



**An exploration of students' lived experiences of Gender-based violence (GBV) at a  
South African University**

**By**

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Declaration: I hereby declare that this present body of work: An exploration of students' lived experiences of Gender-based violence (GBV) at a South African University, has not been previously submitted in whole or in part, for any degree or examination to any university, and is solely my own work. If any text passages or diagrams from books, papers, the Web, or other sources have been copied or in any other way used, all references – including those found in electronic media have been acknowledged and fully cited in the American Psychological Association (APA) 7th edition referencing style.

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Abstract:

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a general term used to capture violence that is directed at an individual based on their biological sex, gender identity, or adherence to socially constructed norms of masculinity or femininity, which may be linked to unequal power relations one gender has over the other (Davids, 2020). Gqola (2015) speaks to the nature of rape and GBV to be a social problem that is prominent, entrenched, and regularly reported in the South African media. However, the report's subtlety still communicates and suggest that not much is being done about the issue or problem in South Africa.

A qualitative research methodology was utilised to seek an in-depth understanding of students' lived experiences of Gender-based violence (GBV) at a South African University. The ability for qualitative research to appropriately explore the experiences of students being subjected to GBV made it an ideal research approach. Under the qualitative approach, a descriptive phenomenological approach was used. The descriptive phenomenological approach aims to understand people's perceptions, perspectives, and understanding of a particular phenomenon.

Three students were employed for this study. These were all female students studying at the University of Pretoria. All three students were of African ethnicity. The students ages ranged from 21 and 24. The students are currently completing their degrees in psychology, theology, and medicine respectively. This study primarily focused on issues related to the overall safety of students and how safety precautions established by the university influenced their feelings of safety and fear about certain areas on campus. The findings highlighted that the students were keenly aware of the GBV prevalence on university campuses and surrounding spaces, which birthed an innate fear of potential harm within these spaces. Furthermore, the students each shared the experience of feeling that the university could do more to disperse widespread awareness and information about student safety protocols and legislation with regards to GBV incidences. Therefore, the findings of this study do provide evidence that GBV in university



environments may need to be further examined and that more should be done to ensure that students are safeguarded by university policies and laws.

**Keywords: Gender-based-violence; students; universities; South Africa; women; experiences**

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Dedication:

I dedicate this mini dissertation to my mom, dad, stepmother, siblings, and girlfriend. You all motivate me to be the best version of myself. I am eternally blessed to have such genuine and loving individuals in my life.

## Table of Contents

<i>An exploration of students' lived experiences of Gender-based violence (GBV) at a South African University .....</i>	<i>1</i>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Background &amp; Context.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2. Rationale:.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.3. Aim: .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.4. Objectives:.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.1.1. Types of Gender Based Violence .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.1.2. Exploring Gender .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2.1.3. Prevalence of GBV on women and in university.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.1.4. Why University Students are a vulnerable population.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.1.5. The effects of GBV on students .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>4.1. Research Question.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>4.2. Research Aim and Objectives.....</b>	<b>26</b>

<b>4.3. Research Approach .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>4.4. Research Design .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>4.5. Research Setting.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>4.6. Participants and Sampling.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>4.7. Data Collection and Procedure.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>4.8. Data Analysis.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>4.8.1 Familiarizing Yourself with the data. ....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>4.8.2. Generating Initial Codes.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>4.8.3. Searching for Themes .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>4.8.4. Reviewing Themes.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>4.8.5. Defining and Naming Themes .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>4.8.6. Producing the Report.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>4.8.7. Trustworthiness.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>4.8.8. Ethical Considerations.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>5.1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>5.2. Findings.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>5.2.2. Theme 1: Loss of freedom.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>5.2.3. Theme 2: Safety.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>5.2.4. Theme 3: Cycle of IPV .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>5.2.5. Theme 4: Mental health consequences of IPV.....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>6.1. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>61</b>

<b>6.2. Recommendations.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>6.3. Limitations .....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>6.4. Personal reflection .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>APPENDIX A:.....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>APPENDIX B .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: .....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Appendix D: Advertisement .....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Appendix E: Psychologist’s letter .....</b>	<b>94</b>

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background & Context**

In general, gender-based violence (GBV) is defined as violence against individuals that is based on the sex, gender identity, or adherence to socially constructed norms of masculinity or femininity that are aimed at them based on their biological sex, gender identity, or social constructs of masculinity or femininity. This may be related to unequal power relations between the sexes (Davids, 2020). Within this definition of gender-based violence, an element of patriarchy is introduced, which can be understood as the element of unequal power relations between genders (Gqola, 2015). To be more specific, a social and political system that treats men as superior to women is known as patriarchy (Sultana, 2010). Under this system, women are unable to protect their bodies, are marginalized in workplaces, or simply struggle to fully participate in society. Furthermore, it is also important to identify that there are also intrapersonal factors to be understood that have an influence on the basis of perpetuation of GBV, and not just interpersonal factors (Jewkes et al., 2010). Additionally, Gqola (2015) speaks to the nature of rape and GBV to be a social problem that is prominent, entrenched, and regularly reported in the South African media. However, the report's subtlety still communicates and suggest that not much is being done about the issue or problem in South Africa.

There have been earlier accounts of GBV awareness campaigns in South Africa, however from as recent as 2016, there was a country wide outcry and initiative to facilitate awareness regarding the issue of GBV. This awareness was created through protests and social media awareness campaigns, which were predominantly led by university students (Davids, 2020). Students are at the forefront of this national issue, as there is an increase in reports of GBV in higher education in South Africa. In 2013, 12-13% of students from Rhodes University reported feeling unsafe walking around campus in the evening, which equates to an estimate of 363

students (TeamSVT, 2016). In 2018, students from the University of Pretoria voiced very similar concerns regarding feeling unsafe on university campuses and held the belief that the university is not doing enough to address these problems (Keppler, 2018). The common denominator around the students concerns about their safety is predicated on the prevalence of GBV incidents within their university contexts. In addition, despite widespread agreement that South Africa has one of the highest rates of gender-based violence (GBV), violence against women and girls (VAWG), and violence against members of the LGBTQIA+ community, the majority of incidents of gender-based violence in the country are not reported (Machisa, 2011; Ndlovu et al., 2020).

Finchilescu and Dugard (2018) say that young women, LGBTQIA+ students, and students from underrepresented groups are the most common victims of gender-based violence (GBV) in South African universities. This may suggest that diversity concerns should be taken into account when looking into individual factors that may contribute to experiencing GBV because most universities have a diverse student population. According to Machisa (2011), 12%-28% of women in South Africa have reported having been raped at some point in their lives. A significant conclusion is that nearly all males who rape do it by their mid-twenties (Jewkes et al., 2010). That is particularly interesting, as the reality in university, is that the average age of students is usually their mid-twenties.

Consequently, the rapid increase in the prevalence of GBV incidences within educational sectors have led to studies that have contributed to the knowledge base of certain predictors of sexual violence on university campuses. These variables include the academic year, prior victimization history, hazardous sexual behavior, religious affiliation, ethnicity, marital status, living on or off campus, and faculty affiliation (Illiyasu et al., 2011; Mutinta, 2022). The year of study may be an indicator of the level of vulnerability of certain students, due to either being impressionable and new to the university environment or being too familiar with the environment

and lacking the necessary caution within certain situations. Furthermore, the additional factors are linked to sexual violence for reasons ranging from mental health impacts of prior victimization, unhealthy coping mechanisms amongst students, and being discriminated against based on specific affiliations (Mutinta, 2022).

There has been a challenge in the past with regards to the underreporting of gender-based violence incidents in university contexts in South Africa based on lack of follow ups and investigations within the education contexts (Swartz et al., 2017). The factors that may contribute to this issue of underreporting are victims not knowing where to report these issues or having the knowledge of what processes go into reporting such crimes. Therefore, indicating that there may be a disparity between the implementation of policies protecting students and the communication of such policies to the students. According to Chauke et al. (2015), humiliation, guilt, bewilderment, dread of becoming scrutinized, and fear of stigmatization all have a detrimental impact on the rate of reporting of gender-based violence incidents by victims. The lack of reporting is then directly linked to the lack of policy implementation and awareness of such crimes within university contexts, which further disadvantages the students presently enrolled and those that will enroll in future. Additionally, this perpetuates the discourse around the societal belief that the lack of reporting is directly influencing the increase of these crimes being committed, subsequently placing the responsibility of gender-based violence prevention on the victims rather than on the perpetrators (Mayeza et al., 2022). Placing this onus on the victims may also result in the victims experiencing psychological impacts of self-blame, a sense of hopelessness, socialized acceptance of these crimes, and anxiety of re-victimization (Ndlovu et al., 2020).

The phenomenon the lack of reporting of crimes involving gender-based violence in South African Higher education institutes has brought to light the nuanced politics and reality

at play when victims choose not to disclose these crimes. In 80–90% of cases of gender-based violence, the perpetrators and victims are either friends, acquaintances, classmates, roommates, or individuals they indulge in recreational activities with (Mutinta, 2022; Rennison & Addington, 2014). Studies show that victims are less likely to report crimes committed against them by family members, community members, friends, or intimate partners due to feeling the need to protect these individuals or preserve the relationship shared with the respective individuals (Swartz et al., 2017). It is well documented that factors such as social connectedness, friendships, social support systems at school, residences, and by staff members contribute positively to the success of a student at university level. The victims then yield to the psychological tension experienced when having the fear of losing these social support systems, which results in the victims consciously choosing to not report these crimes (Alsubaie, 2019).

The primary factor sustaining gender-based violence as a societal issue in university settings is the social acceptance of it (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2021). Gqola (2015) highlighted the influence of a patriarchal society in South Africa and its normalization of violence, the tendency to blame victims of crimes and the lack of sympathy the society provides for the victims. As a result, the narrative victim blaming postulates that the obligation is on the individuals themselves to prevent these crimes from occurring, and that if they do not dress, act, or interact in a specific manner, they will not fall victim to such crimes. This narrative reinforces the notion that the world is an injustice-free and secure place, which contributes to the idea that if you do not ascribe to patriarchal societal norms then the bad done unto you should then be justified (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2021). Consequently, the paucity of reporting of gender-based violence offenses in universities result in students join the setting believing that such crimes are uncommon and unlikely. As a result, when students experience such crimes, they may come to believe that they are the source of the problem. Therefore, making them less inclined to report such crimes because they do not want to face social rejection or ostracization. There is a positive

correlation to the lack of reporting of gender-based violence crimes and the interventions the universities implement to counteract these issues (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2021). The less the university knows about the extent of the issue, the less power the university has to deal with the issue.

## **1.2. Rationale:**

It is evident that GBV is a macro societal issue and is a startling reality for many in South Africa (Maluleke, 2018). GBV takes on many identities and forms, such as sexual harassment, intimate partner violence (IPV) and even rape (WHO, 2005). Specifically, for university related incidents it is proving to be an area of much more exploration as prevalence rates seem to be rising (Beyene et al., 2019). Naidu (2018) reported that nine occurrences of rape and sexual assault were reported at the University of Cape Town in 2017, followed by seven at Walter Sisulu University, six at the Tshwane University of Technology, five at Nelson Mandela University, and four at the University of Johannesburg. Both the University of the Western Cape and Rhodes University reported two. Each of the following universities reported one incident: University of the Witwatersrand, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Durban University of Technology, North West University, University of Pretoria, and University of South Africa. At Walter Sisulu University, there was purportedly another case of campus sexual assault, which led to a boycott of classes by students in opposition to the situation (Naidu, 2018). Within the Pretoria context, there was a student protest held at the Sefako Makgatho Health Science University in 2020, due to a young woman who was a student at the university, being abducted and raped outside her university residence, which led to the university having to release an official statement addressing the incident (Pule, 2020). Lots of GBV research has placed focus on contexts such as trade unions and corporate spaces, however university contexts have not been focused on as much (Maluleke, 2018). These startling statistics about university prevalence of gender-based violence, necessitates the exploration of this gap through this research.

### **1.3. Aim:**

The aim is to explore the experiences of students being subjected to GBV in a South African University in Pretoria and explore the circumstances that such experiences occur within.

The following objectives are established to achieve this aim:

### **1.4. Objectives:**

- To investigate the experiences of university students who have experienced GBV in academic settings.
- To examine under what circumstances GBV occurs at university.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The African continent is one continent that has been plagued with violence because of the nature of its colonial history and past. This is also particularly true of South Africa, whose history of violence is as recent as that of Apartheid which was abolished as recently the early 1990s (Mkhize et al., 2020). According to Van der Merwe (2013) a history of violence breeds future violence. Thus, it is unsurprising that South Africa often finds itself in the headlines with regards to its high levels of violence (Van der Merwe, 2013).

