

An investigation of the dominant forms of gender-based violence in Maseru district, Lesotho

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ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive and pernicious social problem that hampers the socio-economic development of nations globally. In Lesotho, the pervasiveness of GBV is associated with patriarchy, and unequal social and economic power between males and females. The overall aim of this study was to establish the major forms of GBV in Lesotho. The study objectives were to: ascertain the social relationships of GBV perpetrators and survivors; establish the dominant forms of GBV perpetrated by men against women, in Maseru rural areas and find out the main forms of GBV perpetrated by men against women, in Maseru urban areas. Primary data were gleaned from a sample of 20 participants, using in-depth interviews. Hagan, Gillis and Simpson's (1985) power-control theory foregrounded the theoretical framework for this study. The study unearthed that the dominant forms of GBV in Maseru rural areas are rape, inclusive of marital rape, incest and concurrent sexual relationships. In Maseru urban areas, the dominant forms of GBV are rape, inclusive of marital rape, concurrent sexual relationships, death threats and femicide. I argue that forms of GBV in most societies are linked to relationships between perpetrators and victims, poverty as well as inherent and structural gender inequalities between males and females. The study recommends stiffer sentences as a deterrent measure for perpetrators and to curb recidivism; crafting and implementation of GBV mitigation strategies that target economic empowerment and harmful socially constructed norms.

Keywords: Gender-based violence, rape, femicide, incest, Maseru, Lesotho

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Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is persistent worldwide, inclusive of Lesotho. GBV is always accompanied with physical, social and economic harm. Gender-based violence and harm (GBVH) is a broad term that encompasses various forms of violence. GBVH is a term whose conceptualisation originates from the evolution of the definition of gender-based violence (GBV). GBV as a concept has developed rapidly in recent decades and how it is understood in the context of GBVH (WHO, 2021). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2020) defines GBVH as any acts perpetrated by either men or women that cause physical, mental, or sexual harm, suffering, threats of those acts, bullying and other violation of freedom and rights. This definition by the UNHCR (2020) is comprehensive since it covers broad forms of GBVH and cites victims as well as perpetrators. Furthermore, the WHO (2021) defines GBVH as any act of sexual, physical and psychological violence, committed by either family, community members or the State. From this definition, therefore, perpetrators of GBVH can be men or women that commit acts of abuse, targeting individuals, based on their gender or sex. GBV refers to any acts or threats of violence that are physical, social and psychological in nature, perpetrated on a person, based on their gender.

Although some scholars do not define GBV as harm, they acknowledge that GBV constitutes harm (Peterman et al., 2020; Neville et al., 2019; Rico, 1997). Such scholars have demonstrated how GBV is linked with harm. For instance, Peterman et al. (2020) illustrate the issue of harm in relation to survivors, citing that they currently face more harm in the context of increased exposure to COVID-19. With regard to children, Neville et al. (2020) elucidate that, GBV impacts children in that they incur harmful consequences that are detrimental to their physical and mental growth. As for intimate and former intimate partners, Neville et al.

(2020) observe that GBV causes psychological harm; hence mitigation strategies should not cause further harm to the survivors. Rico (1997) notes that most women who normalise GBVH tend to remain in exceptionally harmful relationships.

Globally, GBV is a pernicious social problem. In most patriarchal societies, issues around sexism, male hegemony, heteronormativity, normalised socially constructed gender roles and gender stereotypes contribute to the acceleration of GBV (Mkhize and Njawala, 2016). Thus, in patriarchal societies such as Basotho, GBV is attributed to similar issues, including social and economic imbalances between men and women. GBV occurs in intimate partner and non-partner relationships. Notably, debates concerning the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and social lives globally seem to draw a nexus between an unfortunate surge of GBV and the pandemic. Dhlamini (2021) highlights that, in South Africa, GBV has currently become a twin pandemic to COVID-19. Lesotho is listed as one of the places with the highest rates of sexual violence globally, (Nation Master, 2020). Sexual violence and rape are forms of GBV. GBV is prevalent in Lesotho and in the Maseru district in particular (Mabale, 2020; Nation Master, 2020). Studies with a particular focus on Lesotho remain scant.

