TITLE

Exploring the Impact of Exposure to Domestic Abuse and Gender-Based Violence on Youth in critical demographic and socio-cultural contexts: A Criminological Analysis and Intervention Framework.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the intricate implications of domestic abuse and gender-based violence on youth within specific demographic and socio-cultural contexts from a criminological standpoint. It addresses the global challenge, recognizing the unique vulnerabilities of youth in these dynamics. Leveraging criminological theories, the research aims to unravel the dimensions of victimization, perpetration, and societal influences.

Objectives include comprehensive analysis, identification of demographic factors, and the development of a tailored intervention framework. The methodology integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches, revealing diverse implications on youth. The proposed intervention framework addresses intricacies within varying demographics and socio-cultural landscapes.

Recommendations focus on collaborative approaches involving communities, law enforcement, and support organizations. This research contributes to criminological understanding, providing a tailored intervention framework for the unique challenges faced by youth. Findings and recommendations aim to inform policy, practice, and future research, fostering a more effective response to this societal issue.

KEYWORDS:

Domestic abuse; Gender-based violence; Youth; Criminological perspective; Demographic factors; Socio-cultural influences; Victimization; Perpetration; Intervention framework; Criminological theories

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I. INTRODUCTION

Domestic abuse and gender-based violence constitute pervasive societal challenges, exerting profound impacts on individuals and communities globally. Amidst these complexities, a particularly vulnerable demographic emerges—the youth, whose experiences are influenced by intricate interplays of demographics and socio-cultural contexts. This research endeavors to unravel the intricate web of implications arising from exposure to domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth within specific demographic and socio-cultural settings. Embracing a criminological perspective, the study seeks to navigate the multifaceted dimensions of victimization, perpetration, and societal influences.

A. BACKGROUND

i. Definition and scope of domestic abuse and gender-based violence

The United Nations defines Domestic Abuse (also called "domestic violence" or "intimate partner violence") as: “a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. It can occur within a range of relationships including couples who are married, living together or dating. Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels.” (United Nations)

In the South African context, defining and understanding domestic abuse and gender-based violence is crucial due to the unique socio-cultural landscape and the prevalence of these issues in the country. For the purpose of this study, *domestic abuse* refers to the patterns of behavior in intimate relationships used to maintain power and control, encompassing physical, psychological, economic, and emotional abuse. *Gender-based violence* (GBV) includes any harmful act directed at an individual based on their gender, which can occur in both public and private settings. The United Nations definition aptly captures the multifaceted nature of

domestic abuse, encompassing physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and psychological actions or threats within intimate relationships.

Youth are often both witnesses and potential victims or perpetrators of domestic abuse and gender-based violence due to their vulnerable and impressionable stage of development. The severity of this problem necessitates a focused examination that recognizes and considers the distinct challenges faced by South African youth within diverse societal frameworks.

South Africa's historical and cultural contexts, marked by apartheid's legacy and ongoing socio-economic disparities, add layers of complexity to the understanding of domestic abuse. The impact of these issues is not uniform across different communities, and cultural norms can either exacerbate or mitigate the prevalence of domestic abuse and gender-based violence.

For South African youth, exposure to domestic abuse can have profound and lasting effects on their development, shaping their attitudes, behaviors, and future relationships. It is essential to consider the nuances of cultural dynamics, such as traditional gender roles and community norms, which can influence the perpetuation or prevention of domestic abuse.

This research, within a South African perspective, seeks to delve into the intricate intersections of domestic abuse and gender-based violence, with a specific focus on youth. By understanding the unique challenges faced by South African youth and considering the socio-cultural factors at play, the research aims to contribute to the development of targeted interventions that address the specific needs of this demographic. Ultimately, the goal is to foster healthier societal norms, creating a safer and more supportive environment for the youth in South Africa.

ii. Significance of focusing on youth

Centering around youth is essential, particularly in South Africa, where domestic abuse and gender-based violence are prevalent issues. The country's diverse culture, historical inequalities, and economic disparities make young people particularly vulnerable to these

problems. Understanding how these issues affect youth is crucial due to their developmental stages and susceptibility to external influences.

South African youth go through pivotal stages of development, and exposure to domestic abuse during these times can have long-lasting effects on their well-being, shaping their attitudes and behaviors. The country's varied cultural landscape also plays a role, with different communities having unique norms that can either exacerbate or mitigate domestic abuse and gender-based violence.

Considering South Africa's history of apartheid and ongoing inequality challenges, an intersectional approach is crucial. Factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and geographical location intersect with gender, influencing how youth experience domestic abuse and gender-based violence.

Focusing on youth in this research is not only about understanding their experiences but also recognizing the potential for long-term societal impact. By addressing these issues early on, interventions can break the cycle of violence, influencing future generations and promoting a culture of respect and equality. Crafting effective interventions for South African youth requires a nuanced understanding of their specific needs within the broader socio-cultural context. This research aims to contribute both academically and practically to addressing the complex dynamics of domestic abuse and gender-based violence in South Africa, ultimately striving for a safer and fairer society for the nation's youth.

iii. Rationale for a criminological analysis

The choice of employing a criminological analysis in this research stems from the recognition that criminology provides a comprehensive framework to unravel the intricacies inherent in domestic abuse and gender-based violence. Particularly within the South African context, where these issues are not only prevalent but deeply intertwined with historical and socio-cultural factors, a criminological lens proves invaluable.

Criminological perspectives, including strain theory, social learning theory, and routine activity theory, offer a multifaceted approach.

Strain theory enables the exploration of societal pressures and inequalities that may contribute to the perpetration of violence or victimization. In a country like South Africa, grappling with historical disparities and ongoing economic challenges, understanding how strains manifest and potentially lead to domestic abuse becomes essential.

Social learning theory, within the criminological context, illuminates the role of socialization and cultural norms in shaping behaviors. Considering the diverse cultural landscape of South Africa, where different communities may hold varying attitudes towards gender roles and interpersonal relationships, this perspective becomes crucial. It allows for a nuanced examination of how cultural dynamics may either mitigate or exacerbate domestic abuse and gender-based violence.

In adopting a criminological lens, this research not only scrutinizes individual behaviors but also considers the broader societal and systemic influences contributing to the complexities of domestic abuse and gender-based violence. This approach is especially pertinent in South Africa, where the historical context, cultural diversity, and socio-economic disparities create a unique backdrop for understanding and addressing these issues. By applying criminological perspectives within a South African framework, the research aims to offer a nuanced and comprehensive understanding, paving the way for targeted and effective interventions that consider the specific contextual factors at play in the country.

B. THESIS STATEMENT

The current research endeavors to thoroughly examine the diverse implications of domestic abuse and gender-based violence on youth within specific demographic and socio-cultural contexts. Employing a criminological perspective and incorporating multivaried analysis, this study aims to delve into the intricate intersections of victimization, perpetration, and societal influences. By adopting this comprehensive approach, the research aims to gain a more nuanced understanding, paving the way for the development of an effective

intervention framework that considers the various factors contributing to the complexities of domestic abuse and gender-based violence.

C. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The objectives of this research are central to understanding the complex relationship between domestic abuse, gender-based violence, and youth, particularly within diverse demographic and socio-cultural contexts. These objectives are designed to not only explore the nature of victimization and perpetration but also to provide actionable insights into prevention and intervention efforts. This section elaborates on the three core objectives, highlighting the significance of each within the context of criminological research and intervention strategies.

i. Comprehensive Analysis of the Impact of Domestic Abuse and Gender-Based Violence on Youth

The first objective is to conduct a thorough analysis of the impact of domestic abuse and gender-based violence on youth. This analysis will examine both the individual and collective experiences of youth, recognizing that their exposure to violence can have long-lasting effects on their development, mental health, and social relationships. The research will delve into how domestic abuse and gender-based violence affect different aspects of youth's lives, including their emotional well-being, educational outcomes, and future relationship patterns.

This objective recognizes the intersectionality of experiences, as youth from marginalized groups, including those from low-income backgrounds, minority ethnic communities, or rural settings, may experience different types of violence and may be impacted in varied ways. For instance, studies in South Africa have shown that youth from communities with high levels of poverty and social inequality are at a greater risk of experiencing domestic violence and may suffer from higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and substance abuse (Jewkes et al., 2010; Moffitt, 2013). By incorporating both victimization and perpetration into the analysis, this research will explore

how exposure to violence not only harms youth directly but also may lead them to reproduce violent behaviors in their own relationships, creating a cycle of violence.

Additionally, this objective seeks to highlight the long-term consequences of such violence. Research has indicated that exposure to domestic abuse during adolescence can lead to negative outcomes in adulthood, including difficulties in forming healthy relationships, an increased risk of substance misuse, and engagement in criminal behavior (Fagan, 2005). This objective will, therefore, extend beyond immediate impacts, offering a longitudinal perspective on how early exposure to violence shapes future life trajectories.

ii. Identification of Critical Demographic and Socio-Cultural Factors

The second objective focuses on identifying and analyzing the critical demographic and socio-cultural factors that contribute to patterns of victimization and perpetration among youth. This objective seeks to unpack the intricate dynamics that influence how different groups of youth experience and respond to domestic abuse and gender-based violence.

By identifying specific demographic variables, such as age, gender, socio-economic status, and ethnic background, the research will uncover patterns that explain why certain groups are more vulnerable to victimization or more likely to engage in perpetration. For example, gender plays a significant role in shaping experiences of violence, with research showing that young girls are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse, while boys may be more likely to internalize and replicate violent behaviors they observe (Fulu et al., 2017). Moreover, cultural norms around masculinity and femininity in certain communities may perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes that either excuse violence or discourage reporting (Lynch et al., 2014).

In the South African context, socio-cultural factors such as patriarchy, traditional beliefs, and the legacy of apartheid further complicate these dynamics. For example, some research has indicated that in areas where traditional gender roles are strictly enforced, there may be higher levels of acceptance of domestic violence (Pelser, 2018). The intersection of these demographic factors with socio-cultural dynamics will provide a rich, context-specific

understanding of how domestic abuse and gender-based violence are experienced and perpetuated among youth.

Furthermore, the study will explore how community-level factors, such as access to education, economic opportunities, and healthcare, influence the prevalence of violence. Understanding these factors is essential for designing targeted interventions that address the root causes of violence, rather than just its symptoms.

iii. Development of an Intervention Framework Grounded in Criminological Insights

The third objective is to develop a comprehensive intervention framework grounded in criminological insights, tailored to specific demographic and socio-cultural contexts. Drawing from the theoretical perspectives of Strain Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Routine Activity Theory, this framework aims to provide actionable strategies for preventing and addressing domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth.

One of the key components of this objective is the contextualization of interventions. The research will develop strategies that take into account the unique needs and challenges of different youth populations. For example, in communities with high levels of poverty and unemployment, economic empowerment programs may be essential to reducing the strain that leads to violence. In areas where patriarchal norms are deeply entrenched, gender sensitization programs that challenge harmful gender stereotypes may be more effective.

The framework will emphasize a multi-faceted approach to intervention, combining policy recommendations, community-based programs, and educational initiatives. For example, school-based programs that teach youth about healthy relationships, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation have been shown to be effective in reducing rates of violence among adolescents (Smith et al., 2015). Additionally, community policing and safe spaces for youth can help to create environments where they feel supported and protected, reducing opportunities for victimization and perpetration.

Crucially, the intervention framework will be informed by evidence-based practices from both local and international contexts, adapting successful models to fit the socio-cultural

realities of youth in South Africa. For example, restorative justice practices, which focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment, may be particularly effective in addressing youth violence, as they encourage accountability and empathy (Skelton & Batley, 2006).

The implementation of these interventions will also focus on fostering collaborative partnerships between government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), schools, and community leaders. By involving a diverse range of stakeholders, the research aims to create a sustainable framework that can be scaled and adapted to different communities across South Africa and potentially other similar contexts.

The objectives of this research are designed to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth. By exploring the impact of these issues through a nuanced, context-specific lens, identifying key demographic and socio-cultural factors, and developing an intervention framework tailored to the realities of youth in different contexts, this research aims to contribute meaningfully to the prevention and mitigation of violence. Ultimately, it is hoped that the findings will inform policy and practice, leading to more effective interventions that can disrupt cycles of violence and support youth in building healthier, more resilient futures.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. CRIMINOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

The criminological framework of this research draws on three key theoretical perspectives to illuminate the dynamics of domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth. First, the Strain Theory posits that societal pressures and inadequate coping mechanisms may lead individuals, particularly youth, to engage in deviant behavior, including perpetrating violence or becoming victims. Second, the Social Learning Theory underscores the role of observational learning and the transmission of violent behaviors within social networks, emphasizing the influence of family, peers, and community. Third, the Routine Activity Theory contributes by examining the daily activities and patterns of individuals, identifying opportunities for victimization and perpetration within the context of domestic relationships. This synthesis of criminological perspectives provides a comprehensive lens through which to understand the complex interplay of factors contributing to domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth.

i. Strain theory

Strain Theory, developed by Robert K. Merton, serves as a conceptual framework for understanding how societal strains and discrepancies between societal goals and available means can contribute to deviant behavior (Merton, 1938). In the South African context, where high levels of unemployment, poverty, and inequality persist, this theory is particularly relevant. Many youths face immense pressures to succeed academically and socially, often set against a backdrop of limited economic opportunities and unstable family environments (Wassenaar et al., 2021).

For instance, youth from marginalized communities may experience a significant disjunction between their aspirations—such as obtaining an education or achieving financial stability—and the legitimate means available to them. This gap can foster feelings of frustration, helplessness, and anger, which may manifest as aggressive or violent behaviors. Research indicates that the strain caused by socio-economic disadvantages can lead to increased rates of domestic violence, as individuals may resort to violence as a coping

mechanism (Agnew, 1992). In South Africa, where gender-based violence is a pervasive issue, this theoretical lens helps illuminate how systemic inequalities contribute to cycles of violence, underscoring the importance of addressing these broader social inequalities to mitigate their impact on youth.

ii. Social learning theory

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling (Bandura, 1977). This perspective is particularly significant in understanding the transmission of violent behaviors in the context of domestic abuse and gender-based violence. In South Africa, where exposure to violence is alarmingly high, youth may learn and internalize aggressive behaviors from their immediate environments, including family dynamics, peer interactions, and media portrayals of violence (Mkhize, 2020).

For instance, children who witness domestic violence at home may perceive such behaviors as normative and acceptable methods for conflict resolution. Studies have shown that youth who grow up in violent households are more likely to perpetrate or become victims of violence themselves, perpetuating a cycle of abuse (Gonzalez et al., 2010). Furthermore, societal factors, such as traditional gender roles that normalize male aggression and female submissiveness, can influence how youth interpret and model behaviors within their communities. Understanding these social learning mechanisms is crucial for developing targeted interventions that promote non-violent conflict resolution and challenge harmful norms, particularly in the diverse socio-cultural contexts of South Africa.

iii. Routine activity theory

Routine Activity Theory, developed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson, focuses on the convergence of three elements—motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardianship—leading to criminal incidents (Cohen & Felson, 1979). In the context of youth experiencing domestic abuse and gender-based violence, this theory provides a lens through which to examine the routine activities and environments that may expose them to victimization or perpetration.

In South Africa, where many youth experience unsupervised time after school or live in high-crime neighborhoods, the conditions described by Routine Activity Theory become particularly relevant. The absence of capable guardianship—such as engaged parents, mentors, or community programs—can increase the likelihood of youth becoming involved in violent situations, either as victims or perpetrators (Wessels & Theron, 2020). For instance, when youth lack supervision during vulnerable hours or reside in unsafe environments, they may be more susceptible to being drawn into cycles of violence or abuse. Identifying these routine activities is crucial for tailoring interventions to specific circumstances, such as establishing after-school programs or community policing initiatives aimed at enhancing safety and support for at-risk youth.

