framework that aligns with the experiences of Indian

¹ Ethical clearance was secured for this study from the University of Pretoria on 04 August 2021, reference number:20796235 (HUM023/ 1120)

women. The qualitative research was conducted with various participant groups, including government officials, or "street-level bureaucrats" (n = 7 in-depth interviews), civil society representatives (n = 4 in-depth interviews), and Indian women from the Westcliff community (n = 115 survey questionnaires; n = 5 in-depth interviews). This approach was instrumental in unearthing the experiences and perceptions of women, CSOs, and government officials concerning the functionality of the Victim Support Program, explicitly focusing on the challenges and best practices for implementing the program targeting Indian women from Chatsworth.

The research involved seven semi-structured interviews with street-level bureaucratic officials responsible for implementing the Policy Framework in Westcliff, representing government departments such as DSD, DOH, DOJ, NPA, and SAPS. Additionally, three representatives from local civil society organizations operating in the Westcliff area and one community leader was interviewed. Purposive and snowball sampling methods were employed to identify suitable government officials and civil society representatives. Some study participants recommended other participants from additional government departments or local CSOs that met the study's criteria. These interviews were held in August 2021.

To include women participants, both direct and indirect beneficiaries of the policy were recruited in public spaces such as markets and churches within the Westcliff community. Through this, 115 Indian women aged 18 to 55, residing in the Westcliff flats, responded to an online survey, and six participated in face-to-face interviews. The survey, conducted from June 25 to August 12, 2021, incorporated standardized questions to gather demographic and context-specific information. The semi-structured interviews with women took place in September 2021.

In anticipation of potential emotional triggers, even though questions did not directly probe personal experiences of gender-based violence (GBV), the researcher proactively made counseling services available. This precaution aimed to support participants requiring assistance during or after the research process. Participants were consistently reassured of the confidential handling of their responses, reinforcing the commitment to ethical considerations and participant well-being. These interviews provide insights into the

prevalence of GBV in its physical, psychological, sexual, and economic forms. Additionally, they delved into the demographic characteristics of implementers of support services, along with victims' reporting and support-seeking behaviors.

The data analysis employed a thematic approach, guided by the 7Cs Framework, systematically applied to qualitative data derived from interviews and document analysis. The analysis involved systematically coding transcribed interviews grouping coded segments into categories based on shared features. The 7Cs Framework, originating from Najam's (1995) 5C variables shaping policy implementation research, provided a unique lens for a comprehensive data analysis. The expanded 7C Protocol, incorporating communication and coordination (Cloete et al., 2018; Barret, 2004), comprises seven interrelated elements: content, context, capacity, commitment, client support, coalitions, communication, and coordination. These components formed the basis for identifying themes and patterns from participants' responses to GBV within the Chatsworth Indian community.

Given South Africa's developmental state status, the 7C Protocol emerged as highly relevant, in tandem with an intersectional analysis, offering a holistic assessment of the Policy Framework for the Victim Support Programme in Westcliff. This approach facilitated an understanding beyond traditional top-down or bottom-up perspectives, considering the dynamic context of South Africa's evolving democracy. The application of the 7C Protocol was particularly pertinent for evaluating the Victim Support Program's implementation, allowing an assessment from the viewpoints of street-level bureaucrats and beneficiaries (right holders) navigating intersecting inequalities.

Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of the Participants

The participant cohort comprises 126 individuals and showcases various demographic variables, including age, gender, educational background, and employment status. Noteworthy is the robust participation of 115 women from the Indian racial group in the online survey, complemented by purposefully selected interviews with six women from this demographic. Women, aged 18 to 55, were distributed as follows: 46% (n=53) in the 41 years and above bracket, 30% (n=35) in the 18 to 30 age group, and the remaining 24% (n=27) between 31 and 40 years old. In terms of educational background, the majority (66%; n=76)

attained high school or matric/secondary education, 25% (n=27) pursued tertiary education, and 13% (n=12) concluded primary school level. The marital status presents a diverse picture, with 51% (n=59) identifying as married, 39% (n=45) as single or cohabiting, and 10% (n=11) expressing divorce. The socio-economic data indicates that 65% (n=75) of surveyed women reported unemployment, aligning with a prevailing trend within the Westcliff flats community (see Table 1 for full description with emphasis to description of women residents).