It is the negative impacts and pervasiveness of GBV, as well as the lack of literature on this phenomenon in Lesotho that this study sought to answer the following research questions:

- i. How were gender-based violence perpetrators related to the survivors?
- ii. What are the dominant forms of gender-based violence, *perpetrated by men against women*, that occur in rural areas of the Maseru district?
- iii. What are the dominant forms of gender-based violence, *perpetrated by men against women*, that occur in urban areas

of the Maseru district?

Literature review

The literature illustrates that the most dominant forms of GBV are physical assault, rape and femicide (Sikweyiya et al., 2020; Mashiri, 2013; Jewkes et al., 2003). Rape culture “is perpetuated through the use of misogynistic language, the objectification of women's bodies” (Derrough, 2018: 6). The raping of females by male intimate and non-intimate partners is a social problem prevalent in other countries as well, for instance, South Africa (Jewkes et al., 2003); Canada (Derrough, 2018) and Zimbabwe (Mashiri, 2013)). Rape refers to engaging in a sexual encounter, utilising a sexual organ or an object, without the consent of the victim (Carbon, 2021). In other African countries, marital rape was found to be a dominant form of sexual abuse, for instance, in South Africa (Jewkes et al., 2003) and Zimbabwe (Mashiri, 2013). Thus, intimate-partner violence (IPV) is a form of GBV.

GBV is linked to gender inequalities between men and women. Mkhize and Njawala (2016) highlight that, males are seen as the superior gender and females as the inferior gender; hence males perpetrate sexual violence to exert their power over the inferior gender (females). This then confirms the power and control theory, which expounds that, some women cease to have autonomy over their reproductive health, due to abuse (Pence and Paymar, 1993). This is not only an issue confined to Lesotho, Mkhize and Njawala (2015) also confirm women's sexual inferiority and control of their sexuality and bodies by their (women) patriarchal husbands in most heterosexual marriages. These scholars' observation is in line with the power and control theory, which elucidates that, some women cease to have a voice over their reproductive health due to abuse (Pence and Paymar, 1993).

GBV is associated with unemployment, poverty and women's economic dependence on men, for instance, in Ghana (Sikweyiya, 2020); Zimbabwe, (Mashiri, 2013) and South Africa (Graaff, 2017). GBV is also caused by hegemonic masculinities, for instance having multiple sexual partners, as is a risk-taking behaviour associated with masculinity. Hegemonic assumptions of masculinity usually characterise real men as fearless, tough, strong, in control, breadwinners, sexually promiscuous and emotionally independent (Sikweyiya et al., 2020; Schippers, 2007; Connell, 1995). It is such masculinity that drives some men to physically and sexually abuse women, thereby engaging in GBVH. Literature confirms that most unemployed husbands use violence over their female intimate partners to assert their masculinities and patriarchal power (Sikweyiya et al., 2020; The literature review on GBV has revealed that studies with particular focus on Lesotho remain scant, a literature gap this current study seeks to close.

Theoretical framework

The power control theory foregrounds the theoretical framework for this study. This theory was found appropriate given that it seeks to gauge power relations within a family system as well as in patriarchal systems. Power-control theory is credited to Hagan Gillis and Simpson (1985) and it identifies power and control as the intention of abuse since victims' experiences consistently show that the behaviour of perpetrators is not accidental, but intentional and systematic. The power-control theory is a theory that specialises in explaining differences in men's and women's deviance (Bates, Bader and Mencken, 2003). Power-control theory forecasts that the association between gender and delinquency is more apparent in patriarchal than egalitarian families (Hanrahan,1996, Hagan, 1990, Hagan, Gillis and Simpson,1985). Power and control are difficult concepts to define,