Integrating Strain Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Routine Activity Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted dynamics of domestic abuse and gender-based violence among South African youth. These theories allow for an exploration of how societal pressures, learned behaviors, and routine activities intersect to create environments conducive to violence. By applying this theoretical lens, this research aims to deepen the understanding of the unique challenges faced by youth in South Africa, ultimately informing targeted prevention and intervention strategies that address the complex interplay of individual, social, and environmental factors influencing their experiences.

B. INTERSECTIONALITY

While not a standalone criminological theory, intersectionality, a framework developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, provides a powerful lens for understanding how multiple social identities—such as race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, and more—interact to shape individual experiences and access to resources. In the context of domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth, intersectionality is crucial for capturing the nuanced ways in which these identities intersect to influence the nature, extent, and impact of violence. This concept moves beyond viewing individuals as belonging to single, isolated categories and instead acknowledges the complex and interconnected nature of their lived experiences.

Understanding Intersectional Vulnerabilities: The literature on intersectionality underscores that the impact of domestic abuse and gender-based violence is not uniform but varies significantly across different groups due to intersecting forms of oppression and privilege. For example, a young person who identifies as a Black female may experience domestic abuse differently from a white male counterpart due to the combined effects of racism and sexism. Youth from marginalized communities—such as those who are LGBTQ+, disabled, or from lower socioeconomic backgrounds—often face compounded vulnerabilities that can increase their risk of experiencing violence and reduce their access to resources and support systems.

These compounded vulnerabilities are often rooted in systemic inequalities, such as structural racism, economic disparities, and social stigma. For instance, youth of color may encounter discrimination within legal, educational, and healthcare systems, which can exacerbate their exposure to violence or hinder their ability to seek help. LGBTQ+ youth may face additional challenges, such as rejection from family or peers, which can lead to isolation and increased vulnerability to domestic violence. Similarly, youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may lack access to safe housing, healthcare, or legal protection, further entrenching the cycle of abuse.

Intersectional Analysis in Research: Research that incorporates intersectional analyses reveals specific challenges faced by diverse youth populations that are often overlooked in studies that adopt a one-dimensional approach. For example, studies have shown that the stigma and discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ youth not only increase their risk of victimization but also affect the likelihood of them reporting abuse or accessing supportive services. Additionally, intersectional research highlights that young girls of color are disproportionately affected by harsher punitive measures in schools and the juvenile justice system, which can be linked to underlying biases that criminalize their responses to violence, such as self-defense or behavioral reactions to trauma.

Intersectional approaches in research enable a deeper understanding of how social identities shape the pathways into and out of violence. They help to identify gaps in existing services and support structures, pointing to the need for culturally competent and inclusive

interventions that address the unique needs of various groups. For example, intersectional research has highlighted the importance of creating support programs that are not only sensitive to gender but also to race, culture, and sexuality, ensuring that youth receive appropriate and effective care that resonates with their specific contexts.

Implications for Interventions and Policy: The integration of intersectionality into the study of domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth has important implications for the development of interventions and policy. It emphasizes the need for a holistic approach that considers the full spectrum of an individual's identity and experiences rather than applying one-size-fits-all solutions. Interventions should be tailored to address the specific barriers that different groups face, such as language accessibility for immigrant youth, culturally relevant resources for Indigenous youth, or targeted outreach for LGBTQ+ youth.

Policies should also reflect an understanding of intersectionality by promoting inclusive practices that account for the diversity of youth experiences. This may involve training service providers, law enforcement, and educators on intersectional awareness, ensuring that they can recognize and appropriately respond to the diverse needs of youth experiencing domestic abuse and gender-based violence. Additionally, there is a need for advocacy to address systemic inequities that contribute to the perpetuation of violence, such as pushing for policy changes that address income inequality, discrimination, and access to mental health services.

Intersectionality is a critical framework for unpacking the complexities of domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how intersecting identities shape experiences of violence. By acknowledging and addressing the unique challenges faced by diverse youth populations, intersectional analyses pave the way for more effective, equitable, and inclusive approaches to prevention and intervention. This review underscores the importance of adopting intersectional approaches in both research and practice, as they are essential for capturing the full scope of youth experiences and fostering environments that support the safety and well-being of all young people.

C. APPLICATION TO DOMESTIC ABUSE AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AMONG YOUTH

Applying the selected criminological theories—Strain Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Routine Activity Theory—to the realm of domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth illuminates the intricate mechanisms influencing victimization and perpetration within this demographic. By examining how these theories intersect and apply within the South African context, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dimensions of violence affecting youth.

Strain Theory facilitates an exploration of the external pressures and societal strains that may contribute to deviant behaviors, shedding light on the complex factors leading to youth engagement in harmful actions. In South Africa, youth experience various strains, including poverty, unemployment, and family instability, all of which are exacerbated by a history of socio-economic inequality and racial discrimination (Lund & Gouws, 2021).

These societal pressures can lead to feelings of frustration and helplessness, driving some youth to either perpetrate violence as an expression of anger or become victims of domestic abuse themselves. Research indicates that economic strain can result in increased rates of aggression among youth, especially when coupled with limited coping mechanisms (Patterson et al., 2019). For instance, youth from low-income households may struggle with unmet aspirations, leading them to view violence as a viable means of asserting control or obtaining resources. This perspective emphasizes the importance of addressing broader structural inequalities and providing youth with supportive environments that can mitigate the effects of these strains.

Social Learning Theory emphasizes the role of observational learning and modeling in the acquisition of behavior, highlighting how youth may adopt violent behaviors from their immediate social environments, including family, peers, and media influences (Bandura, 1977). In a South African context where violence is often normalized within homes and communities, this theory becomes particularly relevant.

Studies have shown that youth exposed to domestic violence are more likely to adopt similar aggressive behaviors in their own relationships (McGee et al., 2011). For example, if young individuals observe a parent using violence as a means of conflict resolution, they may internalize this behavior as acceptable or effective (Finkelhor et al., 2009). Furthermore, peer dynamics can reinforce these patterns, where youth may feel pressured to conform to violent norms or engage in retaliatory behavior as a means of maintaining social standing. The proliferation of violent imagery in media can further exacerbate this issue, normalizing aggression as a method of resolving disputes. Understanding these social learning mechanisms is crucial for developing targeted prevention programs that challenge these learned behaviors and promote non-violent conflict resolution strategies.

Routine Activity Theory provides a framework for examining the daily activities and environments that may expose youth to victimization or perpetration of violence. This theory posits that crime occurs when three elements converge: motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardianship (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

In the context of domestic abuse and gender-based violence, many South African youth experience routine activities that increase their vulnerability. For example, youth who lack supervision after school or reside in high-crime neighborhoods may be more susceptible to both victimization and engagement in violent acts (Wessels & Theron, 2020). The absence of protective guardianship—such as engaged caregivers or supportive community structures—can lead to increased opportunities for violence to occur.

Additionally, youth may encounter situations where they feel compelled to engage in violence as a means of self-defense or to assert dominance in peer interactions. By identifying the routine activities and environments that contribute to these dynamics, community programs can be developed to enhance supervision, foster safe spaces, and reduce opportunities for violence.

Integrating intersectionality into this analysis ensures a nuanced understanding of how various social identities—such as race, gender, socio-economic status, and geographic location—converge to shape youth experiences of domestic abuse and gender-based violence.

For example, black female youth in South Africa may face unique challenges related to both gender-based violence and systemic racism, affecting their likelihood of victimization and access to support services (Pillay, 2020).

Recognizing the intersectional nature of these experiences is crucial for developing tailored interventions that address the specific needs of diverse youth populations. For instance, programs aimed at empowering young women must consider not only gender dynamics but also the socio-economic barriers that may limit their ability to seek help or access resources (Chigunta, 2021). By applying an intersectional lens, this research can more effectively unravel the complex layers of victimization and perpetration, ensuring that interventions are sensitive to the diverse realities faced by South African youth.

By applying Strain Theory, Social Learning Theory, Routine Activity Theory, and an intersectional framework to the study of domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth, this research aims to unravel the multifaceted dimensions of victimization, perpetration, and societal influences. This comprehensive approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in these issues, ultimately informing the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies that can better support the needs and experiences of youth in South Africa.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The exploration of domestic abuse and gender-based violence within the academic realm has been extensive, highlighting the pervasive nature and far-reaching consequences of these issues. However, the specific examination of their implications on youth within varied demographic and socio-cultural contexts, especially within the context of South Africa, remains an area that requires deeper exploration. The existing literature provides a foundational understanding of the broader issues, but a more targeted approach is needed to address the complexities of youth experiences and to develop effective intervention strategies.

A. OVERVIEW OF DOMESTIC ABUSE AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The overview of domestic abuse and gender-based violence acknowledges extensive studies revealing their complex nature and wide-ranging impacts on individuals and communities. This understanding is particularly crucial in the South African context, where historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors contribute to the prevalence of these issues.

In South Africa, the historical legacy of apartheid and ongoing economic challenges shape the manifestation of domestic abuse. It's vital to consider not only physical violence but also the subtler impacts of psychological and economic abuse within the diverse societal structures of the country.

The South African perspective introduces additional layers of complexity, including cultural dynamics influenced by the country's rich diversity. Different communities have unique norms, influencing the dynamics of gender-based violence.

Given the urgency of addressing domestic abuse and gender-based violence in South Africa, the research focuses on youth, recognizing their critical developmental stage in a society dealing with historical challenges. This overview establishes the foundation for exploring the unique implications on youth and aims to contribute both to academic

understanding and the development of interventions tailored to the specific needs of South African youth within their societal context.

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS IN CRIMINOLOGY

Criminological theories offer crucial insights into the complex landscape of domestic abuse and gender-based violence, particularly when analyzing how these issues impact youth. These theories not only help identify the underlying causes of such behaviors but also provide a structured way to approach prevention and intervention efforts. In the South African context, where historical and socio-economic factors uniquely shape experiences of violence, applying these theoretical frameworks can yield valuable insights into the realities faced by youth.

Strain theory, originally developed by Robert K. Merton, posits that deviant behavior, including violence, can arise when individuals experience a disjunction between culturally valued goals and the legitimate means available to achieve them (Merton, 1938). In South Africa, systemic inequalities, high unemployment rates, and widespread poverty create a context where many youths encounter significant barriers to achieving societal expectations such as educational success and economic stability.

For instance, research indicates that South African youth from impoverished backgrounds often experience immense pressure to succeed in a society that equates success with material wealth and status. These pressures can lead to feelings of frustration, helplessness, and anger—emotions that may manifest as aggressive or abusive behaviors. Studies show that adolescents exposed to familial economic strain are more likely to exhibit violent behavior as a means of expressing their frustrations or coping with their difficult circumstances (Van der Westhuizen, 2016).

Additionally, the psychological toll of living in a high-violence environment, which is prevalent in many South African communities, can exacerbate these feelings of strain. The persistent exposure to violence can lead to a learned helplessness, where youth may feel that they have no control over their circumstances, prompting them to resort to violence as a

perceived solution. Addressing these broader social inequalities through targeted interventions is crucial to providing youth with alternative pathways to achieve their goals without resorting to violence.

Albert Bandura's social learning theory emphasizes that behavior, including violent behavior, is learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement (Bandura, 1977). In the South African context, youth exposed to violence in their homes or communities are at a heightened risk of internalizing such behaviors. For many, violence becomes normalized through continuous exposure, leading them to adopt these behaviors as acceptable methods of conflict resolution.

Jewkes et al. (2006) highlight the prevalence of intergenerational transmission of violence in South African households, where children growing up in violent environments often emulate the aggressive behaviors they observe. This cycle of violence is further reinforced by cultural norms that may condone or trivialize violent responses, particularly among young males who may feel pressured to conform to traditional notions of masculinity (Madhavan et al., 2016).

Moreover, the portrayal of violence in South African media, including television, film, and music, often glamorizes aggressive behavior, further perpetuating the normalization of violence among youth. Understanding this context emphasizes the importance of early intervention programs that focus on positive role modeling and teach non-violent conflict resolution skills, which can be crucial for breaking the cycle of violence and promoting healthier interactions among youth.

Routine activity theory, developed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson, focuses on the situational factors that make violence more likely to occur (Cohen & Felson, 1979). In South Africa, various situational elements—such as unsupervised time after school, exposure to high-crime neighborhoods, and engagement in risky online activities—can increase youth vulnerability to both victimization and perpetration of violence.

For example, youth living in under-resourced communities often lack adequate supervision and safe recreational spaces, making them more susceptible to engaging in delinquent behavior or becoming victims of violence (Sampson & Wilson, 1995). This lack of guardianship can manifest in numerous ways, such as increased exposure to gang activity or drug use, which further compounds their risk of victimization.

Additionally, the influence of social media and online environments cannot be overlooked. With many South African youth spending significant time online, they may encounter cyberbullying or harassment, which can lead to both psychological distress and, in some cases, retaliatory violence. Routine activity theory thus underscores the importance of creating safe environments for youth through community initiatives—such as after-school programs, increased community policing, and parental engagement—that can help mitigate risks and create safer environments for youth.

By integrating strain theory, social learning theory, and routine activity theory, this research adopts a comprehensive approach to understanding the multifaceted dynamics of domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth in South Africa. Strain theory helps to identify the underlying societal pressures that contribute to violent behaviors, social learning theory explains how these behaviors are acquired and reinforced, and routine activity theory sheds light on the situational conditions that facilitate violence.

This holistic analysis is critical for informing targeted prevention and intervention strategies tailored to the unique socio-cultural and economic realities of South African youth. For example, addressing the strains that lead to violence may involve policy changes aimed at reducing socioeconomic disparities and improving access to mental health services. Programs designed to alleviate poverty and create employment opportunities can significantly reduce the stressors that lead to violence.

Social learning theory supports the development of educational programs that teach non-violent behaviors and provide positive role models. Initiatives that focus on mentorship and community engagement can help reshape youth attitudes toward violence and foster resilience. For instance, programs that bring together at-risk youth with community leaders or

successful individuals from similar backgrounds can serve to provide alternative pathways and examples of success that do not involve violence.

Routine activity theory underscores the importance of creating safe environments for youth through community engagement and active supervision. Initiatives that increase community involvement in youth activities, such as sports leagues or arts programs, can help build social cohesion and protective factors that reduce the likelihood of violence. Furthermore, community policing strategies that focus on building trust between law enforcement and local communities can help ensure that youth feel safe and supported.

In conclusion, employing these criminological insights allows researchers and practitioners to deepen their understanding of youth experiences with domestic abuse and gender-based violence in South Africa. By leveraging these theoretical frameworks, interventions can be tailored to address the unique needs and vulnerabilities of young individuals, ultimately fostering healthier, safer environments for future generations.

C. INTERSECTIONALITY AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE STUDY

Intersectionality is a critical framework for understanding how various social identities, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and cultural background, intersect to create unique experiences of oppression or privilege. In the context of domestic abuse and gender-based violence, applying an intersectional lens is essential to fully grasp how these overlapping identities influence the way youth experience and respond to violence. Recognizing this complexity allows for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the problem, as it highlights how different forms of inequality and discrimination can compound the effects of abuse (Crenshaw, 1991).

For instance, a young person who belongs to a marginalized racial or ethnic group may encounter additional challenges in accessing support or reporting abuse due to systemic racism, cultural stigmas, and a general lack of trust in law enforcement. These barriers can lead to a sense of isolation and helplessness, making it more difficult for these youth to seek

help from social services or community organizations (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Moreover, their racial or cultural background may influence their experiences with family dynamics, where cultural norms may discourage open discussions about violence, perpetuating cycles of silence and shame. These factors create a hostile environment for those seeking to escape or report domestic violence, as they may fear repercussions both from their community and their abusers.

