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South African Media Discourse on Intimate Partner Violence and Femicide

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Abstract

South Africa faces escalating gender-based violence and femicide, which is among the highest globally. This paper analyses media representations of this violence, advocating for narrative change to prevent it. It employs critical discourse analysis and machine learning to study news articles, highlighting the need for media, policymakers, and civil society to challenge existing narratives. The research also explores how these narratives intersect with societal structures like patriarchy and sexism, reinforcing the issue. The findings emphasize the crucial role of media in shaping narratives and the collective responsibility to address and alter these narratives for societal change. These findings include victims of sexual abuse are commonly subjected to secondary victimization via victim-blaming narratives, which can discourage survivors from pursuing justice and increase emotions of shame and guilt. This promotes a culture of silence and feeds the cycle of abuse. Additionally, the media plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of gender-based violence (GBV) and femicide in South Africa.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, Gender-based violence, Victim blaming.*

Introduction

Attaining Sustainable Development Goal 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030, remains a distant prospect for South African society. This ambitious objective aims to eliminate all types of violence against women and girls in both public and private sectors, including trafficking, sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse (Statistics South Africa, 2020). South Africa, like numerous other countries, grapples with the pervasive problem of violence against women, which persists due to cultural values and norms that perpetuate abusive practices directed towards women (Kim & Motsei, 2002).

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is regarded as a global societal issue, making it a progressive social concern in South African societies. Ilyasu, Abubakar, Aliyu, Galadanci, and Salihu (2011:111) argue that “intimate partner violence is a major public health and human rights problem worldwide.” Intimate partner violence, which typically results in femicide in South Africa, has increased recently among women against their male partners, men against their female partners, and same-sex intimate

partnerships. Despite this, the focus of this paper is on male intimate partner violence against female intimate partners.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023), 35% of women globally have experienced physical or sexual intimate relationship violence (IPV) or non-partner sexual violence. Intimate partner violence is generally driven by gender inequities and power imbalances between men and women, and it is frequently perpetuated by patriarchal systems and toxic masculinities, which are prevalent in African communities (Ratele, 2016).

According to Gordon and Collins (2013), the frequency of violence against women in South Africa, along with authorities' inability to respond, have created a culture of fear among women, in which IPV is normalised. Graaf (2017) found that different communities tend to embrace specific sorts of toxic masculinity identities, resulting in power inequalities within gender dynamics.

Notably, toxic masculinities may manifest in men assuming the role of primary breadwinners and exhibiting traits such as strength and toughness, which can subsequently contribute to their utilization of violence as a means of exerting control over others, particularly their intimate partners (Graaf, 2017). Abrahams, Mathews, Martin, Lombard, and Jewkes (2012) state that IPV, which is generally understood to be the deliberate killing of females (women or girls) due to their gender, is the direct cause of femicide. Therefore, the death of females by their male counterparts is the focus. The increasing number of male offenders who use rape as a prelude to murder is reflected in these femicides (Moruri & Obioha, 2020).

In South Africa, there has been an increase in incidences of intimate partner violence (IPV), particularly on higher education campuses (Davids, 2020). IPV often targets young women perpetrated by people they know. It persists to be a societal issue, both in the public and private spheres, prior to and throughout the COVID-19 epidemic (Nduna & Oyama, 2020). IPV is described as nonconsensual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner, which includes rape, domestic assault, kidnapping, trafficking, sexual harassment, and femicide. It also includes emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, as well as threats and coercion (Nduna & Oyama, 2020).

Beyond physical and psychological harm, IPV has economic consequences of up to 3.7% of a country's GDP (Nduna & Oyama, 2020). IPV primarily affects women aged 15 to 49, particularly those with

lower educational levels (Statistics SA, 2020). Over 37% of women worldwide have suffered IPV, with intimate partners responsible for 38% of femicides (Statistics SA, 2020). South Africa has higher IPV rates than the global average (Govender, 2023). In 2022/2023, 114 life sentences were issued for IPV crimes, and 410 people were detained for rape, demonstrating the gravity of these offenses. Alarming, South Africa reports approximately 10,000 rape cases per quarter (Govender, 2023).