measure and distinguish from each other but these concepts have always been central concepts to understanding intimate-partner violence (Wagers, Hamberger and Sellers, 2022). The presence of male power in the families and the absence of control of men create conditions of freedom that facilitate deviance given that fathers and sons in households experience freedom that allows violence against women to occur (Bates et al., 2003). Thus, power and control are fundamental concepts in the patriarchal family structure as well as in the relationships that exist between violent men and their battered (Cassidy, 1995). Power-control theory explains some of the reactions, or lack of reactions, toward battered women in relation to health workers, police, judiciary, lawmakers and also on the part of the victims and batterers themselves (Cassidy, 1995).

Research Methodology

This study conducted in-depth interviews with chiefs and police officers, GBV survivors and perpetrators, the sample size is 20. Taking a cue from Creswell (2013), I employed a case study research design for this cross-sectional study, which enabled me to gather relevant data using Lesotho's Maseru district as the study site. GBV survivors and perpetrators were asked to state the form or forms of abuse they experienced or perpetrated respectively. They were also asked to state the relationships with their perpetrators and victims respectively. Chiefs and police officers were asked to state the forms of abuse they solve within their jurisdiction at village courts and police stations, respectively. Kapa (2015) affirms that in Lesotho, chiefs are also found in urban areas. There are ten districts in Lesotho. Each district has many chiefs, given that a district is divided into villages and each village has a chief. There are numerous chiefs in Lesotho, approximately one per thousand citizens (Quilan, 1994). The in-depth interviews were conducted in 2019. Qualitative data were analysed utilising

thematic data analysis. Research ethics that I adhered to are debriefing, informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity. In order to ensure the anonymity of the participants, I did not use their real names. Instead, I used pseudo names. Furthermore, I ensured the participants' freedom to withdraw from the study without encountering any negative impact and seeking research permission from the gatekeepers of the four sets of participants.

Presentation of findings

The findings are presented placing focus on relationships between perpetrators of GBV and the victims. Furthermore, the findings place focus on dominant forms of GBV in rural areas as well as urban areas of Maseru district.

Relationships of perpetrators and survivors and other attributes

The majority of survivors are sexually abused by familiar people, as pointed out by Police Officer Morake, “Most of the women in Maseru are raped and sometimes killed by men they know, whom they stay with, in the same homes or village”. A similar finding was established in Canada, South Africa, Ghana and Zimbabwe by Derraugh (2018), Graaff (2017) and Sikweyiya (2020) and Mashiri (2013) respectively. Participants highlighted that; rape occurs within intimate-partner relationships. This was highlighted by Chief Molapo thus, “Some men rape their wives and girlfriends”. Some GBV survivors indicated that they were raped by strangers. For instance, Puleng, a survivor, pointed this out, “I was at the bar and when I went to the toilet, an unknown man attacked me and raped me”. Other survivors were raped by relatives, as highlighted by Chief Nthama, “It is a pity that some women are raped by their male relatives”. Likhabiso, a survivor, affirmed this by saying, “I was raped by my father at home”. Thus,

GBV occurs within homes, which are private spaces that are perceived as safe havens. Some females are also raped by male religious leaders who abuse their positions and their congregants' trust. Likhabiso, a survivor revealed this, "My pastor asked me to meet him at the river so that he prays for me to have a baby boy. When I met him there, he raped me".

The majority of the survivors of GBV were women of reproductive age, between 18 and 35 years. The argument advanced by this study is that rape and femicide, as dominant forms of GBV, are rooted in patriarchy, as well as economic and social power.