Although violence has been extensively researched field in South Africa, it nonetheless remains one with more questions than answers (Mkhize et al., 2020). According to the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (Brankovic, 2019), along with the transition to democracy in 1994, violence research has also experienced a shift from a framework that prioritised political violence, to one that aims to prevent interpersonal violence. However, even with that focus, researchers have still identified an increase in the levels of violence. Davids (2020) argues that despite the dearth of research on violence in South Africa, a poor understanding of what the prevalence patterns are, and the root causes still remain unidentified. Whilst multiple risk factors such as social inequality, alcohol and a lack of social cohesion have been identified, the root cause nonetheless remains highly debated (Brankovic, 2019). Whilst identifying the root causes of violence falls out of the scope of this study, it is critical to reflect on possible causes as they inform the definitions and understandings of violence that shall be explored.

Defining violence is a very complex and highly contested process which can be understood differently based on one's context, belief systems they carry, or the culture they form a part of. Despite this, the World Health Organization (2002) has coined a general and umbrella definition, terming violence as the deliberate use of power or imposing one's physical force over

another person, group, or community, which may result in injury, psychological or emotional damage, maldevelopment, and even fatality. Per this definition, violence may be understood as the use of one's power or position to inflict harm on others either physically, emotionally, psychologically or otherwise. According to the WHO (2002), violence is further classified into three basic categories: self-directed violence, interpersonal violence, and collective violence. Whilst numerous kinds of violence fall under these different categories, the focus and scope of this research will focus only on one category, interpersonal violence, more specifically, Gender-Based Violence.

Gender Based Violence (GBV) remains yet another contested definition with the discourse of violence (Bloom, 2008). In addition to its definition being contested, GBV is a highly problematic phenomenon in the South African landscape due to a lack of well documented prevalence and patterns (Davids, 2020). It is partly due to the lack well-documented statistics that makes this definition contested and at times controversial (Davids, 2020). The prevailing understanding of GBV in society is a male-on-female violence, which is a perspective that shall be rejected within this study as fails to encapsulate the complexity of GBV (Davids, 2020). The rejection of this perspective is important as it is accompanied by harmful insinuations such as women permanently being victims as well as gender being a rigid, inflexible concept (Shaikh, 2003). Rather, a comprehensive definition shall be adopted, one that will capture this complex issue that has plagued society.

In defining GBV, Bloom's (2008, p.14) definition has been adopted for this research project due to it being utilitarian and attempts to be inclusive yet precise. He defines GBV as:

A term generally used to describe violence that occurs as a result of the normative roles and expectation associated with each gender as well as the unequal power relationships between the genders within the context of a specific society. It is a means to

subjugate not only women, but anyone who does not conform to gendered forms of conduct and anyone who is perceived as 'less than' normal and therefore deserves to be controlled, manipulated and violated.

What Bloom highlights in this comprehensive definition is how although victims of GBV are often women it is not exclusively the abuse of women by men (Clowes et al. 2009; Frances, 2009; Goldblum et al., 2012; Hargrove, 2021; Kheswa, 2014; Magudulela, 2017; McDermott, 2015; Wamundila, 2019). This definition also challenges the stereotyped, normative definition argued by Davids (2020). Furthermore, this definition highlights the fluidity of gender and how gender as a concept is also defined contextually. Lastly, it also highlights a crucial dynamic which is that of power relationships amongst various genders.

### **2.1.1. Types of Gender Based Violence**

Gender-based violence can take many forms, and students can become victims of it both at university and in society as a whole (Brankovic, 2019). Although reports from various universities have tended to narrow reports mostly on sexual violence, various other forms of GBV are experienced by students. The sorts of GBV pertinent to the study's aims and scope will be examined in this essay. The varieties of GBV discussed below aren't thought to constitute an exhaustive list. The most prevalent form of GBV is sexual violence, which is defined as any kind of violence that may entail sexual harassment, rape, sexual exploitation, or trafficking for sexual gain (Matthews, 2010). Although it is often under reported overall, it is the most commonly identified kind of GBV at Higher Education Institutions (Chauke et al. 2015).

The second kind of GBV that has been found to be common among partners is domestic violence (Ross & Davis, 2022; Sigsworth, 2009). According to Sigsworth (2009), Spencer et al., (2019), and Ross and Davis (2022), domestic violence, interchangeably termed intimate partner violence, is understood to be real or suggested physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, or

stalking behaviour by a close romantic or dating relationship. This violence may occur among partners cohabiting or partners who may be living separately but spend considerable amounts of time in shared spaces. Despite paucity of statistics of this kind of violence amongst university students possible due to under-reporting and unregulated statistics, Spencer et al. (2019), conducted study which shed light about the prevalence of such abuse in Higher Education Institutes. In a study where students, 68% of which were female, 43% of the ones who reported being in relationships, reported having experienced domestic. What this means is that within that sample, almost 50% of the students in that study experienced domestic violence (Spencer et al., 2019). This concerning statistic is yet another factor that warrants the necessity of this research project. As more youth experience such abuse, thorough research aimed at providing practical, realistic and relevant solutions remains essential.

The third form of GBV is physical violence (Brankovic, 2019). This type of GBV entails using physical force of any kind, including striking, slapping, kicking, punching, and so on. (Sigsworth, 2009). Although this type of violence exists as its own category, almost all the other categories involve some level of physical violence (Spencer et al., 2019). Whilst this type of violence is common in all GBV interactions regardless of gender, it is more common amongst heterosexual relationships or between men and women (Bloom, 2008; Muluneh et al., 2020; Van der Merwe, 2013). With this trend in mind, this research project shall also seek to identify a similar trend amongst student, as generalised views of GBV in different contexts may also be contributing to its prevalence and it not improving.

The fourth kind of violence, also classified under GBV is emotional violence emotional (Karakurt & Silver, 2013). Emotional violence is violence that entails verbal abuse, belittling, or name-calling, often with the intention of inflicting emotional harm through embarrassment, humiliation and disrespect (Brankovic, 2019). This violence, similar to physical violence, is also often a proponent of most of the other violence categories. According to Aitken and Munro

(2018), although all kinds of violence are associated with psychological impacts, emotional abuse together with physical and sexual abuse contribute the most to severe psychological changes. Furthermore, due to the stigma and secondary victimisation that recipients of abuse receive, these psychological impacts are often under reported and under treated, often resulting in severe behavioural changes as well as cultivate violence (Imasiku & Hamweene, 2013; Mngoma et al., 2016; Tazeen, 2019; Tsoaledi, 2019).

The fifth kind of violence is economic violence (Brankovic, 2019). Economic violence is defined as violence that includes overt authority over a partner's assets, unjustified access to another's money or other economic resources, and reluctance of a partner to have their own employment (Ouedraogo & Stenzel, 2021). Due to the majority of South African youth being unemployed, this form of violence is also one of the most prevalent forms of maltreatment. This kind of violence is also one of the most common types of abuse in the South African context as a result of most of youth being unemployed (Mago, 2019). As a result of this, individuals in relationships often find themselves being abused as a result of being unable to find employment for themselves. Additionally, with university students often being at a developmental stage where their focus is education and seldom have an active income, they are particularly vulnerable to this kind of abuse which may lead to other types of GBV (Kaufman et al., 2019). This also reiterates socio-economic status being a risk factor for GBV (Brankovic, 2019).

Lastly, the sixth of GBV explored within this study is femicide. Femicide is deemed to be the most extreme outcome of GBV and is defined as the murder of a female partner by an intimate male partner (Matthews, 2010; Ndlovu, et al., 2020). Whilst this study will not explore femicides, it is important to critically discuss femicides at South African universities as they are increasingly becoming the ultimate result of the unresolved plague of GBV specifically against women in South Africa (Ndlovu et al., 2020). Additionally, as the literature indicates this increased trend of fatal violence in South African universities and society at large, this finding also reiterates the

importance of this study and its objectives in contributing to an ongoing crisis (Abrahams et al., 2012; Enaifoghe et al., 2021; Shai et al., 2022).

### **2.1.2. Exploring Gender**

As discussed earlier, defining gender-based violence is a highly contested notion which has divided scholars. Similarly, defining gender is also yet another highly contested notion (Buck, 2016; Komori et al., 2011; Perez-Arche & Miller, 2021; Schudson, 2021). Whilst this study falls out of the scope of exploring in depth what gender is and what understandings are associated with it, its inclusion in this literature serves the purpose of being sensitive to the important aspects of gender. In their view regarding varying definitions of gender, Lindqvist, and colleagues (2020) argue that researchers fixate on gender being on-binary without operationalising or defining what gender means for their studies. They further argue that in addition to negating gender as a binary concept of male or female, researchers should highlight and include important aspects of gender which are relevant to their study. They also argue that gender is a complex notion and the reflections made regarding it should display such (Lindqvist et al., 2020). Whilst this study opts to not engage in such a complex discussion, it, together with many researchers (Gao et al., 2022; Gauvin & Merwin, 2022; Gofman et al., 2021; Kassis et al., 2021; Kidd et al., 2021; Renstrom et al., 2022) concedes that gender is non binary and is a notion that cannot be defined based on a singular aspect such as biology (Hameed & Shukri, 2014).

Additionally, in borrowing from Lindqvist and colleague's (2020) argument of operationalising gender, gender in this study shall be understood as being a term inclusive of all genders and how readers may define it for themselves. Whilst this view may be considered vague and lacking, the purpose it serves is to acknowledge that GBV refers to violence perpetrated to all individuals of differing and varying genders. This view is an acknowledgement that GBV is not

violence commit only against women as this term has often been associated (Bloom, 2008). Although this perspective does not negate women being the majority of recipients of GBV, it highlights that gender-based violence is any form of violence where gender is “violence that occurs as a result of the normative roles and expectation associated with gender as well as the unequal power relationships between the genders” (Bloom, 2008, p.14).

What this perspective highlights and acknowledges is that due to various societal constructs, norms and values, different genders have been deemed to have certain privileges over others whilst also having shortcomings. Subsequently, GBV then becomes the result of differing genders using their privileges to abuse differing genders and their lack of privilege. For example, society has deemed heterosexual relationships to be the norm (Bloom, 2008). Thus, homophobia which may include any of the above listed types of GBV, would be violence perpetrated by a heterosexual individual with the privilege and assumption that homosexuality contradicts the norm. In a similar manner, society deems men, more often than not, being physically more dominant than women. The physical strength associated with men is the societal and biological privilege which some men then use to dominate women physically, thus constituting GBV of a physical kind for example. The pervasiveness of gender-based violence globally is primarily attributable to systematic gender inequity, which deprives women, girls, men, LGBTQI people, and other minorities of their human rights. (Perez-Arche & Miller, 2021).

### **2.1.3. Prevalence of GBV on women and in university**

Gender-based violence (GBV) rates in South Africa are among the highest in the world, according to Devries et al. (2013). While global data indicate that over 30% of women in relationships may suffer IPV at some time, rates in South Africa are significantly higher (Jewkes, et al., 2010). Another research by Jewkes and colleagues (2010) revealed that a

sizeable percentage of women (77% in Limpopo, 51% in Gauteng, 45% in the Western Cape, and 36% in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) provinces) have experienced GBV at some point in their lives. What this study illustrates is that despite GBV being violence perpetrated based on gender, women are undoubtedly the most affected by it.

The prevalence of GBV is closely related to economic disempowerment. Thus, Jewkes (2010) contends that poor women are fundamentally more vulnerable to GBV than are wealthy women. In his first argument for this connection, Jewkes (2002) mentioned that few social and demographic variables designate risk groups for intimate partner violence, however due to poverty's implications on conflict, women's power, and masculine identity, it is a variable that may be directly linked to increased risk for women (Jewkes, 2002). Data on the frequency of GBV among educated women in South African society are hard to come by, maybe as a result of this. Whilst this may be a hypothesis, most studies have indicated most women being potential victims of GBV (Davids, 2020). Additionally, there is insufficient evidence on GBV in the tertiary education community to establish such a judgment. For most women who experience GBV, this violence which ranges in the different categories listed, is committed to them by men (Jewkes et al., 2010).

Accompanying these statistics, were findings that revealed an increased prevalence within educational institutions and among female youths. In South Africa specifically, research revealed incident estimates of about 56,3 % for physical abuse, 35,5% for emotional abuse, and 9% for sexual abuse (Meinck et al., 2016). It appears there is an awareness of the rapid perpetuation of violence against women, especially now in schools and university spaces, however, the way the issue is addressed within these contexts is not as rapid or vast. Hence, this has played a crucial role in the substantial occurrence of GBV towards women in South African institutions.

World Health Organisation (2010) highlights that over recent years, a lot of research has been conducted within Sub-Saharan Africa but mentions that these studies and publications fail to direct the point of emphasis around GBV prevalence among young females in educational institutions. Through various studies done in the Sub-Saharan region, GBV prevalence in university was linked to living arrangements, place of residence, and how far one lived away from their hometown or parents (Iliyasu et al., 2011). This involved young females who have found themselves living in communal spaces shared with men, females staying in on-campus residences, and those that lived very far from home or their parents. All the young females who identify with these factors, all reported experiences of GBV (Iliyasu et al., 2011).