Additionally, the intersection of gender identity plays a significant role in shaping youth experiences. Young individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ often face compounded vulnerability, as they may not only experience violence in their homes but also discrimination and exclusion within their communities (Friedman, 2015). Such experiences can exacerbate feelings of alienation and increase the risk of mental health issues, including depression and anxiety, which may further hinder their ability to access available resources.

Socioeconomic status adds another layer of complexity; youth from lower-income families may have fewer resources to escape abusive environments or may be more dependent on their abusers for financial support (Kracke, Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, & Hamby, 2009). For these youth, the absence of stable housing and economic insecurity can severely limit their options, trapping them in cycles of abuse. They may lack access to transportation, healthcare, and education, making it difficult to break free from their circumstances. The economic precarity often experienced by low-income families can lead to a reliance on community support networks, which may not always be equipped to address the specific needs of those facing domestic abuse.

This literature review will draw from studies that have applied intersectionality to examine how these various factors influence youth's experiences with domestic abuse and gender-based violence. By exploring research that focuses on specific intersections—such as the experiences of Black, Indigenous, or LGBTQ+ youth, or those from immigrant families—the review aims to identify patterns that highlight the unique vulnerabilities and challenges these groups face (Nixon & Humphreys, 2010). This exploration will reveal how structural inequalities exacerbate these issues, such as the lack of culturally appropriate support services,

systemic biases in the legal system, or the economic barriers that limit access to safe housing or education (Bent-Goodley, 2007).

In this way, the literature review seeks to provide a more holistic understanding of the impact of domestic abuse and gender-based violence on youth, moving beyond one-dimensional analyses that may overlook critical elements of their lived realities. Intersectionality, as a theoretical approach, not only informs the analysis but also offers a framework for developing more targeted and effective interventions that are responsive to the diverse needs of youth from various backgrounds (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). By embracing this multifaceted perspective, the study aims to propose solutions that address the complex and multifaceted nature of abuse, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient when dealing with such deeply personal and context-dependent issues. This framework will empower practitioners and policymakers to create strategies that foster resilience and support for youth navigating these intersecting challenges.

D. PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON THE IMPACT OF DOMESTIC ABUSE AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ON YOUTH

A growing body of research has begun to illuminate the broad impact of domestic abuse and gender-based violence on youth; however, much of this literature tends to generalize findings across diverse populations and contexts. While there is a recognition of the psychological, emotional, and developmental consequences of such violence on young individuals, this general approach often overlooks the nuanced ways in which these issues manifest in specific demographic and socio-cultural contexts, particularly within South Africa (Finkelhor et al., 2009; Jewkes et al., 2010).

Existing studies frequently provide an overarching view that, while informative, lacks the depth necessary to understand the complex realities faced by youth in varied environments. For instance, the prevalence of domestic violence may be coupled with different cultural norms and expectations that influence how young people perceive and respond to such violence (Richter & Morrell, 2006). In South Africa, the historical and ongoing socio-

economic disparities play a pivotal role in shaping the lived experiences of youth exposed to domestic violence, an aspect that is often absent from broader research frameworks (Moffett, 2006).

The socio-political landscape of South Africa, marked by the legacy of apartheid and persistent structural inequalities, calls for a more localized approach to studying the effects of domestic violence on youth. Many studies conducted in Western contexts fail to account for the unique socio-cultural realities that South African youth navigate daily. Factors such as economic disparity, communal violence, traditional gender norms, and limited access to social services significantly influence the experiences of domestic abuse and its repercussions on youth in South Africa (Matshedisho, 2020). The interplay of these factors complicates the relationship between exposure to violence and its psychological impacts, making it imperative for research to reflect these complexities.

Additionally, existing literature often lacks an exploration of how cultural factors—such as beliefs surrounding gender roles, family dynamics, and community expectations—interact with experiences of domestic violence. In many South African communities, traditional patriarchal values can lead to the normalization of gender-based violence, further complicating the ability of young individuals to seek help or speak out against their experiences (Mann & Hutton, 2018). Young girls may feel pressure to conform to submissive roles, while boys might be socialized into aggressive behaviors, perpetuating cycles of violence within households and communities. The ramifications of these cultural dynamics are not sufficiently addressed in the existing body of research, limiting our understanding of the broader social forces at play (Meyer, 2016).

Moreover, the historical context of South Africa cannot be underestimated when examining youth experiences of domestic abuse. The structural conditions stemming from apartheid, which systematically disenfranchised and marginalized black and colored communities, continue to shape the socio-economic landscape today (Dawes, 2008). Many young people in these communities face compounded vulnerabilities due to intersecting issues of poverty, lack of access to quality education, and inadequate social support systems. Research that fails to incorporate these historical and structural factors risks oversimplifying

the experiences of youth and neglecting the systemic influences that contribute to their realities (Seedat et al., 2009).

Given the complexities of domestic abuse within the South African context, it is essential for future research to adopt a more nuanced lens that considers the intersectionality of identity—how various forms of oppression and privilege converge to create unique experiences for young people (Crenshaw, 1989). For instance, LGBTQ+ youth in South Africa encounter challenges not only related to domestic violence but also stemming from societal discrimination and stigma. Their experiences may differ significantly from those of their heterosexual peers, necessitating a distinct focus within the research (Bhana & Anderson, 2015).

The overall impact of domestic violence on youth cannot be fully understood without addressing these contextual factors that shape their realities. While existing research offers a foundation, it is clear that a more tailored investigation into the experiences of South African youth is essential for informing effective interventions and policies. As the understanding of domestic abuse and its consequences evolves, it is critical for future studies to prioritize context-specific research that captures the intricate dynamics at play in the lives of young individuals. Only through such focused inquiry can we begin to dismantle the cycles of violence and promote healthier, safer environments for the youth of South Africa.

E. GAPS IN EXISTING LITERATURE

The exploration of domestic abuse and gender-based violence and their subsequent impact on youth has gained increasing attention globally; however, significant gaps remain in the existing literature, particularly concerning the South African context. These gaps hinder a comprehensive understanding of how these forms of violence uniquely affect young individuals within this specific socio-cultural and economic landscape. Identifying and addressing these gaps is critical for the development of effective interventions and policies tailored to the needs of South African youth. The following sections delineate the key gaps in the existing literature:

i. Lack of Context-Specific Research

While numerous studies have examined the general impact of domestic abuse and gender-based violence on youth, there remains a conspicuous absence of research that focuses specifically on the South African context. Much of the existing literature is derived from Western perspectives, which may not adequately account for the distinct socio-economic and cultural dynamics that influence the experiences of South African youth. For example, research conducted in North America often overlooks the historical and socio-political legacies, such as apartheid, that continue to shape the lives of youth in South Africa (Maqutu, 2017). This historical context is vital, as it frames not only individual experiences but also community responses to domestic violence, as well as the availability and accessibility of support systems.

The absence of localized research limits our understanding of how cultural beliefs, societal norms, and historical legacies shape the experiences of young people exposed to domestic violence. Additionally, this lack of context-specific studies means that existing intervention frameworks may not resonate with the lived realities of South African youth, ultimately undermining their effectiveness. Interventions that work well in one cultural context may fail in another if they do not take into consideration local customs, societal expectations, and the specific challenges faced by South African youth.

ii. Underrepresentation of Marginalized Communities

Research on domestic abuse often overlooks the experiences of marginalized communities within South Africa, particularly youth from low-income households and rural areas. Existing studies frequently aggregate data across various populations without considering the unique challenges faced by these specific groups. For instance, young people living in impoverished communities may experience compounded vulnerabilities due to intersecting factors such as poverty, unemployment, and limited access to resources, which influence their responses to domestic violence (Lange et al., 2019).

This underrepresentation is particularly problematic given that youth in these communities may not only face domestic violence but may also be exposed to broader systemic violence, such as gang-related activity or community conflicts. This compounded exposure to violence can exacerbate the psychological and emotional toll on youth, making it

critical for research to focus specifically on these populations. By failing to represent these experiences, the literature risks perpetuating a one-size-fits-all narrative that does not reflect the realities faced by many South African youth. Moreover, the experiences of youth from marginalized communities may differ significantly from their wealthier counterparts in terms of coping mechanisms, resilience, and access to support services, highlighting the need for research that is nuanced and reflective of these differences.

iii. Inadequate Exploration of Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality is crucial for understanding how different social identities—such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation—intersect to create unique experiences of domestic abuse and gender-based violence. However, the existing literature on domestic violence often lacks an intersectional framework, leading to a limited understanding of how these intersecting identities shape the experiences of South African youth. For example, LGBTQ+ youth may encounter distinct challenges related to domestic violence that are not adequately addressed in the broader literature (Meyer, 2016).

This oversight is particularly concerning in a South African context, where prevailing cultural attitudes toward LGBTQ+ identities can create additional barriers to seeking help and support. The fear of stigmatization and discrimination may deter LGBTQ+ youth from reporting abuse or accessing services designed to assist victims of domestic violence. Furthermore, the intersection of multiple identities—such as being both a youth from a marginalized community and identifying as LGBTQ+—can compound the effects of violence, leading to unique challenges that must be understood to develop effective interventions.

iv. Limited Focus on Psychological and Behavioral Outcomes

While there is considerable literature documenting the psychological and behavioral impacts of domestic violence on youth, much of this research is not context-specific to South Africa. The psychological consequences of exposure to violence—such as trauma, anxiety, and depression—are well-documented in other regions; however, the ways these issues manifest and are addressed within South African communities are often overlooked (Murray et al., 2019).

This lack of context-specific studies on mental health outcomes impedes efforts to create effective support systems and interventions for affected youth in South Africa. For instance, cultural stigma surrounding mental health may discourage young individuals from seeking help, and the limited availability of mental health resources in many South African communities can exacerbate these issues. Additionally, the interaction between mental health and socio-economic factors—such as unemployment or educational disruption—can create a vicious cycle that hinders recovery and resilience. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing interventions that not only address immediate safety concerns but also promote long-term mental health and well-being.

v. Neglect of Community and Structural Factors

The existing literature frequently focuses on individual experiences of domestic abuse while neglecting the broader community and structural factors that contribute to these issues. South Africa's complex socio-political landscape, characterized by deep-rooted inequalities and historical injustices, necessitates a holistic understanding of how community dynamics and structural conditions shape youth experiences of domestic violence (Ramphele, 2012).

Research that examines these broader contexts is essential for understanding the systemic nature of domestic abuse and for developing interventions that address the root causes of violence. For instance, community-level interventions that engage local leaders and stakeholders may prove more effective in reducing domestic violence than individual-focused interventions alone. Furthermore, understanding the role of community networks, social capital, and collective efficacy can provide valuable insights into how communities can mobilize to address domestic violence collectively, fostering a safer environment for young people.

vi. Inadequate Attention to Policy and Intervention Efficacy

While there is a growing recognition of the need for effective policies and interventions to address domestic violence, there is limited research evaluating the efficacy of existing programs within the South African context. Many initiatives aimed at supporting youth affected by domestic abuse are implemented without sufficient empirical evidence to guide their design and execution (Petersen et al., 2018).

This lack of evaluation research hinders the ability to determine which strategies are most effective in addressing the needs of affected youth, ultimately limiting the potential for positive outcomes. Policymakers and practitioners require data-driven insights to refine existing programs and develop new initiatives that effectively meet the diverse needs of South African youth. Moreover, ongoing evaluations and assessments are necessary to ensure that interventions remain relevant and effective in addressing the evolving landscape of domestic violence.

vii. Cultural and Societal Norms Influencing Help-Seeking Behaviors

Cultural beliefs and societal norms significantly influence the help-seeking behaviors of youth experiencing domestic violence. However, existing research often fails to explore how these cultural dynamics operate within the South African context. For instance, traditional gender roles may discourage young women from seeking help or reporting abuse, while young men may feel pressured to conform to ideals of masculinity that prevent them from discussing their experiences (Moffett, 2006).

Understanding these cultural barriers is critical for designing interventions that effectively reach and support young individuals affected by domestic violence. Cultural competency in intervention design can enhance youth engagement and help dismantle the stigma associated with seeking help. Additionally, community education programs that challenge harmful gender norms and promote healthy relationships can play a pivotal role in reshaping societal attitudes towards domestic violence, encouraging more individuals to seek support when needed.

The identified gaps in existing literature highlight the urgent need for more context-specific research on the impact of domestic abuse and gender-based violence on South African youth. By addressing these gaps through rigorous, localized studies, researchers can enhance our understanding of the unique challenges faced by young individuals in South Africa. This knowledge will, in turn, inform the development of targeted interventions and policies that are sensitive to the socio-cultural realities of South African youth, ultimately fostering healthier, safer environments for future generations.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design for this study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive exploration of domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth. Quantitative methods involve the systematic collection of numerical data through structured surveys distributed among a diverse sample of participants. This approach facilitates statistical analyses to uncover prevalence rates, patterns, and correlations related to domestic abuse. In tandem, qualitative methods, particularly in-depth interviews, aim to capture the nuanced experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors surrounding domestic abuse among youth. This dual-method design ensures a holistic understanding of the topic, combining the strengths of both approaches to offer a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis.

B. SAMPLE SELECTION

The selection of participants for this study will employ a purposeful and diversified approach, utilizing a stratified sampling technique to ensure a comprehensive representation of youth experiencing or perpetrating domestic abuse. Stratification will consider key demographic and socio-cultural factors such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, and cultural background. By deliberately including individuals from various backgrounds, the study aims to capture the diversity and complexity inherent in youth experiences of domestic abuse. This sample selection contributes to the generalizability and richness of the findings, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the impact of domestic abuse and gender-based violence within different demographic and socio-cultural contexts.

Sampling size

For this research project, a sample size of 161 participants was utilized, ensuring a balance between feasibility and statistical reliability. This sample size provides an approximate margin of error of 7%, which reflects the degree of variability that can be expected in the

results when generalized to the broader population. The chosen sample size was determined based on the population size and the desired confidence level, aiming to achieve a representative and diverse cohort. By maintaining this error margin, the study ensures that its findings are sufficiently robust to support meaningful conclusions while acknowledging inherent sampling limitations.

C. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

i. Surveys

The quantitative component of this research involves the distribution of structured surveys or questionnaires among the selected participants. These surveys are carefully designed to collect numerical data on the prevalence, frequency, and associated factors of domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth. Participants will be asked to provide anonymized responses, ensuring the confidentiality of sensitive information. The use of standardized survey instruments enhances the reliability and comparability of data across diverse demographic groups. Additionally, the surveys include demographic information to understand variations based on factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural background, providing a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the quantitative dimensions of domestic abuse among youth.

ii. Interviews

The qualitative aspect of this research involves conducting in-depth interviews with a subset of participants from different socio-cultural backgrounds. These interviews aim to explore the subjective experiences and perspectives of individuals affected by or involved in domestic abuse. Using open-ended questions, the interviews provide a platform for participants to share their stories and offer rich, context-specific information. The semi-structured nature of these interviews allows for a flexible yet focused exploration of individual narratives, coping mechanisms, and contextual factors. Through these qualitative insights, the research seeks to achieve a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of youth in the context of domestic abuse, capturing the diversity and complexity of their perspectives.

V. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In conducting a research thesis, ethical considerations play a paramount role in ensuring the integrity, respect, and well-being of all involved stakeholders. Adhering to ethical principles is crucial for upholding the trustworthiness of the research process and the validity of its findings. Researchers must prioritize informed consent, safeguard participant confidentiality, and ensure that their study design minimizes any potential harm. Additionally, transparency in reporting methodologies, acknowledging and mitigating conflicts of interest, and upholding the principles of academic honesty are essential ethical practices. Ultimately, a commitment to ethical considerations is imperative for maintaining the credibility and societal impact of research endeavors.