According to a 2019 study, 18% of women and girls aged 15–49 in partnerships experienced physical or sexual violence within a year, demonstrating the widespread nature of IPV (Sardinha et al., 2022). Some progress has been made in addressing IPV, with 68 people sentenced to life in prison for IPV crimes (SAPS Crime Statistics 2022/2023). Despite this, violence in South Africa continues to be a distressing issue, with 6,289 people killed by violent acts between January and March 2023, according to Police Minister Bheki Cele. The COVID-19 pandemic made IPV worse, with lockdowns causing a spike in violence against women because of societal disruptions (UNFPA; John et al., 2020).

The media greatly influence public impressions about IPV. This study uses an interdisciplinary approach that combines the Social and Computer Sciences to examine how media narratives affect public knowledge and responses to IPV. The Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) algorithm was used to extract topics from newspaper articles about IPV in South Africa (2020–2023), and Python was used for data processing. A critical discourse study looked at the narratives and language patterns that support toxic masculinities in crimes including femicide, rape, and assault.

The results showed that negative preconceptions are frequently reinforced by media narratives, which influences public perceptions of IPV. The study is organized as follows: Section 2 discusses the impact of the media; Section 3 reviews the literature; Section 4 deals with methodology; Section 5 deals with discourse analysis; and Section 6 deals with conclusions and media practices and societal change.

Literature Review

South Africa has one of the world's highest rates of IPV, with women and girls subjected to a variety of types of abuse, including domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, and femicide. The gang rape and

disembowelment of Anene Booysen and Thandiswa Qubuza, as well as the cases of Uyinene Mrwentyana, Karabo Mokoena, Reeve Steenkamp, Leighandre Jegels, Mvumelwano Qumbu, Zodwa Tyoloda, and many others, have left South Africa in shock and "broken." The South African Police Service Annual Report states that as of the end of March 2019, there were 179 683 recorded offenses against women, up from 171 591 in 2013/2014 (South African Police Service, 2019).

Gender inequality, patriarchal views and attitudes, cultural norms, poverty, substance misuse, and lax law enforcement are the leading causes of violence against women in South Africa (Gulati & Kelly, 2020). Women of all ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds are impacted (Dlamini, 2021). High rates of "corrective rape," which targets LGBTQ+ people to enforce heteronormative roles and perpetuate the notion that women exist to appease men, have also been fuelled by patriarchy.

Introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Intersectionality theory investigates how overlapping social identities, such as sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, and class, lead to different experiences of discrimination. Intersectionality in South Africa emphasizes how heterosexism, classism, and ableism are examples of power structures that increase violence against underprivileged women. This viewpoint emphasizes the necessity of inclusive strategies that consider a range of experiences influenced by intersecting identities to address gender-based violence.

According to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, behavior is learned through the interplay of behavioural, cognitive, and environmental elements. It highlights how social settings and upbringing influence criminal behaviour, providing insight into how violence persists in societies.

Intimate Partner Violence in the Media.

The media, including print and social media platforms such as Twitter, considerably impacts public conversation surrounding IPV. While hashtags like #JusticeForNamhla help to raise awareness and stir discussions on social media, they can also magnify negative narratives. For instance, the viral spread of Namhla Mtwa's murder case and Sesam Gcolotela's kidnapping, both demonstrate the media's ability to mobilize

action. Inaccuracies, such as those made in Joslin Smith's case, can have serious effects (Mthatha Express, 2023; Imray, 2024).

The media's approach to IPV is frequently characterized by sensationalism, victim blaming, and stereotype reinforcement, all of which can promote dangerous views. The agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1968) demonstrates how prolonged coverage of dramatic instances, such as Namhla's murder, can distort public perceptions of IPV prevalence. Similarly, cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1973) contends that repeatedly portraying women as victims normalizes gender-based violence and desensitizes viewers.

Despite its limitations, media can uncover IPV, amplify survivor voices, and advocate for action. Investigative journalism and hashtags such as #CountMeIn and #AmINext have increased awareness and rallied support (Van de Heyde & Bengu, 2022). However, contentious hashtags like #MenAreDogs risk reinforcing gender stereotypes and impeding productive discourse. Ethical media practices are critical for appropriately reporting IPV, assisting survivors, and challenging misconceptions. Media literacy programs, partnerships with civil society, and survivor-centered narratives are critical for promoting informed, empowered reporting. We can promote gender equality and combat IPV by addressing the media's promise and flaws simultaneously.

Methodology

An exploratory research design was employed. This design is suitable when the subject matter is relatively novel or lacks comprehensive information. In this case, there is a limited understanding of how language discourses contribute to, sustain, and replicate violence against women in South Africa. Thus, employing an exploratory design is crucial in shedding light on this phenomenon by investigating potential systematic literature responses and generating novel insights through the comparison of various available sources of literature on this issue.

