Navigating gendered realities: A systematic review of literature on intimate partner violence in South Africa.

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Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a serious public health and human rights concern in South Africa, with national data indicating some of the highest prevalence rates worldwide. While existing literature has significantly contributed to understanding the causes and consequences of IPV, much of it remains centred on individual-level risk factors, often neglecting broader systemic and cultural dimensions. This study undertakes a systematic review of South African scholarly work on IPV to interrogate how the phenomenon is constructed within academic discourse. Guided by social constructionist, feminist, and hegemonic masculinity theories, the analysis synthesises findings from 30 peer-reviewed studies. Following the thematic analysis, four major thematic domains emerged: the structural and social underpinnings of IPV, individual and interpersonal triggers of IPV, survivor narratives related to coping and meaning-making, as well as rationalisations and justifications by perpetrators. A recurring pattern within the literature associates IPV predominantly with poverty, Black African masculinities, and traditional cultural norms, frequently omitting middle-class and White South African experiences. Such framing risks perpetuating racialised and class-based stereotypes, while simultaneously obscuring the systemic roles of patriarchy, institutional failure, and socioeconomic inequality. This review underscores the urgency of adopting a more inclusive, intersectional lens in both research and intervention, one that challenges reductive narratives and more accurately reflects the diverse realities of IPV in the South African context.

Keywords: Intimate Partner Violence (IPV); Gender-Based Violence (GBV); South Africa; Hegemonic Masculinity; Patriarchy; Feminist Theory; Social Constructionism; Intersectionality; Systemic Violence; Structural Inequality

Opsomming

Intieme vennootgeweld (IVG) bly ’n ernstige openbare gesondheids– en menseregte kwessie in Suid-Afrika, met nasionale data wat van die hoogste voorkomskoerse wêreldwyd aandui. Alhoewel bestaande literatuur waardevolle insigte bied oor die oorsake en gevolge van IVG, bly die fokus dikwels beperk tot individuele risikofaktore, terwyl breër sistemiese en kulturele dimensies oor die hoof gesien word. Hierdie studie onderneem ’n sistematiese oorsig van Suid-Afrikaanse akademiese werk oor IVG om te ondersoek hoe die verskynsel binne akademiese diskoers gekonstrueer word. Gelei deur sosiale konstruksionistiese, feministiese en hegemoniese manlikheidsteorieë, sintetiseer die analise bevindings uit 30 eweknie-geëvalueerde studies. Na afloop van die tematiese analise het vier hooftemas na vore gekom: die strukturele en sosiale grondslag van IVG, individuele en interpersoonlike snellerfaktore, slagoffers se narratiewe oor hantering en betekenisgewing, sowel as regverdiging en rasionalisering deur oortreders. ’n Herhalende patroon in die literatuur verbind IVG hoofsaaklik met armoede, Swart Afrika-manlikhede en tradisionele kulturele norme, terwyl die ervarings van middelklas– en wit Suid-Afrikaners dikwels uitgesluit word. Hierdie raamwerk loop die gevaar om gesentraliseerde rassestereotipering en klassifikasie te versterk, en terselfdertyd die rol van patriargie, institusionele versuim en sosio-ekonomiese ongelykheid te verbloem. Die oorsig beklemtoon die dringende behoefte aan ’n meer inklusiewe, interseksionele benadering tot navorsing en intervensie–een wat reduktiewe narratiewe bevraagteken en die diverse realiteite van IVG in Suid-Afrika meer getrou weerspieël.

Sleutelwoorde: Intieme Vennootgeweld (IVG); Geslagsgebaseerde Geweld (GGG); Suid-Afrika; Hegemoniese Manlikheid; Patriargie; Feministiese Teorie; Sosiale Konstruksionisme; Interseksionaliteit; Sistemiese Geweld; Strukturele Ongelykheid

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Abbreviations

CBO(s): Community-Based Organisation(s)

CSVR: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation

DBE: Department of Basic Education

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

GDP: Gross domestic product

GGG: Geslagsgebaseerde Geweld

HSRC: Human Sciences Research Council

LGBTQ+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and others

LSHTM: London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

ICF: Inner-City Fund

IPV: Intimate Partner Violence

IVG: Intieme Vennootgeweld

NCPS: National Crime Prevention Strategy

NdoH: National Department of Health

NDP: National Development Plan

NGO(s): Non-Governmental Organisation(s)

NPO(s): Non-Profit Organisation(s)

PRISMA: Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses

SADF: South African Defence Force

SAMRC: South African Medical Research Council

SAPS: South African Police Service

SASSA: South African Social Security Agency

SES: Socioeconomic Status

Stats SA: Statistics South Africa

STIs: Sexually Transmitted Infections

UN: United Nations

WHO: World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and significance of the study

The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies gender-based violence (GBV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) as critical threats to public health and clear infringements on human rights (World Health Organization [WHO], 2013). Although GBV encompasses multiple forms of violence stemming from gender inequality, this study concentrates on IPV, defined as physical, sexual, emotional, or economic abuse within intimate relationships. In South Africa, the magnitude and seriousness of IPV are particularly alarming. Jewkes et al. (2021) highlight that South African women face some of the highest levels of IPV internationally, with recent statistics showing that over half have encountered IPV during their lifetime. Although IPV can be perpetrated by individuals of any gender, the most widespread global trend involves men committing violence against women (Akudolu et al., 2023).

According to a recent Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) study, 33.1% of women aged 18 and up had experienced physical violence in their lives, affecting an estimated 7.3 million women (Zungu et al., 2024). According to the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), intimate partners were responsible for the deaths of approximately 60% of women who were murdered between 2020 and 2021, highlighting the alarming extent of IPV in the country (Abrahams et al., 2024).

Although South Africa has developed a progressive legal framework aimed at protecting women's rights and fostering gender equality, the everyday experiences of many women reflect a stark contrast. Constitutional rights—such as those ensuring dignity, equality, and safety from violence—alongside laws like the Domestic Violence Act of 1998 (Republic of South Africa, 1998), frequently do not result in meaningful protection in practice. The HSRC report stressed that the historical effects of apartheid are significant contributing factors to the high levels of IPV victimisation and perpetration (Zungu et al., 2024; Abrahams et al., 2024).

IPV is made worse by the persistent socioeconomic disparities that resulted from the apartheid era, which adversely affected Black South African communities. The persistent racialised character of economic exclusion is seen in high unemployment rates, especially among Black South Africans (37.6% vs. 7.9% for White South Africans) (Statistics South Africa [Stats SA], 2023). The danger and entrenchment of IPV are recognised to be increased by these intersecting disparities, which also contribute to settings of chronic stress, reliance, and disempowerment.

While this body of work is invaluable, its focus risks constructing IPV as a problem specific to poor, Black communities, thereby perpetuating racialised and class-based stereotypes. This review therefore not only synthesises existing themes but also interrogates the systematic silences within the discourse. Notably absent are sustained investigations into IPV within middle-class and White South African households, LGBTQ+ relationships, and the role of institutional whiteness and capitalist patriarchy. This study asks not only what the literature says, but also what it omits, and what ideological work these omissions perform in obscuring the universal nature of patriarchal violence.

Moreover, social and cultural norms rooted in patriarchal values continue to play a significant role in legitimising male control and authority in relationships. Cultural standards, religious beliefs, and societal ideals regularly push women to remain in abusive relationships, often putting family cohesion or social acceptance ahead of their safety (Jewkes et al., 2015; Sultana, 2010). These expectations are often reinforced in both private and public spheres, where female subservience is framed as a cultural or moral duty (Morrell et al., 2012). This normalisation of violence, combined with weak institutional responses, including inadequate police action and insufficient shelter or counselling services, means that many survivors are left without meaningful protection or avenues for recourse (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Gqola, 2007).

A wide body of research attributes IPV to unequal relations of power among men and women, compounded by circumstances such as poverty, marginalised social status, and limited access to education (Akudolu et al., 2023; Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation [CSVR], 2016; Jewkes et al., 2021; Ochani et al., 2024). Likewise, Muluneh et al. (2021) found a substantial association between IPV in Sub-Saharan Africa and variables such as limited educational attainment, unemployment, and deeply rooted patriarchal norms that reinforce women's subordination to men. These findings support the argument that IPV cannot be fully understood through individual risk factors alone and should be investigated within the broader context of systemic inequality and cultural expectations (Muluneh et al., 2021).

However, despite these broader drivers, much of the literature on IPV in South Africa has tended to focus narrowly on individual risk factors, often neglecting the broader structural, cultural, and institutional dimensions that shape violence (Ochani et al., 2024). Addressing IPV in South Africa requires a comprehensive understanding of these interconnected factors. It is essential to consider not only individual risk factors but also the broader structural and institutional dynamics that perpetuate IPV. This study, therefore, aims to explore how IPV is constructed in South African research literature, with a special emphasis on the interconnections of gender, culture, socioeconomic status, and institutional responses.

1.2. Definition of key terms

The following key concepts are central to this study. Their definitions are not merely descriptive but are informed by the theoretical frameworks of social constructionism, feminist theory, and hegemonic masculinity that guide this analysis. These specific conceptualisations were chosen because they foreground power, social context, and systemic inequality, which aligns directly with the research aim of critically examining how IPV is constructed within South African literature.

1.2.1. Gender-based violence

The term gender-based violence (GBV) has been conceptualised differently across various research settings. For its use in this study, GBV is defined as any instance of violence (actual or threatened) aimed toward an individual based on their gender, irrespective of whether a person is male or female (Ochani et al., 2024). This includes threats of such actions, intimidation, or unlawful constraints on liberty, in both private and public contexts (Ochani et al., 2024). This definition is employed because it moves beyond a purely legal or individualistic understanding. From a social constructionist and feminist perspective, this framing highlights how violence is used to enforce and perpetuate socially constructed gender hierarchies and power imbalances, rather than being an isolated, personal act (Ferguson, 2017; Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014).

According to Akudolu et al. (2023), GBV can manifest in various forms, including physical, sexual, economic, verbal, and emotional abuse. Physical violence refers to acts involving bodily harm that may result in injury or, in severe cases, death. This includes hitting, smacking, kicking, striking, pushing, and so on (Akudolu et al., 2023; CSVR, 2016). Sexual GBV encompasses sexual activities such as sexual manipulation, human trafficking, sexual harassment, rape, and assault, which are carried out without a person's consent (CSVR, 2016). GBV which is economic involves having control over a partner's resources, as well as regulating funds and other financial resources (Akudolu et al., 2023). For instance, the perpetrator could be unwilling for the victim to work or manipulate and misuse their income (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005). Akudolu et al. (2023) define verbal GBV as any type of hate speech directed against an individual based on their gender. Lastly, emotional GBV tends to consist of insults, name-calling, and berating the victim. Such behaviours are intended to degrade, embarrass, or show disregard for the individual, ultimately undermining their self-esteem, personal identity, and confidence (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005).

1.2.2. Intimate partner violence

While closely related, intimate partner violence (IPV) is conceptually distinct from GBV in that it specifically involves abuse between individuals in an intimate relationship. In South Africa, IPV is classified within the wider framework of domestic violence as defined by the Domestic Violence Act of 1998, which encompasses multiple forms of abuse such as emotional, verbal, and financial harm (Republic of South Africa, 1998). Patra et al. (2018) define IPV as harmful actions that take place within romantic or cohabiting relationships, irrespective of the couple's marital status or living arrangements. This includes physical assault, forced sexual activity, psychological injury, and coercive or controlling behaviours (Patra et al., 2018). IPV occurs across all social groups and is not limited to heterosexual relationships. As highlighted by Patra et al. (2018), IPV affects individuals regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, or age. This conceptualisation is crucial for addressing research questions 3 and 4, which focus on how survivors and perpetrators make sense of these specific actions. By including non-physical forms of abuse, this definition allows the analysis to capture the full spectrum of power and control dynamics central to feminist critiques of intimate relationships.

1.2.3. Patriarchy

According to Walby (1989), patriarchy refers to a societal structure in which men hold primary positions of power, exercising control over areas such as political authority, moral guidance, social standing, and property ownership. Systemic gender inequalities in patriarchal societies are sustained by institutional, cultural, and interpersonal behaviours that favour men while marginalising women and other gender minorities (Walby, 1989). Moreover, patriarchy creates cultural expectations, enforces gender norms, and validates male dominance and female subjugation (Walby, 1989). As noted by Walby (1989), patriarchy is not a static arrangement but functions across multiple levels, including the home, employment, and broader sociopolitical organisations. This is a foundational concept for the feminist theoretical framework of this

study. It provides the analytical lens to understand IPV not as random acts, but as a manifestation of a systemic structure that legitimises male dominance and female subordination, which is a recurring theme explored in research question 2.

1.2.4. Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant cultural ideal of manhood in a specific context—one that encourages male domination, women's subordination, and less favoured manifestations of masculinity (Connell, 2020). While it may not represent the most prevalent form of masculinity, it is socially esteemed and functions to uphold systems of power that privilege heterosexual, cisgender men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This type of masculinity is often linked to features like violence, control, emotional repression, and heteronormativity, and it maintains gender inequity across social systems (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell, 2020). This concept is directly drawn from the theoretical framework in Chapter 3 and is essential for analysing the data pertaining to research question 4 (perpetrator rationalisations). It allows the review to interrogate how certain masculine norms, such as dominance and control, are socially constructed and linked to the perpetration of IPV.

1.2.5. Structural Violence

Farmer (2004) characterises structural violence as the systematic methods through which societal systems and structures cause harm or exclude individuals. Flynn et al. (2018) add that these forms of violence are frequently concealed, ingrained in extensive societal arrangements, and normalised by laws and practices that reinforce disparities, marginalisation, and oppression. Poverty, prejudice, sexism, and other institutional disparities can all contribute to structural violence by limiting people's access to opportunities, resources, and basic human rights (Farmer, 2004). This concept bridges the feminist and social constructionist perspectives by making visible the often-invisible systems of power and inequality. It is a

key building block for research question 1, as it allows for the analysis of how factors like poverty and racialised inequality are not just background context but active drivers of IPV.

1.2.6. Culture / Cultural Norms

Culture encompasses the collective beliefs, values, customs, and practices that influence the behaviour and perspectives of members within a society (Frese, 2015). Cultural norms, in particular, are the socially accepted rules and expectations that govern behaviour within a group (Frese, 2015). These norms shape the way individuals behave, what is acceptable or incorrect, and how power and gender roles are formed and perpetuated (Frese, 2015). As defined by Frese (2015), cultural practices are shared perceptions of how individuals typically behave in a society, whereas cultural values are shared cultural ideals. From a social constructionist standpoint, this definition is vital. It frames cultural norms not as static or inherently causative of violence, but as fluid, contested sets of meanings. This prevents a simplistic, pathologising view of culture and instead allows the analysis to investigate, per research question 2, how cultural discourses are mobilised to construct, justify, or challenge IPV.

1.3. Aims and objectives of the research

The main objective of this study is to explore how IPV is framed and understood within the literature, specifically in the South African context. To achieve this goal, the study aims to address the following sub-questions:

1. What are the general themes in the literature about the factors that influence perceptions and experiences of IPV in South Africa?
2. What are the general themes in the literature concerning how individuals make sense of IPV in the context of South Africa?