Dominant forms of gender-based violence in Maseru rural areas

Rape, as a form of GBV, is common in both intimate and non-intimate partner relationships in the Maseru district. According to the Lesotho sexual offences Act of 2003, rape is a sexual offence crime (GOL, 2003). The raping of several women by men, that takes place in Maseru rural area, illustrates the devaluing of women by men, as highlighted by Chief Mojalefa, "I have handled several rape cases in this village. Some of the women were raped by their husbands". Moipone, a survivor, affirmed the following, "My husband forces me to have sex with him when I am tired or angry at him". Furthermore, Police officer Morake stated this, "At this police station, we deal with a lot of rape cases. Some of the women are raped by their boyfriends and at times by their husbands, within their homes". In addition, chief Hlalele also echoed the same, saying, "Married women are raped by their husbands at night when the husbands come back home drunk or when the women refuse to have sex and the husbands force them saying that they paid bohali (bride price) for them". The fact that rape occurs within intimate-partner relationships suggests that

there is a rape culture in these rural communities.

Some women were raped by male non-intimate partners as clarified by Moroka, a perpetrator, “I raped a woman whom I did not know, who asked me to carry her luggage”. Chief Molapo had this to say, “I handle a lot of rape cases involving men who bear children for infertile men”. Furthermore, chief Hlalele highlighted this, “Most women are raped by strangers and it happens anytime during the day, when they go to work in the fields alone, especially when their children are at school or when they go to fetch water or go to bury other villagers. As you can see, people stay far away from each other, so when they shout, no one hears them”. Mapaku, Perpetrator stated, “I raped a woman outside the bar at night”. Police officer Tsosane added, “Some women are raped by strangers during the day. You know what; women walk for a long distance to fetch water down there or when they go to the clinics and churches, far away and there are no houses in between. At times, these women try to take shortcuts and such paths are not used by many people. Therefore, they are raped along the way”. Sometimes the perpetrators of rape are familiar to the victims. For instance, one of the survivors explained, “I was raped by my pastor whom I had approached to give me holy water to conceive a baby boy. This extract suggests that some perpetrators of rape are trusted people who abuse trust. Very few rape cases occurred at night. For instance, on rare occasions, some women were raped when walking from beer-drinking places and bus stops at night. This illustrates that rape cases occur in broad daylight, hence, with police visibility, this sexual offence may be curbed.

Research participants highlighted that some of the non-intimate partners' rape cases occur when fathers rape daughters and paternal uncles rape their nieces in situations where the extended family are staying together. This form of GBV is called incest. Incest occurs when people who are related by blood engage in sexual intercourse. For instance, Likhabiso, a survivor, was raped

by her father. She narrated the following, “Before the rape incident, my father was using very painful words to me each time I asked for some money from him for my upkeep. He used to say: 'Likhabiso, I am tired of hearing the words money, money, money from you. Do you think I work in a bank?’” Moreover, the manner in which the father was responding to his daughter was demeaning and it suggests that the father embodies notions of male supremacy, which is not acceptable. Likhabiso elaborated, “My father was trying to get back at my mother by tormenting me and through denying me fatherly support”. This finding is in congruence with Mackay (2015) who observed that some perpetrators physically and sexually abuse their children deliberately, so as to gain male-centred control of the female victims and survivors (the mothers). Correspondingly, the power and control theory highlights that abusive spouses use children, for instance, to relay messages to the other partner (Pence and Paymar, 1993; Mackay, 2015). Chief Molapo said, “I sometimes solve cases of fathers and uncles who rape their daughters and nieces and, in such cases, we take them to the police straight away for such men to be arrested”. Police Officer Morake added, “In this village, we handle incest cases too”. These rape cases cited above involving relatives reflect the pervasiveness of rape culture in the Maseru rural area.

One of the GBV cases that is peculiar involved two biologically related women who had sexual relations with the same man. This scenario is a unique case of intimate-partner violence, which this study regards as a form of GBV since one man was having sexual relations with his girlfriend and his girlfriend's daughter at the same time. Liteboho, a perpetrator explained this form of GBV thus, “Eeeeh (pondering) ... The abuse involved me; I was having sexual relations with a mother ... and her daughter at the same time. It was suggested by the mother who was unemployed. She did not want to lose me to other women”. This form of GBV is regarded as taboo in most, if not all, African cultures, including Basotho

society. Typically, most incidents that involve love triangles occur secretly with the partners trying by all means to conceal the relationships. Contrary, in this case, both the mother and the daughter were aware of what was taking place. This finding illustrates that females are sometimes abused by males due to a lack of economic power. Jewkes et al. (2003) highlight that women's economic dependence on men forces them to engage in unprotected sex thereby increasing their chances of contracting HIV and other STIs.