This study explored various literature sources to elucidate the potential role of material dealing with violence against women in inciting and perpetuating violence against women. The researchers adopted a systematic review approach to accomplish this objective. A systematic review is a rigorous research method that systematically identifies, describes, evaluates, and synthesises existing research literature using transparent and accountable methods (Maluleke and Dlamini, 2019).

Following the steps outlined by Punch (2014), the researchers meticulously conducted the systematic review, adhering to pre-defined protocols and employing standardised tools for literature search, screening, coding, weighting, and integration.

Sampling

For articles selection, social media platforms, online newspaper articles and academic journals in this study, purposive sampling was employed, targeting diverse sources that align with the study's content. Keywords used to select these newspaper articles were IPV, COVID-19, abuse, and femicide. The researchers utilised specific criteria to determine the inclusion of materials as units of analysis for this paper. The following criteria were applied:

- (i) Publication Period: Materials published between 2020 and 2023 with the three- four (4) keywords IPV, COVID-19, abuse, and femicide were considered eligible for inclusion.
- (ii) Focus on Language Discourse: Materials concentrated on materials dealing with violence against women and the role language plays in perpetuating violence against women in South African news outlets and, social media platforms.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study was conducted using document study techniques, including library and online research. The researchers gathered secondary data from various sources, such as e-books (including published and unpublished dissertations, theses, journal articles, academic books, and conference papers). Electronic databases, such as ResearchGate, EBSCOhost Research Databases, Emerald Insight, 'Free Full PDF' Google Scholar, Oxford University Press, South African Media via Sabinet (specifically Sabinet African ePublications) Online, Science Direct, and Taylor & Francis, as well as social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, were also utilised to ensure a comprehensive and diverse dataset. This approach was employed to provide a wealth of information for analysis and interpretation.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed using discourse analysis as the chosen method for this paper. Discourse analysis involves a systematic examination of texts to uncover their underlying meanings and how these meanings shape social reality (Johnstone & Andrus, 2024). Within this approach, the meanings attributed to any discourse are constructed, supported, and challenged through texts' production, dissemination, and consumption. Furthermore, these meanings emerge from the interactions between social groups and the complex societal structures within which the discourse is situated (Johnstone & Andrus, 2024). Discourse analysis examines the origins and maintenance of socially produced ideas and objects in our world (Hjelm, 2021). This method is particularly well-suited for exploring qualitative, interpretive, and constructionist aspects of social phenomena.

Discussion of Results

In this section, we present the discussion of the results obtained from our analysis of newspaper articles on the topic of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in South Africa. The themes presented were derived by applying topic extraction using the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) method. By employing this approach, we could identify and extract key phrases and topics that frequently appeared in the articles, providing valuable insights into the prevalent discourses surrounding IPV in the media. Through this analysis, we aim to shed light on the narratives and linguistic choices employed in reporting IPV, examining their potential impacts on shaping societal perceptions and attitudes towards violence against women.

South Africa as the Rape Capital of the World

The framing of South Africa as the "rape capital of the world" has important ramifications for the country's discourse on intimate partner violence (IPV). While this term emphasizes the alarming incidence of sexual assault, it also reinforces damaging stereotypes, develops a sense of inevitability, and adds to a culture of acceptance or indifference toward IPV. Despite having some of the highest rates of rape in the world, Buiten and Naidoo (2016) contend that South African rape

scholarship frequently highlights the importance of context. Rape is commonly attributed to apartheid's historical, social, and economic legacies as well as to government discourses that normalised and approved of such violence after it ended.

Armstrong (1994) emphasises how the South African media frequently sensationalises rape, ignoring its basic origin as a tool of male dominance over women. Buiten and Naidoo (2016) observe that public knowledge of rape varies, rising with high-profile incidents such as then-Vice President Jacob Zuma's 2006 rape trial or Anene Booysen's violent rape and murder in 2013. Booysen's case garnered considerable media coverage, resulting in national debate and protest. Dosekun (2013) notes that many South African men ignore female consent, creating an environment in which women feel powerless to claim their rights. With one in every three South African women at risk of rape and high rates of compelled sex, the problem persists (Kapp, 2005; Jewkes et al., 2010). Table 1 depicts the various atrocities experienced by women nationwide. Various news outlets have covered widely these atrocities. According to media reports, sexual violence against women is on the rise in South Africa. However, it is critical to recognize that the statistics on these instances may be incorrect due to a variety of causes as recorded by Africa Check (2014). SA People (2020) narrates that the lack of reporting by women includes the humiliation and stigma of being a rape victim, as well as the lack of privacy while reporting such crimes. Contrary to victims, to safeguard their rights until they are proven guilty, criminals are frequently granted privacy.