3. What does the literature reveal about how victims/survivors make sense of IPV in the context of South Africa?
4. What does the literature reveal about how perpetrators of IPV make sense of their actions in the context of South Africa?

1.4. Research Design and Methodology

This study employed a systematic review methodology to qualitatively examine how IPV is framed and understood in the literature within the South African context. The analysis was conducted through a two-stage systematic review process. The first stage examines research questions one and two by conducting quantitative investigations on the factors that contribute to IPV and its creation. The second stage uses qualitative studies to address concerns three and four, examining how victims/survivors and perpetrators understand IPV. This approach combines statistical analysis and contextual insights to provide a full picture of IPV. Following this, thematic analysis is used to identify emergent themes from the systematic review process.

1.5. Overview of chapters

Chapter 1 offered a concise introduction to the focus of this study, including a discussion of the rationale, aim, and objectives.

Chapter 2 examines significant research findings on IPV, both globally and in South Africa. It starts by highlighting the prevalence of IPV in South Africa and then delves into its characteristics and associated risk factors. The chapter concludes with an analysis of IPV's impact, and the tactics used to counter it in South Africa.

Chapter 3 elaborates on the theoretical framework which informed this study. It starts with a discussion of the central theory of this study, social constructionism. Next, feminist perspectives are discussed. The final

part of the study's theoretical framework, hegemonic masculinities, is then explored. This chapter outlines and explains the main elements and central ideas of each framework, highlighting how they relate to and support the focus of this particular study.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach adopted in this study, detailing the research design, aims, and guiding questions. It further examines the methods and tools employed for data analysis and concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations relevant to the research.

Chapter 5 presents the findings and interpretations of the systematic review, aimed at deepening the understanding of how IPV is constructed and perceived within the South African literature. It begins by outlining the systematic review process and its outcomes, followed by a comprehensive table summarising the 30 studies included in the review. The chapter then discusses the outcomes of the thematic analysis. It ends with an exploration of the important findings, connecting them with current literature and theoretical frameworks, which include social constructionism, feminist perspectives, and hegemonic masculinities.

The sixth and last chapter examines the study's limitations and importance, as well as recommendations for further research. It finishes with final reflections on the study's overall contributions and findings.

1.6. Summary

This chapter aimed to outline the background and significance of IPV as a pressing social issue in South Africa. It has highlighted the gap between the country's legal responsibilities to gender equality and the lived experiences of many women. This chapter lays the groundwork for a more in-depth look at how IPV is represented and created in South African academic literature by introducing the study's fundamental ideas, research aims, and methodology. The following chapter provides a literature review on IPV in the South African research context.

CHAPTER 2: OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction

Research conducted by the National Department of Health (NDoH), Stats SA, the SAMRC, and the Inner-City Fund (ICF) in 2019 highlights the severe occurrence of GBV in South Africa, ranking it among the countries most impacted worldwide. The term GBV denotes any action leading to psychological, physical, or sexual harm inflicted against an individual's consent, typically stemming from disparities in gender-based power dynamics (Mngoma et al., 2016). IPV, the most common form of GBV, is the central concern of this study. It encompasses actions by a current or former intimate partner that inflict physical, emotional, or sexual harm (Rees et al., 2014). These include physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling actions (Rees et al., 2014). While the definitions of GBV and IPV do not imply that violence is always perpetrated by one partner, research consistently indicates that women and girls suffer greater harm and experience various types of violence more frequently (Akyüz et al., 2012; Michau et al., 2015; Neal & Edwards, 2017).

Considering the above, this study intends to investigate the literature on interpersonal relationships in South Africa, focusing on the role of violence, by employing a critical social psychology framework and exploring the influence of the concepts of masculinity and sexuality. By examining how social constructions of masculinity and sexuality may shape attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours related to IPV, this study aims to contribute nuanced insights into how IPV is constructed and understood in South African literature and how individuals make sense of IPV in their relationships.

This will be accomplished by first exploring the incidence of IPV in South Africa. Following this, the specific characteristics of IPV present in South Africa will be examined. The discussion will then turn to identifying and analysing the risk-related variables associated with IPV in the country. Finally, the chapter will outline the consequences of IPV and the responses it has prompted within the South African setting.

2.2. Prevalence of intimate partner violence in South Africa

There is an abundance of research detailing the concerning statistics of IPV globally as well as in the context of South Africa. South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) acknowledges that IPV has reached catastrophic levels, with the country ranking among countries with the highest rates of violence against women and girls globally (Boonzaier, 2014; Yamile, 2021). The WHO, alongside the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and the SAMRC, conducted a study in which they examined secondary data from over 80 countries (WHO, 2013). The report indicates that nearly one-third of women globally have been subjected to either physical or sexual violence, whether by an intimate partner or through sexual assault by someone else (WHO, 2013). Of the 80 countries, the statistics for South Africa showed that 53% of women in this study experienced IPV (WHO, 2013).

Mngoma et al. (2016) present findings from a survey done between 2010 and 2012, which revealed that a sizable proportion of women in various South African provinces have experienced some type of IPV throughout their lifetime. The highest prevalence was observed in Limpopo at 77%, followed by Gauteng (51%), the Western Cape (45%), and KwaZulu-Natal (36%) (Mngoma et al., 2016). The same study also found that between 35% and 76% of men in these provinces admitted to engaging in violent behaviour toward women (Mngoma et al., 2016).

What is even more concerning are the findings by Madumise-Pajibo and Shisana (2020), where they estimated that the rate of reporting sexual abuse to the police among women in South Africa stands at just 1 in 23, indicating a significant problem of underreporting when it comes to sexual offenses. This indicates that the reported number of IPV cases could be considerably higher (Madumise-Pajibo & Shisana, 2020). Considering these studies, why is it that IPV cases are still on the rise in South Africa? For the high prevalence of IPV in South Africa to be unpacked, there are certain contexts and variables, such as sociopolitical and sociocultural factors, which must be discussed.

2.3. Violence in the South African context

Violence, and IPV in particular, is a complex and multifaceted issue, rooted in the sociopolitical and sociocultural history of South Africa. According to Boonzaier and De La Rey (2003), there are numerous interconnected motives why some individuals choose violence rather than a single, causative factor. Research highlights that IPV in South Africa results from a combination of interconnected factors, including the cycle of violence perpetuated by apartheid, dominant masculinity ideologies, patriarchal attitudes and beliefs, and poverty (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003; Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Hamber, 2000; Hoosen et al., 2022; Machisa, 2010; Sultana, 2010; Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). Here, I argue that IPV and the elevated incidence rates in South Africa can be unpacked by looking at the sociopolitical history of South Africa, how this history created an environment in which violence has become the norm, and how sociocultural and socioeconomic factors are contributing to IPV.

2.3.1. The violence of Apartheid

South Africa's history is deeply connected with violence and inequality (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). During apartheid, a conscious strategy was used to strip people of colour of their humanity and enforce a system of racial superiority (Sideris, 1998). People of colour endured severe violations of their human rights and dignity. Social control by the White-minority government was executed through racist assaults, physical attacks, arbitrary detention, torture, and execution (Sideris, 1998).

During the apartheid era, South Africa witnessed significant gender disparities alongside the legally enforced racial inequality. Much research has been done regarding the gendered experience of violence during apartheid, as it manifested differently for men and women (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Hamber, 2000; Machisa, 2010; Sideris, 1998). Men frequently faced violence at the hands of the state, such as unwarranted arrests, torture, and unlawful killings carried out by security forces (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). According to Hamber (2000), many men of colour were targeted for their involvement in anti-

apartheid activism or perceived threats to the apartheid regime. Townships and urban areas experienced frequent clashes between residents and security forces, resulting in casualties among predominantly male protestors (Hamber, 2000). In contrast, women faced intersecting forms of oppression due to both their race and gender (Shefer, 2010). Shefer (2010) contends that women of colour were subjected to various types of violence, ranging from abuse by the state to domestic and sexual violence. The apartheid regime often targeted women activists, subjecting them to harassment, torture, and imprisonment (Shefer, 2010). Moreover, women living in low-income areas faced an increased likelihood of encountering violence both at home and within their broader communities (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Hamber, 2000; Machisa, 2010; Sideris, 1998). Violence thus affects men and women differently, shaped by their distinct gender roles and cultural expectations (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017).

During apartheid, the use of violence and repression became routine, as both the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the South African Defence Force (SADF) escalated their forceful tactics against those opposing the regime (Shefer, 2010). Graaff and Heinecken (2017) describe this period as one in which South Africa evolved into a heavily militarised state, shaped by widespread institutional violence and control. This militarisation was based on a specific conception of masculinity and citizenship. Here, men (White men and men of colour) started using violence to solve problems and accomplish objectives (Shefer, 2010). Graaff and Heinecken (2017) argue that the constant use of violence and brutality that characterised the apartheid government led to the construction of structural violence, in which a space was created where violence was seen as the norm. This gave rise to the idea of justified violence, where force was seen as legitimate, whether carried out by the state against its opponents or by those resisting state oppression (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Shefer, 2010). A scenario was thus created where violence became increasingly acceptable, leading to reduced societal condemnation and higher rates of violence being committed (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017).

Despite the end of apartheid, violence persists in South Africa, albeit in different forms. The transition to democracy was accompanied by a surge in crime, including violent crimes such as robbery, assault, and murder (Hamber, 2000; Machisa, 2010). According to Hamber (2000) and Machisa (2010), apartheid's entrenched structural violence and widespread acceptance of violence contributed to a long-standing cycle of violence in South Africa. Graaff and Heinecken (2017) argue that men continue to be disproportionately affected by violent crime, both as perpetrators and victims. However, women also face significant risks, particularly concerning IPV, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and femicide. It is thus essential to look at the gendered factors of violence, particularly IPV (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Hamber, 2000; Machisa, 2010).

2.3.2. Sociocultural factors/influences and intimate partner violence

Boonzaier and De La Rey (2003) assert that discussions of gender refer to the socially defined roles and expectations assigned to individuals within specific social contexts. Many of these roles are learned through the socialisation of certain gender roles (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003). The process by which people are shaped in how they express and embody their gender identity by societal cues, whether positive or negative, about the roles expected of their gender, is known as gender role socialisation (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). Furthermore, Boonzaier and De La Rey (2003) maintain that men assess which expressions of gender identity are socially esteemed or diminished, while women interpret their experiences of violence through the limitations imposed by their social environment.

As stated by Zinyemba and Hlongwana (2022), South Africa is a culturally diverse country, with many cultures being traditional in their values, beliefs, and practices. This can be seen through the patriarchal framework, which is prominent within both Black and White communities in South Africa (Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). In cultures where societal norms of patriarchy and masculinity endorse male supremacy and authority over women, disparities in gender power dynamics (gender inequality) are often the result

(Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). Furthermore, traditional gender roles and cultural beliefs about masculinity influence attitudes toward violence (Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022).

Similarly, Zinyemba and Hlongwana (2022) investigated men's understanding of IPV in Alexandra Township. This study revealed that cultural influences associated with the patriarchal system, as well as the falling importance of mutual respect between men and women, are the primary causes of IPV (Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). Additionally, participants reported that because women were granted an excessive number of rights, men were able to abuse their position of authority (Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). Sultana (2010) asserts that power dynamics are shaped by hierarchical systems and material conditions that enable men to maintain autonomy and exert control over women. These patriarchal structures are rooted in the belief that, based on biological differences, men are naturally more entitled to power than women (Sultana, 2010). It is crucial to understand that patriarchy is not usually a conscious, constant attempt by men to rule women, but rather a deeply embedded system into which individuals are born and may unknowingly engage (Sultana, 2010). According to Gottzén et al. (2020), in these contexts, violence can be a tool for achieving masculinity and gaining authority and status over women and other men.

To explain this, Zinyemba and Hlongwana (2022) use the example of the traditional practice of *lobola* used in many African cultures. *Lobola* is a traditional practice in which a groom or his family provides a payment to the bride's family as part of the marriage arrangement (Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). The practice of paying *lobola* often grants men significant authority within marriage, diminishing women's agency and influence within the union (Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). This is further demonstrated by the societal norms associated with this practice, such as being obedient to one's husband and regarding sex as an essential marital privilege (Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). In a similar study by Ludsin and Vetten (2005) conducted in the Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape, and Limpopo provinces, 84% of the women interviewed

believed that it was customary for a man to use physical violence against his wife if she behaved inappropriately, after paying *lobola*. The traditional practice of paying *lobola* is only used as an example of how practices built on patriarchy can lead to the cultural normalisation of violence and IPV. That is not to say that it is only traditional African cultural practices that might lead to an increased use of violence by men towards women. The culturally dominant social constructions of masculinity, which are argued to be the basis of patriarchy as well as violence towards women, will be discussed in the following chapter.

2.3.3. Inequality in South Africa

Graaff and Heinecken (2017) contend that the racial segregation of the apartheid era contributed to profound wealth disparities, with a substantial income gap emerging between the predominantly White middle and upper classes and the lower and working classes, which were primarily made up of people of colour. The recent economic decline and rising income inequality are seen as possible factors driving the current levels of violence, including IPV, in South Africa (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). Violence affects not only people but also their families and the neighbourhoods where they reside (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2015). Moreover, there are context-specific differences in how violence is experienced (van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2015). Otwombe et al. (2015) investigated the exposure to and encounters with violence among ethnically diverse adolescents (age 16–18) from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in Johannesburg. This study discovered that 67% of participants had experienced violence, either within their communities or at the hands of family members (Otwombe et al., 2015). Similarly, a study by Boafo et al. (2014) involving adolescents aged 12 to 17 found that individuals from a disadvantaged socioeconomic background showed higher odds of encountering violence.

As previously noted, South Africa is regarded as a society in which patriarchal systems are prevalent (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Sultana, 2010; Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). Within the South African setting, patriarchal systems are grounded in the belief that men are the primary breadwinners and bear the

responsibility of providing for their families, particularly through financial support (Seedat et al., 2009; Sultana, 2010; Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). The impact of financial disparity on men's quest for masculine identities is frequently considered a crucial element motivating their participation in acts of violence (Seedat et al., 2009). Boonzaier and De La Rey (2003) report similar findings in their qualitative narrative study, which explored how 15 women aged 30 to 52 from Mitchell's Plain interpreted their experiences of abuse within their relationships. The authors discovered that women in the labour force who earned greater salaries than their partners were at a higher risk of abuse (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003). This indicates that as women gain more financial independence, traditional gender roles are confronted, causing men to feel more insecure in their authority within the family and society (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003). Jewkes et al. (2009) contend that failing to fulfil societal expectations of a "successful" masculine identity can result in a crisis of male self-identity. In response, violence, particularly IPV, is used as a method of restoring a perception of power that may otherwise be perceived as diminished (Jewkes et al., 2009).

2.4. Risk factors and social variables associated with IPV

Several risk factors influence the occurrence of IPV in South Africa, which can be divided into two categories: individual and interpersonal variables, and community and social factors.