The subset of six women interviewed spans ages 22 to 50, providing qualitative insights. Furthermore, interviews included discussions with three representatives from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), a community leader aged 30 to 55, and seven key officials (two men and five women) between the ages of 35 and 55 from departments overseeing the Victim Support Programme. These interviews contribute depth and diversity to the thorough investigation of participant demographics. The questions posed to these respondents centered on their perception of the prevalence of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in the Westcliff flats, their awareness of community support for GBV victims, and an evaluation of the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms, with a focus on potential areas for improvement.

Insert Table 1

The table outlines socio-economic and demographic details of 126 participants, ranging from CSOs to Government representatives. The focus is on women from the Indian racial group, aged 18 to 55, revealing varied educational backgrounds (66% with high school education) and marital statuses (51% married, 39% single or cohabiting, 10% divorced). Notably, 65% of surveyed women reported unemployment, mirroring a trend in the Westcliff flats community.

Perspectives of Indian Women Beneficiaries about Gender-Based Violence in Westcliff

In modern South Africa, despite the socio-economic progress experienced by many Indian women who simultaneously embrace their cultural heritage, certain localities, such as the Westcliff flats, grapple with persistent patriarchal norms contributing to heightened gender-based violence (GBV). Factors like substance abuse, unemployment, and poverty further exacerbate this issue, impacting numerous Indian women in Chatsworth (Jagganath, 2020; Vahed & Desai, 2012).

When queried about the extent of GBV in the Westcliff flats, an overwhelming 96% of surveyed respondents (n=110) and all participants in in-depth interviews unanimously affirmed the pervasive and deeply rooted nature of GBV in the Westcliff community. A participant vividly expressed distress, stating:

Women need help. There are 126 flats in this part, 800 houses, estimated 600 women are experiencing gender-based violence. If they speak up, they will have no home to live in. Mothers are also getting abused by their sons – substance and drug abuse. Mothers [are] forced to beg. Physical, emotional, and verbal abuse is rife in Westcliff; constant intimidation” (Respondent 1, 38 years, married).

Another woman tragically and succinctly stated: “Domestic violence is high in this area. I experienced it. I am now divorced. I experienced every form of gender-based violence” (Respondent 4, 43 years, divorced).

A community member also shared how prevalent GBV is, even though she had not experienced it herself:

I live in the Westcliff flats. I witnessed gender-based violence growing up. My father was a drug addict and he abused my mum. I am not in an abusive relationship, but I do know a number of people that are experiencing gender-based violence right now in this community (Respondent 46, 27 years, married)

Another woman described her experience of abuse by stating:

I was abused when I lived with my ex-husband. I experienced every form of gender-based violence: physical, emotional, sexual. It ended in a divorce ... I used to overlook things. (Respondent 82, 51 years, divorced)

The historical oppression of Indian women in South Africa traces its origins to their roots in colonized India, where, upon arriving in South Africa, they were relegated to an inferior and submissive position as indentured female laborers within the minority group. The race classification system, established during colonial rule and reinforced by white nationalism in the apartheid era, further solidified the marginalized status of Indian women (Dawood & Seedat-Khan, 2020; Vahed, 2013; Vermeulen & Khan, 2012). This systemic discrimination resulted in the stigmatization and marginalization of Indian women in Chatsworth, with

instances of HIV transmission from male partners leading to rejection from both the community and peers (Govender, 2005). The research findings, supported by participant accounts during interviews, stress the impact of historical injustices on the contemporary experiences of Indian women in South Africa:

The picture drawn here of the Westcliff flats is one of a population living under social and economic pressures as a result of high unemployment; low income for those employed, particularly women; crowded households, and drug abuse. (Respondent 23, 22 years, single)

The community leader interviewed also confirmed women's reports and stated:

Westcliff area is 95% predominantly Indian people that live there. Most of the men are unemployed, they drink, smoke zoll, and take drugs; and the wives, the few that do have jobs, go to work and come back and it's a normal thing. But then the wives that do sit at home, are the middle-aged people (Respondent 24, 45 years, woman).