Dominant forms of gender-based violence Maseru urban areas

The raping of females by males is a common phenomenon in urban areas of Maseru district. Congruently, Brown et al. (2006) found that, rape was common in Maseru and Maputsoe districts of Lesotho. For the current study, rape was found prominent in urban areas, including marital rape. Puleng, a survivor, painstakingly narrated, “Since I was unemployed, I could not go away, even though my husband was always forcing me to have sex with him when he comes back from his nyatsi (girlfriend)”. Chief Nthama concurred with Puleng thus, “Most women who complain of being raped and at times harmed by their husbands, are those that are not working”. Letame, a survivor narrated this, “I was employed and my husband was unemployed. Most of the time that I asked my husband about looking for a job, he shouts, beat and forced himself on me to avoid such a topic”. Marital rape is a form of sexual abuse involving intimate partners that are married. I argue that rape is perpetrated by men who abuse their patriarchal, economic and sometimes physical power, and this demonstrates male supremacy.

Besides marital rape that is perpetrated by husbands in heterosexual marriages, rape is another form of GBV involving

non-intimate partners, which also occurs in the Maseru urban area. The current study established that some of the perpetrators of rape cases were survivors' male workmates, pastors, taxi drivers and money lenders. This is highlighted in the following excerpt. One of the perpetrators narrated this, "I lost my erection when I wanted to rape my workmate, but still, I was arrested". Adding his voice on this matter, chief Selialia affirmed, "Some women in my area are raped by their managers at work after being given jobs". Mamokete, a survivor narrated this, "On two occasions, I was touched on my breasts and buttocks, by my pastor and on both occasions, I had to run away. I was working at his house as a domestic worker". Police officer Maine added the following, "Some of the females working in Maseru urban area are raped by taxi drivers and money-lenders". The excerpts above suggest women's vulnerability to rape in Maseru's urban areas, with men being the perpetrators of this crime.

Apart from rape and marital rape, femicide, death threats and concurrent sexual relationships are dominant forms of GBV that are also perpetrated by men against women in Maseru urban areas. Chief Selialia narrated the following, "I sometimes solve cases involving the killing of girlfriends by boyfriends when they end the relationships. Just like rape cases, I take these matters to the police straight away". Moreover, Police Officer Selebalo had this to say, "A lot of men in this district have killed or threatened to kill their wives and girlfriends after catching them engaging in sexual relations with other men". Mohapi, a perpetrator confirmed the following, "I raped my neighbour after she reported me to my wife when she caught me cheating with someone who works with my wife. This neighbour reported me to the police for raping her and for threatening to kill her with my gun". Another confirmation came from Bofihla, a perpetrator, who reported this, "I shot and killed my girlfriend with a gun because she was refusing to marry me. She was saying that she has found another boyfriend". Some

men's tendency of killing women and using guns to threaten women after being rejected by women are forms of GBV that illustrate male entitlement. Evidently, these narratives illustrate that concurrent multiple sexual relationships are common in Maseru urban areas, with some of them becoming fatal.

In Maseru urban areas, men's concurrent sexual relationships with women were surrounded by HIV infection issues. Police officer Selebalo highlighted this finding thus, “Many women here have been infected with HIV by their promiscuous boyfriends and husbands and a lot of these women are infected with HIV by these men”. Puleng, a survivor, confirmed this, “My husband infected me with HIV since he was having many sexual partners”. This finding suggests that women in heterosexual marriages and relationships contract HIV from their promiscuous male partners and rape experiences; and Jewkes et al. (2003) expound that, this is common with unemployed women. Rape is a possible source of HIV infection (Jewkes et al., 2003). The GOL (2003) highlights that infecting someone with HIV during coercive sex is a form of sexual offence in Lesotho.