A. INFORMED CONSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY

i. Consent

As some of the research will be conducted at schools, teachers are allowed to act on behalf of the parents. The responsibility known as the 'in loco parentis' principle, tasks teachers to act in the place of a parent by carrying out legal responsibilities and functions in line with the Fundamental Rights of children in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (CRSA) of 1996. Informed consent will therefore be provided by the teachers where required.

When utilizing the data collection services in the online forum, the participants are able to answer the survey questions anonymously and without the need for parental consent.

ii. Confidentiality & Privacy

All participants' personal information as well as responses will be kept confidential.

- Anonymity: Names will not be included in the questionnaires and surveys.
- Restricted Access: access to data will be restricted with locked and encrypted files and passwords.
- Physical Storage: all data will be stored in a secure and locked safe.

B. POTENTIAL HARM

In this research endeavor, commitment to ethical conduct extends to prioritizing the well-being of participants. Every effort will be made to minimize potential harm by ensuring that the needs of participants are thoroughly met. In the event of any distress or concerns arising from participation, support will be readily available. There will be collaboration with dedicated social workers and/or guidance counselors who will stand ready to offer assistance and guidance. Participants will be provided with comprehensive information about the support services available at various facilities, empowering them with the knowledge and resources necessary to make informed decisions about their involvement in the study. This proactive approach aims to create a safe and supportive environment, reinforcing our dedication to ethical research practices and the welfare of those who contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this field.

Should any disclosures be made during the course of the study, the mandated reporters will provide the necessary information to the authorities and assist with following through any further proceedings. The social workers and guidance counsellors are independent of the school and therefore any school related disclosures will also be accounted for.

VI. POTENTIAL SHORTCOMINGS

A. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The mixed-methods approach selected for this study offers a robust framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of domestic abuse and gender-based violence. By combining quantitative methods (such as surveys and statistical analysis) with qualitative techniques (such as interviews and case studies), the research aims to capture both the breadth and depth of youth experiences. However, there are inherent limitations to this approach. Striking a balance between quantitative and qualitative data can be challenging, as each method has its strengths and weaknesses. Quantitative data, while providing large-scale trends, may fail to capture the nuanced emotional, psychological, and cultural dimensions that are often pivotal in understanding how domestic abuse impacts youth. Conversely, while qualitative methods allow for deeper insight into individual experiences, they may be too limited in scope to provide a comprehensive understanding of broader trends across different demographic groups. Additionally, practical constraints—such as time limitations, financial resources, and access to participants—may further narrow the scope of the research. This could result in the exclusion of certain groups or aspects of the issue, potentially leading to an incomplete analysis that overlooks critical elements of the problem.

B. BIAS AND SUBJECTIVITY IN DATA COLLECTION

The nature of the research topic, focusing on the sensitive issue of youth exposure to domestic abuse and gender-based violence, makes it especially prone to the challenges of bias and subjectivity in data collection. While efforts will be made to implement standardized protocols, train researchers, and establish rigorous data collection methods, it is nearly impossible to eliminate all forms of bias, particularly in the qualitative aspects of the study.

For example, during interviews or case study reviews, researcher bias can manifest in subtle ways, influencing how questions are posed or how participants' responses are interpreted. Additionally, participants themselves may not always provide fully honest or

accurate responses, particularly if they feel pressured to conform to socially desirable answers, known as social desirability bias. This is especially likely when discussing topics as sensitive and personal as domestic abuse.

While researcher reflexivity—actively reflecting on and challenging one's biases—is an important strategy to mitigate these issues, the inherent subjectivity in qualitative research cannot be entirely removed. As a result, the findings may reflect not only the realities of participants' experiences but also the perspectives of the researchers conducting the study.

C. CHALLENGES IN GENERALIZING FINDINGS

One of the key concerns in this research is the ability to generalize findings beyond the specific demographic or socio-cultural groups being studied. Domestic abuse and gender-based violence are complex issues that manifest differently across various populations, influenced by factors such as cultural norms, socio-economic conditions, gender roles, and family structures.

While the research sample will aim to be diverse and inclusive, it is unlikely to capture the full heterogeneity of youth experiences worldwide. For instance, findings from a particular socio-cultural group in South Africa may not be entirely applicable to youth in other regions or countries, where different legal frameworks, cultural attitudes, and support systems exist.

Moreover, even within a single demographic or cultural context, there is often significant variability in how individuals perceive and respond to experiences of abuse. Therefore, while the research findings will contribute valuable insights within the chosen context, it is essential to clearly communicate the limitations regarding the broader applicability of these results.

The study's conclusions should be seen as context-specific rather than universally representative, and future research may be needed to validate and expand upon the findings in other populations.

D. UNFORESEEN ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Researching sensitive topics like domestic abuse and gender-based violence, particularly with vulnerable populations such as youth, inevitably introduces potential ethical dilemmas that may not be fully foreseeable at the outset. While the study will adhere to ethical guidelines—ensuring informed consent, maintaining participant confidentiality, and prioritizing well-being—there may be unanticipated situations that challenge these protocols. For example, participants may disclose ongoing abuse or other forms of trauma, requiring researchers to navigate the difficult terrain of reporting obligations versus maintaining confidentiality.

In some cases, the research process itself may trigger distress or retraumatization in participants, which could require immediate intervention or referral to support services. These ethical complexities highlight the importance of ongoing ethical oversight throughout the study, with regular reviews by institutional review boards (IRBs) and open communication with stakeholders, including participant advocates.

Adapting protocols in response to emerging ethical concerns will be crucial to ensuring that the research remains respectful and protective of the rights and dignity of all participants, even when unforeseen dilemmas arise. Regular training and debriefing of the research team will also be essential to manage these challenges ethically and sensitively.

VII. FINDINGS

A. DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS INFLUENCING VICTIMIZATION AND PERPETRATION

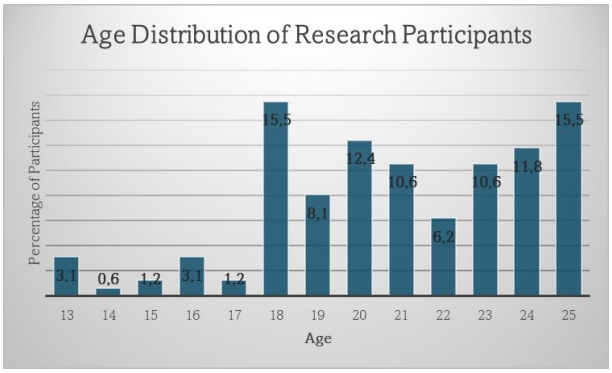
The research questionnaire encompassed a range of demographic factors to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the participants' diverse backgrounds. Age was a primary factor, targeting individuals between 13 and 25 years to capture insights relevant to youth experiences. Gender was included to explore potential disparities or trends across male, female, and non-binary participants. Provincial area was assessed to account for regional differences within South Africa, reflecting urban, rural, and semi-urban contexts. Ethnicity was examined to understand cultural and racial dynamics influencing participants' experiences. Socioeconomic status was evaluated through indicators such as household income and access to education, providing context to the social and economic factors shaping respondents' lives. Sexual orientation was also included to identify unique challenges or perspectives among LGBTQ+ youth, contributing to a nuanced analysis of demographic and socio-cultural intersections.

i. Age

The age distribution of the participants reflects a diverse representation across the targeted range of 13 to 25 years, providing valuable insights into different stages of youth development. Participants aged 13 to 17 years accounted for a smaller proportion of the sample, collectively making up 9.2% (13 years: 3.1%, 14 years: 0.6%, 15 years: 1.2%, 16 years: 3.1%, and 17 years: 1.2%). Younger respondents, particularly 13-year-olds, exhibited a mixed pattern of responses, with reports of abuse predominantly concentrated on low-income and "prefer not to say" socioeconomic categories, indicating unique vulnerabilities linked to financial instability.

The majority of participants fell within the 18 to 25 age range, with notable peaks at ages 18 and 25 (each representing 15.5%). Other significant age groups included 19 years (8.1%), 20 years (12.4%), 21 years (10.6%), 22 years (6.2%), 23 years (10.6%), and 24 years (11.8%). This concentration of participants in late adolescence and young adulthood is critical

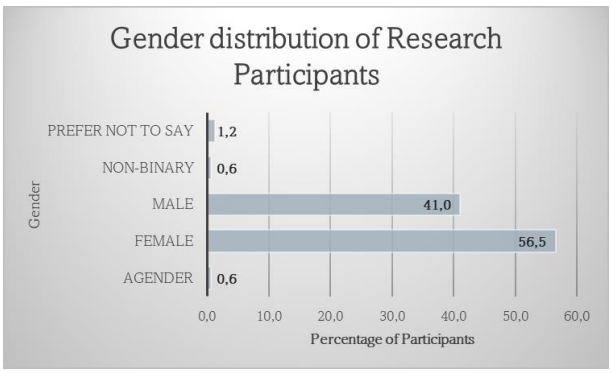
for understanding the experiences and vulnerabilities unique to this developmental period, where individuals are often navigating transitions to independence and forming key social and economic relationships.



ii. Gender

The gender distribution of participants reveals a majority female representation, comprising 56.5% of the sample, followed by males at 41%. Non-binary and agender individuals each made up 0.6%, reflecting the study's inclusivity in capturing diverse gender identities, while 1.2% of participants chose not to disclose their gender, demonstrating respect for privacy in the research design.

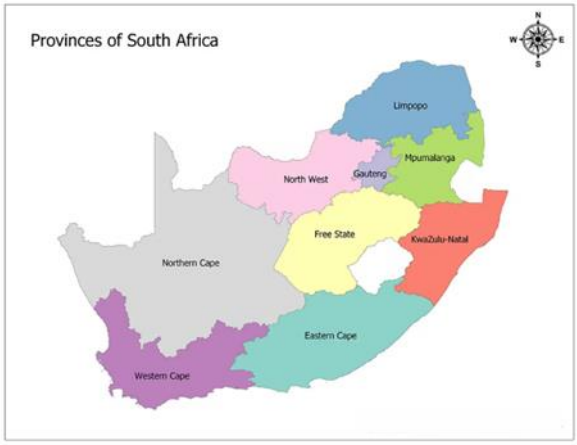
Females emerged as the most vulnerable demographic, reporting 19 abuse cases—significantly higher than other gender groups. This vulnerability was particularly pronounced among females in low-income and "unsure" socioeconomic categories, emphasizing how financial instability exacerbates risks. Male participants reported 9 abuse cases, primarily in middle-income brackets, reflecting a lower but notable level of vulnerability. Additionally, the inclusion of one agender individual who reported abuse underscores the need to account for diverse gender identities when addressing domestic violence, ensuring that all experiences are recognized and addressed in prevention and intervention efforts.



iii. Provincial Distribution

The provincial distribution of participants highlights significant representation from Gauteng, which accounted for 36.6% of the sample, emphasizing its prominence in the dataset. KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape followed, each contributing 13.0%, while 34.2% of participants did not disclose their provincial location, categorized as "Unknown." Smaller proportions were recorded in the Free State (0.6%), Limpopo (0.6%), Northern Cape (0.6%), and North West Province (1.2%). This diverse geographical spread reflects a concentration of participants from urbanized provinces while ensuring inclusivity across less populous regions.

PROVINCE	PERCENTAGE
Free State	0,6%
Gauteng	36,6%
KwaZulu Natal	13%
Limpopo	0,6%
North West Province	1,2%
Northern Cape	0,6%
Western Cape	13%
Unknown	34,2%



The survey revealed notable disparities in abuse rates across South Africa's provinces. The Free State and North West Province reported the highest abuse rates, with 100% and 50% of respondents, respectively, indicating personal experiences of abuse. In contrast, KwaZulu-Natal recorded a low abuse rate of 4.8%, while Gauteng demonstrated a significantly higher rate of 20.3%.

In terms of total reported cases, Gauteng led with 12 cases, followed by participants who did not disclose their province (10 cases) and the Western Cape (4 cases). The Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, and North West Province each reported one case, while Limpopo, the Northern Cape, and Cape Town reported no cases of abuse.

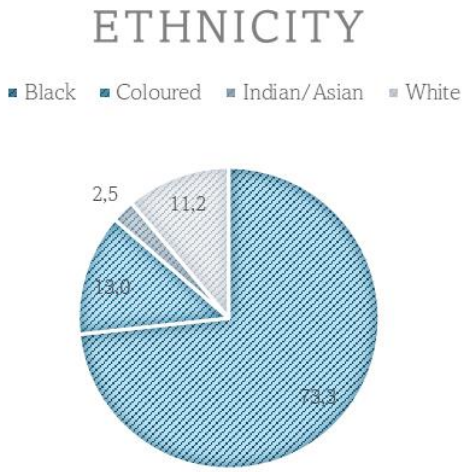
Particularly vulnerable groups were identified in Gauteng, the Western Cape, and among participants who did not specify their provincial location. Within these regions, specific intersections of gender, age, and ethnicity displayed a heightened vulnerability, with some groups exhibiting 100% abuse rates. These findings underscore the need for targeted

intervention strategies that consider the unique risks associated with geographical and demographic factors.

iv. Ethnic Composition

The ethnic composition of the participants reflects South Africa's demographic diversity, with the Black community forming the majority at 73.3% of the sample. Coloured participants accounted for 13.0%, White participants for 11.2%, and Indian/Asian participants for 2.5%. This distribution aligns closely with the broader population composition of the country, ensuring the study captures a representative range of experiences.

Abuse reports varied significantly across ethnic groups. Black respondents reported the highest number of abuse cases (20), consistent with their predominant representation in the sample. Coloured participants reported 4 cases, and White participants reported 5 cases. Notably, no cases were reported by Indian or Asian respondents. This absence may indicate underreporting or cultural barriers to disclosure rather than a lack of abuse, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive approaches to encourage openness and provide support across all communities.

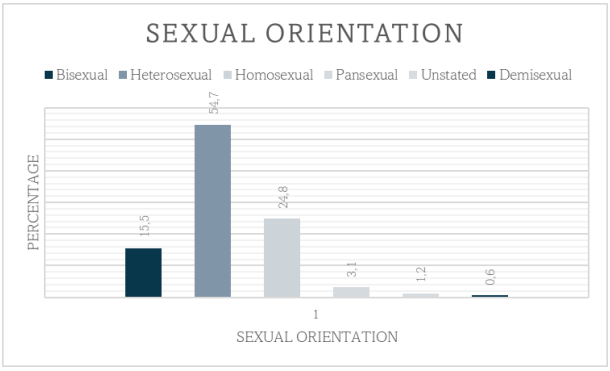


v. Sexual Orientation of Research Participants

The sexual orientation breakdown of study participants reveals a diverse range of identities, underscoring the varied experiences of youth in the context of domestic abuse and gender-based violence. The largest group identified as heterosexual (54.7%), followed by

homosexual participants (24.8%) and bisexual participants (15.5%). Smaller proportions identified as pansexual (3.1%) and demisexual (0.6%), with 1.2% choosing not to disclose their sexual orientation. This diversity emphasizes the need for inclusive approaches to addressing gender-based violence, as youth of different sexual orientations may face distinct challenges and vulnerabilities.