Under these circumstances, and as is often the case, all sorts of crimes, including murder, assault, and sexual offenses (see Figure 1 below for details) have become integral to the social fabric of the Westcliff flats and Chatsworth as a whole.

Insert Figure 1

Figure 1 illustrates the trend in reported cases of sexual offenses in Chatsworth from 2012 to 2021. The data reveals a consistent decline in reported cases from 173 in 2013 to 77 in 2018, albeit at relatively high levels. However, this downward trajectory is disrupted, with cases rising to 82 in 2019 and 102 in 2020, followed by a significant 21.6% drop in 2021. While the reliability of the data may be questioned due to underreporting, the increase in sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) cases against women in Chatsworth from 2018 to 2020, reported by study participants aligns with literature documenting national and global trends of high GBV prevalence (Enaifoghe et al., 2021; Odeku, 2021; WHO, 2021).

Perceptions of the Causes and Drivers of GBV

Exploring perceptions of GBV drivers in Westcliff flats revealed diverse views. About 44% of respondents in the online survey and in-depth interviews attributed GBV to culture, while the majority (56%) disagreed or were unsure. In-depth interviewees identified masculinity, patriarchy, socialization, financial dependency, fear of discrimination, and religious beliefs as cultural elements central to GBV. A community participant points out the pervasive influence of patriarchy, highlighting its role in subjugating women and its entrenched support within the community. This deep-rooted support makes challenging any shift in mindset, primarily due to financial dependence and housing dynamics, which could potentially render women and their children homeless. (Respondent 12, 33 years, single). This finding validates results from a study that found that victims, especially from ethnic minorities, may stay in abusive relationships due to economic dependency on their partners (Heron et al.,2022).

A civil society representative highlighted how harmful cultural practices undermine women's rights.

Women are abused and many do not come forward to talk about it. It has everything to do with the culture. You understand as an Indian, you know our culture. Our fore mothers way before that have served their husbands, you know the roles did not change and the culture did not change and the expectations are still the same as our foremothers. My mom served my dad hand and foot, you know, she waited at home every day and when he got home, even if it was late, he would get the same service. As time went on we are all working [but] ... the expectation is the same in the home front. Times have changed but people's culture has not (Respondent 27, 38 years old, woman)

Gender-based violence in the Westcliff flats is likely fueled by entrenched gender norms and power imbalances, contributing to a culture where such violence is normalized (Hossain et al., 2021). While some participants contested the notion that culture alone influences GBV, pointing to factors like unemployment, power imbalances, and substance abuse, their accounts underscore the prevailing anguish and frustration among women in the Westcliff flats.

One participant highlighted the significance of drug abuse in triggering gender-based violence during a telephone interview on September 8, 2021: "The biggest cause here is drug abuse, and that is why gender-based violence happens so often in our community. Gender-based violence is happening right now as we speak. You can probably hear the screaming going on in the background." (Respondent 94, 47 years, married).'

These participant accounts align with an intersectional approach, accentuating the interconnected impact of race, gender, and socioeconomic factors on violence against women (Ghasemi et al., 2021; Ross et al., 2017; Verloo, 2013). The vulnerability of Indian women in South Africa, particularly in Westcliff, is further emphasized by the enduring effects of colonial and apartheid legacies, cultural norms, religious influences, and patriarchal structures (Freund, 1991; Dawood & Seedat-Khan, 2020; Okpara & Anugwa, 2022). Persistent patriarchal traits, such as submissiveness and obedience, reflect imposed expectations on Indian women (Dawood & Seedat-Khan, 2020). Narratives from women also expose societal pressures related to issues like pregnancy out of wedlock, where societal norms dictate shame and disgrace, forcing unwanted marriages (Ramadhin, 2010). One woman's account vividly substantiates this observation:

Women are not outspoken in this community. It does not happen here; we are too scared and do not have any backup. Women are caught up with the struggle [of] do I keep my kids, do I run away, where do I go to, who is going to take [care] of me and my children? The husbands have full control of everything. Here [if] you have a child out of wedlock, the woman is forced to maintain that relationship because of our culture (Respondent 105, 39 years, married)

These sociocultural complexities perpetuate harmful masculinity norms in South African communities, contributing to GBV (Raj et al., 2022; Wood et al., 2021). Societal expectations that value behaviors like dominance and emotional suppression can instill violent acts in intimate relationships (Connell, 2020).