Discussion

Rape stood out as the most dominant form of sexual abuse in both rural and urban areas of Maseru district. This finding confirms results from a prior study conducted in the Maseru district by Brown et al. (2006), which illustrates the pervasiveness of this social problem. Furthermore, Marital rape is a prevalent intimate partner sexual violence in Maseru's rural and urban areas and it occurs in heterosexual marriages. This form of GBV also happens in other African patriarchal countries, such as Ghana (Sikweyiya et al., 2020); Zimbabwe (Mashiri, 2013, 2018) and South Africa (Jewkes et al., 2003). The raping of women in both geographic areas suggests that there is a rape culture in the Maseru district.

Rape culture is an environment in which rape is prevalent and in which GBV “is normalised and excused in the media and popular culture” (Derrrough, 2018: 6). Invariably, rape culture negatively impacts on women's sexuality and reproductive rights. This study argues that, rape culture is embedded in patriarchy, which is characterised by male dominance and social power. Wiesner-Hanks (2018) highlights that, patriarchy is a term derived from two Latin words that mean “father's rule”. Therefore, the power that some men wield and then abuse to commit rape is vested in patriarchy. The current study argues that, the prevalence of rape cases is linked to hegemonic masculinities enacted by men; and this conduct heightens women's chances of contracting HIV and other STIs.

The circumstances in which rape cases take place differ. For instance, some of the rape cases occur due to some cultural practices, as alluded by Mashiri (2013), in a study conducted in Zimbabwe. In Maseru rural areas, cultural practices associated with rape include a practice whereby some men are tasked by family members to bear children for infertile men. Another cultural practice is whereby a man who works far away from his home would assign another man to take care of his household duties, inclusive of sexual duties, even if the wife disapproves. These are unacceptable practices since they violate women's sexual rights. Another cultural practice interlinked to marital rape entails the bride price. In Maseru's rural areas, some men use the bride price concept as an excuse to rape their wives as highlighted by several participants. Since payment of *bohali* (bride price) is a cultural practice linked to patriarchy; this epitomises how culture is used by some men who believe they are superior to women, to justify marital rape. The three cultural practices occur at night and they are linked to GBV, specifically rape. This resonates with the notion that GBV is linked to cultural practices (Mashiri, 2013).

Participants highlighted that all forms of rape cases associated with the above three cultural practices involve men who share homes or communities with the victims. Anderson et al. (2008) perceive that male supremacy heightens females' vulnerabilities to GBV. Thus, some women are raped by men who are familiar to them. Similarly, in a study conducted in Leribe district of Lesotho, Hapazari (2020) observed that girls staying in female-headed families encounter a lot of challenges and are vulnerable to sexual abuse by men. These three cultural practices are typical forms of GBV since participants alluded to the fact that, the wives have no input in these arrangements. Some participants blamed the prevalence of rape cases on the manner in which Maseru district rural households are located, arguing that it poses a huge challenge to women. This cannot be a central issue since blame should be apportioned to male perpetrators of rape who ought to reform their ways of thinking. In a society that is rid of a culture of rape, women should enjoy freedom of movement within their communities without any fear of being raped by men. In rural areas, some women were raped while performing some duties in locations that are isolated and away from their homes. These duties include working in the fields, fetching firewood and attending burials. These duties are specifically performed by women; hence, they are normative gender roles in patriarchal societies such as Lesotho. In any society, normative roles are aligned with gender and culture.