Mixed-gender communes can prove to be very risky for females, as intimate spaces like bathrooms and living rooms are commonly shared, which then leaves the women more accessible and vulnerable to the men they share these spaces with. Thus, leaving them at risk for GBV. On-campus residence living is marked by consistent social gatherings in which male and female students find themselves interacting in spaces that involve parties, alcohol, recreational drug use, and high-risk sexual behaviour (Gebreyohannes, 2007). Hence, a culmination of these factors may also lead to an increased risk for GBV. Lastly, those that find themselves far from home, are faced with the task of adjusting to an unfamiliar environment, accompanied by adjusting to the social norms of that university space, which may leave these females very susceptible and naïve to the risks of GBV.

Much like South Africa, the prevalence of GBV in Western universities is also an issue, which has resulted in groups such as the Faculty Against Rape (FAR) being established in 2014 as a body that is dedicated to backing faculties in universities that are involved in fighting the fight against GBV on campuses in North America (Sharoni & Klocke, 2019). Whilst South Africa has implemented and prioritised policy on a governmental level, few policies of such a nature exist within the university context (Davids, 2020).

As opposed to the African context, the risk factors are largely very similar, however, in the Western context, the increase of GBV on campuses is largely linked to policies and systems that are believed to be heavily biased against perpetrators of this type of violence. These biases are believed to be influenced by fraternities' lobbies, conservative civil liberties group and the large movement of men's rights activists (Sharoni & Klocke, 2019). Hence, the establishment of bodies like FAR, to actively address and counteract this epidemic faced in university campuses.

Bodies like FAR address the issue of GBV in the university through providing support for the survivors of this violence and ultimately aiding faculties in instigating change in university policies and practices. Campus GBV in university has become so severe that the numbers almost resemble the rates of rape against women in the general population. Whilst such statistics are not as readily available in South Africa, a similar trend could be predicted which exacerbates the severity of the issue (Davids, 2020).

An examination of the policies of a representative group of Universities in South Africa reveals a focus on sexual harassment without a discernible understanding of the intricacies underlying societal conceptions of gender or violence. None of these laws, though, offer a thorough explanation of GBV. In a similar vein, the sexual crimes, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and sexual violence policies for a number of colleges in South Africa omit to define what is meant by GBV or to make reference to LGBTQI employees or students (Bloom, 2008). It is clear from these policies that there is a lacklustre emphasis on GBV and a lack of knowledge of the variables that contribute to violence against women. Therefore, rather than being proactive in preventing GBV, university policies appear to be created as a legal necessity. This then leads to inefficiency in combatting it as well as difficulties preventing it. According to Davids (2020), the development of such policies should be strongly encouraged in academic programs through teaching and learning interactions, in addition to institutional daily proceedings and activities. Davids (2020) and Mulla (2018) lastly argue that the inept policies

may also be contributing the underreporting of such incidents could further be contributing to distorted statistics of GBV among University students.

The few "high profile" occurrences that have been covered by local and national media have sparked controversy over GBV incidences in and around South African Higher education institutions (Davids, 2020; Rentschler, 2015). Nonetheless, the number of GBV events on and around university campuses in South Africa that are reported in the local and/or national media is a tiny percentage of the total. There is a problem in that there isn't enough research or reporting infrastructure to give a complete picture of the scope of the GBV epidemic (Decker et al., 2015). The vast majority of instances, particularly those involving LGBTQI persons, either go undocumented or, if reported, are not addressed or interrogated further (Fisher et al., 2010; Karjane, 2002; Rennison & Addington, 2014). A valuable lens through which to examine both the normalization and prevalence of GBV are the reasons for the lack of reporting, which are numerous and complicated (Fisher et al., 2010; Mulla, 2018).

One of the most prominent causes for underreporting given by victims is a lack of knowledge about what to do (Iliyasu et al., 2011). Those who have suffered GBV crimes tend to be unsure about how to proceed, who to contact, and where to report their experiences. In essence, unclear institutional policies are a factor in the prevalence of GBV in universities (Davids, 2020). Additionally, not knowing what processes or steps to take following an incidence may be linked to victims experiencing being in a state of perplexity, trauma, and pessimism. A multitude of feelings can be associated with 'not knowing what to do,' including embarrassment, fear of being harshly evaluated by parents, relatives, friends, and the community, discrimination, and dread of retaliation attacks from the perpetrators (Iliyasu et al., 2011). Because of the guilt, stereotyping, and mortification associated with sexual assault, a considerable number of GBV episodes go unreported. Social and institutional discourses and norms frequently exacerbate the shame and stigma associated with being a victim of GBV. For

example, programs and activities aiming at reducing GBV are frequently addressed at women or victims of these crimes, placing the burden of preventing this violence on them rather than the offenders or the surroundings that may encourage these crimes (Rentschler, 2015).

Whilst some victims may have the knowledge on what proactive measures to take when subjected to GBV crimes, Decker et al. (2015) explains, they encounter obstacles that hinder them from reporting. As a result of the possible repercussions, including destroying a student's career, tarnishing a lecturer's reputation, or causing secondary victimization, complaints are frequently aggressively discouraged among students (Decker et al., 2015). Also, in order to prevent harm to the organization, allegations of sexual harassment in universities may not be made public (Decker et al., 2015).

Another contributing factor to GBV in university is 'stranger-rape' myths, of GBV crimes (Decker et al., 2015). What this refers to is the assailant being unknown to the victim. In reality, according to other researchers, the victim and the attacker are known to each other in the vast majority (80–90%) of sexually motivated GBV cases as acquaintances, friends, or partners (Fisher et al., 2010; Karjane et al., 2002; Rennison & Addington, 2014). This, along with the prospect of drinking, which typically defines recreational interactions on university campuses, contributes to the hardship felt by victims and, as a result, decreases the chance of reporting. Furthermore, research suggests that victims who are unconscious during the attack due to alcohol or drugs are less likely to disclose their victimization to law enforcement agencies than victims who are assaulted using physical force (Fisher et al., 2010). Underreporting has the indirect effect of preventing justice, which leads to the continuation of GBV, especially when combined with institutional obstacles and suboptimal reporting procedures. Apart from underreporting, another difficulty is that universities have a propensity to downplay the severity of the GBV pandemic on their campuses (Decker et al., 2015). The institutions do so, due to intrinsic concerns about the university's reputation and possible public scrutiny, which informs

their reluctance to commit to delivering the adequate sanctions to combat this issue (Chauke et al., 2015). As a result, institutions contribute to the concealing of the true extent of GBV incidence on their campuses. Therefore, this negligence holds the institutions liable for complicity in maintaining GBV crimes in university contexts.

#### **2.1.4. Why University Students are a vulnerable population.**

University students are some of the most vulnerable populations to GBV due to various levels of worry about educational excellence, career prospects, and social relationships while enrolled in university (Aristnovik et al., 2020). Anxiety, negative moods, low self-esteem, psychosomatic issues, drug misuse, and suicidality among students have grown globally (Aristnovik et al., 2020; Davids, 2020; McDermott et al., 2021). This constitutes students to be a vulnerable population. Hence, in order to deal with the effects of GBV on their physical and mental health, students may require additional resources and assistance.

When the nature of a student's educational experience changes dramatically, such as when they experience recurrent violence, the load on the mental health of this vulnerable demographic increases drastically.

GBV specifically within a South African university context is said to be influenced by economic disparities between males and females, and the normalized culture of engaging in sexual relationships with older men among female students (Mahlori et al, 2018). The idea of sex being transactional is driven by the economic disparity noted to be prevalent among males and females, therefore influencing young females to engage in sexual intercourse with older men, in hopes of having their school fees, photocopies, accommodation fees paid for or to generally increase the woman's social status (Mahlori et al, 2018).

These gender inequalities and damaging norms around sexual intercourse can all be regarded as risk factors present in university spaces, in which GBV rates can be increased.

Additionally, one of the other big risk factors for GBV in university spaces in South Africa is the lack of reporting and the unsolicited practice of silence. To highlight this nature of silence, in 2013, a report on sexual violence at the University of Witwatersrand was published by the Centre for Applied Legal Studies, where it was found that students who suffered from GBV had their grades drop and most of all the university did not keep official records of sexual harassment complaints and incidents, hence further influencing the reluctance to report to university authorities (Mahlori et al., 2018).

### **2.1.5. The effects of GBV on students**

It is crucial to consider the alarming incidence of gender-based violence, particularly in South Africa, in order to position it within academic environments. Mkhize et al. (2020) speak to the reality that rape culture is an old concept that was normalised by colonial rule, slavery, and unequal power relations between people ranked socially higher than others according to socioeconomic status. Although this was the birth of such violence within the South African Context, this violence has since morphed into varying kinds which are influenced by differing aspects of social rank and privilege. In South Africa, many people, mostly women, have suffered GBV, which has a terrible effect on their mental health (Mkhize et al., 2020). According to studies, these survivors are three times more inclined to think about suicide as a release.

GBV may have severe effects on everyone, regardless of where they live, cultural status, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or allegiance (Enaifoghe, 2019). Survivors must deal with psychological, behavioral, and bodily ramifications as well. According to the researcher, women and girls are considered as the most impacted group who stand the most at danger of gender-based violence, while boys, men, and gender minorities all face gender-based violence (Enaifoghe, 2019). According to a researcher like Ott (2017), gender-based violence can have detrimental physiological, emotional, economic, and societal consequences. Unintended pregnancies, pregnancy - related

complications, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are some of the negative consequences of sexual assault against women. Moreover, it may result in despair and loneliness. According to Enaifoghe (2019), GBV might prohibit survivors from reaching their full economic productive capacity because of the prejudice and the physical and psychological pain that the violence causes. Throughout time, the particularly violent problems in South Africa "cultivated a culture of violence," which has subsequently repeated itself in all spheres of society and culture. This has made it easier to understand how prevalent gender violence is throughout the nation.

GBV has genuine social and developmental impacts on the victims, their families, networks, communities, and society as a whole. It is a serious violation of human rights. (Talbot & Quayle, 2010). Gender-based violence, according to Jewkes et al. (2010), can cause mental harm and have emotional, psychosocial, and physiological repercussions for survivors. Boys and men who have been abused are at a higher risk of developing HIV and are more prone to yield to substance misuse, despondency, and suicide. Women who have been abused, on the other hand, are at risk of undesired pregnancy, HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections.

Actions that will reduce violence against women and girls need to be taken with a community-based, flexible strategy and ongoing participation from numerous organizations. The societal norms around gender roles and the tolerance of violence are among the most effective measures to address the underlying risk factors for violence. A sizable percentage of women have been subjected to many forms of violence. A dominance survey that addresses the high rate of "violence against women in all its forms, may produce more information than 'single issue' surveys about the meaning and impact of violence in women's lives" (Greenan, 2004, p.5). The inclusion of women from marginalized groups in demographic research should not be the only thing that is documented about their experiences. Gender-based violence (GBV) is a serious issue that is pervasive in South Africa and has a negative influence on nearly all

elements of life (Enaifoghe, 2019). Nonetheless, in an effort to end abuse of women and children and safeguard individual rights, the literature indicates that there is an ongoing crisis in the form of GBV. Whilst multiple studies have been conducted, disagreement on the definition has contributed to the inability for society and government at large to successfully and efficiently combat GBV. The difficulties in defining GBV have also led to misconceptions regarding it. Whilst GBV has become a colloquial term to refer to violence against women by men, GBV has demonstrated itself to be far more inclusive and varied.

Despite the fact that the complexity of gender is outside the purview of this study, it is essential to emphasize the spectrum of GBV and avoid taking a binary approach to understanding gender. Despite this, it is an admission that, both in South Africa and globally, GBV affects women more than other genders. At high education institutions, it has also appeared that this is the case. Universities in South Africa have also been observed to have a lack of policies that are sufficient to help prevent GBV incidences. Numerous factors contribute to GBV being rife at universities as students are considered a vulnerable population due to a number of contributing social factors. This is one of the main reasons for this study and its objectives. Students have been identified to be in dire need of such research which many influence policy thus protecting them as well as assist in the prevention of GBV. Despite this hope, it inevitable that those students who have already experience GBV has had severe psychological impacts which also need to be addressed through research.

### **CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework grounding the proposed study is Heise's Etiological conceptual framework also known as the Integrated Ecological Model, which examines violence against women through four categories: personal history factors, microsystem factors, exosystemic factors, and macrosystem factors (Heise, 1998).