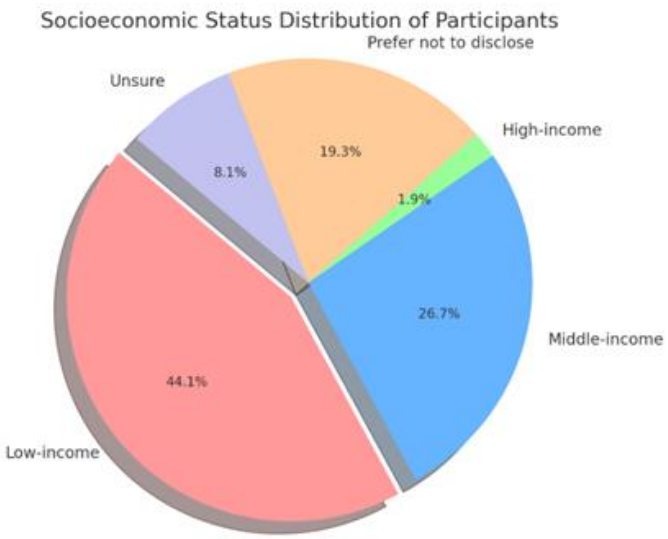
While the majority of respondents identified as heterosexual, abuse cases were reported among homosexual individuals, particularly within the "prefer not to say" socioeconomic category. This suggests that individuals with marginalized sexual orientations may experience additional layers of vulnerability, potentially exacerbated by societal stigma and discrimination. These findings highlight the importance of recognizing and addressing the specific needs of LGBTQ+ individuals, ensuring that they receive appropriate support and protection within both the context of domestic violence and society at large.



vi. Socioeconomic Status of Participants

The socioeconomic status of participants reveals that 44.1% identified as coming from low-income households, making it the largest group in the sample. Middle-income participants represented 26.7%, while only 1.9% identified as high-income. Additionally, 19.3% of participants preferred not to disclose their socioeconomic status, and 8.1% were unsure. This distribution highlights the study's focus on capturing diverse financial backgrounds, with a particular emphasis on lower-income groups, while also respecting participants' privacy and acknowledging uncertainty in self-assessment.

The relationship between socioeconomic status and abuse was striking. Low-income participants reported the highest number of abuse cases (14), underscoring how financial insecurity significantly increases vulnerability to domestic violence. Middle-income groups reported fewer cases (9), and only one high-income participant disclosed experiencing abuse. These findings emphasize the critical role of economic stability in mitigating risks, illustrating the disproportionate impact of domestic violence on financially disadvantaged groups.



B. SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON YOUTH IN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC ABUSE AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The socio-cultural influences on youth exposed to domestic abuse and gender-based violence are pivotal to understanding the complex challenges faced by this demographic. The majority of participants in the study were Black (73.3%) and female (56.5%), which reflects the disproportionate vulnerabilities associated with race and gender in South Africa. These factors intersect with economic hardship, as 44.1% of participants came from low-income households, further compounding the risk of exposure to violence. Financial insecurity often limits access to protective resources such as legal support, healthcare, and education, leaving youth vulnerable to both immediate and long-term consequences of abuse.

One critical socio-cultural factor that warrants attention in understanding the experiences of young girls in South Africa is the phenomenon of "blessers." This term refers to older men who provide financial support, gifts, or other material benefits to younger girls, often in exchange for companionship or sexual favors. In some communities, particularly in urban areas, this dynamic has become culturally normalized to the extent that many young girls, sometimes as young as school age, may enter into these relationships believing they are securing their financial future or social status. The power imbalance in such relationships is often compounded by financial instability and the promise of material gain, which makes it difficult for the girls to break free, even when faced with physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. These relationships are characterized by exploitation, as the girls may feel trapped in a cycle of dependency on their "blessers" for money, clothing, and other luxuries. Although the abusive nature of these relationships is often well-documented, the cultural perception of the material benefits—the money, the gifts, the promise of financial stability—creates a sense of perceived "security" for these young girls, making them more likely to accept the abuse or turn a blind eye to it. In many cases, girls are taught by their families, peers, or broader societal expectations that the transactional nature of these relationships is acceptable, particularly if it elevates their social standing or provides a reprieve from the economic hardships they face. The violence and abuse in these relationships are often exacerbated by the lack of support systems, such as access to education, job opportunities, or community-based interventions. The young girls may not view themselves as victims but as beneficiaries of a system that offers them short-term material gain at the cost of long-term emotional and physical harm. The normalization of this "blesser" culture within certain sectors of South African society complicates efforts to address the issue of domestic violence and gender-based violence, as it perpetuates the idea that abuse can be justified by material gain or social status. This cultural norm creates a complex barrier to intervention, as it intertwines socio-economic factors with deeply ingrained gender roles, making it harder for these girls to recognize their victimization and seek help.

Geographically, Gauteng, representing 36.6% of the sample, stands out as a key area of concern. While Gauteng is a densely populated urban province, it is also plagued by challenges such as overcrowding, unemployment, and social inequality. These urban stressors can amplify vulnerabilities, particularly for youth, who may face increased exposure to violence and limited

opportunities for support. Conversely, the underrepresentation of rural provinces and the 34.2% of participants who chose not to disclose their provincial location signal gaps in addressing the needs of youth in less visible or underserved areas. This lack of representation suggests that there may be significant challenges in reaching those in rural or isolated communities, where domestic violence may be even more hidden and access to support more limited.

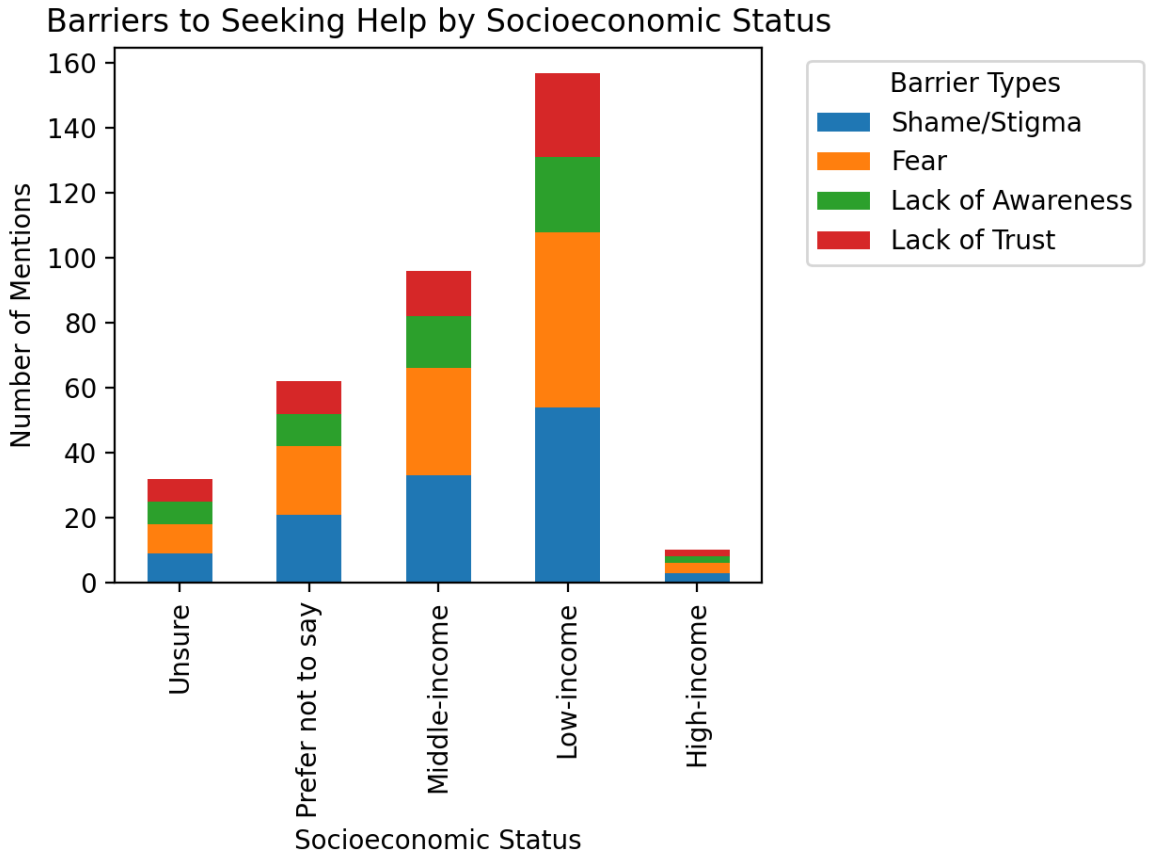
The study's inclusion of non-binary and agender participants, though small (0.6% each), is an important step toward recognizing the diverse gender identities among youth affected by gender-based violence. LGBTQ+ individuals may experience heightened stigma and discrimination, which can increase their vulnerability to abuse and further complicate their ability to seek help. The recognition of these identities underscores the importance of inclusive approaches to addressing domestic violence, ensuring that support systems are accessible and tailored to the needs of all youth, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation.

Awareness, Understanding, and Barriers to Seeking Help

The survey revealed that most respondents (54.7%) rated their awareness of domestic violence as moderate to high, with scores ranging between 6 and 8 on a 10-point scale. This suggests that while there is a general understanding of domestic violence, there is room for improvement in public education and outreach efforts. Awareness levels varied significantly across communities and provinces, reflecting disparities in access to information and cultural perceptions of abuse. Notably, younger respondents demonstrated a strong understanding of what constitutes abuse, likely due to increased exposure to educational programs and digital media, which are powerful tools in shaping perceptions of violence and justice.

However, several significant barriers to seeking help emerged from the study, indicating that awareness alone is not sufficient to address domestic violence. Over half of the respondents (52.8%) reported that societal stigma surrounding domestic violence prevents victims from disclosing their experiences or accessing support. This stigma is deeply rooted in cultural norms that frame abuse as a private or taboo issue, often leaving victims feeling isolated or ashamed to seek assistance. This cultural pressure to keep abuse within the confines

of the home can significantly deter victims from reaching out for help, despite their awareness of available resources.



Moreover, the survey found that only 29.8% of respondents felt that support systems were highly accessible, with 32.9% experiencing significant barriers to accessing services. These challenges stem from factors such as geographic location, financial constraints, and limited knowledge of available resources. For example, rural areas or economically disadvantaged regions often lack adequate infrastructure, which exacerbates the difficulty of reaching out for support. Additionally, a lack of information about legal or medical services in many communities further compounds this problem.

Cultural and societal pressures were also identified as major obstacles. Traditional gender roles, community dynamics, and the stigmatization of victims can discourage individuals from seeking help, either due to fear of judgment or loyalty to family structures. In communities where patriarchal norms dominate, women and other vulnerable individuals may

face immense social pressure to remain silent about their experiences, even when their safety is at risk.

By incorporating these findings, the study emphasizes the critical need for culturally sensitive, regionally informed, and gender-inclusive interventions. These efforts should aim to not only address the immediate impacts of domestic abuse and gender-based violence but also challenge the socio-cultural norms that sustain them, fostering environments where youth can thrive free from fear and harm.

C. INTERSECTIONS OF VICTIMIZATION, PERPETRATION, AND SOCIETAL FACTORS

The study's findings demonstrate that vulnerability to domestic violence is shaped not by any single factor, but by the complex intersection of multiple identities, socioeconomic conditions, and geographic contexts. The compounded risks faced by certain groups are amplified when these factors overlap, creating unique, often heightened vulnerabilities. These intersecting identities illustrate how an individual's experiences with abuse cannot be fully understood without considering the interaction between gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and location.

i. Gender and Socioeconomic Status

A key finding from the data is the compounded vulnerability of women, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. Women in low-income households reported significantly higher rates of abuse, with financial insecurity playing a major role in increasing the risk of domestic violence. This pattern is consistent with existing research on how economic instability can create environments where power imbalances and coercive control thrive. In this case, women's economic dependence, particularly in financially unstable households, contributes to their higher vulnerability to abuse. This finding emphasizes the critical need for targeted interventions and support systems that address the dual challenges of gender inequality and economic disadvantages.

ii. Age and Socioeconomic Status

Younger individuals, particularly those aged 13 to 17, in low-income households, were disproportionately affected by abuse, highlighting the critical role that age-related dependency plays in vulnerability. Younger individuals are more likely to be dependent on their families for economic support and may not have the resources or autonomy to escape abusive situations. This age-related dependency, combined with financial instability, exacerbates vulnerability. For example, the mixed patterns of abuse reported by 13-year-olds, particularly in low-income and "prefer not to say" socioeconomic categories, suggest that younger individuals in financially insecure environments may face heightened risks of abuse. Furthermore, the concentration of participants between the ages of 18 and 25 reflects a period of transition, where individuals may experience further strain in navigating economic independence, leaving them vulnerable to domestic violence. The intersection of youth, financial instability, and gendered power dynamics calls for prevention strategies that target young people, particularly those in financially precarious situations.

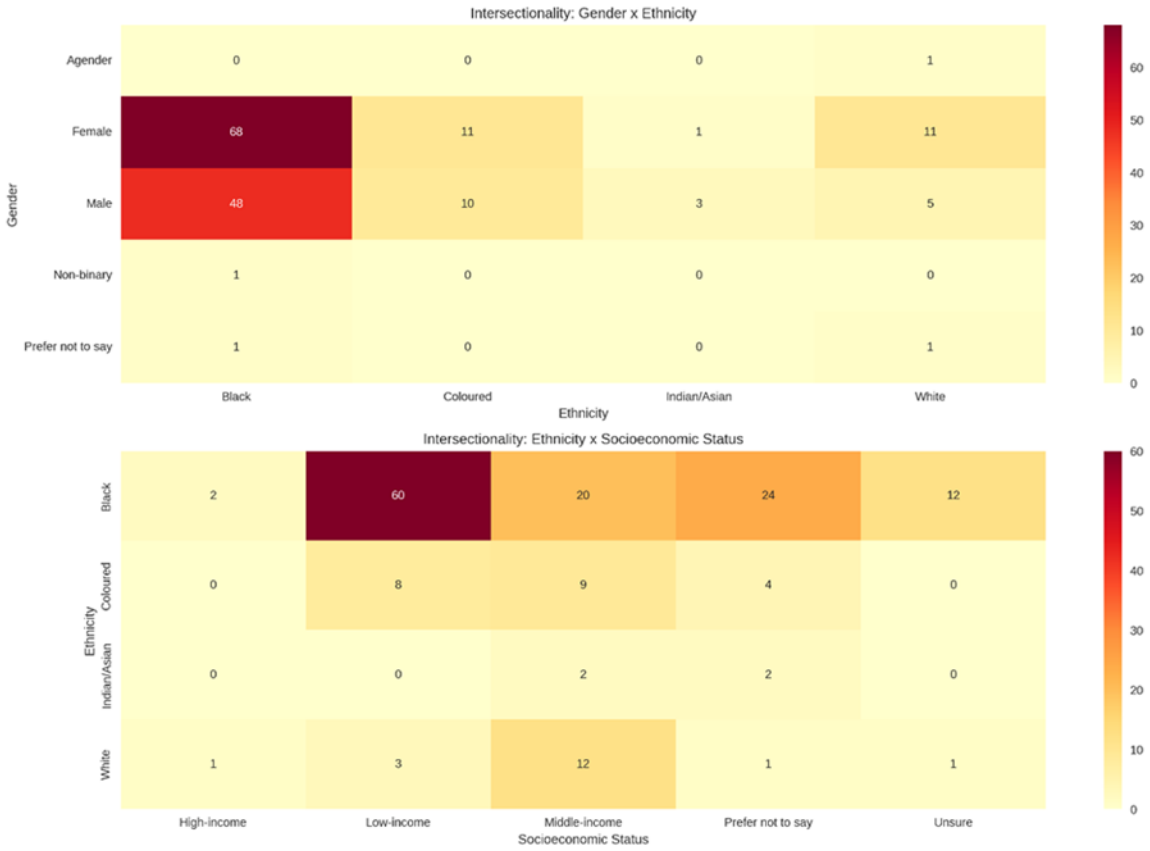
iii. Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status

The ethnic breakdown of the study revealed that Black respondents, who also represented the majority of low-income participants, experienced the highest number of abuse cases. Black participants accounted for 73.3% of the sample, and they were disproportionately represented among those who reported abuse. The intersection of race and socioeconomic status illustrates how racial and economic disparities compound the risks of domestic violence. Black respondents, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, are not only more vulnerable due to financial insecurity but may also face systemic barriers to seeking help, including cultural stigmas, lack of access to resources, and discrimination. This compounded vulnerability reinforces the importance of addressing both racial and economic disparities in intervention and prevention strategies. Additionally, the lack of reported abuse cases from Indian/Asian respondents, while it may reflect underreporting or cultural barriers, highlights the need for culturally sensitive approaches to supporting these communities.

iv. Geographic Context

Geographic context plays a significant role in shaping the vulnerability to domestic violence, with regional disparities reflecting both demographic and socio-cultural factors. Gauteng, the Western Cape, and Free State emerged as areas with higher rates of reported abuse, and these regions require tailored intervention strategies due to their unique abuse patterns and vulnerable demographics. For instance, Gauteng, which accounted for 36.6% of the sample, had the highest number of reported cases, with 12 participants disclosing experiences of abuse. This province, being urbanized and economically diverse, presents unique challenges, including the intersection of socioeconomic status, gender, and geographic isolation. The Western Cape and Free State, with their own distinct patterns of abuse, may benefit from localized approaches that consider the demographic make-up of these areas. The findings from the Free State and North West Province, where 100% and 50% of respondents, respectively, reported abuse, suggest that rural areas or provinces with fewer resources may have an even higher concentration of unreported or under-addressed cases of domestic violence. Conversely, provinces like KwaZulu-Natal, which reported the lowest abuse rates, may face different challenges in awareness and reporting, underscoring the importance of region-specific interventions that account for both the prevalence and the reporting barriers of domestic violence.