2.4.1. Individual and relationship factors

The individual aspects related to an increased risk of IPV include limited access to education regarding violence, perceptions of violence, limited social support, depression and anxiety, alcohol and substance abuse, and having multiple sexual partners (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003; Makongoza & Nduna, 2021; Stylianou et al., 2019; Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022).

Limited access to education or low levels of literacy may contribute to misunderstandings about healthy relationships and consent, increasing the risk of IPV (Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). Stylianou et al.

(2019) argue that this limits an individual's access to employment prospects and financial freedom, increasing their reliance on partners and decreasing their ability to escape abusive relationships. Research also indicates that in many communities, especially where literacy and education are low, men are typically not cognisant of the prevalence of IPV as a societal problem affecting communities (Stylianou et al., 2019; Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022).

Studies show that people's attitudes and views regarding IPV can greatly influence its reporting and prevalence (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003; Makongoza & Nduna, 2021). A qualitative study by Makongoza and Nduna (2021) in which they examined the perceptions and experiences of female victims of IPV in Soweto found that participants downplayed their experience of IPV as well as their partner's actions. This study further found that participants are either ashamed to seek help, believe they can handle the abuse on their own, or have normalised abusive behaviour (Makongoza & Nduna, 2021). Additionally, women who believe that men are socially superior and have the right to control them are also linked to the persistence of IPV (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003; Makongoza & Nduna, 2021). In their study, Boonzaier and De La Rey (2003) found that participants tolerated IPV and chose not to report it, as they loved their husbands and often adhered to the expectations of being a "good wife".

Regarding social support, research indicated that social support acts as a vehicle for psychological strength in women who have been abused (Machisa et al., 2018). Social support is defined as having a supporting network of individuals around one who are willing to lend a hand when needed during difficult times in life and includes strong social connections, improved network ties, and a sense of community support (Machisa et al., 2018). In relation, a study by Mngoma et al. (2016) found that the absence of social support systems or being cut off from friends and family can exacerbate feelings of frustration and increase the risk of continued IPV. This is because by isolating victims from society, abusers are allowed to continue their abusive relationships (Machisa et al., 2018; Mngoma et al., 2016).

Untreated depression and anxiety in men have been found to put these individuals at a higher risk of perpetrating IPV (Zartaloudi, 2023). Research by Zartaloudi (2023) has indicated that men demonstrate depression and anxiety in ways distinct from women, frequently through actions such as substance abuse, aggression, and engaging in risky behaviours. Individuals with depression and anxiety may have difficulty managing their emotions and coping with stressors effectively. This can lead to outbursts of anger or aggression, which may manifest as IPV (Zartaloudi, 2023). Zartaloudi (2023) argues that it is important to note that while depression and anxiety can increase the likelihood of IPV, not everyone with these mental health conditions will engage in violent behaviour.

Personal use of alcohol or drugs, particularly in excess, can impair judgment and increase the likelihood of participating in aggressive behaviour (Muluneh et al., 2021). Zinyemba and Hlongwana (2022) investigated fifteen adult males in Alexandra Township. They found that alcohol and substance abuse directly impact cognitive and physical functioning, diminishing individuals' ability to negotiate non-violent methods of resolving conflicts within relationships (Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). Similarly, Boonzaier and De La Rey (2003) found that numerous women in their study shared the challenges of cohabiting with a husband who is an alcoholic or drug addict. When men did not have the money to buy drugs or alcohol, they were angry and exceedingly aggressive (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003).

According to Muluneh et al. (2021), engaging in sexual relationships with multiple partners emerged as a significant risk factor within relationships for incidents of IPV. This behaviour could be linked to a lack of respect towards female partners and might lead to emotional detachment, consequently leading to weakened psychological and emotional connections (Muluneh et al., 2021). Zembe et al. (2015) examined how IPV is linked to numerous sexual encounters in women aged 16 to 24 in the Western Cape. Their findings found that 86% of individuals had experienced IPV in the previous year and described disproportionate power dynamics in their relationships (Zembe et al., 2015). Moreover, having multiple

sexual partners was discovered to correlate with transactional sex in which individuals trade money or physical goods for sex (Zembe et al., 2015). Studies show that women in transactional relationships with multiple partners face a higher risk of experiencing IPV, as such dynamics often intensify power imbalances within romantic partnerships (Muluneh et al., 2021; Zembe et al., 2015).

2.4.2. Community and societal factors

Community and societal factors that could contribute to IPV include exposure to violence, poverty, beliefs of masculinity, and weak legal enforcement (Graaff & Heineken, 2017; Mngoma et al., 2016; Muluneh et al., 2021; Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022).

According to Graaff and Heineken (2017), individuals who have been exposed to violence, either through personal experience or by witnessing it within their families or communities, are more likely to be involved in violent behaviour themselves (Graaff & Heineken, 2017). Experiencing or witnessing violence thus significantly impacts the probability of engaging in violent behaviour (Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). Furthermore, being exposed to violence constantly may normalise it as a means of conflict resolution or asserting power, leading individuals to view violence as an acceptable response in certain situations (Graaff & Heineken, 2017; Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022).

In low socioeconomic status (SES) communities where poverty is rife, economic insecurity and unemployment may lead to emotions of powerlessness and frustration, increasing the risk of IPV within relationships (Muluneh et al., 2021). Mngoma et al. (2016) report that men in their study admitted that they perpetrate abuse against their partners when women are the primary breadwinners in the relationship. The same study also found that money is often used as a hold on women who depend on men for their survival (Mngoma et al., 2016). According to Mngoma et al. (2016), poverty can exacerbate dependency within relationships, particularly for women who may have limited economic autonomy. Such dependence can

heighten the risk of experiencing IPV, as financial limitations may leave individuals feeling unable to leave abusive relationships (Mngoma et al., 2016).

Graaff and Heineken (2017) highlight the importance of cultural norms surrounding masculinity in influencing men's participation in violent behaviour. In settings where masculinity is closely associated with the exercise of authority over women, gender power imbalances frequently result in higher levels of male-perpetrated violence and greater vulnerability for women (Graaff & Heineken, 2017). As a result, societal expectations around masculinity can legitimise or excuse violent behaviour by men (Graaff & Heineken, 2017). As previously mentioned, Madumise-Pajibo and Shisana (2020) argue that underreporting of abuse, especially IPV is a serious problem in South Africa. Enaifoghe et al. (2021) discovered that one of the key reasons IPV often goes unreported in South Africa is due to victims facing secondary trauma when interacting with the SAPS and healthcare providers, along with a general deficiency of trust in the criminal justice system. In areas where law enforcement is not diligently enforced, the rates of IPV tend to be much higher (Muluneh et al., 2021). Inadequate enforcement of laws can exacerbate IPV by failing to hold perpetrators responsible and provide justice for survivors (Hoosen et al., 2022).

Moreover, in many South African communities, abuse has become the norm, and Jewkes et al. (2000) account that in their study, many women believe that in some situations, it’s acceptable for them to be physically abused by their partners. They may feel that being beaten is just part of a woman's life that she must accept without protest (Jewkes et al., 2000). A common thread is also found in many communities where IPV is considered a private issue within families, rather than a public problem that society needs to address and is thus not reported to the authorities (Enaifoghe et al., 2021). This view treats abuse between partners or family members as a personal matter, rather than recognising it as a serious crime and human rights violation (Enaifoghe et al., 2021). Through their research, Muluneh et al. (2020) add the fear of

stigma, concern about financial difficulties, and fear of retaliation as additional factors hindering the reporting of IPV in South Africa.

An important point to consider is that underreporting often occurs amongst susceptible categories of individuals, such as children, illegal immigrants, and disabled individuals who do not necessarily have the means or knowledge to report abuse (Pankhurst, 2008). Here, the term “culture of silence” coined by Freire (1970) becomes valuable and is characterised by the silence of all those who are oppressed, including the uneducated, the underprivileged, the exploited, and all other groups of subdued people. Raditloaneng (2013) reports this phenomenon in his research, in which he found that many female participants choose to keep quiet regarding their abusive relationships. Instead, participants focused on improving their relationship by showing more love or by acting in a way that the abuser may find appropriate (Raditloaneng, 2013). This becomes particularly prevalent where high rates of dependency are present or when there is a belief that ending intimate contact with the abuser would put one's life at greater risk (Raditloaneng, 2013).

2.5. Consequences of IPV

As seen by the disturbingly high prevalence of IPV in South Africa, it is not surprising that IPV is considered a societal concern, with many negative consequences stretching much further than the immediate victims (Yamile, 2021). For this study, these consequences will be divided into health consequences, societal consequences, and complex trauma.

2.5.1. Health consequences

South Africa has one of the world's biggest HIV epidemics, with an estimated 7.5 million people living with the virus (Kim et al., 2021). Wechsberg et al. (2013) found that over 1300 South African women who were physically abused by their spouses had a 50% higher risk of developing HIV than women who had not been abused. Moreover, a lot of women who are in violent relationships tend not to get tested for HIV or look for appropriate support programs (Wechsberg et al., 2013). Wechsberg et al. (2013) argue that this

is due to the possibility of serious repercussions, such as ongoing violence, should they reveal their HIV status to their violent partner. As a result, women in such circumstances often cannot access essential medical care and treatment, putting their long-term health at significant risk. This includes a heightened likelihood of homicide, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV-related mortality, suicide, physical injuries, chronic pain syndromes, gastrointestinal disorders, unintended pregnancies, miscarriages, and low birth weight in their children (Enaifoghe et al., 2021; Wechsberg et al., 2013). Similarly, Klazinga et al. (2020) note that young women are particularly susceptible to HIV, sexual violence, and IPV due to their limited sexual autonomy and the challenges posed by poverty and unstable economic conditions. As previously mentioned, IPV also affects men, and research by Enaifoghe et al. (2021) discovered that men who had suffered violence were more likely to contract HIV, develop alcohol abuse issues, experience depression, or even attempt suicide.

2.5.2. Societal consequences

IPV affects individuals and has a substantial economic impact on both developed and developing nations. In South Africa, studies estimate that the annual financial cost of IPV ranges between R28.4 billion and R42.4 billion (Day et al., 2005; Enaifoghe et al., 2021). This is due to the significant financial resources that the South African government allocates to social services, law enforcement, courts, and shelters to support and assist victims and survivors of IPV (Day et al., 2005).

The societal cost of IPV is further evidenced by low earnings and productivity as well as a lack of social and human capital accumulation (Enaifoghe et al., 2021). Gross domestic product (GDP), which is the total cost of all completed goods and services produced in a nation over a given period, and the state of the nation's economy are significantly harmed by the high rates of IPV (Day et al., 2005). This is because IPV crimes result in resources not being used as effectively, which lowers economic development and living standards (Day et al., 2005; Jewkes et al., 1999). The likelihood that a woman experiencing domestic abuse

will arrive at work on time, be productive while there, and remain employed is markedly reduced (Enaifoghe et al., 2021). This is aggravated by the reality that many women are forbidden from working by their partners, even if the household is impoverished (Jewkes et al., 1999).

2.5.3. Complex trauma

Whether children are bystanders to the abuse or are direct victims themselves, IPV has a profound impact on them (Day et al., 2005). According to Kaminer et al. (2013), youth have limited access to safe spaces and are frequently exposed to violence in a variety of life domains. Violence leads to a range of harmful consequences, including the development of depressive symptoms, a steady drop in academic performance, a weakened sense of personal identity, reduced overall well-being, and a diminished sense of security in typically safe spaces, such as schools (Henrich et al., 2004).

Hoosen et al. (2022) discovered that children who had experienced violence in their homes or communities were more likely to exhibit aggression, develop depression and anxiety, and participate in gang-related activities. This study further reported that children who have observed abuse in their household or communities are far more likely to either engage in violent acts personally or experience violence as a victim (Hoosen et al., 2022). It is therefore clear that exposure to violence has a grave impact on the way that children view violence and its function in their lives (Hoosen et al., 2022). This is corroborated by Petersen et al. (2017), who argue that men are more prone to committing domestic violence if they experienced physical or sexual abuse during childhood or witnessed violence between their parents. Exposure to violence can perpetuate the pattern of abuse, increasing the possibility that South Africa's youth will grow up to be victims or abusers (Petersen et al., 2017). IPV has a profoundly harmful influence on the growth and wellness of young people in South Africa, with extensive implications for people, their families, and the community as a whole (Petersen et al., 2017).

2.6. Responses to IPV

To address IPV, the South African government has implemented several policies and laws, such as the 1996 National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS), the 2000 National Rape Prevention Strategy, and national guidelines aimed at supporting victims of sexual offenses (Van Niekerk et al., 2004). However, regardless of these laws and policies, the incidence of IPV in South Africa remains alarmingly high (Van Niekerk et al., 2004). This brings us to shed light on how the South African criminal system deals with cases and perpetrators of IPV.

Jewkes (2013) argues that the low number of reported IPV occurrences is likely due to the comparatively low conviction rates, which significantly understate the rate and incidence of IPV. Moreover, in their study, Jewkes et al. (2002) found that when cases of IPV make it to court, court employees often take bribes from the defendant. This study further reports instances where a private meeting is set between the victim and the accused, and the victim is advised to take the accused's money and end the case (Jewkes et al., 2002).

This coincides with research by Leisenring (2012), who indicates that in the past, police personnel have come under fire for downplaying the needs of victims and for not realising how serious IPV is. Sprague et al. (2017) argue that due to poor police response to IPV cases, women would rather seek health services from local clinics or hospitals because they felt more comfortable asking for help at the facilities. This study brought further attention to the tendency of police officers who instruct women to go back to violent households and assume the roles of obedient wives, which highlights the patriarchal beliefs discussed earlier (Sprague et al., 2017). Moreover, research indicates that when reporting IPV, women are often made to feel stupid by police officers, which may cause re-victimisation among women and decrease their likelihood of reporting abuse and requesting protection orders (Leisenring, 2012; Sprague et al., 2017).

For victims of IPV to leave abusive relationships, supportive, protective, and empowering social reactions that assert IPV as wrong are required (Coates & Wade, 2016). This, however, is not always the case, and

community responses to IPV often add further fuel to the fire. Van Niekerk and Boonzaier's (2015) study, which explored reactions to IPV within an employed community in Cape Town, revealed a tendency to stigmatise and dehumanise victims. This behaviour contributed to narratives that blamed victims and portrayed perpetrators as nearly innocent (van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2015). Not only do these responses contribute to the normalisation of IPV, but research indicates that some IPV survivors internalise these victim-blaming narratives, which leads to the marginalisation and suppression of IPV survivors (Coates & Wade, 2016; van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2015). Moreover, these responses could convey the idea to perpetrators of IPV that particular actions and attitudes regarding violence are acceptable (van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2015).

2.7. Gaps in the literature

The preceding review has outlined the significant body of work linking IPV in South Africa to a complex interplay of historical, structural, and cultural factors, with a predominant focus on poverty, Black communities, and traditional masculinities. While this research is crucial, a critical examination reveals systematic silences and patterns of representation that themselves require interrogation. The overwhelming focus on specific demographics and contexts risks constructing IPV as a problem inherent to particular (namely, poor, Black) communities, thereby pathologising them while obscuring the phenomenon's universality within patriarchal structures (Boonzaier, 2014; Shefer, 2010).