This study explored and attempted to understand the personal experiences of student's who have experienced GBV in a university context. It is for this reason that, Heise's Etiological framework was chosen as a tool for data analysis and contextualisation within reviewed literature. There are four namely individual, relationship, community, and society. According to Heise (1998) the individual level tends to include experiences of child abuse or witnessing parental conflict, and neglectful parenting. The relationship level is characterised by marital conflict, patriarchal rule within the household, and overt age and education discrepancies between spouses. The community level is characterised by reduced access to economic opportunities and evaluating social influence of peers and family. Lastly, the societal level is characterised by patriarchal social norms that justify unhealthy power disparities between men and women, acceptance of violence, and the rationalisation of violence as a form of conflict resolution in relationships (Heise, 1998). These levels were also taken into account when the analysis of the data was being conducted.

Using Heise's (1998) approach, this study encouraged the widespread adoption of an integrated, ecological framework for understanding the origins of gender-based violence. It adopted an ecological approach to abuse, which conceptualized violence as a multifaceted phenomenon grounded in an interplay among personal, situational, and sociocultural factors. Heise's theoretical framework was appropriate for this study as it used the ecological framework as a heuristic tool to organize the existing research base into an intelligible whole. What this means is that it joined together years of research amongst students about gender-

based violence and compiling it in a logical and coherent manner which also aids in the identification of patterns and trends amongst students experiencing violence in South Africa (Ozcurumez, 2021). Additionally, whilst other frameworks have posited myriad ways to think about violence, few have attempted to establish what factors emerge as predictive of abuse at each level of the social ecology. This is yet another strength of this framework hence its utilisation in this study. Lastly, Heise's integrated ecological model is largely informed by international and cross-cultural research together with findings from the West. And finally, the framework draws from findings related to all types of physical and sexual abuse of women to encourage a more integrated approach to theory building regarding gender-based abuse (Gupta et al., 2014).

Ontogenic factors refer to those features of an individual's developmental experience or personality that shape his or her response to microsystem and exosystem stressors. Most existing leads on ontogenetic factors related to violence have emerged from case control studies that have sought to identify risk factors that can reliably distinguish victims or perpetrators of violence from matched controls (Heise & Kotsadam, 2015). Several theories have attempted to make sense of the patterns of violence using meta-analysis to identify markers that consistently predict either victimization and or perpetration of abuse (Mootz, et al., 2017). Significantly, very few factors have emerged that reliably predict women at risk of intimate assault. In one particular study supporting Heise's (1998) framework, Hotaling and Sugarman (1986) found that of 42 risk markers studied in female victims, only one - having witnessed violence between parents or caregivers in childhood. was consistently correlated with being the victim of a male partner's violence.

The ecological approach aimed to ensure that this study also prioritised interventions that consider and address the conditions across different levels such as individual, family, community and society, which affect women and girls' risks of experiencing violence (Gupta

et al., 2014; Heise & Kotsadam, 2015; Wirtz et al., 2014). As illustrated in the model there are biological, social, cultural, and economic factors and norms at each layer that may increase men's risk of perpetrating violence and a woman's risk of experiencing it. Taking into account these factors adopt a holistic role in which one is able to identify patterns and understand the factor that led to the current violence experienced by women, including students at South African universities. Witnessing marital violence or experiencing abuse as a child; male control over family wealth; lack of economic opportunities for men and social norms granting or tolerating male control over female behaviour were amongst these factors (Heise & Kotsadam, 2015).

According to Heise and Kotsadam (2015) interventions should also identify and reinforce the protective factors, or those that decrease the likelihood of women and girls experiencing violence, at each level within the ecological model. Protective factors that can support women's and girls' resilience against violence include, for example: education (especially completing secondary school); vocational skills; economic resources and opportunities; and social norms that promote gender equality should be encouraged. It is also likely that interventions such as this research project also aid and assist women in empowering them and serves as a protective factor, which speaks to the significance of this study. Additionally, holistic interventions are successfully generated when holistic frameworks such as this one are utilised in the data analysis process.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter details the research study's methodology, which was used to investigate the actual lived experiences of university students who had experienced GBV in a university setting. This chapter covers descriptions of the study's sampling of participants, research environment, and research design. The study's ethical issues as well as the acquisition and processing of data are also examined.

### **4.1. Research Question**

As Creswell and Poth (2016) explains, the stated aims of social research studies are used to establish particular research questions that need to be addressed. Research questions serve to lead the formulation of study designs, establish parameters, and regulate the course that specific investigations take (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The research question for this study was:

What are the lived experiences of university students that have been victim to GBV within a university context?

### **4.2. Research Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this research study was:

To explore the experiences of students being subjected to GBV in a South African University in Pretoria, and the circumstances that these experiences occur within.

Objectives

To attain the aim of this study, the following objectives were set:

- To explore university students' experiences of being subjected to GBV in university contexts.
- To explore under what circumstances GBV occurs at university.

### **4.3. Research Approach**

A qualitative research approach was used to gain an in-depth knowledge of students' lived experiences of gender-based violence (GBV) in a South African University. The potential of qualitative research to adequately investigate the perspectives of students experiencing GBV makes it a suitable research technique for this study (Cibangu, 2012; Fischer & Guzel, 2023; Mohajan, 2018). The use of qualitative research methodology allowed the researcher to gain insights into each participant's personal experiences particularly those of such a sensitive nature (Cibangu, 2012; Fischer & Guzel, 2023; Mohajan, 2018). Since there is active seeking of finding, understanding, and exploring personal experiences, a research methodology of this nature is ideal.

### **4.4. Research Design**

A descriptive phenomenological technique was employed in the qualitative approach. The goal of the descriptive phenomenological technique is to comprehend how individuals see, view, and comprehend a certain phenomenon. Groenewald (2004) mentions that this research design is effective when the research problem is aimed at establishing a profound understanding of a human experience common to a group of people. Thus, to locate this design within this study, the human experience that is going to be explored is that of experiencing GBV, and the group of people in which this experience will be common are university students.

Willig (2013) further posits that descriptive phenomenology focuses on how the participants perceive and understand a particular phenomenon in their context rather than how the phenomenon informs their reality. In addition, Heotis (2020) emphasizes that the researcher should set aside their knowledge about a phenomenon so that the phenomenon can be understood from the participants' perspective and their context, thus the chosen qualitative nature of this research study. Qualitative research is designed to explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social problem (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

This study will draw the meanings of individuals who have experienced GBV and ascribe to the actual experience within a university context, through qualitative inquiry from the researcher. Nestor and Schutt (2018) explain that the inductive nature of qualitative research is an effective means to investigate complex and sensitive issues, through the various perspectives and enriched knowledge that will be imparted from the participants' explanations and experiential reality. Gender-based violence (GBV) is one such issue, that is sensitive and prominent within a South African context (Maluleke, 2018). Therefore, the phenomenology will allow me as the researcher the potential to understand the participants' subjective experiences and to attempt to understand their meaning ascribed to experiencing GBV within a university context.

#### **4.5. Research Setting**

The University of Pretoria hosted the conduct of this study. Undergraduate students with a range of degrees made up the participants. As a means of precautions following the COVID-19 pandemic, online interviews were conducted with all the participants. The data collection of the study in the form of interviews, took place using online encrypted platforms, namely as Zoom and Google Meets.

#### **4.6. Participants and Sampling**

Individual interviews were utilized for this study. Due to the sensitive nature of the content that was explored, individual interviews were appropriate as they offered the participants maximum confidentiality and privacy (Frances et al., 2009). One on one interviews are one of the most common methods of data collection in qualitative research (Frances et al., 2009). One of the advantages of using this data collection method is the confidentiality is guaranteed when conducted in an ethical manner (Alamri et al., 2019). Furthermore, individual interviews were advantageous for this study as they provided a safe space for containment whilst affording participants an opportunity to create meaning of their experiences with the researcher (Alamri et al., 2019). This was of utmost importance in this research project as meaning creation also

contributes to post-traumatic growth (Naik & Khan, 2019). Although this research focuses on understanding students' experiences, it is also imperative that it considers ways to empower its participants. This was yet another added advantage of utilizing individual interviews (Djogbenou, 2019). Essentially, individual interviews provide myriad advantages when conducting research. The most paramount of them all is the confidentiality and privacy it affords participants especially when sharing highly sensitive information. Additionally, it provides a safe space for participants to make meaning of their experiences which may facilitate healing and or growth.

A non-random sampling method namely purposive sampling was utilized for this study. This sampling technique was carefully considered once again given the sensitive nature of this study and the specific criteria the sample population must meet. According to Etikan et al. (2016) It is frequently used in qualitative research to find and pick the cases with the most information so that the resources are used as effectively as possible. This entails identifying and choosing individuals or groups of individuals who are conversant with and experienced in the phenomena of interest. Researchers emphasize the value of availability, participation, and the capacity for clear, expressive, and reflective communication of views and ideas in addition to knowledge and experience (Etikan et al., 2016). Henceforth, purposive sampling was utilized in this study as it allowed the researcher to purposively choose participants who fit the criteria for the study, specifically university students who have experienced any form of GBV violations at the University of Pretoria.

The screening process of this study included students declaring they have been or are currently recipients of GBV. The screening was aided through self-disclose after seeing the advert or hearing about the study. As per the advert instructions, participants reached out to the researcher via the researchers posted contact details and consented to the requirements of the participant information sheet (Appendix C), which also specified the research criteria. Within the

context of this study, an experience of GBV was defined as any form of violence ranging from physical assault, sexual assault, rape, psychological violence such as verbal insults or harassment, and stalking that an individual had or has been the recipient of (Bloom, 2008). An additional inclusion criterion was also that these experiences should have occurred within the confines of university spaces, such as on-campus, university residences, or university social events.

Purposive sampling was a plausible means for choosing participants, as it allowed the researcher to use their judgement to choose the sample of the study (Etikan et al., 2016). The sample being university students who have experienced GBV within a university context makes the required criteria very specific. Therefore, resulting in the researcher using homogeneous purposive sampling as the chosen sampling method. Homogenous purposive sampling focuses on applicants who have particular qualities or shared attributes. Participants in homogenous sampling, for instance, would be in terms of their ages, cultures, occupations, or life experiences. The purpose is to concentrate on this specific resemblance and how it pertains to the subject under investigation (Etikan et al., 2016). All the participants were recruited through receiving the advertisement for research participation and contacting the researcher to form part of the study. The researcher had the responsibility of determining whether the individuals who reached out met the inclusion criteria of the research study. The reason I decided to place particular focus on university enrolled students, is mainly due to the methodological plausibility of understanding the lived experiences of university students through a phenomenological approach in the study. Initially, the desired amounts of participants were five, however due to the withdrawal of participants for reasons unknown to the researcher, the sample size was decreased to three.

#### **4.7. Data Collection and Procedure**

After gaining ethics permission from the appropriate boards, the study procedure began. The researcher communicated with each research participant personally and agreed on a

convenient time. Three online individual interviews were used to obtain data. As aforementioned, the interviewees comprised of undergraduate students, in differing faculties studying varying degrees.

Following the approval of the relevant boards, the researcher designed a poster which was intended to invite students to participate in the study. The initial contact with students was through the poster (appendix D) upon which the specified purposive sampling was utilized to determine if the individuals who contacted the researcher met the required inclusion criteria. Students who were identified through this process all met the criteria and received the information sheet and informed consent sheet and knowledgeably consented to participate in the study. Upon advertising the poster, five participants agreed and responded accordingly, however, only three committed to attending the online interviews. Therefore, the research data consisting of three participants.

Semi-structured interviews were used for this study, which allowed for the participants to engage with the questions, through their own understanding and experiences. The questions used were open-ended questions. Semi-structured interviews are widely used when using a descriptive phenomenological research design, hence their use in this specific study (Cresswell & Poth, 2016).

The following questions were used as a guide to reach the objective of the research study:

- What were you most looking forward to about coming to university?
- What were your ideas about how campus life would be?
- Since you have been in university, have any of these ideas changed?
- Do you generally feel safe on campus?

- Can you please tell me about your ideas of what you think gender-based violence (GBV) is?
- Have you ever experienced this form of violence in a university context?
- If yes, did you report it to anyone?
- If no to question 6, are there any reasons for not reporting?
- What was the nature of the relationship you had with the perpetrator?
- How has experiencing this form of violence impacted you?
- What are your thoughts on the University's involvement around GBV issues?

The duration of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to an hour and were dependent on how in-depth the participants' engagements to the questions was. The interview question guide (Appendix B) directed the line of questioning during the interviews. An example of the interview questions which were asked was, "do you generally feel safe on campus?" and "how has experiencing this form of violence impacted you?". Furthermore, each interview was conducted in English, and all the interviews were scheduled at a time that is convenient for both researcher and participant after the informed consent form was signed. The researcher requested permission from participants for the interviews to be audio recorded for transcription purposes and this was also outlined in the informed written consent form. The initial stages of data collection entailed the use codes to label the participant data, pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants. The use of pseudonyms was also employed when transcribing the recordings, and password-protected and encrypted files were utilized to store the data and recordings.