The intersectionality of gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographic location reveals a complex and multifaceted risk landscape for domestic violence. The compounded risks faced by women from low-income backgrounds, younger individuals in financially unstable households, Black participants, and residents of provinces with higher abuse rates require nuanced, targeted interventions. Policies and programs that address the specific needs of these groups—while considering the interconnectedness of their vulnerabilities—are essential to reducing domestic violence and providing adequate support for survivors. Recognizing and responding to the intersectional nature of domestic violence can help ensure that prevention and intervention efforts are more effective and inclusive, ultimately fostering a more supportive and protective environment for vulnerable populations.



D. FINDINGS NOT INCLUDED

While the primary findings of this research shed light on the demographic, socio-cultural, and socioeconomic factors influencing youth exposure to domestic abuse and gender-based violence, several critical elements were beyond the scope of the study's included results. This section addresses those areas, emphasizing their significance and recommending future research directions.

i. Psychological Context and Mental Health

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

The psychological aftermath of domestic abuse often manifests in symptoms of PTSD, including intrusive memories, heightened arousal, avoidance behaviors, and emotional dysregulation. Youth affected by PTSD may experience difficulties in concentration, interpersonal relationships, and maintaining academic performance. These challenges often

perpetuate cycles of disadvantage, limiting opportunities for recovery and growth. Additionally, the stigma surrounding mental health in some communities exacerbates the reluctance of affected individuals to seek help, leaving the condition untreated.

Substance Abuse

Exposure to domestic abuse has been consistently linked to increased rates of substance abuse among youth. Drugs and alcohol often become coping mechanisms for the trauma and stress caused by violence. However, this reliance introduces further risks, such as heightened vulnerability to exploitation, health issues, and entanglement in criminal activities. Substance abuse not only deepens the personal struggles of the affected youth but also creates a ripple effect, impacting their families and communities.

Survival Strategies: Prostitution and Exploitation

In environments of economic deprivation and lack of support systems, some youth resort to prostitution or enter exploitative relationships as a means of survival. This normalization of abuse for financial gain often exposes them to repeated violence, sexually transmitted infections, and further psychological trauma. The societal condemnation of these survival strategies compounds the issue, isolating victims and discouraging them from seeking support or exiting these harmful cycles.

ii. Cultural Understanding and Misconceptions

Perceptions of Domestic Abuse

Misconceptions surrounding domestic abuse—such as equating violence solely with visible physical harm—limit the recognition and reporting of emotional, psychological, and financial abuse. Cultural norms that uphold patriarchal values, including the misuse of lobola (bride price), often create an environment where abusive behaviors are dismissed or rationalized as familial duties or traditions. This perception undermines efforts to provide meaningful support to victims and holds back progress in addressing the issue comprehensively.

Cultural Beliefs and Traditions

Traditional beliefs and practices, such as seeking ancestral guidance or consulting Sangomas (traditional healers), heavily influence responses to domestic abuse. While these cultural practices can serve as sources of strength and resilience, they may also perpetuate silence around abuse due to fear of violating cultural norms. The dual role of tradition as both a potential support system and a barrier to intervention requires nuanced exploration to ensure culturally sensitive yet effective approaches to prevention and recovery.

E. SHORTCOMINGS OF RESEARCH

While the study offers significant insights into the experiences of youth affected by domestic abuse and gender-based violence, several shortcomings must be acknowledged. A key limitation is the reliance on self-reported data, which introduces the possibility of biases such as social desirability bias, recall bias, or underreporting, especially when participants are discussing sensitive topics like abuse. Respondents may have been hesitant to disclose personal experiences due to fear of judgment, cultural stigma, or the privacy of their situation, which could result in an underestimation of the actual prevalence of abuse. Additionally, the study's cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causal relationships or to track the long-term impacts of exposure to domestic violence.

The representativeness of the sample is also a concern. While the study draws from a diverse group of participants, it may not fully capture the experiences of youth from all regions of South Africa. A significant 34.2% of participants did not disclose their provincial location, which points to potential gaps in geographic representation. Underrepresentation of rural provinces, such as Limpopo and Northern Cape, may lead to skewed conclusions, as these areas often face unique challenges related to poverty, access to services, and cultural norms that differ from those found in more urbanized provinces like Gauteng and the Western Cape. Consequently, the findings may not be fully generalizable to youth across the country, particularly in less visible or underserved regions.

The small representation of non-binary and agender participants (0.6% each) also presents a limitation, as these individuals may experience distinct forms of abuse and discrimination that are not adequately captured in the sample. Further research is needed to explore the specific vulnerabilities faced by LGBTQ+ youth, as the experiences of these groups are often underrepresented in studies on domestic violence and gender-based violence. Their unique struggles with stigma, societal rejection, and the intersectionality of gender identity and abuse require targeted attention and a more inclusive approach to research.

Lastly, while the study emphasizes the intersectionality of gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in shaping vulnerability to abuse, the complexity of these intersecting factors may not have been fully explored. Future research could benefit from a more in-depth, qualitative approach that examines how these factors interact and compound each other in specific contexts. Understanding the layered nature of vulnerability will help develop more effective and tailored interventions that address the root causes of abuse, taking into account the intricate ways in which youth experience domestic violence and gender-based violence across different demographic groups.

F. STORIES

15 year old black, heterosexual female, residing in Gauteng, from a low-income status:

Q: Have you personally experienced domestic abuse or gender-based violence? If yes, please briefly describe your experience, including the nature of the abuse, the relationship with the perpetrator, and any impacts on your life.

A: "My uncle tried to sexually abuse me 2 times. It was scary because my mother and family lived far from me."

Q: How would you describe the cultural norms and attitudes regarding relationships and gender roles in your community?

A: "Men are always above women, and they always use gender to get what they want."

Q: Do you think there is a stigma associated with being a victim or survivor of domestic abuse or gender-based violence in your community? If yes, how do you believe this stigma affects individuals who experience abuse?

A: "In my case, people thought I was lying, some called me a slut, so I am afraid of ever speaking up because I will be judged."

Q: What types of support or interventions were sought, and were they helpful?

A: "My mom called the police, but the community let my uncle run away, till today we haven't heard anything from the police or the social workers."

18 year old white, bisexual female, residing in Gauteng, from a middle-income status:

Q: Have you personally experienced domestic abuse or gender-based violence? If yes, please briefly describe your experience, including the nature of the abuse, the relationship with the perpetrator, and any impacts on your life.

A: "My father abused me emotionally for most of my life. It got to the point where it felt better to not exist. I stopped talking as much, I felt huge all the time (I still do), I feel like I'm too loud and take up too much space. There's much more, but it's too hard to talk about."

Q: How would you describe the cultural norms and attitudes regarding relationships and gender roles in your community?

A: "People are generally very superficial when it comes to relationships. Men can have sex with multiple women and be applauded. Women have sex with 1 man and they're a slut. There are too many double standards."

Q: Do you think there is a stigma associated with being a victim or survivor of domestic abuse or gender-based violence in your community? If yes, how do you believe this stigma affects individuals who experience abuse?

A: "Victims tend to blame themselves for things going on. Victims feel as though they cannot speak up. They feel as though others will disregard their point of view and tell them they are wrong."

Q: Have you or someone you know ever faced challenges in reporting or seeking help for domestic abuse or gender-based violence?

A: "I feared that my father would stop financially supporting my mom and it would stress her out. I was also scared that he would hurt me."

20 year old black, bisexual female, residing in Free State, from a middle-income status:

Q: Have you personally experienced domestic abuse or gender-based violence? If yes, please briefly describe your experience, including the nature of the abuse, the relationship with the perpetrator, and any impacts on your life.

A: *"Being raped."*

Q: How would you describe the cultural norms and attitudes regarding relationships and gender roles in your community?

A: *"It not usually stable."*

Q: Do you think there is a stigma associated with being a victim or survivor of domestic abuse or gender-based violence in your community? If yes, how do you believe this stigma affects individuals who experience abuse?

A: *"They never get to be themselves again or look themselves the same way as before."*

Q: Have you or someone you know ever faced challenges in reporting or seeking help for domestic abuse or gender-based violence?

A: *"I was scared because I had no body to trust about my story."*

23 year old black, pansexual female, residing in a Kwa-Zulu Natal:

Q: Have you personally experienced domestic abuse or gender-based violence? If yes, please briefly describe your experience, including the nature of the abuse, the relationship with the perpetrator, and any impacts on your life.

A: *"It was very bad and scary."*

Q: How would you describe the cultural norms and attitudes regarding relationships and gender roles in your community?

A: *"Iny community people always want a better boyfriend"*

25 year old black, homosexual female, residing in a rural village, from a low-income status:

Q: Have you personally experienced domestic abuse or gender-based violence? If yes, please briefly describe your experience, including the nature of the abuse, the relationship with the perpetrator, and any impacts on your life.

A: *"Yes I have been raped by my own brother."*

Q: How would you describe the cultural norms and attitudes regarding relationships and gender roles in your community?

A: *"It's really un understandable coz most of people is doing the same"*

Q: Do you think there is a stigma associated with being a victim or survivor of domestic abuse or gender-based violence in your community? If yes, how do you believe this stigma affects individuals who experience abuse?

A: *"Most of other's they need therapist or social workers."*

Q: What types of support or interventions were sought, and were they helpful?

A: *"We made a group supporters to talk about everything."*

Q: Have you or someone you know ever faced challenges in reporting or seeking help for domestic abuse or gender-based violence?

A: *"Yes many times I helped many people about same story."*

25 year old black, homosexual female, residing in a rural village, from a low-income status:

Q: Have you personally experienced domestic abuse or gender-based violence? If yes, please briefly describe your experience, including the nature of the abuse, the relationship with the perpetrator, and any impacts on your life.

A: *"Yes I have been raped by my own brother."*

Q: How would you describe the cultural norms and attitudes regarding relationships and gender roles in your community?

A: *"It's really un understandable coz most of people is doing the same"*

Q: Do you think there is a stigma associated with being a victim or survivor of domestic abuse or gender-based violence in your community? If yes, how do you believe this stigma affects individuals who experience abuse?

A: *"Most of other's they need therapist or social workers."*

Q: What types of support or interventions were sought, and were they helpful?

A: *"We made a group supporters to talk about everything."*

Q: Have you or someone you know ever faced challenges in reporting or seeking help for domestic abuse or gender-based violence?

A: *"Yes many times I helped many people about same story."*

25 year old black, bisexual female, residing in Gauteng, from a middle-income status:

Q: Have you personally experienced domestic abuse or gender-based violence? If yes, please briefly describe your experience, including the nature of the abuse, the relationship with the perpetrator, and any impacts on your life.

A: *"He is the father of my children, he says hurtful things, threatens to harm me and the kids, has sexually and physically assaulted me. The relationship was filled with fear, hate and resentment. I live in fear and don't want to date because I don't want to be hurt again."*

Q: How would you describe the cultural norms and attitudes regarding relationships and gender roles in your community?

A: "Men are always in control and culturally the women are encouraged to stay in the relationship to keep the family together, because it is embarrassing for the family."

Q: Do you think there is a stigma associated with being a victim or survivor of domestic abuse or gender-based violence in your community? If yes, how do you believe this stigma affects individuals who experience abuse?

A: "You are seen as a weak person, sometimes people will treat you as an outcast because you chose to walk away from the abuse instead of being strong and staying in the relationship."

Q: What types of support or interventions were sought, and were they helpful?

A: "I have reported the abuse (police didn't come to my rescue). Ended up getting a protection order via family court and the magistrate granted it, which was helpful, but the police couldn't get him to sign it."

Q: Have you or someone you know ever faced challenges in reporting or seeking help for domestic abuse or gender-based violence?

A: "The police just don't care, they are not quick to respond when called out."

25 year old black, pansexual female, residing in Kwa-Zulu Natal, from a low-income status:

Q: Have you personally experienced domestic abuse or gender-based violence? If yes, please briefly describe your experience, including the nature of the abuse, the relationship with the perpetrator, and any impacts on your life.

A: "Emotional abuse is the ultimate brainwashing technique. It often hides in the form of feigned helplessness, generosity, compassion and love. The perpetrator knows how to appear kind and caring while interwriting abusive behavior, causing the person on the receiving end to become powerless"

Q: How would you describe the cultural norms and attitudes regarding relationships and gender roles in your community?

A: "Girls and women are generally expected to dress in typically feminine ways and be polite, accommodating, nurturing. Men are generally expected to be strong, aggressive and bold"

Q: Do you think there is a stigma associated with being a victim or survivor of domestic abuse or gender-based violence in your community? If yes, how do you believe this stigma affects individuals who experience abuse?

A: "Internalized stigma also can lead to self-blame, guilty, shame, as well as low self-esteem."

VIII. INTERVENTION FRAMEWORK

A. CRIMINOLOGICAL INSIGHTS GUIDING INTERVENTION DESIGN

i. Prevention strategies

Prevention strategies must address both the symptoms and root causes of domestic abuse and gender-based violence (GBV). Evidence from South African case studies and international best practices supports the following approaches:

Educational Campaigns: Nationwide campaigns should be designed to raise awareness of abuse and promote understanding of healthy relationships. These programs must target schools, focusing on youth aged 13–25, to instill knowledge of consent, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution. Programs like *Soul City* and *Brothers for Life* in South Africa have successfully raised awareness about GBV, demonstrating the effectiveness of targeted multimedia campaigns. Expanding such initiatives to include digital platforms can reach a broader audience, especially younger populations who are active online.

Community Empowerment: In underserved areas, community leaders and local organizations should work to dismantle harmful norms, such as patriarchal values and the acceptance of transactional relationships like "blesser" dynamics. Research has shown that community-led programs, such as the *Stepping Stones* initiative, which emphasizes gender equity and respectful relationships, reduce violence by challenging harmful norms. Replicating and adapting such programs for urban and rural contexts can empower communities to address GBV collectively.