As noted in the introduction, this discourse often renders invisible the experiences of IPV within middle-class and White South African households. This omission perpetuates the false notion that IPV is a consequence of poverty or 'Black culture' rather than a manifestation of gendered power imbalances that cut across all race and class lines (Shefer, 2010). Furthermore, the literature remains overwhelmingly heteronormative, with a glaring absence of research into IPV within LGBTQ+ relationships in the South African context. This silence reinforces the assumption that IPV is solely an issue of male-perpetrated

violence against women, neglecting the diverse ways in which power and abuse operate in intimate relationships. By failing to critically ask why these silences persist, the academic discourse risks complicity in reinforcing the very power dynamics it seeks to understand. Therefore, this systematic review aims not only to map the existing terrain but also to highlight these constitutive omissions, framing them as a central part of the knowledge politics surrounding IPV in South Africa.

2.8. Conclusion

This chapter offered further context on IPV and highlighted significant research related to the issue within South Africa. Given the intricate interactions of sociopolitical, cultural, and economic influences, IPV stands out as a deeply rooted problem in the country, taking diverse forms and impacting individuals of all genders. As evidenced by the staggering prevalence rates, the urgency to address IPV cannot be overstated. IPV is more than just individual behaviours; it is profoundly ingrained in societal systems and historical legacies. The legacy of apartheid, characterised by systemic violence and inequality, has left a lasting imprint on South African society, perpetuating cycles of violence and exacerbating existing power imbalances. Patriarchal norms and cultural beliefs that uphold male dominance further entrench gender inequalities, contributing to the normalisation and perpetuation of violence against women. Moreover, socioeconomic disparities, compounded by poverty and unemployment, create conditions ripe for the proliferation of IPV, as individuals struggle with feelings of frustration and helplessness. The high level of IPV in South Africa has far-reaching consequences for people, their families, and the community. The way that IPV is responded to in South Africa demonstrates the intricate interactions between societal attitudes, legal frameworks, and policy that affect how well victims are supported and how treatments operate. The next chapter will go into the theoretical framework that was applied to frame this study.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Introduction

IPV continues to be a pervasive and deeply entrenched issue in South Africa, permeating all levels of society and inflicting profound harm on individuals, families, and communities (Akyüz et al., 2012; Michau et al., 2015; Neal & Edwards, 2017). Despite concerted efforts to address this phenomenon, rates of IPV persist at alarming levels, underscoring the need for a comprehensive understanding of its underlying causes and dynamics (NDoH, Stats SA, SAMRC, & ICF, 2019). This study endeavours to shed light on the multifaceted nature of IPV in South Africa through an interdisciplinary lens that integrates insights from social constructionism, feminist perspectives, and hegemonic masculinities.

At the heart of this analysis lies the theoretical framework of social constructionism, which posits that reality is not inherent or objective but rather socially constructed through language, discourse, and cultural norms (Gergen, 1985). Implementing a social constructionist perspective allows us to deconstruct prevailing notions of gender, power, and violence in South African society, illuminating how social constructs and cultural narratives shape understandings of masculinity, femininity, and acceptable forms of behaviour (Gergen, 1985). Murnen (2015) contends that individuals absorb expectations from society, which shape collective experiences and views of the world, hence framing IPV as an extension of the cultural and social context in which it occurs. The current research used a social constructionist lens to look at how IPV is portrayed in South African empirical literature and to determine how these representations may influence personal understandings of IPV.

Moreover, feminist perspectives offer a critical framework for analysing the power imbalances, gender disparities, and patriarchal systems that sustain IPV. By focussing on the experiences and voices of women and gender minorities, feminist perspectives highlight how systemic oppression and discrimination contribute to the prevalence of violence and undermine attempts to achieve gender equivalence and social

righteousness (Brown, 2018). This study utilised feminist perspectives to explore the societal, cultural, and structural influences that reinforce patriarchal power structures and gender inequalities, which in turn facilitate and normalise IPV in South Africa (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). Graaff and Heinecken (2017) highlight apartheid, poverty, gender norms, and patriarchal attitudes as key underlying contributors to IPV. By drawing on feminist perspectives, the study aims to examine how these factors intersect and interact, producing distinct forms of oppression that perpetuate IPV in the South African context (Crenshaw, 2013).

Furthermore, the concept of hegemonic masculinities provides important insights into the function that dominant variations of masculinity play in promoting IPV. Hegemonic masculinities, characterised by traits such as aggression, dominance, and control, shape cultural norms and expectations around masculinity and violence in South Africa, often reinforce gender hierarchies and legitimise the subjugation of women and marginalised genders (Connell, 1987, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Yang (2020) explains that hegemonic masculinities are often associated with privilege and authority, reinforcing gender hierarchies and inequalities that are influenced by specific historical and contextual factors. The characteristics of these masculinities can vary depending on time, place, and cultural context (Yang, 2020). This study used the notion of hegemonic masculinities to look at how South Africa's current patriarchal system affects the occurrence of IPV.

By synthesising insights from social constructionism, feminist perspectives, and hegemonic masculinities, this research intended to offer an inclusive analysis of IPV in South Africa, informing efforts to develop effective interventions, policies, and support mechanisms to address this pressing issue. Through interdisciplinary inquiry, this study endeavoured to challenge existing norms and narratives surrounding IPV and advocate for transformative social change toward a more impartial and equitable society for all.

3.2. A social constructionist perspective

According to Burr and Dick (2017) as well as Gergen (1985), social constructionism is a theoretical perspective that asserts reality is not an objective, unchanging entity, but a socially produced notion. It maintains that what individuals perceive as real is shaped by social interactions, language, and cultural context (Burr & Dick, 2017; Gergen, 1985). In other words, social constructionism proposes that individuals are socialised to adhere to societal norms, thereby influencing shared experiences and the internalisation of the external world (Murnen, 2015). A core principle of social constructionism is the understanding that knowledge is sustained by interactions between people (Burr, 1996; Burr & Dick, 2017). As individuals within a culture engage with one another, they collectively create and uphold their social reality by developing shared beliefs, values, institutions, customs, and laws (Burr, 1996).

At the core of the social constructionist perspective is the understanding that language and discourse play pivotal roles in constructing and reinforcing social categories, identities, and institutions (Murnen, 2015). Language and conceptions are shaped by diverse cultural and historical contexts, instead of being unchanging or universal parts of the lives of people (Murnen, 2015). In this regard, Muehlenhard and Kimes (2014) assert that no definition of a concept can be universally accepted or objectively true without debate. The meanings assigned to terms depend on those in positions of authority, ultimately reflecting the priorities and perspectives of those who hold power (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014).

Moreover, the social constructionist perspective emphasises the influence of cultural and historic factors on the construction of reality, acknowledging that meanings and interpretations of concepts such as gender, race, and identity are contingent upon historical contexts and cultural norms (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014). This perspective underscores the subjective nature of reality, recognising that individuals and groups may interpret and experience reality differently based on their social backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives (Murnen, 2015). Social constructionism also scrutinises power dynamics and social

hierarchies, highlighting how dominant groups wield power to define and impose their interpretations of reality, often marginalising and silencing minority perspectives (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014; Murnen, 2015). Whose actions are categorised as violent and the conditions under which this occurs, as well as who holds the authority to make such determinations, demonstrate the influence of those in positions of power (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014).

Social constructionism, serving as the theoretical foundation of this study, provides critical insights into understanding IPV in South Africa. It highlights how social and cultural influences shape attitudes, behaviours, and norms surrounding gender and violence (Jewkes et al., 2003).

Social constructionism emphasises how societal norms and expectations regarding gender roles are created and maintained through social interactions, language, and cultural traditions (Burr, 1996; Burr & Dick, 2017). Strebel et al. (2006) explored how gender identities and roles are formed among men and women in two Black communities in the Western Cape, South Africa, using a social constructionist perspective. This study examined the way individuals understood IPV and how they perceived the association between gender dynamics and HIV risk (Strebel et al. 2006). Strebel et al. (2006) found widespread endorsement of traditional gender roles among various groups, with men serving as household authority, primary providers, and those making decisions in family concerns. Women were typically presumed to remain at home, attending to domestic tasks such as cleaning and cooking (Strebel et al., 2006). Similarly, Kalichman et al. (2005) investigated gender perceptions and beliefs supportive of sexual violence (rape myths) among a group of South African individuals, both men and women, who are vulnerable to HIV transmission. This study found that both males and females expressed approval of gender beliefs reflecting conventional, submissive, and passive roles for women, with almost all individuals agreeing that wives ought to submit to their husbands (Kalichman et al., 2005). These studies indicate that traditional views of manliness and femininity are deeply ingrained in South Africa. Research (Jewkes et al., 2003; Kalichman et al., 2005;

Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014; Strebel et al., 2006) highlights societal expectations that portray men as dominant, assertive, and authoritative, while women are frequently assigned subordinate and passive roles. These socially constructed gender roles contribute to power imbalances and inequalities, creating a conducive environment for IPV (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014).

Secondly, Burr (1996), as well as Burr and Dick (2017) argue that social constructionism emphasises how violence becomes normalised and justified within certain cultural contexts and how cultural attitudes that condone or trivialise violence, such as beliefs in the use of force to assert dominance or resolve conflicts, lead to violence being normalised. South Africa's history of colonisation, apartheid, and political instability have contributed to widespread violence within many communities (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). Here, one can refer to structural violence, which is described as violence stemming from oppressive social systems that tend to be concealed, persistent, and institutionalised (Lamb & Snodgrass, 2013). During apartheid in South Africa, the deliberate restrictions imposed by the state on access to education and employment opportunities for much of its population led to social, political, and economic marginalisation of these groups (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Lamb & Snodgrass, 2013). Many analysts link South Africa's prevailing societal violence to the enduring impact of apartheid, primarily due to the entrenched inequality it cultivated (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Hamber, 2000; Lamb & Snodgrass, 2013; Machisa, 2010; Shefer, 2010). Van Niekerk and Boonzaier (2015) highlight that the social environment in which IPV occurs is a crucial analytical location because it shapes the available reactions based on the circumstances of people who experience or witness this abuse. De Lannoy et al. (2015) argue that numerous adolescents in South Africa face violence in a variety of settings, such as their residences, schools, and neighbourhoods, involving crimes such as homicide, IPV, and sexual abuse. Experiencing such violence and associating with peers engaged in deviant behaviour heightens the probability of youths engaging in high-risk and violent conduct as they strive for closer connections with their peers (De Lannoy et al., 2015). Similarly, Leoschut's (2006) research findings suggest that numerous South African families view physical violence as an

acceptable method for resolving issues, and among many young people in South Africa, domestic violence has become commonplace rather than uncommon.

A study by Lamb and Snodgrass (2013) delves into the experiences of a cohort of young South African individuals (18–25 years of age) labelled as "at-risk", examining how their acceptance and normalisation of violence is evident in their perspectives and personal narratives of conflict. When violence is accepted instead of being criticised, the criteria for evaluating violent behaviour are established based on this normative perspective, influencing children's perception and judgment (Lamb & Snodgrass, 2013). The study also found that there were indications of male power and control that had been socialised, with violence being utilised to reaffirm masculinity (Lamb & Snodgrass, 2013).

Hoosen et al. (2022) examined and aggregated empirical studies to investigate how adolescents and young adults experienced violence in post-apartheid South Africa. The evaluation included 34 studies with respondents aged 8–27 years (Hoosen et al., 2022). The study used thematic analysis to divide its findings into three main themes: being exposed to violence, GBV and sexual violence, and violence within relationships and schools. It revealed that while some individuals managed challenges with the help of social support, others experienced adverse outcomes like anxiety, depression, and aggression (Hoosen et al., 2022).

According to Petersen et al. (2017), when young people are subjected to detrimental internal or external environmental influences, such as domestic violence, their self-perception tends to become disordered. This can lead to feelings of disorientation and ambiguity within themselves, particularly in a volatile and dysfunctional setting (Petersen et al., 2017). These symptoms increase the possibility of youth engaging in gang activities (Petersen et al., 2017). Secondly, Hoosen et al. (2022) discovered that violent behaviour was a recurring aspect of sexual interactions, which served to uphold male dominance and regulate sexual encounters, shaping the dynamics of intimacy. Finally, the study showed that respondents' perceptions and

experiences of violence in their relationships reflected a clear succession of violence, implying the intergenerational transfer of violent behaviours (Hoosen et al., 2022).

From the research examples, it becomes evident that the normalisation of violence reinforces harmful gender norms and contributes to the prevalence of IPV. From a social constructionist theory perspective, the normalisation of violence reinforces harmful gender norms and contributes to the prevalence of IPV by constructing and positioning men and women in specific social norms, attitudes, roles, and practices that are tied to dynamics of power (Hoosen et al., 2022). This perspective acknowledges that violence against women is part of a broader continuum shaped by social contexts and gender norms, rather than being a series of isolated incidents (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014). This normalisation process is deeply intertwined with gender inequality, as it often stems from entrenched social conventions that encourage male superiority, dominance, and authority over women and girls (Lamb & Snodgrass, 2013). The social constructionist perspective on attitudes recognises the significance of comprehending the broader societal contexts in which attitudes toward violence against women are created (Hoosen et al., 2022; Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014; Lamb & Snodgrass, 2013).

Finally, social constructionism underscores the role of language and discourse in affecting societal views on gender and violence within the South African context (Burr, 1996; Burr & Dick, 2017). This theoretical perspective highlights how societal norms, beliefs, and power dynamics are constructed and reinforced through language, narratives, and social interactions (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014). By examining the narratives and discourses surrounding gender and violence in the country, social constructionist approaches to this phenomenon reveal how these constructs are not inherent but are socially constructed and maintained through communication, media representations, and cultural practices (Davis et al., 2022; Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014). Language shapes how individuals perceive and interpret gendered behaviours, relationships, and experiences of violence, influencing societal attitudes and responses to these issues (Muehlenhard &

Kimes, 2014). According to Davis et al. (2022), individuals organise and perceive the world and its social aspects through mental frameworks. When people use gendered language, it triggers heightened mental representations linked to gender, which amplify the magnitude of gender distinctions and strengthen the influence of gender norms (Davis et al., 2022). Davis et al. (2022) contend that this increased activation can reinforce existing gender norms, many of which condone IPV, thereby exerting a more substantial impact on the behaviour of those who speak a gendered language. Societies, such as South Africa, where gender norms have a significant influence, are more likely to adopt gendered language (Davis et al., 2022). This use of language can shape perceptions of gender roles, relationships, and violence, thereby reinforcing societal attitudes toward IPV (Davis et al., 2022; Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014). Language reproduces shared ways of viewing the world, and this shapes how sense-making happens in a certain context (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014). For example, the perception of "wife" is linked to a typical wife, who, depending on the situation, could be perceived as someone submissive, who prepares meals, tends to the children, remains loyal, and is sexually accessible to the spouse (Davis et al., 2022). Bicchieri (2016) consequently argues that in settings where individuals utilise gendered language when a woman fails to conform to the typical wife model, the disparity between the ideal and her actual behaviour is frequently perceived negatively. In this scenario, punishment is viewed as fitting and potentially a husband's responsibility. If a community shares this gendered framework, it could reinforce and rationalise systemic domestic violence (Bicchieri, 2016).