#### 4.8. Data Analysis

Because of its adaptability across qualitative research approaches, thematic analysis (i.e., identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing and reporting repeated patterns of meaning across a data set; Braun & Clarke, 2006) was chosen because it enables common understanding between researchers using various research methodologies (Nowell et al., 2017).

According to Braun and Clark (2013), thematic analysis entails the identification of codes and recognition of common themes within the data. Subsequently, conclusions can be made about the findings (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). One of the main benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility which makes it an accessible analytic method which may also be used by amateur researchers such as students (Nowell et al., 2017).

Thematic analysis is also useful for the descriptive phenomenological approach to qualitative research. This approach aims to understand people's perceptions, perspectives, and understanding of a particular phenomenon. Given this, it will also allow for the identification of possible patterns and themes that may emerge for participants who have shared experiences (Sundler et al., 2019). According to Groenewald (2004), this research approach is successful when the goal is to get a thorough knowledge of a human experience that a large number of individuals share. Thus, to locate this design within this study, the human experience that is going to be explored is that of experiencing GBV, and the group of people in which this experience will be common are university students. Willig (2013) further posits that descriptive phenomenology focuses on how the participants perceive and understand a particular phenomenon in their context rather than how the phenomenon informs their reality, which also coincides with the type of thematic analysis that shall be used in this study, inductive thematic analysis. In addition, Heotis (2020) emphasizes that the researcher should set aside their knowledge about a phenomenon so that the phenomenon can be understood from the participants' perspective and their context, thus

the chosen qualitative nature of this research study which is also why inductive thematic analysis is appropriate for this study.

According to Nowell et al. (2017) Inductive theme analysis is data-driven and is not carried out to conform to the researcher's analytic beliefs. The data gathered by the researcher has thoroughly informed this. Contrastingly, the second type of thematic analysis is theoretical or deductive thematic analysis which is guided by the researcher's theoretical interest and is analyst driven rather than data driven (Nowell et al., 2017). As contrast to the inductive approach's broad overall description, this type of thematic analysis typically offers a more in-depth study of specific data points (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al.,2017).

In this study, participant-generated data, not the researcher's preconceived preconceptions, completely drove the analysis (Nowell et al.,2017). This helped to guarantee that the data analysis adequately reflected the perspectives of the students, which in turn contributed to the resolution of the research topic. The themes found in this study were closely related to the information (Nowell et al., 2017). The credibility of a qualitative study is highly impacted by the depth of the data analysis process description (Nowell et al., 2017). Here is a description of the data analysis procedure used for this investigation, which followed the stages outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

#### **4.8.1 Familiarizing Yourself with the data.**

The initial phase entailed the procedures designed to acquaint the researcher with the data. This involved transcription, reviewing the information again, and jotting down first thoughts. According to many academics, theme analysis cannot begin before the researcher is fully familiar with the data (Maguire and Delahunt 2017). This occurred through the researcher listening to the interviews repeatedly and proceeding to prescribe and generate transcripts which

were repeatedly and thoroughly analysed. The researcher was able to grasp the individuals' experiences by engaging himself with the data during this procedure.

#### **4.8.2. Generating Initial Codes**

The second phase required going over the data collection and methodically coding any intriguing features (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While inductive theme analysis was employed in this study, all coding was done using information derived from participant interviews. Participants' words or sentences from the interview were considered possible codes throughout the analysis. Participants' exact statements from the transcripts were used as the beginning codes, and they were also explicitly cited. Afterwards, more sorting and sifting was done with the coded material.

#### **4.8.3. Searching for Themes**

The act of looking for themes allowed the researcher to organize the data into potentially useful information that was also logical and cohesive. This was done to begin understanding and analyzing the codes that had previously been grouped together.

#### **4.8.4. Reviewing Themes**

This stage entailed making sure the themes connected to the dataset and the coded extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). They were also improved when the pertinent topics were found.

#### **4.8.5. Defining and Naming Themes**

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this step necessitates coming up with precise names and meanings for each subject. Theme names must be brief and descriptive in order to convey to the reader the essence of the topic (Maguire and Delahunt 2017).

#### **4.8.6. Producing the Report**

The report was put together once the final themes had been decided upon and categorized appropriately (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

#### **4.8.7. Trustworthiness**

Unlike quantitative research where the quality of the research can be deduced through validity and reliability properties of the assessments or instruments used, qualitative research' quality standards or trustworthiness are established through increasing credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability of the research study's findings (Strydom, 2011). Each research study is conducted with both an awareness and description of its particular scope and this assists in determining how applicable it is across various contexts. Transferability refers to how applicable the findings of the research are to other contexts (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). The in-depth nature of the responses to the open-ended questions in the semi-structured interview also resulted in a thorough description of each participants' responses, which further provided a basis for transferability to be evaluated. Transferability in this study was ensured through rich descriptions of participants' responses as well the researchers' interpretations which allowed readers to have a thorough understanding of the phenomenon under study, enabling them to compare the research to other contexts (Given & Saumure, 2012).

Credibility entails ensuring that the participant's expressed view during the interview process is represented accurately. To establish this form of credibility, member checking will need to be done, which involves specifically checking the accuracy of the data during and after the data collection process (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). For this study this was ensured by having the participants read over their transcripts and having them attach a supplementary explanatory aid that also depicted the researcher's interpretation of their experience.

Confirmability refers to the extent of the representativeness of the participants' responses void of any researcher bias, interest, or perspectives (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). In an effort to ensure confirmability, thorough reflexive capacity was engaged in by the researcher, with the aim of being attuned to how much of their own biases, motivations, and interests possibly impacted the results and interpretations of the findings. Korstjens and Moser (2018) reiterate that reflexivity is a pivotal aspect of upholding the quality of qualitative research. Thus, the researcher ensured this confirmability through consistent reflection in personal therapy, research supervision, and personal journaling as well.

Dependability refers to the extent to which the chosen research methodology and data collection processes can be replicated (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). This can be ensured by outlining a very detailed and clear research methodology within your study and keeping track of all developments during the research process. This was achieved through an audit trail that actively took note of all important proceedings and details of the entire research process from the onset to the collection of data, and the reporting of the findings. This process established transparency on part of the researcher and enabled the researcher to interpret the results in great depth, which will ensure dependable findings and increase the dependability of the study (Treharne & Riggs, 2015).

#### **4.8.8. Ethical Considerations**

The University of Pretoria's Research Ethics Committee provided ethical permission prior to performing this research and collecting data (HUM015/0222). Because of the qualitative nature of this investigation, human subjects were engaged, and written informed permission was obtained from each participant prior to participation in the study (Appendix A). Participants were also informed that their participation in this study was entirely voluntary, and they had the choice to quit at any moment with no consequences (Appendix A). To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms were utilized in the transcripts, data gathering, and this final research project to shield each participant's identity (Appendix B). As

aforementioned, the interviews were conducted via online interviews. This was in accordance with COVID-19 precautionary measures which also ensured the ethical conduct of this study by not placing participants at risk. The time of the interviews was communicated in advance to the participants, and the choice of the online platform they wish to conduct the interviews through was decided by the participants upon their signing of the written informed consent form (Appendix A) and the participant information sheet (Appendix C).

Confidentiality was also carefully considered in this study. The data's confidentiality was ensured through the recordings and transcripts of the interviews being password-protected and encrypted. The recorded files were also safely stored on an external hard drive. Physical copies of interview transcripts have also been prepared and are being retained in a secured cabinet at the University of Pretoria's Department of Psychology for the next 15 years (Strydom, 2011).

As GBV is an emotionally sensitive and demanding topic to discuss, it was anticipated that some of the participants may experience emotional fatigue and possible re-traumatization. Thus, as the interviews were being conducted, participants were also given breaks to prevent intense distress. (Williams & Molebatsi, 2019). For the participants where re-traumatization possibly occurred, they were given the contact details of Dr. Kgamadi Kometsi, a registered clinical psychologist (PR No. 8642079) who agreed to contribute to the study by consulting with the participants in need of debriefing (Appendix E). Alternatively, they were given the option of being referred to a 24-7 Careline for support through the South African Anxiety and Depression Support Group (SADAG). A dedicated and toll-free line for students was also made available to them via the informed consent sheet through to 0800 747 747. The participants were also encouraged to send an SMS to 33123 for a Careline staff member to contact them if they felt it was necessary.

Again, in accordance to the ethical statutes of the university, participants were informed that the findings of the research will be made available to each of the participants upon their personal request (Appendix A). Furthermore, written informed consent (Appendix A) will be obtained from the participants before they take part in the research process and the commencement of online interviews through platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams. The written informed consent form (Appendix A) will outline the voluntary participation of this study and inform the participants of their right to withdraw from the research should they wish to at any point in time (Dawson, 2019). The participant information sheet (Appendix C) and the written consent form (Appendix A) will be forwarded to the participants via email after the participants have indicated their interest in participating in the study.

## CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### 5.1. Introduction

With relation to the themes that arose from the individual interviews performed for this study, this chapter discusses the study's findings. In addition to being explored in connection to the literature and theoretical framework, several themes are recognized in the chapter.

#### 5.2. Findings

This study investigated the experiences of students who were victims of GBV at a South African university in Pretoria. Through carefully and thoroughly planned interviews, this was achieved by exploring the experiences of three students at the University of Pretoria who have previously experienced gender-based violence. The conclusions drawn in the study emanate from the interviews conducted with the participants as well as the literature that informed the study. The three students employed in the study were all female studying at the university of Pretoria. All three students were of African ethnicity.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants using pseudonyms.

<b>Participant name*:</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Course of study</b>
Leleti	22	Bachelor of medicine and surgery (MBChB)
Lebo	24	Bachelor of Arts in Psychology (BA Psychology)
Zandile	21	Bachelor of Theology (BTH)

\*All names are pseudonyms

Given the interactions that transpired with participants, these are the following themes which were derived:

Loss of freedom

Safety

Cycle of GBV

Mental Health Consequences of GBV

### **5.2.2. Theme 1: Loss of freedom**

According to the participants, the experience of being a university student was one that represented freedom from them. The participants highlighted how leaving home and being in varsity represented a rite of passage largely characterized by the presence of freedom that they had not experienced in their upbringing. This freedom entailed exploring their relationship experiences as well developing their own identities in the context of relationships. The importance of this theme is crucial in understanding what the experience of GBV has caused for the students.

The experience of GBV for students within the context of the university setting culminated in a deep sense of loss of freedom through disempowerment. Where the participants claimed to have once felt safe, they claimed that the experience of violence contributed to a great sense of loss of freedom as well as the power that came with the freedom. This loss of freedom included feelings such as those of fear, resentment and being paranoid.

The students also discussed the silence around gender-based violence and how it is not appropriate to discuss such abuse. They frequently avoided using the phrase "violence," instead referring to it as "it" in their conversations. This lack of referral and reluctance to identify behavior as violent exemplifies the pervasive silence around gender-based violence. Chauke et

al. (2015) does note that GBV is underreported and silenced in higher education institutions, however does mention that it is the most common form of violence within universities in South Africa.

Zandile postulated the notion and idea, that a woman's voice is taken away from her when she experiences gender-based violence, leaving her voiceless and vulnerable. Furthermore, she mentioned the impact of relinquishing her power resulted in feeling immobilized to confront the issue and express her victimization. This refers to a society that does not validate women's voices and experiences. Given the social and cultural taboos surrounding these concerns, women's sexual and personal experiences, particularly the unease and uncomfortable feelings associated with sexually coercive events, are frequently disregarded. These are purposefully prohibited, however, since expressing these experiences would call into question the dangers of heterosexual encounters, eventually threatening the present social order. The invalidation of women's voices and subsequent silence contribute to a society that encourages and normalizes violence against women. This contributes to the persistence of gender disparities in our culture.