Table 1: The Unsettling Reality of Sexual Violence against Women in South Africa

Title	Name of Newspaper
Rape is endemic in South Africa. Why the ANC government keeps missing the mark	The conversation
Why it is wrong to call SA (or any country) the 'rape capital of the world' – The Mail & Guardian	The mail and Guadian
Serial Rape in South Africa Report Reveals Extent of SA Rape Crisis	SAPeople
How rape became South Africa's enduring nightmare	The Guardian
South Africa, once called 'the world's rape capital,' is running out of rape kits	Washington Post
South Africa Leads World in Rape Cases	Voice of America (VOA)
Latest Gauteng crime stats paint province as rape capital of SA: Funzi Ngobeni	ENW
Is a child raped every three minutes in South Africa? The data is flawed	Africa Check
'A nation cannot be free until its women are free'	Ajazeera
Violence against women is staggeringly high in South Africa – a different way of thinking about it is needed	The conversation
'Lucky to be Raped'? Police Minister Bheki Cele Must Go, Says DA	TimesLive
KwaZulu-Natal was – again – a leader in rape and murder, in the first crime stats for 2023	News24

According to these reports, the daily rape of women in Gauteng is worsening, with rape becoming more acceptable and allowed throughout South Africa. A distressing example comes from the Minister of Police's comment about female journalists investigating crime among illegal "Zama Zama" miners. He stated that a journalist who was raped by a single man should consider herself fortunate in comparison to her colleagues who were gang-raped, highlighting a troubling narrative. This type of discourse develops a dangerous attitude in which even rape victims are encouraged to consider themselves "lucky," regardless of the severity of their ordeal. Deconstructing damaging myths in media coverage is critical for preventing sexual assault. The usage of adjectives like "luck" or "fortunate" to describe victims of sexual offenses is extremely problematic and inappropriate.

Research on South Africa's rape epidemic has long revealed the country's issue with gender-based violence (GBV), which is worsened by systemic inadequacies. Jewkes et al. (2002) connect sexual violence to historical legacies of violence, power relations, and patriarchal institutions that are reflected in current media narratives. Media framing theory emphasizes how such storylines can challenge or perpetuate public perceptions of violence. According to Entman (1993), depicting South Africa as the "rape capital of the world" might desensitize the population and prolong the normalcy of violence.

The South African media routinely highlights the incidence of sexual violence, while simultaneously reflecting the government's weak reactions. Artz and Smythe (2007) found repeated inadequacies in the legal and institutional treatment of sexual violence cases, such as underfunding, insufficient training, and lack of urgency—factors that perpetuate a culture of impunity. These shortcomings are often emphasized in media outlets like SAPeople and The Conversation (2022).

Furthermore, designating South Africa as the "rape capital of the world," as seen in publications such as VOA (2013) and The Washington Post (2013), obscures the issue's complexities. Moffett (2006) criticizes this sensationalism, claiming that it simplifies the issue without considering its socio-political foundations. Gqola (2015) further emphasizes that, while media coverage shines light on GBV, it frequently focuses on crime statistics rather than survivor accounts, dehumanizing victims and diminishing their voices.

Lastly, media coverage reflects the prevalence and persistence of sexual violence in South Africa, but its emphasis on statistics and global

comparisons risks overshadowing the need for structural change and more nuanced discussions about the cultural and institutional failures driving the crisis.

Women's Safety in South Africa:

The perception of women's lack of safety in South Africa significantly shapes the discourse on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). This narrative underlines women's vulnerability and is consistent with feminist philosophy, highlighting unequal gender power dynamics that perpetuate violence. However, it promotes fear, limiting women's mobility and agency (Decker et al., 2021).

Media portrayal of women's safety frequently exacerbates their perception of vulnerability, reinforcing power disparities (Buti, 2016). This can normalize violence and reinforce IPV as a societal norm. To counteract this, societal views must be challenged through comprehensive gender equality education, awareness initiatives, and policy measures. By promoting women's empowerment and emphasizing their right to safety, the media can change public opinions and encourage communal responsibility for ending IPV.