Certain cultural practices in South Africa, such as *ukuthwala* (the organized abduction of non-married young women for marriage) and *lobola* (the payment of a bride price by the groom's family), reinforce unequal power dynamics between men and women (Rice, 2018; Mbewe, 2021; Diala, 2021). While these practices are entrenched in the social norms of the black

majority, participants reported that women from Indian racial groups also endure unequal, submissive, and harmful cultural practices perpetuated by men. In times of financial stress and threats to their sense of manhood, some men may resort to violence as a means of regaining control (Wood et al., 2021), a sentiment reported by study participants. Although studies highlight that psychological factors and childhood exposure to violence can contribute to individuals becoming perpetrators of violence in adulthood, perpetuating a cycle of abuse (Mazza et al., 2020; Liu & Xu, 2023), none of the women interviewed or responding to the survey confirmed this argument.

Awareness and Perceptions of the Policy Framework

Public policy literature emphasizes the critical role of policy awareness in the practical design and implementation of development interventions (Cerutti et al., 2019; Knapp & Ferrante, 2012; Scheunpflug & McDonnell, 2008). However, as Owusu-Ampomah (2022) noted, policy awareness goes beyond acknowledging a policy's existence; it requires a comprehensive understanding of its key elements.

Given the regulatory nature of the Policy Framework, this study aimed to assess the awareness of key stakeholders, including the DSD, DOH, DOJ, NPA, and SAPS (interviewed departments), civil society organizations, and women respondents. Responses varied among participants, with representatives from civil society organizations highlighting a limited awareness among women regarding available support services for victims of GBV. A participant from the CSO expressed:

The problem is that a lot of women don't even know the available resources. Very little awareness in this community of gender-based violence. I think there should be a multi-front approach where you know ... local churches and other relevant structures can be used as a platform (Respondent 15, 43 years, woman)

This corresponds to Hyman et al.'s (2009) findings that barriers to utilizing support services for GBV among minorities in Canada also included lack of awareness about the support services

Likewise, the community leader highlighted challenges regarding community members' awareness of the Victim Support Programme.

I think they are aware that there are people out there to help them. They know that. The people are out there to help them but it's a matter of getting into those places. Where do they start? How do they even start this journey of reporting abuse and walking the journey to recover, you know ... How do I start this? Should I even attempt this, you know? That is the challenge (Respondent 19, 46 years, male)

Two participants from the DSD and DOH explicitly indicated their awareness of the Policy Framework, particularly the Victim Support Programme as narrated by one: "I am aware [of] the 365 Day Framework, and its goal to assist victims of gender-based violence. It aligns to various commitments from government" (Respondent 16, women, 31 years). Contrary, participants from NPA and SAPS seemed more acquainted with the Victims' Charter and the TCC policy, according to a SAPS official.

I am not sure about the details of the 365 Policy Framework ... Within the police we have our own policies that deal with these issues and we have our own targets and goals that are set in this regard, and I'm sure it ties in with the 365 Day Framework on the victim support. (Respondent 42, 36 years, male)

While all five departments actively implement the Victim Support Programme, only two do so consciously and with awareness. Further investigation revealed that three departments, although unaware of the Policy Framework, were familiar with the Victims' Charter, National Policy Guidelines for Victim Empowerment, and TCC Guidelines that inform the Policy Framework. This aligns with a broader trend identified in a study where departments and metro/district municipalities execute programs without sufficient awareness of critical policies in South Africa (Owusu-Ampomah, 2022, p. 88).