Lebo, who had been in residence for a year, reported of being sexually abused in her room by another male student. Below is an excerpt about the ordeal explained:

Interviewer

*And have you ever experienced any form of gender-based violence, especially within a university context?*

Lebo

*Yes, to an extent.*

Interviewer:

*Would you be willing to share that experience?*

Lebo:

*So, it's something that happened in my first year, my first year, right?*

Interviewer:

*What year was this?*

Lebo:

*2018? Yes. So, you know, you're new to varsity. And you meet some friends because you know, you have the idea that you want to make friends and you make them and begin to become comfortable with these people.*

Interviewer:

*I think maybe, just for the sake of the internet connection, you can switch off your video if it's not a problem. I'll keep my video on.*

Lebo:

*Okay. Okay, that's not a problem.*

Interviewer:

*So Sorry about the interruption. You were saying? It was some time in the first year you meeting new people.*

Lebo:

*Yeah, there's excitement in everything. And then, so I was all supposed to be living in res right, like on campus. But then they were renovating as always. So, they put us in another private accommodation. In the meantime, they found an accommodation for us. So now it was a mixed accommodation. Boys and girls. There was a communal kitchen and where my room was placed, I was basically in the middle of the res on the girl's side and the boys were on the right side of the residence. So obviously, when you making rounds, you go into the bathroom which is placed outside of our rooms close to the communal kitchen. On the way, you meet other people who are close to you. And then I happened to meet the guy in question. This is a person I would always cross paths with. One day he approached me and told me he likes me and everything. I'm just like, ah, that's interesting. But then now what was odd about him was, whenever I would go to the gym, or I'm at the rooftop, I'd always find him around those areas when I'm there. So, it was beginning to give stalker vibes to a large extent. It began to get weird when I realized he was in some of my lectures. We shared English and some other modules. He knew my times when I'm going back to my room, or whatever.*

Interviewer:

*Sorry. How did he know your times? Did you guys speak about it?*

Lebo:

*No, we didn't speak about it I think he just observed then figured it out. It got to a point where he would end up waiting for me at my door. And then I realized that okay, let's try get to know this guy and not make him feel weird or judged. You know, I got to know him a bit further, I realized that nah, this is actually not the type of person I would be interested in, because of the crowd he kept and our vastly different interests. And I told him, I was just like, no, no, actually, it was nice getting to try and know you and everything, but I'm sorry. And he just got mad. It was the*

*first time actually seeing a reaction from him like that. He just got mad and was like, no, sorry, I am not leaving and there's nothing I can do about it. And because I don't know what he is capable of, I felt scared.*

Interviewer:

*Sorry to interrupt? How did you? How could you say that he was mad at you?*

Lebo:

*Because of how he usually speaks to me. But in that moment, it was like, first of all, how he looked at me and how he spoke to me, how he addressed me it was a thing I would say, of him telling me that. Oh, now that you are so used to me? You wasted my time getting to know me and now don't want me anymore. And I feel misled and led on. He then proceeds to walk away, which was a huge relief to me. And then one day I was at my friend's house. He comes there, right? Trying to talk to me, and my friends told him she doesn't want to talk to you. He shouted and then left the place. Later on, that night, bear in mind this guy knows my times and schedule. I was going to my back to my room and I was walking he barged in with me from behind. I was unaware that he was even there. He basically forced himself into the room. His first words were: I had to do this, because you're not going to talk to me if I don't, you know, He forced me into a corner and started raising his voice at me saying a lot of hurtful things to me and literally putting his fingers on my face. And that's when I saw that I might be in danger, because all the time his intentions were to get intimate with me. And I was not yet ready for that. So, I began screaming at him telling him I do not want to engage in any sexual activity with him until he became frustrated and stormed out my room whilst banging the door behind him...*

She highlighted the perceived safety and preconceived notion that living among fellow students would render a controlled and safe environment. The theme of feeling disempowered and being revoked of her sense of freedom was apparent through her mentioning feeling paranoid

that someone may be following her within her residence. Her paranoia has facilitated increased hypervigilance and experiencing a lack of freedom in an environment where she feels was supposed to feel the safest, a university accredited student residence with security and surveillance tailored for students to live safely and comfortably.

### **5.2.3. Theme 2: Safety**

The theme safety refers to different paradoxes that underpin the pupils' core understandings of what it means to be safe. The students' perceptions of fear, as presented by the participants are identified. This also adds to the complexities of theme safety. Furthermore, it is important to note that women predominately report acts of GBV and that GBV affects individuals of all genders (Peters & Norton, 2018).

The false sense of security uncovered through the students' perceptions of safety, as well as what elements and events boosted their sense of safety, are sub-themes that have evolved from this subject of safety. Shefer et al (2018) gives insight into a male student's perspective of feeling secure on and around campus, revealing that most male students do not feel uncomfortable on university campuses. Furthermore, the concept of safety is conceptualized whereby male students are not afraid of particular spaces, however, the reality might be vastly different. Male students are therefore more likely to assume that they are safe in environments that are stigmatized or seen to be risky. Moreover, majority of male students may show empathy for female students, through illustrating that if they were female students, they would probably feel scared in certain spaces (Shefer et al., 2018). The language of "I don't feel unsafe walking there" provides a vague view into genuine sentiments of safety, as this might be referred to as discomfort instead of unsafety. This narrative of women being more likely to feel unsafe positions female students as weak and furthering the societal belief that an individual's gender or sexuality makes them more vulnerable to becoming victims of GBV. Therefore, through the location of the gender conflict theory, According to Shefer et al. (2018),

fear is a gendered phenomenon, with gender having an influence on how afraid you are of probable GBV cases. This may provide light on gender norms and the notions that stress, fear, and anxiety are connected with males, who are viewed as superior and exhibiting less emotional suffering than women. Also, this gender standard may help to explain why more female than male GBV victims disclose their cases (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2018). In addition, this gendered fear was brought to light in research by Clowes et al. (2009), which found that women were more likely to be victims of crime and that universities were perceived as sexualized environments. This was determined to be a result of the stigmatization, labeling, and stereotypes associated with a woman's sexuality as well as many cultural and societal standards, such as heteronormativity, which elevates male people over female people. Below will be an excerpt of Leleti expressing her views about how she experienced and internalized the negative stereotypes of university:

Leleti:

*The first six months are on campus but obviously COVID So I didn't have to go through that. But I just remember thinking while I was accompanying a friend of mine to wise books. That's where we buy our textbooks. I remember having to walk all the way that side from the furthest exit on campus, because we were still not too sure of the directions. It was by Lynwood University Road, we had to walk across campus and then use the other gates to exit. I just remember walking and thinking back to all the YouTube videos I watched before coming to university, that girls need to be more careful, especially when walking around without a big group of companions. I remember how much anxiety that gave me when I was walking, because all I could see was men staring at us so uncomfortably that I just wanted to be in and out of the bookstore as soon as possible.*

Interviewer:

*Okay, so what were your biggest takeaways from the video you watched and what you had just experienced?*

Leleti:

*So, like, I think the one video was just like a girl talking about the dangers of alcohol addiction in university as a means to cope or blend in with the crowd. But yeah, most of the other videos were just explaining that university is a nice place, it's fun, there's a lot of fun and culture around it, but then if you get sidetracked, and you lose focus on one activity, you're going to get yourself in trouble. But you should always just be careful of people that will always try take advantage of you, especially if you're a girl. So, the experience made me overthink about never walking out under the influence because people may take advantage of me, and normalizing walking out in groups as a way to feel safer. Yeah, but I never came into university saying that, oh, I want to experience life. I wanted to dance. I want to do that.*

The RMS building, police stations, and lecture rooms are examples of places that are perceived as safe because they provide security. Leleti asserts that police personnel are now obligated to assist GBV victims rather than flagrantly neglect their psychological, emotional, and physical abuse as a result of the speech made by the police minister. As a result, Leleti views a police station as a safe area. Throughout Leleti's extract she explains how police officers have been known in the past, to ignore issues pertaining to GBV, therefore, impacting her perception of safety with regards to police officials and environments. Evidence can be taken from the following excerpt:

Interviewer:

*And do you generally feel safe on campus? Be at other campuses, since you've been to Mam's campus, and now Prinshof campus and main campus. Especially since you've experienced all three.*

Leleti:

*Initially at Mams like, yeah. I was a bit uneasy. Even my parents felt the same way. They were like: girl you are going to the ghetto, and you're going to learn how to live in the hood. However, once I got there, I felt very safe. Mams were great.*

Interviewer:

*...and Prinshof?*

Leleti:

*I would say yes. The only thing about Prinshof that would make me feel unsafe, right, is that Prinshof is like almost in cbd. Um, and then also the fact that Prinshof consists of people who are from the lower end of life, who are always around there. Because obviously, people are using services that are free to pursue in and around the campus. So, I think Prinshof gives me Mams, but it makes me feel like I am in the hood, I'm not in the university. So, when I am inside the varsity, I feel fairly safe, however when I have to cross the road and go to Steve Biko or Snyman that's when you start to feel like hmm be careful girl. There would be a lot of catcalling as well, because there's a lot of taxis around there. Main campus makes me feel the safest out of all of them. Mam's was cool because you never got to experience anything outside of the campus, because the bus drops you off inside the campus and picks you up there as well. Whereas for Prinshof I do not feel safe, only when I am on campus, however when I need to go home or exit the campus, I do not feel safe.*

*There is a police station nearby and campus security around the campus, but I still do not feel safe, because police stations and security guards tend to not do anything to really protect students, especially if it's not convenient for them. Reporting to the police is also quite traumatic, because I have a friend who reported her boyfriend for hitting her, and the police told her to go back to her boyfriend and solve their issues. Therefore, going to the police station or trusting the police is not something I can bank on. However, the one time I felt really valued, was when I had a late lecture and needed to exit Prinshof campus. I was overcome with fear because it was nighttime, and decided to ask the security guards if they could escort me to back to my residence. To my pleasant surprise, they gave me a lift all the way to myres and were very polite and respectful throughout the duration of the trip.*

According to O'Connor (2000, p. 313) omitting certain words "the difficulties of looking at the language of violence". Leleti chose to exclude mentioning the other violent events and the problems they raised on purpose. Leleti's inability to communicate about violent crimes is further highlighted by the possibility that this may be taken as trouble talk. The trouble talk also illustrates how the police station may have been perceived as a dangerous location for GBV victims, despite the fact that it has long been associated with safety thanks to the presence of police officers who provide residents a sense of security. This seeming paradox in safety further demonstrates how conventions and preconceptions affect how people perceive safety. Hegemonic masculinity, in which male partners are considered as the power bearers and are trained to feel that they have control over their female partners to the point that they should regulate their emotions and behavior, has a significant influence on the social norms of reporting occurrences of GBV. Leleti addresses this common belief within her contradiction of the term, safety. Whereby it is assumed that male perpetrators of GBV should discuss interpersonal conflicts with their partners, such as incidents of GBV, and that people outside of the interpersonal relationship should play a very small, albeit insignificant, role in aiding

GBV victims because it is viewed as an interpersonal issue rather than a human rights violation (Ferrales et al., 2016). Corroborated by one of the participants, Lebo noted:

*Initially I felt safe at my residence due to the stereotypes attached to campus and accommodation security. However, post the incident occurring, I was overcome with the fear of being judged and invalidated by the security guards.*

Lebo became acutely aware that her fear is influenced by her consciousness of the societal perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity. The cognitive dissonance she experienced was due to the tension of attempting to reconcile the idea that:

*How don't I feel safe in a safe environment anymore? I feel stupid for questioning the environment, maybe I am the problem for not being cautious enough.*

Therefore, such cognitive tension for the victim is usually eased by acts of self-blame, harsh self-criticism and the onset of various mental health impacts directly linked to the human rights violation (Ndllovu et al., 2020).

It's vital to situate this discussion within a positive light because several students said that they felt safe on and around the campus, in contrast to the sub-themes described above regarding safety and a false feeling of safety. This sense of security was demonstrated by the university's adopted safety measures, such as the deployment of security personnel and the monitoring of people using campus areas. Several of the students saw the security officers as people who upheld order and thereby reinforced a feeling of safety. Leleti ends by saying that she felt "appreciated" at the end of her shift. Leleti is given more influence by this favorable example of her interactions with the campus security personnel. Yet it is unclear if her status as a student or as a female student contributes to this sensation of authority. The security officers' actions, which involved confirming that Leleti was a student before they could grant her transportation, further demonstrated this feeling of agency. Leleti's decision to accept the

security firm's offer of a good gesture in which the guards brought her to grab some lunch and then led her back to her home highlights her feeling of autonomy.

#### **5.2.4. Theme 3: Cycle of IPV**

The study revealed that, despite the majority of the study's female participants claiming they were not impacted by gender-based violence, an examination of their conversation suggested otherwise. The majority of participants spoke about preparing for gender-based violence while framing their daily decisions and experiences within a rhetoric of dread. Participants viewed gender-based violence as inevitable and played the "waiting game" in anticipation of the threat they thought males frequently represented. Lebo, a lady who had been a resident for two years, talked about the waiting period:

*You never know what may happen. Sometimes you hear cases of rape. So and so has been raped or so and so has been robbed of something or anything of the sort then you, you then start to wonder what may happen to you in the days to come or the few months to come.*

In this waiting game, where they believed it was inevitable that they would become victims, women took positions. Zandile, one of the other participants, expressed the worry and anxiety associated with being in a place where violence seems to be practically constant:

*What if something happens? What if someone comes into my room at night and rapes me? No one will hear. That's what makes me feel scared.*

Notwithstanding public-space safety discourse, even normally "secure" locations, such as university dormitories, were not viewed as safe by the women in this study. Gender-based violence was described as the likelihood of 'something' happening. The absence of the term "violence" in these accounts is significant because it demonstrates how gender-based violence is normalized in these women's lives, and while they feared the specific assaults, they did not conceptualize these as instances of a systemic organization of gender power and inequality.