Table 2 presents the fears and experiences of women within the country. Numerous media sites, including Global Citizen (2022), Africa News (2022), The Times (2024), and Al Jazeera (2020), have widely reported South African women's vulnerability. This vulnerability is highlighted by the presence of over 1,000 shelters around the country, demonstrating that many women rely on these safe havens while fleeing abusive individuals, who are often intimate partners. This reality casts a harsh light on the daily struggles of women and the actions of the males with whom they live.

Table 2: Women's Security: An Examination of Male Atrocities

Title	Name of Newspaper
As a Teenage Girl in South Africa, I Won't Be Silent About the Horror of Violence in My Country	Global Citizen
South Africa's secret shelter: A safe haven for abused women and children	Africa News
Is it safe to travel to South Africa? - Times Travel	The Times
African women face two pandemics	Aljazeera

In Global Citizen (2022), young women in South Africa are shown speaking out against the pervasive violence and instability in their country and expressing their dissatisfaction at being held responsible for rights breaches, persecution, and restrictions on their freedom because of their gender. The Times also describes South Africa as unsafe and advises female visitors to proceed with caution if they plan to visit. It also presents South Africa as dangerous for males as well as women, giving a bleak image of an aggressive society.

According to Meyers' (2004) study, media sources frequently favour sensationalized tales about extreme violence or femicide over less spectacular but more widespread types of intimate partner violence (IPV). This emphasis may cause people to ignore the regular violence that many women experiences. talks in the media about women's security in South Africa reflect scholarly talks on intersectionality and sensationalism, which obscure systemic problems behind dramatic episodes that conceal the daily hardships that many women endure.

The way that the COVID-19 epidemic and gender-based violence (GBV) are covered in South Africa speaks to larger worries about how violence is made worse by international crises. Global crises disproportionately impact women, particularly when it comes to security and vulnerability, as confirmed by Wenham et al. (2020). The stress placed on shelters and support networks is also highlighted in media stories, underscoring the necessity of stronger social safety nets in times of crisis.

Studies on male aggression reveal ingrained cultural factors as the primary cause. Research relates toxic masculinity, apartheid's historical legacies, militarization, and patriarchal norms to high GBV rates (Hamber, 2017). Although media reports emphasize human accounts of violence, they frequently omit to make a clear connection between structural factors like toxic masculinity and economic disempowerment, and male aggression.

Overall, the media sheds light on the dual crises of GBV and health pandemics affecting women but lacks depth in linking individual acts of violence to broader societal and historical factors.

Association of Rape Cases and Murder of Women

The association of rape cases with the murder of women, which is emphasized in the articles, highlights the gravity and potential lethality of

gender-based violence (IPV). This narrative underscores the urgent need to address not only sexual violence but also the issue of femicide, where women are killed due to their gender. However, it is crucial to critically examine the impact of championing this narrative. According to the Citizen (2023) report from October to December 2022, there were 12,419 incidences of rape by women in 2022. WION (2023) also confirms the observation that attempted murder and rape cases increased significantly between 2021 and 2022.

Eriksson (2024) highlights that the narrative linking rape cases with the murder of women can contribute to harmful victim-blaming discourses. It aligns with the social constructionist theory, which suggests that societal beliefs and norms shape our understanding of violence and victims.

Moffett (2006) coincides that rape in SA is associated with maintaining patriarchy and the teachings of the apartheid regime that the weak bear responsibility for their victimisation further victimising women and empowering men. By implying that the victims bear responsibility for the violence perpetrated against them, this narrative obscures the accountability of the perpetrators and perpetuates the notion that women somehow provoke or deserve such violence (Moffett, 2006).

Moffett (2006) warns that this victim-blaming narrative can have detrimental effects on survivors of IPV. It may discourage survivors from coming forward and seeking justice, perpetuating a culture of silence and reinforcing feelings of shame or guilt. Helman (2023) argues that the narrative of victim blaming diverts attention from the actions and behaviours of the perpetrators, shifting the focus onto the victims and leading to a lack of accountability for those responsible for the violence. To counteract this harmful narrative, it is essential to adopt a survivor-centred approach. The feminist theory highlights the importance of challenging victim-blaming attitudes and advocating for systemic changes that hold perpetrators accountable. By reframing the discourse to focus on the actions and behaviours of the perpetrators, as well as addressing the societal factors that enable IPV, we can shift the narrative away from victim-blaming and promote a culture of empathy, support, and justice for survivors.