The gendered use of language and discourse in South Africa reflects and reinforces existing power dynamics, social hierarchies, and gender roles (Bicchieri, 2016; Buqa, 2022; Magodyo, 2013). One example of language reinforcing gender norms is the use of traditional narratives in understanding gender relations, which often reflects patriarchal gender roles and norms (Buqa, 2022). For example, the utilisation of language that emphasises male dominance within households and traditional African customs like *lobola* and initiation ceremonies (*Ulwaluko*) indirectly perpetuates abuse against women (Buqa, 2022). A study

by Magodyo (2013) investigated the part that *Ulwaluko* plays in shaping masculine identities in men at the University of the Western Cape. *Ulwaluko* is a traditional Xhosa practice in which social status and authority are conferred upon men within society after undergoing an initiation ceremony (Magodyo, 2013). Magodyo (2013) found that this practice constructs masculinity in hegemonic ways, establishing and retaining control over young men, boys, and women, strengthening traditional gender norms and hierarchical structures. This chapter will later explore the concept of hegemonic masculinity and its connection to IPV in greater depth.

In essence, social constructionism offers a valuable lens through which to comprehend IPV in South Africa, emphasising the impact of societal and cultural elements on its persistence. Through the analysis of how gender expectations, cultural ideologies, linguistic influences, the normalisation of violence, and power structures shape perceptions and actions concerning violence, social constructionism allows for more in-depth knowledge of the underlying causes of IPV and may help guide the creation of effective pre-emptive and intervention plans.

3.3. Feminist theoretical perspectives

Feminist theoretical viewpoints evolved in the late 19th and early 20th centuries alongside the first phase of feminism, particularly in Western Europe and North America (Brown, 2018; Frenkel, 2008). Some of the key figures who contributed significantly to feminist thought in the 20th century include Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Gloria Jean Watkins (bell hooks), and Betty Friedan (Duffy, 2021). Similarly, feminist perspectives in South Africa have roots in the broader global feminist movement, but they also have distinct historical and cultural influences (Duffy, 2021). Feminist activism and scholarship in South Africa have roots in the early 20th century, marked by the emergence of women's organisations advocating for suffrage, education, and labour rights (Duffy, 2021). However, feminist perspectives gained significant momentum during the apartheid era, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, with women taking

on crucial roles in the fight against apartheid (Brown, 2018). Influential leaders like Albertina Sisulu and Winnie Mandela played key roles in advancing women's rights and drawing attention to the distinct challenges faced by South African women, especially those from marginalised racial groups (Frenkel, 2008).

Feminist perspectives can broadly be defined as politically aware models of gender, power, and social structures that examine human experiences in the context of societal and cultural dynamics, considering the influence of authority on these truths (Brown, 2018). Moreover, feminist perspectives posit that the root cause of distress lies in the oppression stemming from both internalised and external patriarchal structures, which hinder personal empowerment and growth across all genders (Ferguson, 2017). While feminist perspectives primarily aim to free women from the oppression caused by harmful traditions and cultures, Jones (2000) argues that feminist advocacy extends to the liberation of all individuals. The fundamental aim of feminist perspectives is thus to advance equality between genders, and not merely grant women privilege over men (Ackermann, 1993).

Although feminist perspectives encompass a wide array of standpoints, several fundamental principles are commonly embraced as starting points. Firstly, feminist perspectives reject dualistic thinking, which is characterised by a division into two exclusive parts, often reflecting a mentality of "us versus them" or the dichotomy between the dominant culture and marginalised groups (Duffy, 2021). Duffy (2021) and Ferguson (2017) argue that any attempt to categorise the intricate world into two opposing variables (such as reason versus emotion, mind versus body, or male versus female) inevitably oversimplifies a nuanced domain and suggests distinct boundaries instead of recognising the interconnected and overlapping relationships. Additionally, dualistic thinking perpetuates hierarchies by allowing one aspect of the dichotomy to dominate the other, thereby rooting existing power structures and fostering resistance to change (Duffy, 2021; Ferguson, 2017).

The second tenet of feminist perspectives involves embracing a perspective rooted in process-oriented thinking (Duffy, 2021; Ferguson, 2017). Here, feminist perspectives draw on the work of French philosopher De Beauvoir (1949/2011), who argued that we are not inherently born as women; instead, we undergo a process of becoming women. This viewpoint is consistent with social constructionist viewpoints, which contend that identities (including gender) are not innate but rather are formed by interactions in society, social conventions, and historical circumstances (Burr, 1996; Burr & Dick, 2017). The social constructionist notion that gender is constantly formed and reaffirmed by social norms and discourse is reflected in De Beauvoir's (1949/2011) claim that one "becomes a woman" (Burr, 1996).

From feminist perspectives, process thinking explores the origins of phenomena and the pathways leading to the current reality (Duffy, 2021; Ferguson, 2017). It delves into the origins of phenomena, prompting us to contextualise our thoughts historically and acknowledge fluid and evolving connections rather than fixed entities (Duffy, 2021). Thirdly, Ferguson (2017) argues that feminist perspectives involve a dedication to both transforming and examining the world. It encompasses both political and intellectual dimensions, rooted in its commitment to the advancement of movements seeking equality, freedom, and justice (Ferguson, 2017).

Feminist perspectives also utilise three analytical methods, with the first being intersectionality (Cho et al., 2013). Cho et al. (2013) describe intersectionality within feminist frameworks as an acknowledgment of the interconnection between social identities and systems of oppression, emphasising how overlapping forms of discrimination combine to influence individual experiences. In other words, tools of intersectionality are used by conceptualising categories not as separate entities, but as constantly influenced by and influencing other categories, fluid and evolving, perpetually shaped by power dynamics (Cho, et al., 2013).

The second analytical tool is interdisciplinary pursuits, which are often viewed as applying the principles of intersectionality within the academic sphere (Duffy, 2021; Ferguson, 2017). This refers to the exploration and integration of feminist perspectives across various academic disciplines and fields of study (Duffy, 2021). This tool involves applying feminist theories and methodologies to understand and address issues related to gender, power, inequality, and social justice in diverse contexts, ranging from sociology and psychology to literature and political science, among others (Ferguson, 2017).

Lastly, feminist perspectives draw upon both scholarly research and activism, supporting a change-oriented practice while contesting oppression and striving for justice (Duffy, 2021; Ferguson, 2017). In other words, Ferguson (2017) argues that feminist perspectives foster a distinctive approach where data and practices are regarded as parallel collaborators with theory, contributing actively and productively. Instead of imposing theory onto data, feminist theory seeks to facilitate interactions between analyses and examples, allowing each to enrich or challenge the other (Duffy, 2021). In their work, Ferguson (2017) argues that rather than producing books heavy on abstract analysis with a brief concluding chapter on practical examples, feminist perspectives aim to foster dynamic dialogues among various elements.

Feminist perspectives can provide a comprehensive framework for understanding IPV in South Africa by analysing the underlying power dynamics, structural inequalities, and societal attitudes that perpetuate violence directed at women and gender minorities (Ferguson, 2017; Jakobsen, 2014). However, it is essential to also consider the contributions of postcolonial and Black feminist theories, which foreground the significance of race, colonial history, and socioeconomic position in shaping encounters of violence (Cho et al., 2013). In particular, the notion of intersectionality, as proposed by Cho et al. (2013), allows for a more nuanced analysis demonstrating how systems of oppression, including sexism, classism, and racism, overlap to create unique vulnerabilities for Black South African women. Black feminist scholars argue that mainstream feminist theories often overlook these intersecting forms of marginalisation, and thus,

integrating postcolonial and Black feminist thought is crucial for a more contextually relevant and inclusive understanding of IPV in South Africa (Cho et al., 2013; Ferguson, 2017; Gqola, 2007).

Firstly, Walby (1989) argues that feminist perspectives underscore the role of patriarchal systems in maintaining IPV. In South Africa, patriarchy refers to a societal structure in which a male (father) assumes the role of the household's leader, responsible for catering to the family's needs (Coetzee, 2001; Walby, 1989). Patriarchy as a dominant system spans various economic structures, historical periods, geographical locations, and social strata, favouring male control over women (Coetzee, 2001). In her research Walby (1989) argues that six patriarchal structures can be identified and are reflected in: the increased likelihood of women experiencing abuse; assuming responsibility for household chores and childcare; being inadequately represented in media and popular culture; earning lower wages than men for similar work; facing negative perceptions of their sexuality; and being under-represented in areas of power and decision-making (Walby, 1989). Power relationships are a tangible aspect of social dynamics, originating within families where individuals are socialised to embrace a particular set of values that perpetuate the family hierarchy, making it seem like a natural and normal social arrangement rather than a socially constructed one (Walby, 1989). This internalisation occurs due to the association of these hierarchies with seemingly natural processes within the family context (Coetzee, 2001; Walby, 1989). In this environment, a patriarchal society normalises authoritative male rule and cultivates the acceptance of group subjugation as the customary social order (Mazibuko, 2017).

Graaff and Heinecken (2017) argue that historically, women in South Africa were placed in a subordinate role relative to men, with their main responsibilities revolving around motherhood and maintaining the home and family. This patriarchal system has persisted over time, with women's roles primarily confined to domestic duties and men dominating decision-making processes in society and within the household (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). According to Sultana (2010), patriarchy is rarely a deliberate attempt by men

to subjugate women, but rather a deeply embedded societal structure that individuals, regardless of gender, are born into and may unconsciously sustain (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Sultana, 2010). This means that individuals of all genders can contribute to perpetuating patriarchy, even if it primarily benefits men (Sultana, 2010). An illustration of entrenched patriarchy is evident in the example given by Gqola (2007) regarding the tendency to place blame on victims and survivors of violence instead of holding the perpetrators accountable. Young girls often grow up being cautioned against dressing or moving in specific ways to avoid potential risks of sexual assault or violence (Gqola, 2007). The practice of controlling, shaming, and blaming survivors of IPV instead of holding the perpetrators accountable underscores the pervasive influence of patriarchy within our societies (Gqola, 2007).

Several studies (Coetzee, 2001; Crenshaw, 2013; Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Lelaurain et al., 2021; Mkhize & Vilakazi, 2021; Mshweshwe, 2020; Sultana, 2010) have indicated that South Africa's patriarchal norms and traditions, which emphasise male control over women, lead to significant power disparities. These power imbalances often manifest in various forms of IPV, including GBV, sexual assault, and femicide (Coetzee, 2001; Crenshaw, 2013; Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Lelaurain et al., 2021; Mkhize & Vilakazi, 2021; Mshweshwe, 2020; Sultana, 2010). In the private realm, patriarchy exerts a more pronounced influence, with men often subjecting women to abuse due to their perceived subordinate position (Mshweshwe, 2020). Abusive individuals often exploit familial dynamics to assert their dominance, particularly in decision-making and establishing control over the family, particularly the wife (Mshweshwe, 2020).

Moreover, the process of gender socialisation and the view of the family domain as a private realm pursuant to male control contribute to the continuation of IPV (Lelaurain et al., 2021). As argued by Lelaurain et al. (2021), portraying males as strong, powerful rescuers in romantic heterosexual love narratives contributes to domestic violence by reinforcing sexist ideals. The authors emphasise that marriage as an institution

reinforces patriarchal gender roles by upholding male privilege (Lelaurain et al., 2021). Due to the dominance of patriarchy within the private realm of households, women frequently choose not to report instances of IPV because of the power imbalances and gender norms that emphasise male authority and control in domestic settings (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Lelaurain et al., 2021). In their study, van Niekerk and Boonzaier (2019) argue that traditional gender norms and cultural perceptions about masculinity and femininity have a considerable impact on attitudes about IPV. According to the authors, in some groups, IPV is normalised, and victims may feel forced to remain silent because of stigma or fear of social ostracism (van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2019).

Secondly, Coetzee (2001) and Walby (1989) argue that feminist approaches highlight how gender intersects with other societal factors, including class, race, and sexual orientation, in influencing individuals' experiences with violence. It emphasises how these intersecting identities impact and shape how individuals interact with violence, specifically IPV (Coetzee, 2001; Walby, 1989). Crenshaw (2013) defines intersectionality as a framework that investigates how social identities, such as gender, race, and class, overlap and contribute to individuals' marginalisation and oppression in society. According to Jewkes and Morrell (2010), an intersectional approach acknowledges that IPV cannot be fully explained by gender oppression alone but is moulded by the confluence of gender with other societal characteristics and structural inequities such as class, race, and sexuality. To put it differently, how oppression is felt is not tied to just one social identity, but rather to all the various categories one associates with. Oppression is thus characterised by a limitation in available choices (Crenshaw, 2013).

The legacy of violence in South Africa, shaped by colonialism, apartheid, and various forms of oppression, has profoundly influenced the nation's social fabric (Strebel et al., 2006). The interaction between race, class, and sexuality significantly influences power relations and societal norms, fostering conditions that perpetuate violence, particularly against women (Crenshaw, 2013; Strebel et al., 2006). The manner in

which violence towards women is normalised in South Africa is intertwined with these intersecting social identities, where historical injustices and power differentials based on class, race, and gender perpetuate harmful gender norms and attitudes (Crenshaw, 2013). According to Strebel et al. (2006), the reason for this is the prevailing notion that gender is a marker of social standing, which often results in women having less authority, benefits, and assets than men. Allen (2018) argues that the practice of violence has become profoundly embedded in South African society, leading to ongoing violence that is often centred on racial and class conflicts. This legacy of violence has yet to be overcome, and the focus remains on the racial and class-based oppression that was prevalent during apartheid, while the oppression of women by men is frequently overlooked (Allen, 2018). For instance, Crenshaw (2013) asserts that a Black woman may face unique challenges distinct from those encountered by a Black man or White woman due to the overlapping effects of racism and sexism. Similarly, a working-class woman may experience specific forms of oppression distinct from those of an upper-class woman due to the interplay of gender and class factors (Crenshaw, 2013).

Van Niekerk and Boonzaier's (2019) qualitative study demonstrates the value of intersectionality in the context of IPV in South Africa. The researchers utilised focus group discussions and interviews with residents, service providers, and shareholders addressing IPV in two Western Cape communities, Vlottenburg and Hanover Park. In this study, van Niekerk and Boonzaier (2019) emphasise how poverty, unemployment, and a lack of resources contribute to the spread of IPV. These material situations overlap with social identities, resulting in increased vulnerability for specific groups, particularly women of colour (van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2019).