Due to the dread and anxiety involved with labelling certain behaviour as violent, the omission of this phrase might potentially signify a coping technique.

#### **5.2.5. Theme 4: Mental health consequences of IPV**

A woman's need for people to recognize and accept her sexual assault experience is crucial because it enables her to validate the pain of her experience and to restore the autonomy and dignity that the assault had taken away from her. This need for recognition was conveyed by Zandile, and it is evident in the following paragraph:

Interviewer:

*And what is your perception around the different forms of violence, as you mentioned, you say it can be physical, can be verbal, can be sexual. So, can you just elaborate a bit more on these different forms of gender-based violence that you just mentioned?*

Zandile:

*I know that they all leave a huge impact on someone's life. So, it doesn't matter what kind of violence it is, the fact that you're able to harm someone and make them feel some type of way? Yeah. It doesn't matter what form it comes as verbal, physical, sexual harassment; the fact is, you do hurt someone at the end of the day.*

Interviewer:

*Okay. And have you ever experienced this form of violence in a university context? Yeah. Do you report it to anyone? Or before we even get to reporting it to anyone? Can you elaborate on what you experienced?*

Zandile:

*Someone groped my bum. Yeah. Someone I don't even know; I was with a friend. We're getting food. And some guy just paused at the back of me and touched my bum. Yeah, so it was crazy. But yeah.*

Interviewer:

*How did that make you feel?*

Zandile:

*I know that when it happened, I did not feel anything because I was shocked and kind of processing everything that just happened. And I remember my friend was the one who reacted first before I did, which was kind of crazy. It took me a minute to process everything that just happened like oh my gosh, someone just touched me. Because when I mean touch, like the person touched, like someone grabbed my bum. Yeah. And then my friend reacted she was like no, you can't do that and shouted at the guy. That time I am just quiet, and I'm the one who's experiencing this I'm the one that just got sexually assaulted, but I could not say anything, which was weird. It was only after my friend was like, literally okay, why aren't you saying anything? That's when it hit me like that just happened to me.*

Interviewer:

*And why do you think your friend reacted in the manner she did?*

Zandile:

*Because she knew it was wrong. No one is allowed to just touch you inappropriately, without your consent so they knew that it was wrong. And I feel like she also reacted that way because she saw that I did not like what happened, and I think she saw that I was shocked but yeah.*

Interviewer:

*And earlier you said that when these incidences occur it leaves quite an impact on an individual. What impact did it leave with you?*

Zandile:

*I do know that I know I don't feel comfortable around any males whether it be friends, family, I just don't feel comfortable around males, yeah. I cannot even take public transport alone anymore. Yeah. And the saddest part was seeing him not apologizing when he could see my friends and I's reaction. He had a smirk on his face and did not look remorseful. To this day I still wish he would've said sorry. I think hearing him acknowledge his wrongdoing would've made the blow a little softer. But now I am left feeling like all men can hurt us and will feel justified doing so, which makes me so anxious every day I encounter men.*

Interviewer:

*And on campus?*

Zandile:

*It's even worse. There are times I even try avoiding campus if I have the alternative of getting my work done at home I'll opt for that option.*

Interviewer:

*Okay, and since you say you experienced this on campus, did you report it to anyone?*

Zandile:

*No.*

Interviewer:

*Are there any reasons for that?*

Zandile:

*I did not properly see the guy's face, number one so yes, I was gonna report the individual but then if they had asked me to describe how he looked or any form of identification, I was not going to be able to respond, because of my brain choosing to suppress the memory of this individual. So yeah.*

Interviewer:

*And would you know where to report these issues on campus?*

Zandile:

*No.*

Interviewer:

*Okay, and how did that make you feel knowing that you in this context that is supposed to be safe but when something does happen, you don't even know where to go? To report or to say that you feel unsafe.*

Zandile:

*it's honestly sad. I'm not gonna lie because I lowkey did regret not seeing the guy's face or looking at the guy. Because I thought if I did, maybe I could have done something you know? That I didn't. And, not knowing where to report can be quite exhausting because now you're dealing with what happened. And now you go to one place. They're like, no, you don't report these matters here, Yeah, you need to go there or elsewhere. And I'm like, God, I just need someone to talk to someone that's just gonna listen and hear me out. Yeah.*

Interviewer:

*Okay. So, in your opinion, do you think the university is doing enough to create awareness around this issue?*

Zandile:

*Not really.*

Interviewer:

*Can you elaborate for me please.*

Zandile:

*Because I know UP sends all students emails, updates and whatever. And I feel like they could do more when it comes to that part, especially gender-based violence and sexual harassment and all that, they could send emails every month telling students where to report if they do experience that and yeah, they can honestly do more. But they don't want to do that.*

Interviewer:

*And so, in your opinion from when you entered university you don't feel like enough was done to make students aware that if anything does happen to you these other avenues or are the other places you can go to deal with these issues*

Zandile:

*Because imagine something like that happened to me and I did not know where to go. And I'm a full-time student at the university...*

Additionally, Lebo alluded to the impact she experienced with having her experience validated and the empowerment that acknowledgement evoked in her. She mentioned:

*I've tried to make it clear that what you [he] did was not right. I don't like him anymore. I don't want us to be friends. That's what I tried to do and also talk about it. I like to talk about it. I want people to know that this happened.*

She speaks about how he did apologise, but he did not acknowledge the enormity of the pain he caused her. He tried to make it sound like it wasn't so bad. She further mentioned that he did make an attempt to apologise but felt that for what he said he didn't acknowledge that it was a problem.

A society that routinely normalizes and tolerates gender-based violence may be seen in the conflict between this woman's wish to express her horrific experience and the social rejection she received when she did. It perpetuates a cycle of underreporting and conveys a message that women's experiences and identities are not recognized when they disclose their experiences of gender-based violence. The mental health impacts of such invalidation may range from decreased self-confidence, low self-esteem issues, chronic anxiety, obsessive compulsive

behaviour, and various post-traumatic stress symptoms (Ross et al., 2021). The dialogue from the participants would range from:

*Since experiencing my space being violated, I check two to three times if I have locked my door properly. I never go to the bathroom alone. Whenever I find myself in male-dominated spaces, I tend to become overly anxious.*

*I no longer walk around campus in the evening, and I also prefer walking in groups as opposed to alone now. I avoid wearing clothes that show too much skin on campus, even if it's hot, because it garners too much male attention.*

*Through hearing other people's experiences and how women are being treated out there, it scares me to know how common this problem is becoming.*

Finally, the findings depict that the participants tend to be weary of people on campus rather than the campuses themselves, or the surrounding areas such as the residences or public areas. Their main concern revolved around the perception that men are the catalysts of instilling the fear of potential harm within various contexts, and the university spaces being one of them. Undoubtedly, the female students' activities and daily experiences appear to be cultivated and constrained by the fear of sexual violence, harassment, and emotional harm (Alsubaie et al., 2019). Additionally, all of the participants expressed their concern and plea for the university institution to be more proactive in dispersing information about gender-based violence campaigns, policies, and general student safety on campus. Applying Heise's (1998) ecological model to the data may imply that the laissez-faire attitude that academic institutions have toward GBV policies and incidents may be the macrosystem problem in university environments. This tacitly legitimizes and supports the acts. The isolation of students inside university settings, which is fostered by the majority of students leaving their homes and close-knit social networks to pursue academic careers, may be one of the exosystemic causes (Heise,

1998). However, because of their solitude, the pupils are vulnerable to probable abuse. This sense of isolation may be a result of students travelling alone across campus or back to their dorms alone (which ties into the topic of student safety). The perceived domination that men have over women in society may be seen in the participants' mentions of helplessness and their anxiety over being physically dominated by men (Heise, 1998). These are microsystem issues. The degree of violence in the university setting makes up the last set of ontogenic variables (Heise, 1998). Due to the pervasiveness of this type of violence, this emerges as either victims who experience GBV and rationalize the effects of the violation or as perpetrators who perpetrate these actions under the impression that they are commonplace and not unusual in such circumstances. These elements work together to make such crimes more likely to occur at higher education institutions. (Fulu, 2016; Jewkes et al., 2010).

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1. Conclusion

GBV has been identified as a distinct worldwide disease that affects not just South Africa's general population but also, as this study demonstrated, the lives of South African students. It was discovered that students' anticipation of entering university fostered a sense of independence, which may now be imagined to be taken away by the experience of violence.

The main research question, which sought to investigate the students' experiences with GBV in university contexts, helped the researcher uncover sub-themes and later main themes from the transcripts of the students' interviews and assignments. The themes that emerged emphasized the students' experience of losing their independence, experiencing increased anxiety and safety concerns in relation to GBV, as well as many ways that the university have continued to disappoint students in combatting the increased prevalence of GBV within the institution.

The key results related to difficulties with general student safety and how the university's safety procedures affected the students' sentiments of safety and dread about particular locations were revealed via the process of studying and investigating the students' experiences of GBV. Students also dreaded certain areas on and around campus, although those who reported feeling unsafe described their feelings as discomfort, anxiety, and terror.

It is obvious to draw the conclusion that the existence of GBV affects how students perceive their surroundings and their time at university. Students who reported feeling secure on and around the university campus said that the existing security measures implemented by the university as well as their own personal security measures were initially enough in providing the students with a feeling of comfort and degree of safety. Nonetheless, students

believe that many university rules should be reviewed and improved in order to better safeguard student safety in light of the persistence of GBV breaches inside academic environments.

Additionally, the Apartheid regime's imposition of previous social injustices on South Africans, together with heteronormative pressures and unfavorable patriarchal attitudes, has contributed to a rise in violent crimes, including GBV. Also, it is necessary to find solutions to this problem in order to remove GBV and thereby lessen the students' unfavorable feelings against GBV.

## **6.2. Recommendations**

Taking the results of this study into account, the following recommendations were postulated.

Students and academic institutions should be made aware of the growing occurrence of gender-based violence, which was highlighted in the study. The participants' findings and experiences may serve as a springboard for greater awareness of gender-based violence in higher education settings and may serve as a request for intervention programs intended to address such offenses there (Aristnovik et al., 2020). The multifaceted intervention programs can handle the different complexities and conundrums brought on by gender-based violent crimes. First, it should be the obligation of the academic institutions to recognize that female students appear to be the most vulnerable group, and that their year of study also affects how vulnerable they are (Spencer et al., 2019). Two of the participants had experienced gender-based violence incidences during their first year of study, which is indicative. Second, the emphasis should be on empowering the enrolled university students through thorough orientation campaigns designed to inform them of the institution's current policies, campus security procedures, and the various organizations and units they can contact when they require psychological services, academic support, or potential mentorship. In order to reduce their

anxiety about not knowing who or where to turn to when seeking help at the university, students would also greatly benefit from having the chance to interact personally with specific staff members from the various units, such as the Student Counseling Unit, Career Services Unit, Campus security personnel, etc. (Magudulela, 2017; Mahlori et al., 2018).

Moreover, as university students are the ones most immediately affected by GBV as Enaifoghe, (2019) identified. The students will unavoidably decide the success of intervention programs. As higher education instructors and researchers continue to incorporate the perspectives of the students, the execution of the planned participatory intervention should gain significant momentum. By doing so, myths and beliefs that maintain gender-based violence will be successfully addressed (Mutinta, 2022). The engagement of students will enable the interventions to embrace unique methods of material delivery, boost relatability, increase sensitivity to the issue of gender-based violence on campus, and improve access to a group of students who would have been more challenging to reach. To combat the effects of hegemonic masculinity and the prevailing patriarchal construct of femininity, which uphold and normalize the continuation of gender-based violence, comprehensive strategies are required (Gqola, 2015; Hargrove, 2021).

The suggestion for further research is imperative, since more detailed research on the topic of gender-based violence at South African higher education institutions may have a good influence on the prevention of such crimes in the near future. A prospective future qualitative research study should be done to investigate the lived experiences of university security officers and university student counsellors about their perspectives and understanding of the issue of gender-based violence in universities. This will increase understanding of the potential implications of gender-based violence concerns on campuses by determining the vicarious repercussions of those charged with dealing with and assisting with the issue on campus.

### **6.3. Limitations**

There are various limitations to this study as acknowledged by the researcher. This section serves to elaborate on these limitations.

The study made use of an exploratory qualitative method, which may have contributed to the limitations of the findings because there is no control over the quality of the narratives received from the participants, and the researcher may yield to biased interpretations of the data received from the sample of participants. Furthermore, to maintain the integrity of the participant's responses, the researcher is obligated to analyse and interpret the data provided regardless of the quality of the responses.