Moreover, Bridger (2024) highlights that it is crucial to emphasize the role of structural inequalities and power dynamics in perpetuating IPV. Intersectional theories can help understand how intersecting identities, such as race, class, and gender, intersect to shape individuals' experiences

of violence. By acknowledging these intersecting identities and addressing systemic inequalities, we can challenge the narrative that places blame on the victims and instead foster a society that supports survivors, holds perpetrators accountable, and works towards preventing all forms of violence against women (Bridger, 2024).

Table 3 focuses on a recurrent subject in several news sites is the emphasis on deconstructing and giving the elimination of sexual violence and femicide in South Africa a top priority. The 2021 quarterly report from Aljazeera reveals a troubling trend: from July to September 2022, there was a 14% rise in female homicide rates as compared to the same time in 2021, when 6,163 people lost their lives. In 2022, there were around 1,000 female homicides in the country. This narrative is made more urgent by repeated allusions to crime statistics and the portrayal of femicide and sexual violence as epidemics (Aljazeera,2022; WION, 2023). More people are realizing that femicide is a unique societal problem that needs specific legislative solutions. Asserting that targeted interventions are necessary to counteract the rise in femicide, Abrahams et al. (2009) define femicide as the death of women due to their gender, frequently in the context of intimate partner violence (IPV).

According to criminological theories of violence, such as those put forth by Garland (2001), sensationalized media coverage of crimes has the power to influence how the public views safety and the efficiency of the government. The public may be both informed and alarmed by the media's frequent use of crime statistics in South Africa, which could prompt calls for stricter laws, and policies rather than preventive measures aimed at addressing the root causes of violence.

Table 3: Deconstructing the Epidemic: Giving Priority to Femicide and Sexual Violence in South Africa

Title	Name of Newspaper
Crime 'worrying' in South Africa: 7,000 murdered in three months	Aljazeera
Crime stats: Murder and rape cases went up in the last three months of 2022	The Citizen
South Africa crime data: Murder attempt cases against women rise by 21.5% in first three months of 2023	WION

The media often portrays femicide as a public health catastrophe that requires immediate response. While media coverage frequently depends on worrisome figures, scholarly research, such as that of Mathews et al. (2004), highlights the absence of disaggregated data on femicide in South Africa, making it impossible to build effective, targeted interventions. The media's use of general crime statistics can obfuscate the unique nature of femicide as a type of gender-based violence. Schneider et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of patriarchal societal standards in promoting femicide, a topic that is seldom openly addressed in media coverage, which tends to focus on crime figures rather than cultural causes.

While media coverage has successfully raised awareness of femicide as a serious issue, it frequently fails to address the underlying cultural and patriarchal practices that contribute to the problem, instead focusing on crime numbers

High Level of Crime in South Africa

The portrayal of South Africa's high crime rates gives critical context for understanding Intimate Partner violence (IPV) within the larger violent landscape (Bridger, 2024). However, constantly emphasizing high crime rates, especially IPV, risks normalizing or desensitizing violence, supporting views of inevitability, and justifying gender-based violence (Buiten & Naidoo, 2016). Without contextualization and counter-narratives, such portrayals can impede efforts to change societal attitudes against IPV. The media must redefine the conversation to stress the unacceptable nature of violence and address its core causes. Promoting urgency, solutions, and gender equality can transform norms and encourage collective action against IPV. By rejecting violence as unavoidable and pushing for nonviolence and respect, the media may help break the cycle of IPV and create a more secure, equitable society. Table 4 illustrates the high levels of crime committed against women nationwide. Several news outlets reported that IPV has an alarming percentage, making it worse in South Africa. The articles in Table 4 make linkages between South Africa's high crime rates and a variety of underlying reasons, such as societal conflicts, wealth disparity, and organized crime. They also examine the government's response, including measures to reform the police and improve criminal intelligence in the country.

Table 4: The normality of Intimate Partner Violence in countries.

Title	Name of Newspaper
'Spiralling Out of Control': Recent Stats Reveal South Africa's Crime Conundrum	Forbes Africa
Violent crime in South Africa is getting worse – here are all the latest stats	Business Tech
Crime stats: More than 6 200 people murdered in just 90 days in SA	News24
Are 40% of South African women raped in their lifetime and only 8.6% of perpetrators jailed?	Africa Check

According to Africa Check (2020), 40% of South African women have or will be raped, whether by an intimate partner, someone they know, or a stranger. According to News24 (2023), despite continued attempts, the country's crime rate continues to climb. According to Business Tech, two out of every five women in South Africa are raped daily, continuing an epidemic that leaves women feeling vulnerable and in danger.