Opinions on the awareness of the Victim Support Programme varied in the online survey. While 60% of respondents (n=69) believed that women in the community were aware of the services, the remaining 40% (n=46) were either "not sure" (10%, n=12) or believed women were "not aware" (30%, n=34) of the initiative. When asked to explain the uncertainty expressed by some survey respondents, an in-depth interview participant shared:

Indian women do not want the family and neighbors to know about their problems. This community have very high regards of their marriage, everybody knows about the police. It is not that they are not aware, it is the shame and fear of their husbands and

not wanting others to know ... Women are suffering in silence. No one to talk to. Women need to know services [are] available so that they can reach out for help (Respondent 86, 47 years, divorced)

Effectiveness of Support Services

Successful policies are founded on conceptually coherent, evidence-informed advice, acknowledging implementation realities and undergoing careful development, debate, and refinement over time (Compton & Hart, 2019; Luetjens et al., 2019). According to relevant stakeholders and accountability forums, the attainment of "political legitimacy" for a policy depends on the appropriateness of both the social outcomes and the approach taken. Compton and Hart (2019a) argue that the relevance and alignment of interventions to local and international policy commitments are equally vital criteria.

The study finds that the consultative approach aligns with South African laws, policies, and international commitments, as evident in the content of the Policy Framework and its relevance to national and provincial socioeconomic and political development needs and policy commitments. Notably, a participant from the NPA implicitly emphasized the principle of alignment: "We are following the protocol and the legal frameworks ... that's how it is supposed to be" (Respondent 9, 41 years, woman)

Participants' perceptions of the effectiveness and relevance of support services for GBV survivors vary. Some express satisfaction with existing programs, while others identify areas for improvement, highlighting the necessity for enhanced support mechanisms. According to a participant from DSD, the Policy Framework is only relevant to some extent in the Westcliff context:

I think the 365 Framework was an idea crosscutting all communities, but in terms of the Indian community it would be relevant to a degree ... because of the taboos that ... exists in this community it needed to be [implemented intensively] in some aspects, especially in terms of raising awareness and Indian woman's understanding of her role within the home, within the community, within society, and the acceptance of leadership and power. (Respondent 13, 48 years, woman)

Successful policies are founded on conceptually coherent, evidence-informed advice, acknowledging implementation realities and undergoing careful development, debate, and refinement over time (Compton & Hart, 2019; Luetjens et al., 2019). According to relevant stakeholders and accountability forums, the attainment of "political legitimacy" for a policy depends on the appropriateness of both the social outcomes and the approach taken. Compton and Hart (2019a) argue that the relevance and alignment of interventions to local and international policy commitments are equally vital criteria.

The study finds that the consultative approach aligns with South African laws, policies, and international commitments, as evident in the content of the Policy Framework and its relevance to national and provincial socioeconomic and political development needs and policy commitments. A participant from the NPA implicitly emphasized the principle of alignment. This has led to improvements in client satisfaction while seeking justice services as stated by women interviewed: "The police helped me to get my children and my stuff out of the house" (Respondent 3, 36 years, divorced). Another person said: "The services are ok. Takes a long time though, going to the police and the court. But I did get help" (Respondent 19, 34 years, single)

In contrast, a sizeable proportion found the Victim Support Programme "not helpful" and had a different story to tell. Some of them described being in "a trapped relationship" as the service, particularly in relation to the police, did not provide any help. One of them said "I am 23 years old, unemployed, and with a one-year-old child. I am in an abusive relationship. I have nowhere to go. My life is hell. I am on my own. There is no one to turn to. Services are unhelpful" (Respondent 8, 23 years old, married).

In summary, women respondents shared varied experiences when accessing the Victim Support Programme, as outlined in the table below:

Insert Table 2

A detailed examination of the community context confirmed the implementation of the Victim Support Programme in the Westcliff flats community. This aligns with existing literature documenting efforts to implement GBV awareness initiatives and support programs addressing violence against women (Michau et al., 2015; Murhula & Tolla, 2021).

Nevertheless, challenges hindered the consistent and effective implementation of all intervention persist as reported below:

... NPA and DSD does do awareness ... have all these meetings with the community. I remember once they had one at Chatsworth stadium; they had a lot of people attending these meetings ... For the past few years, there's absolutely no awareness campaign (Respondent 11, 37 years, female).

The policy's effective implementation is hindered by the limited capacity of street-level bureaucrats to positively influence victims' experiences when seeking support, as stated by a DOJ official:

An older woman from Westcliff who, after 30 to 40 years of marriage, finally pluck up the courage to go to court to obtain a protection order against their husbands but are treated inhumanely in the process. They are just handed the application form with no guidance or empathy and instructed to return with the completed form. (Respondent 15, 41 years, female).