Thirdly, feminist theory examines the structural inequalities that contribute to IPV, including economic disparities, insufficient access to education and medical services, and institutional failures in the justice system (Coetzee, 2001; Montesanti, 2015; Walby, 1989). Here, one can refer to structural violence, which

is defined as the societal structures and organisation of resources that expose individuals and communities to harm, with these arrangements being structural due to their integration within the social, political, and economic fabric of society (Montesanti & Thurston, 2015). This form of violence is characterised by causing harm to people, often affecting those who are not responsible for maintaining such disparities, resulting in physical, emotional, and psychological injuries (Montesanti, 2015).

Montesanti and Thurston (2015) argue that the concept of structural violence aims to uncover the underlying factors driving harm and promotes equitable social change by analysing the complex relationship between societal structures and the persistence of violence. Montesanti (2015) contends that this type of violence impacts the formation of gendered variations in violence that disproportionately affect women, placing them in vulnerable positions and perpetuating power imbalances. For example, Flynn et al. (2018) observed that economic inequalities often lead women to depend financially on their partners, creating significant barriers to leaving abusive relationships. This financial dependence not only limits their ability to break free but also makes them vulnerable to economic abuse, where abusers manipulate and control their financial resources and opportunities (Flynn et al., 2018).

Moreover, the restricted availability of education and healthcare can worsen the circumstances (Bannister, 2014; Montesanti, 2015; Montesanti & Thurston, 2015). Enhancing women's educational attainment enhances their chances of securing employment and elevates their socioeconomic standing (Montesanti & Thurston, 2015). Similarly, Bannister (2014) argues that empowering women diminishes the imbalanced power dynamics between genders, a fundamental factor linked to IPV. Montesanti (2015) argues that when women are denied equal access to education due to structural violence, research indicates a deficiency in information and the abilities needed to make informed choices about their lives and relationships. Restricted access to education can diminish women's job prospects and socioeconomic standing, thereby heightening their susceptibility to IPV and constraining their capacity to leave abusive situations

(Montesanti & Thurston, 2015). Similarly, Bannister (2014) argues that insufficient healthcare availability, due to factors such as an inadequate number of healthcare professionals, economic constraints, challenges in transportation, insufficient knowledge about existing assistance, and worries about confidentiality and personal privacy, can sustain the pattern of abuse, obstructing women from accessing the essential care and assistance needed to confront IPV. In their study, van Niekerk and Boonzaier (2019) highlighted that responses to IPV range greatly amongst communities and are impacted by local cultural traditions, legal frameworks, and available support services. According to the authors, although some participants seek assistance from formal institutions, others rely on informal networks, which may not always give appropriate support (van Niekerk & Boonzaier, 2019).

Institutional failings in the judicial system continue despite the existence of legislation and guidelines, such as the National Gender Policy Framework, which seeks to promote gender equality across various corporate and government divisions (Office on the Status of Women, n.d.). Although there are still issues with its implementation, this framework aims to reduce gender inequities and establish a more equitable space for both genders (Allen, 2018; Govender, 2023). However, the government's execution has been insufficient in tackling IPV, leaving victims without adequate protection and support (Allen, 2018). Furthermore, research by Govender (2023) indicates that the South African justice system has encountered difficulties in implementing IPV-related laws, resulting in delayed responses to cases and a lack of responsibility for offenders, who often evade punishment and continue to perpetrate violence against women. Govender (2023) contends that the criminal justice and law enforcement systems usually transfer accountability onto the victim instead of the perpetrator, asking questions like "What were you doing alone?", "What were you wearing?", "Why were you out so late?". This positions susceptible victims in a difficult position, particularly when they seek assistance while dealing with the repercussions of traumatic events (Govender, 2023). Similarly, weaknesses within the criminal justice system, including insufficient data gathering and a lack of consequences for those responsible, play a role in exacerbating the crisis of IPV in South Africa

(Allen, 2018; Govender, 2023). Because of these shortcomings, survivors often refrain from pursuing justice due to victim-blaming, secondary victimisation, and the perpetuation of rape myths (Govender, 2023). They also support a high attrition rate in the legal system, a general culture of impunity, and inadequate reporting of IPV cases, all of which exacerbate cycles of violence and institutional inaction (Allen, 2018; Govender, 2023).

Lastly, feminist perspectives examine and challenge cultural norms and traditions that sustain IPV (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). South African researchers emphasise that IPV reflects a quest to wield power and control over women, reflecting a deeply ingrained cultural pattern in traditional communities (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Mkhize & Vilakazi, 2021; Tamale, 2013). In South Africa, various communities exhibit these cultural norms, resulting in men exercising power and control over women, which contributes to the high incidence of domestic violence (Mkhize & Vilakazi, 2021). According to Jewkes and Morrell (2010), these forms of violence include actions such as slapping, hair-pulling, pushing, kicking, striking with objects, attempted choking, threats, verbal abuse, sarcastic remarks in public, imposing strict mobility restrictions, excluding women from decision-making processes, and regularly criticising them to family, neighbours, friends, and relatives, resulting in significant humiliation.

Moreover, many traditional African customs, like harmful practices such as bride abduction (*ukuthwala*), forced marriage, virginity testing (*ukuhlolwa kwobuntombi*), and polygamy, are culturally constructed on patriarchal ideologies where women, regardless of age, are perceived and handled as possessions of culture and men (Mkhize & Vilakazi, 2021). These practices stem from a belief that female sexuality is problematic, deviant, excessively active, and unmanageable, necessitating strict regulation and control (Mkhize & Vilakazi, 2021). Tamale (2013) argues that these cultural practices reflect a societal view that women's sexuality must be monitored and disciplined to maintain order and conform to societal expectations. Cultural norms that enforce ownership and control over female sexuality, behaviour, and

bodies significantly impact the degradation and subjugation of women and girls, ultimately leading to IPV and abuse (Mkhize & Vilakazi, 2021). This power dynamic enables perpetrators to mistreat and exploit women and girls on account of their gender (Mkhize & Vilakazi, 2021).

It is thus evident that feminist perspectives serve as a critical outline for understanding and addressing IPV in South Africa, through illuminating the complex interplay of power dynamics, structural inequalities, and cultural norms that perpetuate violence against women and gender minorities. By emphasising the role of patriarchal systems, feminist perspectives highlight how entrenched norms and traditions contribute to power imbalances, enabling IPV within households and communities. Furthermore, feminist perspectives, through the lens of intersectionality, recognise how overlapping identities like race, class, and sexuality intensify experiences of violence, highlighting the importance of adopting holistic and inclusive strategies for addressing IPV. Additionally, feminist perspectives shed light on structural inequalities, revealing how economic disparities, limited availability of education and healthcare, and institutional failures in the justice system contribute to the perpetuation of IPV. By challenging cultural norms and traditions that sustain IPV, feminist perspectives advocate for cultural shifts and societal transformation to eradicate IPV in South Africa.

3.4. Hegemonic Masculinities

Mshweshwe (2020) argues that societal structures reinforce male supremacy by promoting hegemonic masculinity, which are norms and practices that legitimise male power and maintain the marginalisation of women. The concept of hegemonic masculinities was brought to the forefront by Raewyn Connell's research on masculinities (1987, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and has since emerged as one of the primary theoretical frameworks for examining men and their expressions of masculinity. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinities was greatly impacted by Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony as an ideological process that upholds and justifies the interests of the dominant societal forces during specific

historical epochs (McVittie, Hepworth & Goodall, 2017). Connell (1987, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) describes hegemonic masculinities as a collection of gendered behaviours and norms designed to uphold patriarchal legitimacy, thereby maintaining men's dominance and women's subordination. They are culturally idealised and valorised within a given society and assert that men are expected to uphold a dominant position and that qualities such as strength and sexual prowess within a relationship embody this power (Connell 1987, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinities are often associated with power and privilege, which serve to reinforce gender hierarchies and inequalities (Yang, 2020). Rather than being a fixed, internalised identity or a gender role that all men must conform to, masculinity, according to Gottzén et al. (2020), is a formation of gender practice.

It is essential to recognise that hegemonic masculinities embody the most socially accepted type of masculinity, that certain men may strive to achieve even though it may not necessarily align with the lived experiences or identities of many, if any, individual men (McVittie et al., 2017). However, McVittie et al. (2017) argue that while most men may not fully embody hegemonic ideals, they still enjoy the patriarchal dividend. The patriarchal dividend, according to Connell (1987), refers to the benefits or advantages that men, as a group, receive from the patriarchal structure of society. These benefits arise from the systemic subordination of women and the privileging of masculinity, which can manifest in various forms such as economic advantages, social status, and political power (Jewkes et al., 2015). Connell (1987) argues that even men who do not align with hegemonic masculinities gain advantages from this societal framework because of the broader patriarchal system.

With this being said, the position of hegemonic masculinities differentiates it from and elevates it above alternative gender identities that differ from this prevailing model (Jewkes et al., 2015). For instance, an alternative manifestation of masculinity may not adhere to the norms of hegemonic masculinity, yet if it doesn't actively challenge this dominant identity, it is seen as endorsing and benefiting from the existing

hegemonic masculinity. Conversely, McVittie et al. (2017) argue that other expressions of masculinity significantly diverge from the hegemonic standard and are either marginalised or subjugated in comparison. This is especially notable with homosexual men, who are often subjected to political and cultural marginalisation, as well as legal and physical aggression, indicating the dominance wielded over them by specific groups (Yang, 2020). Furthermore, the masculinity of subordinate classes and racial minorities is also marginalised (McVittie et al., 2017). These marginalised forms of masculinity offer both positive images, like successful Black athletes, for the dominant group to adopt, and negative stereotypes, such as depicting Black men as rapists, which reinforces and validates White, middle-class masculinity (McVittie et al., 2017). Thus, as Connell (2005) argues, the degree of marginalisation is always measured by the approval of the dominant group's hegemonic masculinity.

Another important factor of hegemonic masculinities highlighted by Yang (2020) is that it is not fixed. Rather, constructions of socially valued forms of masculinity adapt to shifts in the circumstances of patriarchy, which are contextually and historically located (Yang, 2020). In their research, McVittie et al. (2017) contend that in contemporary Western and Westernised cultures, the concept of ideal hegemonic masculinities is often equated with traits commonly associated with being manly, characterised by assertiveness, aggressiveness, courage, near-invulnerability to challenges, and a stoic demeanour in dealing with adversity. On the other hand, some Asian cultures may prioritise qualities like emotional intelligence and nurturing abilities (McVittie et al., 2017). Moreover, Yang (2020) contends that views on masculinities often differ between generations, with younger generations often challenging traditional notions of gender roles and masculinity. These examples indicate that hegemonic masculinities are dynamic and subject to change based on various social, cultural, and historical factors (Yang, 2020).

In his research on masculinities in South Africa, Morrell (2002) used the idea of hegemonic masculinities to understand how the structure, manifestation, and dynamics of male authority operate. Morrell (2002)

proposed that masculinity is not a singular dominant construct but comprises at least three distinct forms. The first form is "White" masculinity, which is closely linked with the White elite's power in politics and the economy. The second is "African" masculinity, deeply tied to rural life and traditional structures such as chiefdoms, communal land systems, and customary laws (Morrell, 2002). The third is "Black" masculinity, which developed in response to urbanisation and the unique cultural dynamics of African townships (Morrell, 2002). However, Morrell et al. (2012) argue that these masculinities all seem to have similar perceptions of what constitutes a male, in that traits such as dominance, strength, and authority are idealised. This is further highlighted by Rizvi et al. (2014), who suggest that traditional masculine ideology incorporates seven standards, namely: steering clear of feminine characteristics; reservations towards homosexual orientations; independence; assertiveness; supremacy; sexuality viewed in isolation; and limited emotional expression.

In this study, the concept of hegemonic masculinities sheds light on the IPV prevalent in South Africa by examining the role of societal standards, current patriarchal ordering, and beliefs about masculinity in perpetuating violence towards women and other marginalised genders. Firstly, hegemonic masculinity suggests that men who conform to traditional ideals (such as dominance, strength, and authority) may feel pressured to assert authority and dominance towards women and other marginalised genders in order to affirm their masculine nature (Mazibuko, 2017; Morrell et al., 2012). Jewkes (2002) suggests that when men's authority or dominance is undermined, they may perceive it as a threat to their masculine identity. Failing to fulfil societal standards of masculinity can lead to an unravelling in their notion of masculinity (Jewkes, 2002). As a result, violence towards women is not always a demonstration of male supremacy over them but rather stems from male weakness or powerlessness (Jewkes, 2002). In essence, IPV against women represents a form of power that men, who are otherwise unable to access it, assert. This can manifest in several forms of IPV including domestic violence, rape, and sexual assault (Mazibuko, 2017).

Secondly, hegemonic masculinity can be used to explain IPV in the South African context. Jewkes et al. (2015) argue that in South Africa, traditional masculinity ideals frequently emphasise attributes like dominance, strength, and authority, while simultaneously undermining qualities linked to femininity, such as emotional openness and susceptibility. This imbalance can foster an environment where violence is normalised and perpetuated against individuals who fail to conform to these rigid gender norms (Jewkes et al., 2015). In certain cases, men resort to violence within their intimate relationships to uphold their advantage, especially when faced with significant disadvantages (Mazibuko, 2017). Mazibuko (2017) suggests that men who feel they lack legitimate authority or dominance in their intimate relationships are more prone to using violence as a means to assert control and uphold a sense of power in the only way they perceive as available to them.

The concept of hegemonic masculinities thus frequently intersects with conceptions regarding sexual entitlement and the denigration of female bodies, echoing societal standards that support male authority and dominance over women (Jewkes et al., 2015; Mazibuko, 2017). For example, research by Jewkes et al. (2011) involving 1,686 male participants revealed that 27.64% acknowledged raping a woman, with the most frequent justification being a feeling of sexual entitlement towards women. This dynamic can foster an environment where sexual violence, encompassing acts like rape and sexual assault, becomes accepted and justified, leading to a cycle where victims are often blamed and perpetrators go unpunished (Jewkes et al., 2015).

Moreover, the hegemonic masculinities framework can be utilised to describe the traditional notion of men being breadwinners and how that links to IPV. Hattery (2009) suggests that within certain communities, men are traditionally expected to fulfil the function of the primary contributor, known as the breadwinner, with distinct societal and biological expectations for men and women. Challenges to this breadwinner role can arise from men's financial struggles or their inability to meet their partners' expectations, which may

be perceived as threats to their masculinity and manhood (Hattery, 2009). In response to financial insecurities, some men may resort to violence against their partners to compensate for their perceived shortcomings (Mazibuko, 2017). Women who deviate from traditional gender roles by being the primary earners may be seen as undermining their partners' role as providers, potentially leading to controlling behaviours and violence (Hattery, 2009). Mazibuko (2017) further highlights that wives who are the primary earners and have traditional husbands face a heightened risk of experiencing IPV. This conflict is strongly formed in patriarchal standards that classify men as breadwinners and women as dependents. When these roles are challenged, such as when a woman earns more, some males may resort to violence to reaffirm their control (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Jewkes et al., 2015). This view of masculinity as economically and sexually dominant is also evident in transactional relationships, in which men provide resources in return for sex or affection (Zembe et al., 2015). These partnerships are frequently characterised by significant power inequalities and male sexual entitlement, making women vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Gibbs et al., 2018; Zembe et al., 2015). In both formal and informal partnerships, the belief that males "earn" compliance or sexual privileges through monetary contribution maintains an exploitative relational dynamic in which resistance can result in control, punishment, or violence (Jewkes et al., 2015). These patterns demonstrate how hegemonic masculinity and economic control interact to preserve patriarchal domination in both intimate and transactional settings (Gibbs et al., 2018; Zembe et al., 2015).