The normalization of intimate partner violence (IPV) is a common issue in feminist literature. Walker's (1989) "cycle of abuse" theory explains how violence in relationships normalizes over time through recurring patterns of abuse followed by moments of reconciliation. Media reports highlighting alarming statistics (Forbes Africa, 2023; News24, 2023) reinforce this cycle but, by not framing the issue as solvable, risk creating a sense of inevitability.

The portrayal of IPV in South African media is consistent with trends identified in feminist literature and media theory, namely that frequent exposure to violence desensitizes viewers and inhibits discussions of viable remedies. Boonzaier and De la Rey (2004) observe that IPV is frequently normalized through social and cultural conditioning, with violence being a typical component of relationships in many South African communities. Media publications like Forbes Africa (2023) and Africa Check (2020) reflect this by portraying IPV as ubiquitous and nearly unstoppable without questioning this normalization.

Constant exposure to statistics on IPV, murder, and rape in the media can lead to public desensitization, leaving the viewer passive and resigned to the violence. Altheide (1997) contends that the flood of crime-related content can lead viewers to believe that such violence is beyond remediation. This phenomenon is evident in media reports that

repeatedly cite shocking statistics without offering pathways for systemic change. Consequently, while the media frequently covers IPV in South Africa, it may unintentionally contribute to the normalizing of violence by neglecting to confront the cultural and societal norms that support it.

Police Inefficiency

The discourse over police inefficiency in protecting women from assault shows fundamental gaps in law enforcement's approach to IPV. This story emphasizes the need for improved preventative programs, support, and accountability procedures. However, stressing police slowness may perpetuate the notion that IPV is not a priority, increasing impunity and preventing survivors from pursuing justice (Roelfm, 2020). If perpetrators believe their actions have no consequences, the cycle of violence may continue.

To offset these impacts, it is critical to highlight good cases of competent police reaction, successful prosecutions, and survivor assistance. Addressing structural issues such as resource scarcity, insufficient training, and victim-centered approaches is critical for fostering trust and enhancing IPV therapies. Table 5 below presents news outlets reporting on the shortfall of help for victims of domestic violence cases. Table 5 shows the relationship between the South African Police Service's (SAPS) intervention and the reporting of criminal events. Many occurrences of gender-based violence (IPV) go unresolved, with little to no police involvement or successful court convictions, according to IOL (2024).

Table 5: Police Inefficiency in Domestic Violence Cases

Title	Name of Newspaper
SAPS inefficiency leads to 64 GBV cases struck off court roll in Western Cape	IOL
Ineffective laws are a threat to sex workers in South Africa	Sunday Times
South African police are failing victims of gender-based violence, report shows – The Mail & Guardian	Mail and Guardian

The Mail and Guardian (2022) notes that victims routinely withdraw their claims and protection orders even after they have been granted, attributing this pattern to the lack of attention paid to IPV cases. Naidoo

(2018) concurs that victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) frequently withdraw cases and return to their abusers due to concerns about their safety and insufficient protection from South African authorities. Many victims claim that the protection orders they receive are essentially pieces of paper that provide no real safety, instead increasing their risk of additional abuse.

Sunday Times (2022) draws attention to the restrictive and ineffectual rules that are meant to protect victims of crime, especially when those victims are intimate partners. The sensitivity of crimes against intimate partners, where victims frequently change their minds about filing charges if the suspected attacker shows up and appears remorseful.

IPV Predominance in the Black Community

The articles shed light on the disproportionate impact of IPV within the black community, with a specific emphasis on black women. This narrative acknowledges the intersectionality of race and gender, recognizing the unique vulnerabilities faced by black women and underscoring the importance of targeted interventions to address IPV effectively.

However, it is crucial to critically examine the impact of championing this narrative. Gillum (2019) asserts that the intersections of various social categories, such as race, gender, and class shape individuals' experiences. While it is important to acknowledge the specific challenges faced by black women, the narrative of IPV predominance within the black community can reinforce harmful stereotypes and perpetuate racial biases.