Instances of questionable institutional capacity, as revealed by study participants through unwelcoming treatment towards GBV victims seeking support services, resonate with Murhula Tolla's (2021) research on the effectiveness of the restorative justice program in South Africa. Murhula Tolla's findings provide evidence of GBV victims encountering unfriendly treatment and being denied assistance during court proceedings.

Participants acknowledge the complementary nature of their roles in implementing the Policy Framework. However, awareness programs have been absent in the Westcliff community for years, fostering suspicions of political agendas. Additionally, there is a need for more media outlets used for GBV education programs and activities, aligning with a South African study attributing the rise in GBV cases during COVID-19 to limited awareness campaigns (Nobanda et al., 2021).

Women respondents conveyed negative attitudes toward institutions supporting GBV victims, citing a lack of commitment, empathy, and inadequate or inappropriate equipment. These sentiments align with findings from other studies (Duchesne et al., 2022; Hyman et al., 2009; Van der Heijden et al., 2020). The shortage of workforce, particularly high-level professional

staff, evident in this study, significantly hampers institutional capacity to achieve the Policy Framework's goals. Similar challenges faced by women victims seeking legal and judicial assistance, such as a lack of resources and workforce to visit crime scenes, were identified in South African studies (Durojaye et al., 2020). Consequently, commitment without the necessary resources leads to helplessness among implementers, impeding positive implementation outcomes.

Perceived relevance of the policy in Westcliff

While the relevance of the Policy Framework in the national and provincial contexts is apparent from the perspective of a participant from DSD, the Policy Framework is only relevant to some extent in the Westcliff context. The participant said:

I think the 365 Framework was an idea crosscutting all communities, but in terms of the Indian community it would be relevant to a degree ... because of the taboos that ... exists in this community it needed to be [implemented intensively] in some aspects, especially in terms of raising awareness and Indian woman's understanding of her role within the home, within the community, within society, and the acceptance of leadership and power (Respondent 2, 39 years, female).

Implicitly, the participant is of the view that, in the context of the Indian community of the Westcliff flats, the Policy Framework could be more relevant if the risk factor of the interplay of the specific cultural circumstances of the Indian community and the socio-economic dynamics of modernism and its attendant pressures, including unemployment and poverty, were taken into account in the implementation of the Policy Framework.

A participant from the DOH put it more succinctly: "Yes, the Victim Support Programme is relevant but maybe it's interventions [that] should be customised for this community. The Indian women will not say the word rape, they are so shy" (Respondent 26, 37 years, male) In other words, particular risk factors and context need to be taken into account.

An in-depth exploration of the community context revealed that implementation of the Victim Support Programme is mostly unhelpful in the community of the Westcliff flats. The support is not designed to fit the context in which the women live and exist, which is dominated by cultural influence, high levels of poverty and unemployment, substance abuse, and general

powerlessness, which is compounded by unhelpful services. This is found to be a major hindrance to the uptake of victim support services. This was confirmed by the women from the community and civil society organizations. Commitment was found to be evident on the part of the lead implementers, the street-level bureaucrats of the Victim Support Programme. However, it was found to be lacking at much lower levels where there is more direct implementation of the Policy Framework at a community level. On the other hand, commitment in the absence of relevant resources leads to helplessness on the part of the implementers, as it does not translate to positive implementation outcomes.

Analysis

The 7Cs variables of content, context, commitment, capacity, clients and coalitions, communication, and coordination are interlinked, and each of the variables impacts each other. This was evident in this study. It is also evident that the Policy Framework for Victim Support Programme has a universal content that is generalized for the province as a whole. It aligns with international and national commitments, and it was developed through a consultative process. What is evident is that the consultation was at the provincial level, and did not involve consultations at lower levels, where the street-level bureaucrats exist, and spatial locations where the marginalized or minority communities exist, like the Indian women in the Westcliff flats. The lack of consultation at lower levels assumes that the Policy Framework will be implemented automatically and that lower levels will catch on with their inclusion. Consultation has happened at the provincial level, not at a district level or even lower, but it is only at the lowest level that the nuance and unique context of minorities is well understood.