Economic Support Initiatives: Financial vulnerability is a critical risk factor. Programs providing vocational training and small business grants to families can help mitigate this. Initiatives like cash transfer programs, proven to reduce intimate partner violence in Sub-Saharan Africa, should be scaled to target low-income families in South Africa. These can reduce dependency on abusive partners and empower women financially.

Digital Outreach: Leveraging social media and digital tools can disseminate information widely and engage youth in urban and rural areas alike. Interactive platforms can facilitate anonymous discussions, reducing the stigma surrounding domestic abuse.

ii. Rehabilitation programs

Rehabilitation programs must adopt a dual focus: addressing the trauma experienced by survivors and re-educating perpetrators to break cycles of violence.

Trauma-Informed Care: Survivors, particularly young women and LGBTQ+ youth, require access to free or subsidized counseling services tailored to their cultural and social contexts. Support groups should provide safe spaces to share experiences and foster resilience.

Perpetrator Rehabilitation: Programs targeting perpetrators, particularly young men, must address issues such as toxic masculinity, substance abuse, and poor emotional regulation. Cognitive-behavioral therapy and restorative justice practices can encourage accountability and behavioral change. Restorative justice programs, such as those implemented in Norway and Canada, have shown promise in re-educating offenders about accountability and non-violent behaviors. Adopting similar models tailored to South African cultural dynamics can reduce recidivism.

Holistic Support for Survivors: Comprehensive rehabilitation should include education and career guidance, fostering independence and reducing the risk of returning to abusive environments. Survivor-centric programs modeled after the *Thuthuzela Care Centres* in South Africa provide holistic support, including medical, psychological, and legal assistance, ensuring that survivors have the resources to rebuild their lives.

iii. Legal and policy considerations

Legal frameworks must be strengthened to ensure the effective prevention and prosecution of domestic abuse.

Recommendations include:

Enhancing Victim Protections: The implementation of the Domestic Violence Act in South Africa has made strides, but gaps remain. Streamlining processes for obtaining protection orders and ensuring law enforcement accountability can enhance its impact. Laws should prioritize victim safety, providing immediate restraining orders and secure housing options.

Specialized Judicial Systems: Establish youth-focused courts that operate with sensitivity to the unique needs of young victims and perpetrators. Building on South Africa's Child Justice Act framework, youth courts should adopt a restorative justice model, focusing on rehabilitation rather than punishment for young offenders.

Mandatory Reporting and Training: Educators, healthcare workers, and law enforcement must be trained to recognize and report abuse, ensuring early intervention.

Addressing Economic Barriers: Policies should aim to improve access to resources like legal aid, healthcare, and childcare, which are essential for survivors seeking to rebuild their lives.

B. TAILORING INTERVENTIONS TO SPECIFIC DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Interventions must reflect the diverse and intersecting needs of the populations studied.

Targeting Vulnerable Demographics: Programs in Gauteng and other urbanized provinces must address overcrowding, unemployment, and systemic racial disparities, which contribute to higher abuse rates.

Reaching Marginalized Groups: Initiatives should focus on Black and Coloured youth, who are disproportionately affected, and incorporate culturally appropriate messaging.

Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth: Tailored outreach and support for LGBTQ+ individuals must address the compounded stigma and discrimination they face, ensuring their inclusion in all

protective measures. Studies indicate that LGBTQ+ youth face compounded risks of abuse. Interventions must incorporate safe spaces and counseling tailored to their unique needs, such as those offered by OUT LGBT Well-Being, a South African organization providing support and advocacy for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Challenging Transactional Relationships: Norms around "blesser" relationships often normalize exploitation and violence. Community programs must address these dynamics by educating young girls about their risks and providing economic alternatives to reduce their dependence on older men.

C. COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES INVOLVING COMMUNITIES, LAW ENFORCEMENT, AND SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

Combating domestic abuse and gender-based violence requires a coordinated effort among all stakeholders.

Community-Led Solutions: Engaging local leaders to champion anti-violence campaigns and foster cultural shifts. Community dialogues facilitated by organizations like *Sonke Gender Justice* foster cultural shifts by engaging men and boys as allies in combating GBV.

Law Enforcement Reform: Training police to respond sensitively to abuse cases and establishing partnerships with social workers to ensure victims' safety.

Support Organizations: NGOs and advocacy groups should expand their reach, offering comprehensive services like shelter, legal aid, and psychological counseling.

Public-Private Partnerships: Collaboration between governments, businesses, and civil society can fund initiatives and provide resources for long-term impact.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

i. Stronger Legal Protections

Strengthening the legal framework to address domestic abuse and gender-based violence (GBV) is essential. This includes ensuring the swift enforcement of protective orders to safeguard victims from immediate harm. For example, implementing digital tracking systems for protective orders can ensure immediate police response to violations. Additionally, imposing harsher penalties for perpetrators, especially in cases involving minors or repeat offenders, serves as both a deterrent and a justice mechanism. South Africa's Domestic Violence Act of 1998 provides a robust foundation, but consistent enforcement and timely judicial processes remain a challenge. Lessons can be drawn from countries like Sweden, where specialized domestic violence courts expedite such cases, reducing delays and ensuring victim protection.

ii. Comprehensive Support Frameworks

A national, centralized database of resources, such as shelters, trauma counselors, and legal aid services, can bridge the gap between urban and rural accessibility. This database should be mobile-optimized to reach under-resourced communities, ensuring anonymity and privacy. For instance, in Kenya, the Haki App connects survivors to nearby support services, providing a model for scalable solutions. Governments should also collaborate with NGOs to expand the availability of trauma-informed care, ensuring that survivors receive holistic support that addresses their emotional, physical, and legal needs.

iii. Educational Reform

Integrating domestic abuse awareness into school curricula is crucial for early prevention. This should include topics like gender equality, understanding consent, and the risks associated with transactional relationships such as "blesser culture," where young girls accept money and gifts from older men, often leading to exploitative and abusive dynamics. Programs like South Africa's Life Orientation subject can be enhanced with modules on interpersonal relationships and the law. Other global examples, like Canada's Respect in

School initiative, show how school-based education can reduce tolerance for violence and promote respect among peers.

iv. Economic Empowerment Policies

Economic dependence is a significant barrier to leaving abusive relationships, particularly for women in low-income brackets. Developing targeted economic empowerment programs can provide viable alternatives to remaining in abusive environments. These could include microloans for women, vocational training, and incentives for businesses to hire abuse survivors. Programs such as India's Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) have demonstrated success in enabling women to achieve financial independence. In the South African context, expanding initiatives like EPWP (Expanded Public Works Programme) to specifically target GBV survivors could provide both employment and critical social support.

B. PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING INTERVENTIONS

i. Local Task Forces

Creating multi-disciplinary local task forces can facilitate a cohesive and community-based approach to combatting domestic abuse and GBV. These task forces should include representatives from law enforcement, healthcare providers, social workers, educators, and community leaders. By working together, they can identify at-risk individuals early, ensure survivors receive timely interventions, and monitor ongoing cases to prevent escalation. For example, South Africa's Community Policing Forums (CPFs) provide a platform for collaboration between the police and community members, which could be enhanced by integrating health and social service providers into the framework. In India, One Stop Crisis Centres (OSCCs) serve as a model for such task forces, offering medical, legal, and counseling services under one roof, ensuring streamlined support for victims.

ii. Mobile Outreach Units

Deploying mobile clinics and legal aid units can address the geographic and financial barriers often faced by rural and underserved populations. These units can provide essential services, such as medical care, trauma counseling, and legal assistance, directly to communities that lack access to permanent facilities. For example, the Thuthuzela Care

Centres in South Africa, while typically based in hospitals, could inspire the expansion of mobile units to deliver similar services to remote areas. Additionally, Uganda's Mothers' Union Mobile Clinics provide critical health and psychological support, demonstrating how mobility can significantly increase accessibility and impact.

iii. Digital Innovation

Harnessing technology is critical for modernizing GBV interventions. Apps and hotlines provide victims with discreet, anonymous avenues to report abuse and access resources. For instance, South Africa's GBV Command Centre, a 24-hour hotline offering counseling and support, has been a lifeline for many survivors. This initiative can be complemented with mobile apps like Kenya's Haki App, which connects victims to local resources and includes features like GPS tracking for emergency response. Educational platforms like Shepherd in the United States offer a blend of survivor support and educational tools, which could be adapted to South Africa's socio-cultural context. Ensuring that these digital tools are accessible in multiple languages and dialects will also increase their reach and effectiveness.

C. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future studies should address several critical areas to deepen the understanding of domestic abuse and gender-based violence (GBV) and improve the effectiveness of interventions:

i. Exploring the Long-Term Impact of Interventions on Survivor Outcomes

While many studies focus on immediate support and intervention, there is limited research on how these efforts influence survivors' long-term recovery and quality of life. Future studies could assess the efficacy of specific interventions, such as counseling programs, shelter services, and legal assistance, over extended periods. For instance, tracking survivors who access services like South Africa's Thuthuzela Care Centres could provide data on their psychological well-being, socioeconomic stability, and ability to reintegrate into society.

Such research could identify gaps in current approaches and guide the development of programs that foster sustained healing, including follow-up support services and economic empowerment initiatives. Comparisons between survivors who received tailored interventions and those who did not could further refine best practices.

ii. Investigating the Dynamics of Abuse in Rural and Underrepresented Provinces

Existing data highlights urban areas like Gauteng and the Western Cape, but abuse dynamics in provinces such as Limpopo, Northern Cape, and rural KwaZulu-Natal remain underexplored. Future research should prioritize these regions to uncover specific cultural, economic, and geographic factors influencing abuse prevalence and victim responses.

Studies could examine the role of community norms, access to support systems, and the influence of traditional leadership structures in rural contexts. For example, in many rural areas, patriarchal norms may exacerbate survivors' reluctance to report abuse or seek help. Research could guide interventions that are culturally sensitive and regionally specific, ensuring they address unique barriers like transportation challenges and limited local resources.

iii. Examining the Role of Social Media in Normalizing or Combating Transactional Relationships Like "Blesser" Dynamics

Social media has significantly shaped youth perceptions of relationships, including the normalization of "blesser" dynamics, where young women accept gifts or money from older men in exchange for romantic or sexual relationships. These dynamics often involve abuse, yet they persist due to perceived financial security and social status.

Future research could explore how platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook either glamorize or challenge these relationships. Studies could analyze trends in influencer behavior, user interactions, and the impact of targeted educational campaigns on reshaping narratives around transactional relationships. Examples like the #AmINext movement in South Africa demonstrate how digital activism can mobilize awareness and combat harmful practices.

iv. Studying the Psychological and Social Effects of Domestic Violence on Younger Demographics and Their Coping Mechanisms

Children and adolescents exposed to domestic violence experience profound psychological, emotional, and social challenges that shape their development. Future studies should focus on the long-term impact of this exposure on mental health, academic performance, and interpersonal relationships.

For example, research could examine the prevalence of PTSD, depression, and anxiety among children in abusive households. Additionally, it could explore coping mechanisms such as reliance on peer support, engagement in extracurricular activities, or maladaptive behaviors like substance abuse. Investigating the role of school-based interventions, such as counseling programs and mentorship initiatives, could provide actionable insights for fostering resilience among affected youth.

X. CONCLUSION

A. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

This study reveals the intricate interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and demographic factors contributing to youth vulnerability to domestic abuse and gender-based violence (GBV). It highlights several significant patterns and trends, deeply rooted in systemic inequalities and socio-cultural norms, informed by criminological theories like routine activity theory, strain theory, and intersectionality.

In relation to Socio-Economic Vulnerabilities, the research underscores the disproportionate impact of abuse on women from low-income households, with financial instability emerging as a critical risk factor. Strain theory explains this relationship, as economic stressors can exacerbate domestic tensions and lead to higher incidences of violence within financially insecure families. Black respondents, who predominantly belonged to low-income groups, also reported the highest number of abuse cases, showcasing how structural inequalities tied to race and class compound risks.

Urban and regional disparities are shown to be prevalent. The geographical distribution of abuse cases reveals urban areas, such as Gauteng, as hotspots for domestic violence. Routine activity theory provides a lens for understanding these patterns, highlighting how urban settings often increase proximity between potential offenders and victims, especially in environments lacking guardianship or social oversight. In contrast, the underreporting in rural provinces suggests a pressing need to investigate hidden abuse in less visible areas. A case in point is the lack of reported cases from provinces like Limpopo and the Northern Cape does not necessarily indicate an absence of abuse but reflects barriers like stigma, limited reporting mechanisms, and lack of access to resources. This highlights the importance of tailoring interventions to regional dynamics.

The research emphasizes the role of entrenched socio-cultural norms in perpetuating abuse, such as the widespread acceptance of "blesser" dynamics—transactional relationships where young girls receive financial support or gifts from older men in exchange for romantic

or sexual engagement. These relationships often involve violence and exploitation but are sustained by societal acceptance, financial dependence, and perceived status.

From a criminological perspective, such practices can be understood through the social learning theory, which posits that behaviors, including violence and exploitation, are learned through observation and reinforcement in cultural settings. When communities normalize transactional relationships, they inadvertently perpetuate cycles of abuse.

The study's findings on intersectional vulnerabilities also reveal how intersecting identities—such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity—shape abuse experiences. Intersectionality theory underscores how overlapping forms of discrimination intensify risks for certain groups. For instance, younger individuals in low-income households reported higher rates of abuse, reflecting the compounded vulnerabilities of dependency and financial instability.

Cultural stigma and fear of judgment emerged as significant barriers preventing victims from disclosing abuse or seeking help. These barriers are deeply tied to patriarchal norms and societal expectations that prioritize family loyalty or frame domestic violence as a private matter. Feminist criminological theories critique these structural forces, emphasizing the importance of dismantling gendered power dynamics to enable victims to access justice and support. Educational initiatives, particularly in schools, can help combat these barriers by teaching youth about gender equality, consent, and the unacceptability of abuse, fostering a culture of openness and support.

These findings not only expand our criminological understanding of domestic abuse and GBV but also underscore the urgent need for targeted, intersectional interventions. Addressing socio-economic inequalities, challenging harmful cultural norms, and improving accessibility to resources are critical components of any effective strategy to reduce youth vulnerability and foster safer communities.

By situating these findings within a theoretical framework, this study contributes to the growing body of research advocating for holistic and systemic approaches to addressing domestic violence and gender-based violence among youth in South Africa.

B. CONTRIBUTIONS TO CRIMINOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING

This research significantly advances criminological understanding by emphasizing the critical role of intersectionality in analyzing and addressing domestic abuse and gender-based violence (GBV) among youth. By situating the study within the broader framework of criminological theories, including intersectionality theory, routine activity theory, strain theory, and social learning theory, the research provides a nuanced lens to examine how systemic inequalities, socio-economic factors, and cultural norms intersect to perpetuate cycles of violence.

The study highlights the necessity of intersectional approaches in criminology, showing that vulnerabilities to abuse are not shaped by singular factors like gender or income but by the overlapping effects of multiple identities and systemic barriers. For example, the compounded risks faced by young women in low-income households or LGBTQ+ individuals in culturally conservative areas reflect how intersecting forms of oppression—such as gender, economic inequality, and societal stigma—create unique vulnerabilities.

By incorporating intersectionality, the research challenges traditional criminological models that often adopt a one-dimensional view of victimization. Instead, it advocates for a holistic approach that considers how structural inequalities—rooted in race, class, gender, and geography—shape both the experiences of victims and the broader social contexts in which violence occurs.

The research demonstrates how systemic inequalities, such as poverty and limited access to education, exacerbate vulnerabilities to domestic violence. Drawing on strain theory, it explains how economic hardship not only increases the likelihood of conflict within households but also limits victims' options for escaping abusive situations.

Moreover, the study applies routine activity theory to explain regional disparities, such as the higher prevalence of abuse in urbanized areas like Gauteng. Factors like increased anonymity, population density, and socio-economic inequality contribute to conditions where perpetrators can exploit vulnerable individuals.