Incest is a dominant form of GBV in Maseru's rural areas. Incest is a form of rape or sexual assault, perpetuated by the victim's blood relatives. Men's raping of daughters or nieces reflects not only the sexual exploitation of women but also a weakened moral campus within any given society. It also reflects the prevalence of anomie in society. Anomie refers to “a social situation characterised by an absence of social norms or one where the norms are unclear, conflicting or unintegrated” (Harvey, 2020: 12). Furthermore, the commission of incest by some men demonstrates misplaced

gender roles, where men abandon their usual breadwinner and protector roles, turning into child sexual molesters or paedophilia. The commission of incest is conduct that does not constitute normative gender roles for men.

The concurrent sexual relationships taking place in Maseru rural and urban areas demonstrate that GBV involving sexual abuse is associated with lack of economic power for women, whereby women who economically depend on men endure sexual abuse by men. Furthermore, such sexual relationships illustrate women's vulnerability to HIV infection by men in the Maseru district. The GOL (2003) highlights that engaging in sexual activity with someone, where the perpetrator knows or suspects that he or she has a sexually transmitted infection without disclosing it to the victim is a form of sexual offence. However, some sexual perpetrators intentionally get involved in rape just to spread sexual transmittable diseases (STIs) such as HIV, and syphilis to vulnerable females, which is risk-taking behaviour. The finding on married women who were infected with HIV by their promiscuous husbands demonstrates female victimisation by men. It also reveals women's failure to negotiate safe sex in heterosexual relationships. This finding is not peculiar to Lesotho, since other studies also reveal that, unemployed women get infected with HIV by men due to failure to negotiate safe sex (Mashiri, 2013; Jewkes et al., 2003). The killing of women by men who fail to accept rejection is a dominant form of GBV in Maseru urban areas. This form of GBV illustrates objectification of women by men. Femicide also reveals men's tendency of perceiving women as their possessions or male entitlement, which is an unacceptable conduct, which violates women's right to life.

Conclusion

The study focused on gender-based violence perpetrated on

women by men, also called violence against women. The dominant forms of GBV in Maseru rural are sexual violence, specifically rape, inclusive of marital rape. Another dominant form of GBV rife in rural areas of Lesotho is incest. Incest is a form of sexual assault that is perpetuated by the victim's blood relatives. Victims of incest can either be males or females, the same as the perpetrators. In this study, victims of incest were females, with males as perpetrators, signifying social and physical gender inequalities between genders. The current study argues that rape and incest are forms of sexual violence that illustrate how some men indiscriminately dominate and control women's sexuality and bodies. The raping of females by male intimate and non-intimate partners is a social problem prevalent in both rural and urban areas. Some of the rape cases involve intimate partners, for instance, marital rape. In Maseru's urban area, the dominant forms of sexual violence include husbands who engaged in marital rape and also infect their wives with HIV. Thus, rape is a dominant form of GBV crime in Lesotho. Femicide is one of the forms of GBV common in Maseru urban areas and it illustrates the objectification of women by men. These dominant forms of GBV are perpetrated by strangers and also people who are familiar to the victims. The study recommends GBV mitigation strategies that facilitate economic empowerment and a shift in mindsets regarding harmful socially constructed norms and gender roles within the Basotho society.

Recommendations

- There ought to be more shelters to accommodate women experiencing GBV within their homes. This form of support mechanism facilitates help-seeking among vulnerable women in both rural and urban areas to prevent the fatal consequences of GBV.
- A wider range of appropriate services should be provided to victims and survivors of GBV. These services could include counselling-based interventions such as individual

counselling, and family and marriage counselling.

- To reduce women's dependence on men, economic empowerment programmes are needed for women. This will lift women from poverty and eventually from vulnerability to GBV.
- Lawmakers should consider applying stiffer sentences to perpetrators of GBV crimes.
- Findings of research on GBV ought to be availed to professionals who work directly with GBV victims and survivors in order to equip these professionals with knowledge relating to recent developments on GBV locally. This will help them to design appropriate GBV mitigation strategies, especially those that focus on harmful socially constructed norms and gender roles.

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