The Policy Framework for Victim Support Programme is a multi-sectoral response to GBV implemented by the DSD, DOH, DOJ, NPA, and SAPS in Chatsworth. Whilst all five departments are implementing the Victim Support Programme, only two departments – the DOH and the DSD – were aware of the Policy Framework for Victim Support Programme and were consciously implementing it. The others were implementing it based on the individual departmental mandates, which informed the Policy Framework. Although mostly conversant with their roles and responsibilities in implementing the Victim Support Programme through the departmental mandates, the findings indicate that lack of awareness could be responsible

in departments working in silos and multisectoral structures responsible for coordination are not fully functional.

The context of implementation of the Victim Support Programme was assessed both from institutional and community contexts. The institutional context cut across issues of capacity and it was found that, whilst capacity exists, it is not fully functional with a number of grey areas, especially in terms of equipment, personnel, and training, which have implications for victims for GBV. Community context revealed that implementation of the Victim Support Programme is mostly unhelpful in the community of the Westcliff flats. The support is not designed to fit the context in which the women live and exist, which is dominated by cultural influence, high levels of poverty and unemployment, substance abuse, and general powerlessness, which is compounded by unhelpful services. This is found to be a major hindrance to the uptake of victim support services. This was confirmed by the women from the community and civil society organizations. Commitment was found to be evident on the part of the lead implementers, the street-level bureaucrats of the Victim Support Programme. However, it was found to be lacking at much lower levels where there is more direct implementation of the Policy Framework at a community level. On the other hand, commitment in the absence of relevant resources leads to helplessness on the part of the implementers, as it does not translate to positive implementation outcomes.

Communication and coordination exist between the various sector departments through the multisectoral structure; however, it was found not to be fully operational and lacking in terms of communication between and within the departments in Chatsworth. A major finding is that there is a lack of accountability and each department reports to its own structure without a mechanism in place to monitor the implementation of the Policy Framework in this community.

The overall finding is that the implementation of the Policy Framework for Victim Support Programme has not fully benefitted the community of Indian women in Westcliff. The interventions and supporting activities in the province have a universal human rights-based approach, however, the rights of marginalized populations are not further unpacked to ensure relevance. Interventions, particularly on advocacy of GBV, tend to be events-based with a political agenda and not sustained. For it to be beneficial, the Policy Framework needs to consider context-specific implementation plans, recognizing the intersecting dynamics of race,

gender, culture, and geography that impact on utilization and quality of services. This must be supported with the relevant resources for capacity, communication, and coordination.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study investigated the dynamics of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) within the Westcliff flats community, focusing on the experiences and perceptions of Indian women beneficiaries. Participants' demographic and socio-economic profiles provided an understanding of the contextual drivers that inform the prevalence of GBV in this community. The findings stress the need for context-specific policy implementation, recognizing the impact of cultural, economic, and social factors on the effectiveness of support services.

While the commitment of lead implementers is evident, the study highlights a gap in consultation with, and thus, commitment at lower levels, emphasizing the importance of a more direct and community-level approaches to policy implementation. This is particularly critical considering that it is only at the lowest level that the nuance and unique context of minorities is well understood.

Drawing from intersectionality as a framework this paper postulated that the experiences of Indian women sampled in this study is not just a function of gender but rather the result of how their different locations in the South African context interact to shape their experiences of access, autonomy, and rights both in the private and public spheres.

In summary, the study advocates for a tailored, culturally sensitive, and community-engaged policy approach to combat GBV in Westcliff, ultimately contributing to the creation of a safer and more supportive environment for Indian women beneficiaries.

Key Messages:

- Many Indian women perceive existing victim support services as inadequate, citing stigma and the fear of additional harm as deterrents to seeking help.
- The complex interplay of gender, race, culture, and geography significantly impacts the implementation of gender-based violence (GBV) victim support policies in South Africa, highlighting the need for context-specific interventions.

- Effective policy execution necessitates meaningful engagement with marginalized groups like Indian women in Chatsworth, ensuring their insights are central to developing support initiatives to address GBV.