As a theoretical contribution, these insights underscore the need for criminology to go beyond analyzing individual behaviors and instead address the systemic structures that enable cycles of violence to persist.

The study contributes a framework for interventions that are culturally sensitive, inclusive, and tailored to specific community needs. Recognizing the importance of social learning theory, it emphasizes that behaviors, including those that perpetuate violence, are learned through cultural norms, family dynamics, and societal reinforcement. Consequently, breaking the cycle of violence requires addressing these root causes through education, community engagement, and structural reforms.

By linking theoretical perspectives with actionable recommendations, this research provides a roadmap for integrating criminological insights into real-world interventions. It demonstrates how theories like intersectionality and routine activity can inform practical solutions, such as regional task forces, mobile outreach units, and educational reforms aimed at addressing the root causes of violence.

This study's focus on intersectionality and systemic inequalities not only enriches the theoretical discourse in criminology but also provides a foundation for more effective, inclusive, and contextually relevant interventions. By emphasizing the interconnectedness of individual vulnerabilities and societal structures, it contributes to a deeper understanding of domestic abuse and GBV, paving the way for transformative approaches to prevention and response.

C. IMPLICATIONS FOR ADDRESSING DOMESTIC ABUSE AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AMONG YOUTH

This study highlights the critical need for a multifaceted approach to addressing domestic abuse and gender-based violence (GBV) among youth. By integrating prevention strategies, survivor-centered rehabilitation programs, and systemic reforms, it outlines a path toward sustainable solutions that go beyond surface-level interventions. The findings emphasize the importance of addressing both immediate and structural factors, fostering environments where South African youth can thrive free from violence and exploitation.

Effective prevention strategies are central to disrupting cycles of abuse before they begin. The research underscores the importance of education reform as a key preventive tool, advocating for the inclusion of domestic abuse awareness in school curricula. This initiative would focus on teaching young people about gender equality, healthy relationships, and the dangers of transactional relationships like "blesser" dynamics.

Drawing on social learning theory, the study highlights that attitudes supporting abuse are often learned within families and communities. Preventive education can break these cycles by reshaping perceptions at an early age, challenging the normalization of violence, and fostering healthier behaviors.

Rehabilitation is crucial not only for survivors but also for addressing the behavior of perpetrators. The study emphasizes the need for programs that offer survivors comprehensive support, including psychological counseling, financial assistance, and access to legal resources.

Survivor-Centered Approach: Recognizing the disproportionate impact of GBV on young women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those from low-income households, interventions must be inclusive and tailored to address diverse needs. Rehabilitation efforts should prioritize:

- Trauma-informed care to support survivors' mental health.
- Skills development programs to foster economic independence.
- Safe housing options to protect survivors from returning to abusive environments.

Perpetrator Rehabilitation - Behavioral change programs, informed by routine activity theory and strain theory, can help address the underlying socio-economic pressures and learned behaviors contributing to abuse. These programs aim to reduce recidivism by targeting the root causes of abusive behaviors.

This study's holistic approach integrates immediate interventions with long-term systemic changes, creating a blueprint for safer environments where youth can thrive. By addressing the socio-economic, cultural, and structural factors contributing to abuse, the findings advocate for a comprehensive strategy that not only responds to violence but also actively prevents it from occurring.

By leveraging the insights from criminological theories and grounding them in the lived realities of South African youth, this study provides a foundation for transformative change. The implications underscore that tackling GBV requires an integrated response that empowers individuals, reshapes societal norms, and addresses systemic inequities, ensuring a future where all youth are free from violence and exploitation.

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INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project:

Exploring the Impact of Exposure to Domestic Abuse and Gender-Based Violence on Youth in critical demographic and socio-cultural contexts: A Criminological Analysis and Intervention Framework.

Researcher:

Stacey Venter

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Forensic Criminology Institute

Purpose of the Study:

You are invited to participate in a research study that aims to explore the impact of domestic violence on youth. The study seeks to understand the experiences, coping mechanisms, and support needs of young individuals affected by domestic violence. Your participation will contribute to developing more effective support services for youth in similar situations.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:

- Complete a questionnaire or participate in an interview about your experiences and perspectives on domestic violence.
- Allow the interview or questionnaire to be recorded for data analysis purposes, if applicable.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You are also free to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Risks and Discomforts:

The study involves discussing personal experiences with domestic violence, which may cause discomfort or emotional distress. If you feel uncomfortable at any point, you are free to skip questions, take a break, or withdraw from the study. Support services and resources will be provided if you experience any emotional distress during or after your participation.

Benefits:

While there are no direct benefits to you from participating, your input will help improve understanding of the needs and challenges faced by youth experiencing domestic violence. This knowledge can help shape more effective support programs and interventions.

Confidentiality:

All information provided will be kept confidential to the fullest extent allowed by law. Your responses will be anonymized, and no personally identifiable information will be shared. Data will be securely stored and only accessible to the research team. Results will be reported in a way that does not identify you or any other participant.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participation in this study.

Consent:

By signing below, you indicate that you have read and understood the information provided above, you have had the opportunity to ask questions, and you agree to participate in the study.

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Parental/Guardian Consent:

(Required if participant is under the age of 18)

Parent/Guardian's Name (Printed): _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Statement:

I have explained the purpose, procedures, and potential risks of this research study to the participant. I have answered all questions to the best of my ability.

Researcher's Name (Printed): _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

QUESTIONNAIRE

Introduction:

Thank you for participating in this important research. Your insights will contribute to a better understanding of the impact of domestic abuse and gender-based violence on youth.

Please answer the following questions honestly and to the best of your ability.

Demographic Information:

Gender:

Male

Female

Non-binary

Prefer not to say

Other (please specify)

Age:

_____

Sexual Orientation:

Heterosexual

Homosexual

Bisexual

Pansexual

Other (please specify)

_____

Ethnicity (please specify):

Black

White

Coloured

Indian/Asian

Other:

_____

Socioeconomic Status:

Low-income

Middle-income

High-income

Unsure

Prefer not to say

Cultural Background (please specify):

_____

Section 1: Understanding Awareness and Perception

1.1 How would you define domestic abuse and gender-based violence?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

1.2 On a scale of 1 to 10, how aware do you feel about domestic abuse and gender-based violence issues affecting youth in your community?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1.3 How aware do you think youth in your community are about the signs and consequences of domestic abuse and gender-based violence?

Very aware

Somewhat aware

Not very aware

Not aware at all

1.4 Are you aware of any instances of domestic abuse or gender-based violence within your community or among your peers?

Yes

No

Not sure

Prefer not to say

1.5 If yes, how do you think such incidents impact the well-being of the individuals involved?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

1.6 what factors do you feel are most important in a relationship?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Section 2: Experiences and Effects

2.1 How do you think exposure to domestic abuse and gender-based violence might affect the mental health of youth?

A. Increased risk of anxiety and depression

B. Impact on self-esteem and self-worth

C. Difficulty forming trusting relationships

D. Potential engagement in risky behaviors as a coping mechanism

E. All of the above

F. None of the above

G. Other

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2.1 Have you personally experienced domestic abuse or gender-based violence?

(Please choose one)

A. Yes

B. No

C. Prefer not to say

2.2 If yes, please briefly describe your experience, including the nature of the abuse, the relationship with the perpetrator, and any impacts on your life.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Section 3: Societal and Cultural Influences

3.1 How would you describe the cultural norms and attitudes regarding relationships and gender roles in your community?

_____
_____
_____
_____

3.2 In your opinion, what role does societal or cultural pressure play in influencing youth to perpetrate or tolerate domestic abuse?

A. Significant role

B. Moderate role

C. Minor role

D. No role

E. Unsure

F. Other

_____
_____

3.3 How do you believe cultural norms and values in your community contribute to perceptions of domestic abuse and gender-based violence?

A. Reinforce traditional gender roles

B. Challenge traditional gender roles

C. Contribute to victim-blaming attitudes

D. Promote healthy communication and relationships

G. Other

_____
_____
_____

3.4 Do you think there are specific challenges faced by youth from different cultural backgrounds in addressing and combating domestic abuse and gender-based violence?

A. Yes, due to cultural expectations

B. Yes, due to language barriers

C. No, challenges are universal

D. Unsure

E. Other

_____
_____
_____

3.5 Do you think there is a stigma associated with being a victim or survivor of domestic abuse or gender-based violence in your community?

A. Strongly agree

B. Agree

C. Neutral

D. Disagree

E. Strongly disagree

3.6 If yes, how do you believe this stigma affects individuals who experience abuse?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Section 4: Support Systems and Accessibility

4.1 How accessible do you believe support systems are for youth experiencing domestic abuse or gender-based violence in your community?

A. Highly accessible

B. Moderately accessible

C. Limited accessibility

D. Not accessible at all

E. Unsure

F. Other

_____

_____

4.2 Have you or anyone you know sought help or support in response to domestic abuse or gender-based violence?

A. Yes

B. No

C. Prefer not to say

4.3 If yes, what types of support or interventions were sought, and were they helpful?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4.4 Have you or someone you know ever faced challenges in reporting or seeking help for domestic abuse or gender-based violence?

A. Yes, due to fear of retaliation

B. Yes, due to lack of awareness about available resources

C. Yes, due to cultural or societal stigma

D. No, reporting was straightforward and supportive

E. No, as there was no need for reporting

F. Prefer not to say

Please elaborate.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4.5 In your opinion, what barriers might prevent youth from seeking help when faced with domestic abuse or gender-based violence?

A. Fear of judgment from peers or adults

B. Lack of awareness about available resources

C. Cultural or religious constraints

D. Limited trust in support systems

E. All of the above

F. None of the above

G. Other

_____
_____
_____
_____

Section 5: Intervention Framework

5.1 What, in your opinion, are effective ways to prevent domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth?

A. Comprehensive education programs in schools

B. Increased community awareness campaigns

C. Accessible mental health support services

D. Empowerment programs for youth

E. Stronger legal consequences for perpetrators

F. All of the above

G. None of the above

H. Other

_____

_____

_____

5.2 How can schools and communities better support youth who have been exposed to or affected by domestic abuse and gender-based violence?

A. Implementing counseling services in schools

B. Establishing safe spaces for open dialogue

C. Providing educational resources on healthy relationships

D. Encouraging peer support networks

E. All of the above

F. None of the above

G. Other

_____

_____

_____

5.3 Should interventions be tailored to specific demographic and socio-cultural contexts? Why or why not?

A. Yes, because cultural nuances influence perceptions and responses

B. No, as the issues are universal and should be addressed uniformly

C. Unsure

D. Other

_____

_____

_____

Section 6: Recommendations

6.1 Are you aware of any successful interventions or initiatives in your community addressing domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth? Please describe.

A. Yes, and they involve community workshops

B. Yes, and they focus on school-based programs

C. Yes, and they emphasize legal consequences for perpetrators

D. No, I am not aware of any initiatives

E. Other

_____
_____
_____

6.2 What policy changes or practical suggestions do you think would be beneficial in combating domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth?

A. Strengthening legal frameworks

B. Allocating more resources to mental health services

C. Enhancing school curricula on healthy relationships

D. Establishing community support networks

E. All of the above

F. None of the above

G. Other

_____
_____
_____

Section 7: Education Prevention Strategies

7.1 To what extent do you believe educational institutions should incorporate discussions on domestic abuse and gender-based violence in their curricula?

A. Fully integrate it into existing curricula

B. Offer standalone workshops or programs

C. Address it through counseling services

D. No need to address it in schools

E. Unsure

F. Other

_____

_____

_____

7.2 How effective do you think peer-led initiatives could be in preventing domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth?

A. Very effective

B. Moderately effective

C. Minimally effective

D. Not effective at all

E. Unsure

F. Other:

_____

_____

_____

7.3 Have you received any formal education or information about healthy relationships, consent, and preventing domestic abuse and gender-based violence?

A. Yes

B. No

C. Not sure

7.4 If yes, how effective do you think such educational programs are in promoting awareness and preventing domestic abuse among youth?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Section 8: Community Engagement and Empowerment

8.1 In your view, how can communities empower youth to take an active role in preventing and addressing domestic abuse and gender-based violence?

A. Establishing youth-led advocacy groups

B. Providing platforms for open dialogue in community settings

C. Offering mentorship programs for at-risk youth

D. Collaborating with local law enforcement for community safety

E. All of the above

F. None of the above

G. Other:

_____
_____
_____

8.2 How would you rate the effectiveness of existing community initiatives in promoting awareness and prevention of domestic abuse and gender-based violence?

A. Very effective

B. Somewhat effective

C. Ineffective

D. Not aware of any community initiatives

E. Unsure

F. Other:

_____
_____
_____

Section 9: Media Influence and Representation

9.1 To what extent do you think media representation contributes to shaping perceptions of domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth?

A. Significantly shapes perceptions

B. Has a moderate impact

C. Has minimal impact

D. No impact at all

E. Unsure

F. Other:

_____

_____

_____

9.2 How can media outlets better contribute to raising awareness and fostering a culture of intolerance towards domestic abuse and gender-based violence?

A. Increasing coverage of success stories and interventions

B. Providing accurate portrayals of healthy relationships

C. Collaborating with community organizations for educational campaigns

D. Holding accountable media content that perpetuates harmful stereotypes

E. All of the above

F. None of the above

G. Other

_____

_____

_____

9.3 To what extent do you think technology, including social media, influences the prevalence of domestic abuse and gender-based violence among youth?

A. Significant influence

B. Moderate influence

C. Minimal influence

D. No influence

E. Unsure

9.4 How can technology and social media platforms be utilized to raise awareness and provide support for youth affected by domestic abuse and gender-based violence?

A. Implementing educational campaigns on social media

B. Creating online support communities

C. Utilizing technology for anonymous reporting mechanisms

D. Collaborating with influencers for awareness

E. All of the above

F. None of the above

G. Other

_____

_____

_____

Section 10: Legal Protections and Enforcement

10.1 In your opinion, are legal protections against domestic abuse and gender-based violence sufficient for youth in your community?

A. Yes, they are sufficient

B. Partially sufficient

C. Insufficient

D. Unsure

E. Other

_____
_____
_____

10.2 How can legal systems better address the unique needs of youth who are victims or perpetrators of domestic abuse and gender-based violence?

A. Implementing specialized youth courts

B. Providing age-appropriate legal resources and education

C. Strengthening protective orders for youth

D. Offering rehabilitation and counseling as alternatives to punitive measures

E. All of the above

F. None of the above

G. Other

_____
_____
_____

10.3 How confident are you in the effectiveness of law enforcement and support services in your community in addressing domestic abuse and gender-based violence?

A. Very confident

B. Somewhat confident

C. Not very confident

D. Not confident at all

10.4 What improvements, if any, do you think could be made to enhance the responsiveness of law enforcement and support services to cases of domestic abuse among youth?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Section 11: Long-term Impact and Resilience

11.1 How do you think exposure to domestic abuse and gender-based violence during youth can impact individuals in their later adult life?

A. Increased likelihood of perpetrating violence

B. Long-lasting psychological effects

C. Challenges in forming healthy relationships

D. Greater risk of substance abuse

E. All of the above

F. None of the above

G. Other

_____

_____

_____

11.2 What resilience factors do you believe are crucial in helping youth overcome the impact of domestic abuse and gender-based violence?

A. Strong support networks

B. Access to mental health services

C. Educational opportunities

D. Personal empowerment initiatives

E. All of the above

F. None of the above

G. Other

_____

_____

_____

Conclusion:

Thank you for your time and valuable input. Your responses will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of domestic abuse and gender-based violence on youth and inform the development of effective intervention frameworks. If you have any additional comments or suggestions, please feel free to share.