Lastly, De Lannoy et al. (2015) contend that the notion of hegemonic masculinity can be used to designate how, in some communities, violence becomes ingrained, accepted, and further worsened by socioeconomic challenges such as poverty and inequality, which can significantly contribute to the increase of IPV. Mazibuko (2017) highlights that the intersection of hegemonic masculinity with other oppressive systems, such as class and race, further complicates the issue of IPV. To illustrate, Mazibuko (2017) argues that Black South African men might encounter specific difficulties in adhering to prevailing masculinity ideals because of the historical burdens of subjugation and systemic bias. These challenges can subsequently

shape their perspectives and actions towards women and gender minorities (Mazibuko, 2017). When men experience powerlessness in other areas of their lives, they may use violence to assert dominance and substantiate their sense of masculinity (De Lannoy et al., 2015). According to research (De Lannoy et al., 2015; Jewkes, 2002; Mazibuko, 2017), impoverished populations are more likely to experience violence. Unemployment, poverty, restricted access to education, and an absence of leisure activities all make it difficult for young males to establish a sense of identity and gain social validation (De Lannoy et al., 2015). Consequently, young males may experience dissatisfaction and exclusion, which could present as violent interactions with women or other young males (De Lannoy et al., 2015).

In summary, the concept of hegemonic masculinities, as outlined by Connell (1987, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and further explored by scholars (De Lannoy et al., 2015; Hattery, 2009; Jewkes, 2002; Jewkes et al., 2015; Mazibuko, 2017; McVittie et al., 2017; Morrell et al., 2012; Mshweshwe, 2020; Yang, 2020), offers a valuable lens for analysing the entrenched patriarchal systems that perpetuate IPV. By delving into how societal norms regarding masculinity reinforce male dominance and contribute to violence against women and marginalised genders, we gain insight into the complex dynamics within societies (Jewkes et al., 2015). Hegemonic masculinity impacts not just men's behaviours and beliefs, but also impacts the power dynamics inside intimate relationships, leading to the use of violence to assert authority and strengthen their sense of masculinity (Yang, 2020). This trend is particularly evident in environments where traditional ideals of masculinity prioritise traits like strength, dominance, and entitlement while stigmatising characteristics associated with femininity. Furthermore, Yang (2020) contends that hegemonic masculinities intersect with other systems of oppression, such as race and class, exacerbating the prevalence of IPV, especially in marginalised communities facing socioeconomic challenges. The struggle to adhere to prevailing masculinity standards, coupled with experiences of marginalisation and systemic biases, can drive some men to turn to violence as a way to assert control and validate their sense of masculinity (Yang, 2020).

3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, the theories of social constructionism, feminist perspectives, and hegemonic masculinities were discussed in detail. The major components and key concepts of each theory were defined and described. This chapter further highlighted the use of social constructionism, feminist perspectives, and hegemonic masculinities as a lens to view literature on IPV in the South African context. The following chapter describes the study's methodology in depth.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, a comprehensive explanation of the research design utilised in this study is discussed. Next, this study's aim and objectives are listed and discussed. This is accompanied by a detailed discussion of the methodology, providing a comprehensive explanation of the various steps undertaken in this study. Thereafter, the data analysis and synthesis used are discussed. The chapter concludes by addressing the ethical considerations relevant to this study.

4.2. Research design

Mouton and Marais (1988) characterise a research design as the strategic organisation of factors for gathering and examining data, to ensure consistency with the research objective and efficiency in methodology. The goal of a research design is thus to balance the study objectives with the opportunities and constraints that accompany the research process (Mouton & Marais, 1988).

Seeing as this study sought to examine how IPV is constructed and understood in South African literature, a qualitative research strategy was adopted. Qualitative research utilises a comprehensive and adaptable approach, offering a flexible design for exploring the phenomenon under investigation (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Rutberg and Bouikidis (2018) further argue that qualitative research offers a comprehensive viewpoint on the subject area, is adaptable, and may evaluate new knowledge based on data obtained, allowing the researcher to fully involve themselves in the topic of study. Rather than focusing solely on a single issue, a qualitative research design adopts an open-ended and exploratory approach, grounded in a theoretical philosophical paradigm (Choy, 2014). According to Lambert and Lambert (2012), qualitative research is primarily concerned with capturing in-depth, nuanced understandings of participants' experiences and perspectives. Similarly, Choy (2014) argues that a qualitative research design becomes especially relative when there is a need to wholly explore a phenomenon, as is the case with this study.

Moreover, qualitative research was opted for in this study due to its emphasis on exploring individual viewpoints and reactions, which will be useful when exploring the construction and interpretation of IPV in **South African literature (Choy, 2014).**

4.3. Research aims and objectives

The purpose of this research was to examine how IPV is constructed and understood in the literature about this phenomenon in the South African context.

To address this main question, the following sub questions were focused on:

1. What are the general themes in the research literature on IPV about the factors that contribute to IPV in South Africa?
2. What do the identified themes in the research literature about factors contributing towards IPV in South Africa reveal about how this phenomenon is constructed?
3. What does the research literature reveal about how victims/survivors make sense of IPV in the context of South Africa?
4. What does the research literature reveal about how perpetrators of IPV make sense of their actions in the context of South Africa?

In the section that follows, the techniques that were employed will be discussed.

4.4. Research Methodology

Per Kothari (2004), research methodology is a systematic strategy for answering research questions. This involves examining the stages a researcher takes to analyse a research problem and the reasoning behind them. It is therefore important to create an approach tailored to the specific research aim at hand (Kothari, 2004). Consequently, this study used a two-stage systematic review to explore the literature on interpersonal relationships and the role of violence in the South African context. The first stage of the

systematic review examined research questions one and two by reviewing quantitative studies to establish general trends, prevalence rates, and risk factors for IPV in South Africa. The second stage addressed questions three and four with qualitative studies, enabling a more in-depth examination of the way individuals understand, experience, and interpret IPV. This two-stage strategy provided both breadth and depth, resulting in a deeper comprehension of the phenomenon.

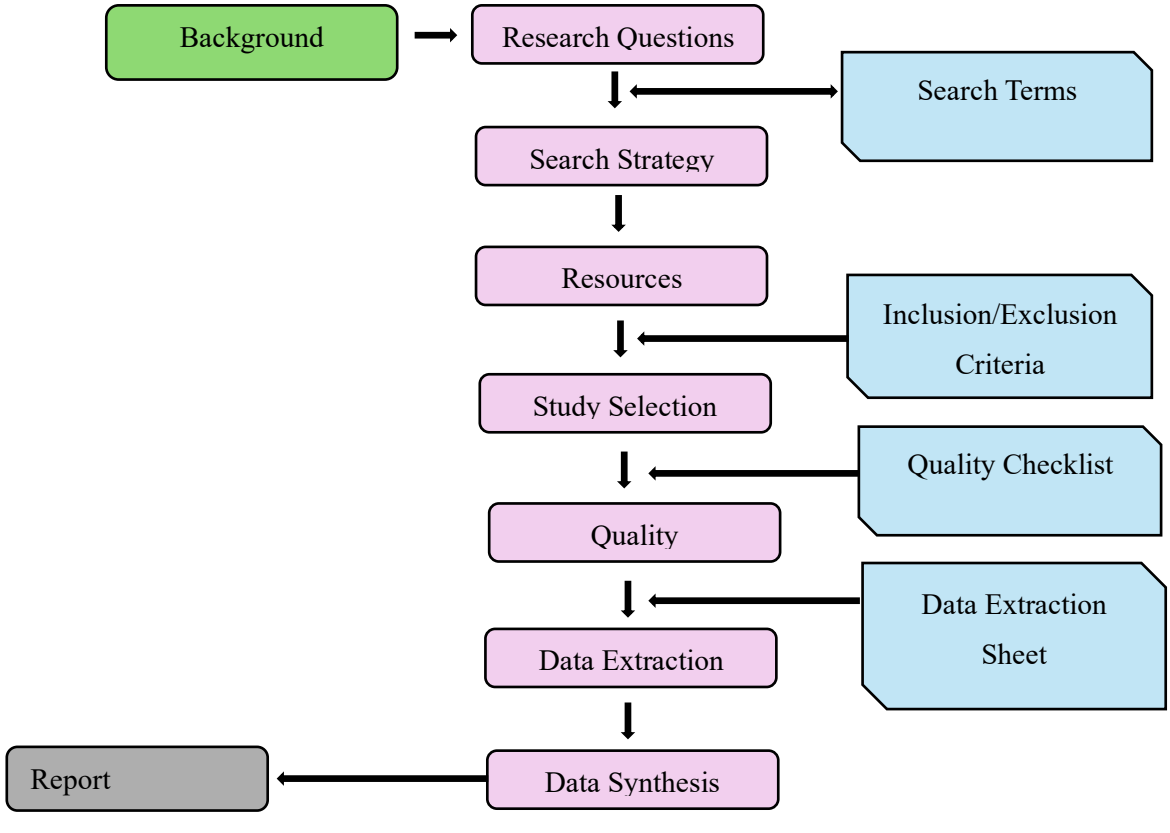
Hallinger (2013) describes a systematic review as a methodical approach to investigating a specific research question. This process involves employing predefined procedures to locate, assess, and analyse relevant studies, enabling the collection and synthesis of data in an organised manner. To answer a specific question(s), systematic reviews follow a strict set of procedures that specifically aim to limit systematic error (bias). This is primarily accomplished by discovering, assessing, and integrating all relevant studies (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). A well-executed systematic review thus provides a general sense of the quantity, kind, and quality of evidence regarding a certain research subject, they compile, synthesise, and evaluate one or more kinds of literature, pointing out gaps between what is known and what is needed to know (Baumeister, 2013; Hallinger, 2013).

A systematic review is well-suited for this study, as it allows for a qualitative synthesis of existing literature on IPV within the South African context, offering deeper insights into the research questions (Hallinger, 2013). Moreover, for this study, a systematic review is pertinent when it is acknowledged that a topic has been the focus of much investigation, but where important questions, such as prevention or interventions, remain unsolved (Hallinger, 2013; Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). By doing a systematic review this study was able to integrate a body of studies on IPV in South Africa to draw conclusions about important concepts, topics, and issues, describe how and why previous research fits together, and lastly what that means for theory and future investigations (Siddaway et al., 2019).

In accordance with Petticrew and Roberts (2008), at the start of a systematic review, a review process should be developed. This comprises the review question, its justification, the suggested methodologies, and specifics on the locations, evaluations, and syntheses of the various kinds of studies (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). According to Petticrew and Roberts (2008), a review protocol serves as a structured guide that ensures the review process is conducted methodically and thoughtfully. The following flowchart illustrates the protocol developed for this review.

Figure 4.1

Review protocol flowchart



Following the completion of the review protocol, the systematic review for this study was conducted by following these steps as informed by Petticrew and Roberts (2008):

1. Define the review questions
2. Searching for relevant publications
3. Data extraction
4. Screening and critical appraisal
5. Data analysis and synthesis

4.4.1. Step 1: Define the review questions

According to O'Connor et al. (2008), for a systematic review to be well-defined and focused, the first step is to create well-framed questions. Carefully crafted review questions serve as a roadmap for critical components of the systematic review process, including defining eligibility criteria, identifying relevant research, extracting data from selected studies, and organising the presentation of results, all of which are shaped by well-designed questions (O'Connor et al., 2008).

The review questions guiding this study stemmed from the researcher's investigation into key issues related to IPV within the South African context, particularly how IPV is represented and interpreted in existing literature. An initial step involved searching the literature to determine whether any prior systematic reviews had examined IPV in South Africa. The results of the literature search led the researcher to undertake a systematic review to successfully address this research question: What can we learn about how IPV is constructed and understood in the literature about this phenomenon in the South African context?

To answer the review question, the following objectives were undertaken:

1. Identify the general themes in the research literature on IPV about the factors that contribute to IPV in South Africa.

2. Analyse and evaluate themes in the research literature on factors contributing to IPV in South Africa, revealing how this phenomenon is constructed within the context of South Africa.
3. Understand what the research literature reveals about how victims/survivors make sense of IPV in the context of South Africa.
4. Understand what the research literature reveals about how perpetrators of IPV make sense of their actions in the context of South Africa.

The next stage in this study was searching for pertinent publications for the systematic review using the specified inclusion criteria.

4.4.2. Step 2: Searching for relevant publications

4.4.2.1. Inclusion criteria

According to Cronin et al. (2008), systematic reviews identify, assess, and synthesise all available literature using precise and stringent criteria. It can be argued that a systematic review's demand for precisely specified objectives and predetermined inclusion criteria is one of its defining features (Cronin et al., 2008). Inclusion criteria are clearly described and consistently applied, and should another researcher apply the same criteria, they would probably reach the same conclusions (Siddaway et al., 2019). Moreover, Zawacki-Richter (2020) argues that inclusion criteria are influenced by the conceptual framework and review question of a study. By establishing specific inclusion and exclusion criteria, this study could directly address the research objectives, assure the quality and consistency of the selected publications, and specify the scope of the review (Siddaway et al., 2019).

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for this study were based on the following parameters: (1) type of study; (2) population; (3) geographical context and publication; (4) content; (5) language. The research questions and literature review that were previously presented served as the basis for the inclusion and exclusion criteria for this systematic review.

4.4.2.1.1. Types of studies

This systematic review intended to examine how IPV is constructed and understood in the literature about this phenomenon in the South African context. Studies were included on the basis that they emphasise the experiences of the participants on GBV or IPV and offer a thorough grasp of the topic. Dixon-Wood et al. (2005) contend that addressing complex issues effectively requires a method that integrates multiple data sources, as it enables the inclusion of a wider variety of research questions and types of evidence. This review thus considered studies with qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. This study also included full-text articles and studies published in peer-reviewed, accredited journals, of which institutional access was provided by Rhodes University. Lastly, this systematic review considered studies published in English for interpretation and analysis purposes.

4.4.2.1.2. Population and Context

This systematic review considered studies that were conducted on populations within the South African context. As defined by Bless et al. (2006), the concept of "population" refers to the complete collection of individuals or items being studied to establish certain characteristics. Because the goal of the search for this systematic review was to investigate the construction of IPV in the South African context, the review necessitated numerous publications from a South African viewpoint, mandating the use of research databases containing African content. This was done to guarantee that the review's insights are directly applicable to the stated setting and that the findings may be applied to the South African context.

4.4.2.1.3. Time

Studies published from January 2000 to the present were included in the review. This cut-off date ensured that the studies selected for review were relevant and reflected the current understanding of the research topic.