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Conflict of interest statement

The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest

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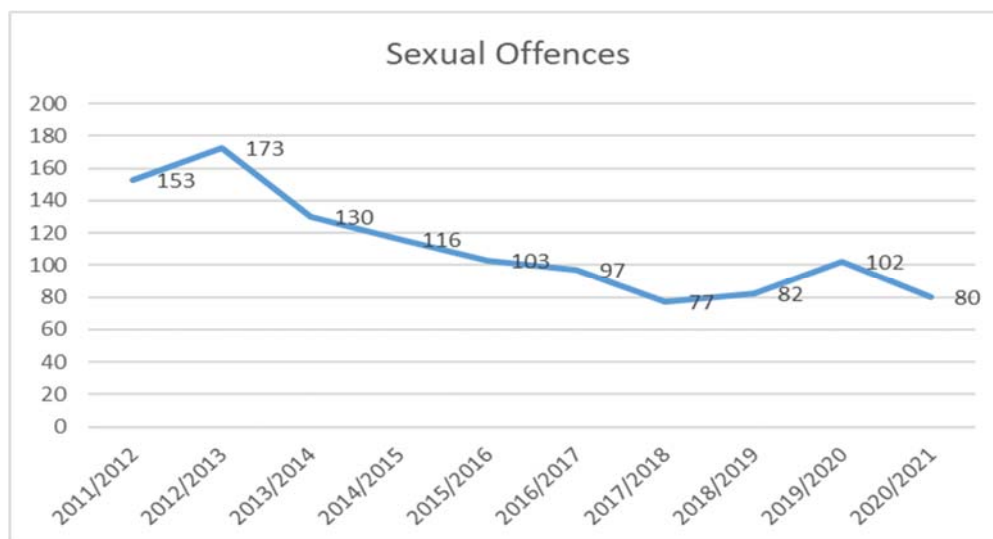
Appendix

Table 1 Socio-economic characteristics of the participants (N=126)

Characteristics	Total (126)			Percent (100%)		
				A	B	C
	(A)	(B)	(C)	A	B	C
A-Refer to women residents						
B- Refer to CSO Representatives						
C- Refer to Government Officials						
				115	4	7
Age						
18–29	35					
30–39	27	30-55	4			
55	7	35-				
40–49	43					
50–59	10					
60+						
Marital status						
Single	45					39
Married	59					51
Widowed						
Divorced	11					10

Separated Never married		
Education		
Upper Primary (Grade 4–7/Std 2–6)		13
12		66
Secondary 76		
Certificate		
Diploma		
Technikon qualification University degree 27		25
Post-graduate qualification		
Employment status		
Employed 25		35
Unemployed 75		65

Figure 1: Reported sexual offences in Chatsworth, 2012-2021



Source: SAPS (2022)

Alt Text: Figure 1 explains how the number of reported sexual offense cases changed in Chatsworth from 2012 to 2021. It shows that the number of reported cases went down from 173 in 2013 to 77 in 2018, but then went back up to 82 in 2019 and 102 in 2020. Despite this trend, there was a significant drop of 21.6% in 2021.

Table 2. Perceptions of Victim Support Services

Response	Explanation
Helpful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The police helped me to get my children and my stuff out of the house</i> • <i>I was abused by my husband and did not do anything because I am dependent on him financially. The interdict was what stopped the abuse</i> • <i>The services are ok. Takes a long time though, going to the police and the court. But I did get help</i>
Somewhat Helpful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Services are there but it must be improved, the bad experiences keep the women away from social welfare and the police.</i> • <i>Yes, we want to see improvement in the services, we want to hear more successful stories from women who have been assisted. I speak to the women in this area through the local church and grocery distribution. There are some who have found the services helpful, but there are also those who did not find it helpful.</i>
Not Helpful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I am 23 years old, unemployed with a 1year-old child. I am in an abusive relationship. I have nowhere to go. My life is hell. I am on my own. There is no one to turn to. Services are unhelpful.</i> • <i>I have a painful story to tell. I am a victim. The first time I withdraw the case, hoping to work things out. There was no change abuse got worst. I opened a new case. He was never arrested, even though he was in front of the police. My protection order is with the police. The police are not assisting me, because I complained about their service</i> • <i>If we are given the right support and services, gender-based violence can be stopped. Now women are on their own, nobody cares, so we stay in these relationships, hoping someday it will change.</i>

Source: Online survey (25 June-12 August 2021)