By singling out the black community as bearing a more significant burden of IPV, this narrative runs the risk of stigmatizing and marginalizing black women. It can contribute to victim-blaming, suggesting that the problem lies solely within the community rather than recognizing IPV as a societal issue that transcends race. This perpetuation of harmful stereotypes further devalues black lives and experiences, reinforcing systems of oppression and hindering efforts to address IPV effectively.

Table 6 presents the prominence of IPV among black women and the vulnerability of this vulnerability almost suggesting that black women are the ones suffering more than other races. The contents of the previously given table indicate that black women are primarily portrayed

as rape victims when compared to people of other races. In contrast to other racial groupings, rape is portrayed in *The Washington Post* (2016) as a widespread problem that mostly affects black women and is akin to a pandemic.

Table 6: Vulnerability of black women in IPV cases.

Title	Name of Newspaper
Rape is black people's 'pastime,' white South African judge says in Facebook rant	Washington Post
Great Read: A night of violence that shattered a South African's view of her white privilege	Los Angeles Times
South African judge sparks racism row for claiming 'rape is part of black culture' The Independent	The Independent
Black Management Forum suspends its president Nomlala over rape allegations	Sowetan Live

According to the *Los Angeles Times* (2015), there is a case involving a white attorney who is well-known for representing black women who have been raped. One day, though, the attorney became a victim herself, which called into question her white privilege of always being the defender rather than the victim.

At the same time, *The Independent* (2016) reports on a South African judge who sees the nation's rape problem as deeply ingrained in black culture rather than as a national emergency. *The Sowetan Live* (2022) sheds light on the idea that rape is a real crime that involves people in powerful positions, like the manager of black management, rather than just a theoretical idea. This suggests that rape in the nation is a widespread national problem that is unrelated to things like low socioeconomic level, illiteracy, or other financial concerns.

Call for Presidential (and Government) Action on IPV

Calls for South Africa's president to act against IPV emphasize the need for government engagement and regulatory reform. However, focusing primarily on presidential accountability risks detracting from communal efforts and grassroots engagement. This focus on top-down solutions may undermine community-based initiatives and individual contributions.

According to social constructionist theory, media framing influences public perceptions and policy agendas. Focusing solely on government action may unintentionally undermine the roles of civil society, communities, and individuals in combating IPV. To mitigate this, narratives should encourage cross-sector collaboration, community involvement, and shared responsibility. Encouraging collaborative efforts has the potential to achieve comprehensive and long-term change in eradicating IPV.

Ultimately, by championing a narrative that balances the call for presidential action with the recognition of collective responsibility, the media can help foster a society where addressing IPV becomes a shared commitment. This approach encourages a comprehensive response that encompasses government leadership, community engagement, and individual actions, leading to lasting change and the eradication of gender-based violence.

Table 7 presents various news outlets reporting on the IPV cases being unresolved and needing urgent government and presidential intervention. The table emphasizes how critical it is that the South African government act swiftly to handle cases of rape and IPV. Since IPV, rape, and femicide are currently the most common social problems in the nation, citizens are calling on the African Union to urge African leaders to focus their energies and resources on tackling these concerns. The current conversation suggests that the ANC government may not be completely aware of the gravity and deleterious effects of rape as a problem in the nation, attributing it to a lack of awareness of some pervasive social issues.

Table 7: An urgent call for government intervention in IPV cases.

Title	Name of Newspaper
African heads of state should lead in fighting GBV, Ramaphosa tells AU	The Citizen
Rape is endemic in South Africa. Why the ANC government keeps missing the mark	The conversation
Cele hints that South Africans should brace for more shocking crime stats	EWN

On the other hand, the EWN (2022) notes that a perceived lack of aggressive steps to lessen or alleviate these social problems is the reason why occurrences of femicide, rape, and IPV are increasing.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Violence against women has grown commonplace in many cultures, with men typically perceiving it as an acceptable means of resolving interpersonal issues and exercising power over women. Victims of sexual abuse are commonly subjected to secondary victimization via victim-blaming narratives, which can discourage survivors from pursuing justice and increase emotions of shame and guilt. This promotes a culture of silence and feeds the cycle of abuse.

The media plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of gender-based violence (GBV) and femicide in South Africa. Analysing news items and social media shows how negative preconceptions and the normalisation of violence against women are frequently perpetuated. To counteract GBV, responsible media practices that prioritize survivor-centered narratives, avoid sensationalism and acknowledge the intersectionality of GBV are required. Collaboration among the media, civil society, and specialists can propel public awareness campaigns, legislation reforms, and community efforts to promote a culture of nonviolence and gender equality.

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