The study was based on data obtained from three participants from the University of Pretoria. Initially, the desired amounts of participants were five, however due to the withdrawal of participants for reasons unknown to the researcher, the sample size was decreased to three. This limited number of participants further limits the research findings as they do not reflect an accurate depiction of the generalized population within the university.

Furthermore, The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the nature of the interviews, as they had to be conducted via online platforms. The limitations of conducting online interviews range from experiencing network issues, which may hamper the integrity of the data received. Additionally, the frustrations experienced by the participants when background noises interrupted their interviews, may have negatively impacted their willingness to share expansively to avoid being on the call for an increased duration.

The results of this research study are limited, due to the data being obtained from a single university and from a limited sample size of students, which may impact its generalisability to other institutions.

#### **6.4. Personal reflection**

My time working as a student assistant and tutor in the psychology department of my former university served as the inspiration and spark for me to start my research adventure and investigate the subject of GBV. Being a student assistant at the psychology department pushed me to have a greater curiosity in students' everyday lives and to immerse myself in the conversation about campus life and the dynamics of being a university student. I started to realize there are many variables that may affect a student's overall academic success and capacity to present their best self in a university setting. Financial insecurity, difficulty adjusting to being away from home, a lack of social support, difficulty finding accommodations close to campuses, difficulty managing various responsibilities separate from the academic work, and students feeling unsafe on campus due to encountering discrimination and/or various forms of violence were some of these factors. It shocked me to learn about the level of violence that permeates that particular educational setting, and it piqued my curiosity regarding the issue of GBV crimes in educational contexts. In the past, I've always thought of South Africa as a violent nation, but I never connected such conduct to settings like universities. I made the decision to read up on various academic works that would give me a better understanding of the gravity and scope of the problem. The information I gained inspired me to look into ways in which I might be able to contribute to the body of literature and provide students a platform on which to share their experiences.

This research study challenged me to introspect on the pivotal role I would have to assume as the researcher of this study. In interpretive phenomenological research, the researcher's role is crucial since they instantly enter a two-stage hermeneutic cycle in which their personal assumptions and worldviews shape the interpretations and findings (Lien et al., 2014). I was pushed to recognize and admit my own prejudices, attitudes, cultural presumptions, demographic influences (race, age, gender, and nationality), and general life

experiences that may have affected my engagement in the research through personal counseling and ongoing reflection. Being a student, I knew there would be a variety of participant perspectives on situations that I would be able to relate to. One of the major difficulties was always having to remind myself that the quality of the research's findings is dependent on the diverse experiences of the participants, not of my own. Therefore, I had to remind myself of my responsibility as a researcher to try to distill the core of the participants' responses. I would challenge myself in personal therapy to focus on the potential triggers I could be going through whenever I did sense that my own prejudices and experiences were entangled with the tales of the participants. The advantages of ongoing reflection included being able to challenge my own ideas, seeing that the feelings evoked throughout this process may be connected to earlier life events, and being able to distinguish my experiences from those of the participants. The value of reflexivity helped me understand the duties of a researcher and embrace the obligation placed on me to make sure that the research study's integrity and quality are maintained throughout the whole process. (Berger, 2015).

The most difficult aspect of this research method was recruiting volunteers for the study. Due to Covid-19 limits and online learning, the first issue I became immediately aware of was the difficulties of physically accessing student populations on campus. As a result, placing my advertising around campus proved futile because the vast majority of students were taking lectures online. This pushed me to think of new strategies to reach the student population that fit the study's inclusion requirements. This entailed publicizing the research work on numerous social media sites. Through these internet platforms, I was able to obtain the required participants that fit the inclusion criteria of the research study. Another eye-opening experience for me was being able to recruit a substantial number of participants who met the inclusion criteria and demonstrated a strong interest in the research topic, but later withdrew from participation due to their discomfort with reliving or having to speak up about being subjected

to GBV violations. This event made me aware of the reality that many GBV victims may face when reporting such crimes to authority or even speaking out about their experiences. As a result, presenting a quick overview of potential GBV underreporting across the country and within a university environment (Swartz et al., 2017). As a result of reflecting on the reality of GBV underreporting, my motivation and zeal increased to complete this research study as a way of contributing to existing literature and as an implicit way of empowering students to feel confident enough to speak up about these societal issues and continue the conversation for those who have not yet gained the courage to add to the conversation. In addition, when I think on this research process, I believe the study has grown to embody and represent a highly significant and extremely personal experience defined by daring, risk, and progress.

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**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A:**

**Title:**

**[An exploration of student’s lived experiences of Gender-based violence (GBV) at a University in South Africa.]**

**WRITTEN CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (**participant name**), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

STATEMENT	AGREE	DISAGREE	NOT APPLICABLE
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and			
I understand that information collected during the study will not be linked to my identity and I give permission to the			
I understand that this study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance from Research Ethics Committee			
I understand who will have access to personal information and how the information will be stored with a clear			
I give consent that data gathered may be used for dissertation, article publication, conference presentations and writing			
I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.			
I consent to being audio recorded.			
I consent to being video recorded.			
I consent to having my photo taken.			

STATEMENT	AGREE	DISAGREE	NOT APPLICABLE
I consent to have my audio recordings /videos/photos be used in research outputs such as publication of articles, thesis and conferences as long as my identity is protected.			
I give permission to be quoted directly in the research publication whilst remaining anonymous.			
I have sufficient opportunity to ask questions and I agree to take part in the above study.			

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Kgothatso Mokitle  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person taking consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## APPENDIX B

### Interview guide:

- What were you most looking forward to about coming to university?
- What were your ideas about how campus life would be?
- Since you have been in university, have any of these ideas changed?
- Do you generally feel safe on campus?
- Can you please tell me about your ideas of what you think gender-based violence (GBV) is?
- Have you ever experienced this form of violence in a university context?
- If yes, did you report it to anyone?
- If no to question 6, are there any reasons for not reporting?
- What was the nature of the relationship you had with the perpetrator?
- How has experiencing this form of violence impacted you?
- What are your thoughts on the University's involvement around GBV issues?

## **APPENDIX C:**

### **Participant information sheet:**

**[An exploration of student's lived experiences of Gender-based violence (GBV) at a University in South Africa/Pretoria.]**

Hello, my name is.....Kgothatso Mokitle....., I am currently [a Master student] at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria. You are being invited to take part in my/our research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take some time to read the following information carefully, which will explain the details of this research project. Please feel free to ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?**

- The purpose of this study is to explore various factors that may be influencing the perpetuation of Gender-based violence in a university context. Specifically looking at the University of Pretoria. A few studies have been done on gender-based violence in South Africa, however, not much emphasis has been placed on university contexts in contemporary South Africa. Thus, I have decided to conduct a study that may contribute further knowledge and insight into the scope of this problem in South African universities regarding GBV
- The overall aim of this study is to explore factors that contribute to GBV in the University of Pretoria.

#### **WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?**

- You will be invited to participate because you are a registered University of Pretoria student.
- You have also complied with the requirement of having experiential knowledge of gender-based violence within the context of the University of Pretoria.

- You will be excluded if you are not a registered student at the University of Pretoria. So too if you have not experienced any forms of gender-based violence within a university context.

### **WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?**

- You will be expected to participate in an online or face-to-face contact-based interview. This interview will take approximately 45 minutes.

### **CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?**

- Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason, if you decide not to take part in the study without negative consequences or being penalized

### **WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

- Anonymity will be established using pseudonyms and confidentiality will be ensured by assigning code names/numbers to each participant, and that will be used in all research notes and documents. Findings from this data will be disseminated through conferences and publications. Reporting of findings will be anonymous, only the researchers of this study will have access to the raw data.
- ❖ Please note participant information will be kept confidential, except in cases where the researcher is legally obliged to report incidents such as abuse and suicide risk.

### **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

- There will be no direct benefit to you for participation in this study, however, the indirect benefit is that the information obtained may place the necessary awareness on the scope of gender-based violence issues in the University of Pretoria. The dissemination of the experiential knowledge of the University of Pretoria students

through the qualitative nature of this research may also speak to the reality of many other students within the university.

### **WHAT ARE THE ANTICIPATED RISKS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

- The possible risks in this study are that participants may experience re-traumatization or possible emotional discomfort when disclosing certain aspects of their experiences of gender-based violence. However, the measures to minimize these risks are a referral to a 24-7 Careline for support through the South African Anxiety and Depression Support Group (SADAG) will be made for the participants. This line is dedicated to students and is a toll-free service on 0800 747 747. The participants will also be welcome to send an SMS to 33123 and a Careline staff member will then contact them. This information will be provided to the participants before their interviews. Additionally, information about access to the campus counsellors will be made available to the participants. The information will detail that the participants will have to email [studentcounselling@up.ac.za](mailto:studentcounselling@up.ac.za), where they will send their student number, faculty, campus, and cell phone number, which will result in an online appointment being scheduled for the participant. A counsellor will call the participants back to find out more about the request for services.

### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT THAT SOME FORM OF DISCOMFORT OCCUR AS A RESULT OF TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?**

- Should you have the need for further discussions after the interviews an opportunity will be arranged for you. However, the measures to minimize these risks are a referral to a 24-7 Careline for support through the South African Anxiety and Depression Support Group (SADAG) will be made for the participants. This line is dedicated to students and is a toll-free service on 0800 747 747. The participants will also be welcome to send an SMS to 33123 and a Careline staff member will then contact them. This information will be provided to the participants before their interviews. Additionally, information about access to the campus counsellors will be made available to the participants. The information will detail that the participants will have to email [studentcounselling@up.ac.za](mailto:studentcounselling@up.ac.za), where they will send their student number,

faculty, campus, and cell phone number, which will result in an online appointment being scheduled for the participant. A counsellor will call the participants back to find out more about the request for services.

#### **HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?**

- Electronic information will be stored for period of 15 years on the departmental google drive. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.
- Participant information in hard copies of raw data will be locked in a cabinet and electronic data will be kept in a file that is password protected in the Department of Psychology

#### **WHAT WILL THE RESEARCH DATA BE USED FOR?**

Data gathered from the participant will be used for research purpose that include.

- Dissertation and article publication.
- For possible administration purpose or policy briefs.
- For further research inform of secondary data analysis.

#### **WILL I BE PAID TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

- NO, you will not be paid to take part in this study, but refreshments/lunch may be provided for the contact-based interviews.
- Travel expenses will be paid for the participants who must travel to the interview site. This means there will be no costs involved to you if you take part in this study.

#### **HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL**

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria. Ethical approval number is..... A copy of the approval letter can be provided to you on request.

#### **HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?**

- The findings of the research study will be shared with you by Kgothatso Mokitle after one year or two years of completing the study.

**WHO SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE CONCERN, COMPLAINT OR ANYTHING I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE STUDY?**

If you have questions about this study or you have experienced adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher (Kgothatso Mokitle) whose contact information is provided below. If you have questions regarding the rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the researcher, please contact the supervisor, on the contact details below

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and in advance for participating in this study.

**Researcher**

Name Surname...Kgothatso Mokitle.....

Contact number.....0822557402/ 0615044815.....

Email address...kgothatsomokitle77@gmail.com.....

**Supervisor**

Name.....Dr. Anathi Ntozini .....

Contact number.....0124202402.....

Email address.....anathi.ntozini@up.ac.za.....

MASTERS CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH  
DISSERTATION

**AN EXPLORATION OF STUDENTS' LIVED  
EXPERIENCES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)  
AT A UNIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA/PRETORIA.**

Hello! My name is Kgothatso Mokitle - a Clinical Psychology Masters student in the faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria. I am looking for registered university students who have experiential knowledge of gender-based violence within the university context.

Participants are required to have a good understanding of English in order to take part in the study.

You will be expected to participate in an interview with me, either in person or online.

**Participating in this study is  
voluntary**

Should you be interested in taking part in this study, please reply to the email address below indicating your interest.

Thereafter, I will send you a detailed information sheet about the study as well as a consent form.

**\*\*Please note that your participation and details will remain confidential.**

email address: kgothatsomokitle77@gmail.com

**Appendix D: Advertisement**

## Appendix E: Psychologist's letter

DR. KGAMADI KOMETSI  
BA Hons (Vista) MA Clin. Psych (UCT), Phd (Wits)  
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PR NO. 8642079

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09 June 2023

To whom it may concern

**RE: Confirmation of availability to conduct counselling sessions for research participants**

I hereby confirm that I was briefed by Kgothatso Mokitle on the research paper titled "An exploration students' lived experiences of Gender-based violence (GBV) at a South African University". I confirm my availability to debrief individuals who may have problems because of their involvement in this study.

It will be my pleasure to contribute to the study's overall purpose.

Kind regards

Signed



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Dr. Kgamadi Kometsi

Registered Clinical Psychologist

Independent practice

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