4.4.2.2. Exclusion criteria

The studies excluded from the review are as follows:

- randomised controlled trials, any observational studies, or case report studies
- studies not available as full-text
- studies not conducted in South Africa
- studies not focusing on GBV or IPV
- studies published in languages other than English
- studies published before January 2000

4.4.2.3. Literature search

To acquire literature for this systematic review, bibliographic databases including PubMed, Scopus, PsycInfo, PsycArticle, Academic Search Complete, Sabinet Databases, Wiley Online Library, and Web of Science were searched. These databases were decided on for two reasons. Firstly, institutional access was provided by Rhodes University to these databases. Secondly, these databases are relevant to psychology and social sciences. The reference lists of the included papers were manually searched for additional resources.

4.4.2.4. Keywords

Using reviewed literature and the defined research questions and objectives, the following keywords were used to conduct the literature search for both stages of this systematic review: gender-based violence/GBV, intimate partner violence/IPV, and South Africa. If using IPV alone did not yield many results, expanded search terms such as physical abuse, emotional abuse, and psychological abuse were used. For stage one, where the focus was on quantitative studies, the keywords gender inequality, gender roles, causes/risk factors/determinants, and construction were added. For the second stage, where the focus was on qualitative

studies, the terms survivors/victims, perpetrators/offenders, experience, interpretation, masculinity, and patriarchy were added. During both stages, these terms were combined with relevant Boolean operators (AND, OR) and used in different combinations to develop a thorough search strategy. These search strategies will be outlined in the subsequent section.

4.4.3. Step 3: Screening and critical appraisal

The study selection, informed by Zawacki-Richter et al. (2020), was conducted in three stages:

1. The first stage was the identification of titles for potential inclusion.
2. The second stage entailed screening of abstracts for potential inclusion.
3. The last stage was the assessment of full papers for selection.

4.4.3.1. Identification of titles

Per Zawacki-Richter et al. (2020), the first phase involved the reviewer performing a cursory screening of the study titles to determine their possible relevance. The researcher employed two strategies to identify relevant studies: conducting electronic searches across academic databases and performing manual reference checks. This dual approach was aimed at maximising the inclusion of pertinent literature (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). In instances where titles or main points were ambiguous, abstracts were consulted for clarity. The search was broad, encompassing all subject areas within the selected databases. At this stage, studies that focused solely on one of the primary keywords (gender-based violence (GBV), intimate partner violence (IPV), or South Africa) were excluded. Included studies were those that incorporated more than one of the given search phrases.

4.4.3.1.1. Electronic database search

During this phase, the researcher relied on the classified keywords and search terms discussed in the previous section to locate appropriate articles for the review. The search was conducted using the following

databases: PubMed, Scopus, PsycInfo, PsycArticle, Academic Search Complete, Sabinet Databases, Wiley Online Library, and Web of Science.

For both stages of the review, the initial search involved entering the selected search terms into all available databases without applying any specific filters. In both stages of the search process, the researcher refined the results using Boolean operators (AND, OR), which served to narrow the scope and clarify the relationships between search terms. A combination of keywords was used, allowing for their appearance in any section of the articles under review.

The search strategy for the first stage contained a combination of the following search phrases:

1. ("gender-based violence" OR "GBV") AND ("intimate partner violence" OR "IPV") AND ("gender inequality" OR "gender roles") AND ("South Africa")
2. ("gender-based violence" OR "GBV") AND ("intimate partner violence" OR "IPV") AND ("causes" OR "risk factors" OR "determinants") AND ("South Africa")
3. ("gender-based violence" OR "GBV") AND ("intimate partner violence" OR "IPV") AND ("construction") AND ("South Africa")

For the second stage, the search strategy was a combination of the following search phrases:

1. ("gender-based violence" OR "GBV" AND ("intimate partner violence" OR "IPV") AND ("survivors" OR "perpetrators") AND ("experience" OR "interpretation") AND ("masculinity" OR "patriarchy") AND ("South Africa")
2. ("gender-based violence" OR "GBV" AND ("intimate partner violence" OR "IPV") AND ("perpetrators") AND ("experience" OR "interpretation") AND ("masculinity" OR "patriarchy") AND ("South Africa")

The table below shows the number of articles that were initially retrieved.

Table 4.1

Total number of articles initially from databases

Database	Number of articles
PubMed	286
Scopus	716
PsycInfo	66
PsycArticle	337
Academic Search Complete	914
Sabinet Databases	156
Wiley Online Library	10843
Web of Science	14009
Total number of articles	286

At both stages, further refinement was necessary to narrow down the search to the most applicable studies. This was achieved by identifying overlapping themes through article titles and key phrases. For the first stage, the following distinctions were applied:

1. Article Title: (“gender-based violence” OR “GBV” OR “intimate partner violence” OR “IPV”) AND (“factors” OR “determinants” OR “causes” OR “predictors” OR “risk factors”) AND (“South Africa”) AND Keywords: (“quantitative” OR “survey” OR “cross-sectional” OR “longitudinal” OR “statistical analysis”)
2. Article Title: (“gender-based violence” OR “GBV” OR “intimate partner violence” OR “IPV”) AND (“survivors” OR “victims”) AND (“South Africa”) Abstract: (“experience” OR “interpretation”)

3. Article Title: (“gender-based violence” OR “GBV” OR “intimate partner violence” OR “IPV”) AND (“perpetrators” OR “offenders”) AND (“South Africa”) Abstract: (“experience” OR “interpretation”)

The table below depicts the outcome of the refined search.

Table 4.2

Total number of articles using specific search criteria

Data base	Number of articles
PubMed	47
Scopus	38
PsycInfo	20
PsycArticle	29
Academic Search Complete	9
Sabinet Databases	22
Wiley Online Library	121
Web of Science	286
Total number of articles	47

4.4.3.1.2. Manual reference search

According to Kitchenham (2004), doing primary study searches solely using electronic databases is insufficient. Consequently, alternative sources of evidence must often be explored manually, including reference lists, academic journals, research registries, and online resources (Kitchenham, 2004). For this systematic review, additional relevant studies were identified by manually examining the reference lists of the selected articles. This method helped uncover sources that were not retrieved through the initial database searches.

4.4.3.2. Screening of abstracts

The second phase involved a more detailed screening of the abstracts from the articles identified in the earlier stage. At this stage, each study was assessed based on the review's inclusion and exclusion criteria, paying particular attention to factors such as participant demographics, unit of analysis, study period, outcome indicators, and access to full-text articles. Articles that met these criteria were moved forward for full inclusion, while those that did not were excluded. Information from all reviewed abstracts was recorded using a standardised abstract summary sheet (Appendix A).

4.4.3.3. Assessment of full papers

Phase three consisted of a thorough evaluation of every article chosen in the previous stage in order to determine its possible significance to the research questions. Mendeley (version 2.110.2) was used to manage included studies (Mendeley Reference Manager, 2024). The included studies underwent a quality assessment using the JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative research (Lockwood et al., 2015) and Quantitative research (Moola et al., 2020). The checklists are included in Appendices B and C. This systematic process evaluates the research's reliability, value, and applicability in the given context (Maeda et al., 2023).

4.4.4. Step 4: Data extraction

Higgins and Green (2011) assert that involving multiple individuals in the review process is essential to maintain rigor and enhance the quality of the review. The researcher conducted the review, and the supervisor monitored it to strengthen the review's quality and provide insightful analysis. Data extraction was carried out for the studies that satisfied the review's inclusion requirements and was managed on two self-constructed data extraction sheets in Microsoft Excel (Appendices D and E). Appendix D contained the following headings: author(s) and year of publication, title, sample and setting, study objective(s), study design, data collection, and data analysis method. Appendix E contained the following headings: author

and year of publication, title, study design, findings, and relevance to the topic. Organising the data in a structured format facilitated the researcher's ability to effectively interpret and integrate key findings from the selected studies. After extracting and tabulating the data, the researcher proceeded to the synthesis stage, which involved concluding the systematic review through a thematic synthesis approach.

4.4.5. Ensuring rigour

Rigour was ensured through several strategies throughout the review process. This included strict adherence to a pre-defined review protocol (Figure 4.1) to minimise selection and confirmation bias. A comprehensive search strategy was employed, utilising multiple academic databases, Boolean operators, and manual reference checking to be as exhaustive as possible. The quality of included studies was assessed using standardised critical appraisal tools (the JBI Checklists), and the entire selection process was reported transparently using the PRISMA flowchart (Figure 5.1). Furthermore, the review process was monitored by the supervisor, providing an independent layer of scrutiny and reducing the risk of bias in study selection and analysis.

4.4.5.1. Thematic analysis

For this study, thematic analysis was used to identify and analyse the key themes and patterns that emerged from the literature on IPV in the South African context. The thematic analysis was guided by the main research question and subquestions previously described. This was done in a deductive "top-down" manner, specifically looking at the results and discussion sections of the included papers, as per Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis process included data familiarisation, coding, categorising, detecting themes, as well as refining and interpreting themes. The analysis was conducted using ATLAS.ti software (version 22), which facilitated the handling, organisation, and identification of patterns and trends in the data set (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software, 2022). This process was guided by the concepts of reflexivity, transparency, and rigor to ensure that the results are trustworthy, dependable, and relevant to the research objectives.

Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis is a versatile research tool that can yield detailed and complex data accounts due to its theoretical independence. Thematic analysis is defined as a method that involves detecting, evaluating, and reporting themes in data, while minimally arranging and explaining a data set in detail. Moreover, thematic analysis is used to interpret key parts of a research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Maguire and Delahunt (2017) explain that thematic analysis aims to identify significant patterns or themes within the data, which are then used to address research questions or provide insights into a particular subject. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that a theme highlights important elements of the data related to the research problem, revealing patterns or significance within the dataset. Moreover, the significance of a theme may not be measurable. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that measures should focus on capturing crucial information related to the study issue and that the value of a theme depends on its relevance to the research question(s).

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis can be guided by either an inductive method, which allows themes to emerge directly from the data, or a deductive method, where analysis is shaped by existing theories or frameworks. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that an inductive approach involves deriving themes that are closely tied to the content of the data itself, without being influenced by pre-existing theories. When data is acquired, especially for studies using interviews or focus group discussions, the themes that emerge may not be related to the research questions and are not influenced by the researcher's conceptual viewpoint or interest in the issue (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), inductive analysis involves coding the data without imposing any preconceived frameworks or assumptions based on the researcher's prior analysis. A deductive approach to thematic analysis, on the other hand, is frequently motivated by the researcher's theoretical or conceptual objectives in the issue, guiding it more closely to the researcher's perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Here, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that this approach generally provides a less comprehensive description of the entire dataset and focuses more on a detailed examination of specific aspects. The choice between using an inductive or

deductive approach depends on the researcher's reasoning and strategies for coding the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A researcher may either code with a clearly defined research question in mind, following the deductive approach or allow the research question to emerge naturally during the coding process, which is in line with the inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that the "level" at which themes are discovered may reflect either a semantic or explicit level, focusing on surface meanings, or a latent or interpretative level, which delves into deeper interpretations and underlying concepts. When analysing at a semantic level, the researcher is not seeking to uncover anything beyond the literal meaning of what the participant has stated or what has been written in the data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). In contrast, latent theme analysis explores the underlying ideas, assumptions, concepts, and beliefs alleged to shape the deeper meanings within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that thematic analysis should progress from simply organising and classifying data to exploring the underlying meanings, broader implications, and significance of the identified patterns, moving past mere description. This often involves relating the interpreted meanings to relevant theories, concepts, or findings from previous research in the field (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In their research, Braun and Clarke (2006) contend that thematic analysis can be done using two different approaches: a realist/essentialist approach or a constructionist approach, with each approach leading to different results and areas of focus. Within a realist or essentialist approach, people's motivations, experiences, and the meanings they express are directly interpreted (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is because this approach assumes a simple, one-way relationship between language, meaning, and experience. In other words, Braun and Clarke (2006) contend that in such a realist approach, it is assumed that language directly reflects and allows us to express our actual thoughts and feelings. In contrast, from a constructionist point of view, the meanings people express, and their experiences are created and shaped by society, rather than

existing inside individuals themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When doing a thematic analysis from this standpoint, the aim is not to elicit personal motivation. Rather, the emphasis is on understanding the social and cultural circumstances, as well as the structural constraints, that shape individual narratives and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

For this study, the researcher conducted a deductive thematic analysis, focusing on results and discussion sections of the included studies from a constructionist perspective. This was decided on for several reasons. The first is that this approach provides a more detailed examination of specific aspects of the data related to the researcher's theoretical interests. Secondly, the research questions of this study were specific (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Lastly, the researcher was interested in analysing the data through the lens of the theoretical frameworks discussed in previous chapters. As a result of this approach, the study was able to identify themes at both the semantic and latent levels, permitting a thorough understanding of both the overt meanings and the underlying assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis used in this study followed the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved becoming acquainted with the data, developing codes, identifying and refining themes, defining and naming the themes, and finally, drafting the report. Additionally, the authors argue that these phases serve as flexible guidelines, which can be adjusted to fit the unique study problem (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such, the thematic analysis process is iterative, with the researcher moving between phases as necessary (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.4.5.1.1. Phase 1: Data familiarisation

In the first phase, Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise the need to fully immerse oneself in the data in order to obtain a clear knowledge of its depth and scope. This portion of the study required the researcher to read the data multiple times while actively looking for meanings and patterns. The researcher also took comprehensive notes for coding, which were examined in later rounds of the investigation analysis.

4.4.5.1.2. Phase 2: Generation of initial codes

After familiarising themself with the data and developing preliminary ideas about its content and significance, the researcher generated initial codes highlighting noteworthy features, whether they reflected explicit meanings or underlying themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) propose that when coding, the aim is to identify as many potential themes and patterns as unexpected insights may emerge later. For this study, the researcher approached each data item systematically and with equal attention, thoroughly examining the entire data set. Coding was carried out using ATLAS.ti software (version 22), where text segments within each data item were tagged and labelled (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software, 2022). Initial codes were generated that represented key segments of the raw data, meaningfully evaluated in connection to the occurrence of IPV. The coding method was theory-driven, where specific research questions guided the analysis. During this process, intriguing elements within the data were identified and served as the foundation for recurring patterns. To ensure a comprehensive analysis accounts that deviated from the prevailing narrative were included.

4.4.5.1.3. Phase 3: Searching for themes

Following the initial coding phase, in which a detailed list of codes was created across the entire dataset, the researcher proceeded to the next step in the analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Phase three entailed reviewing the selected codes and determining how they could be merged or organised into potential themes that capture relevant patterns in the data. Here, the various codes were sorted into thematic categories, and all relevant coded data extracts within each identified theme were gathered. Mind maps were used to facilitate the organisation of codes into coherent themes. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), codes that were not consistent with any of the established themes were categorised under a miscellaneous theme. A summary of the coding process, including sample quotes and their corresponding codes,

subthemes, and final themes, is presented in Appendix F. In addition, Appendix G presents an example of a mind map used to organise codes into overarching themes during the thematic analysis process.

4.4.5.1.4. Phase 4: Reviewing themes

The fourth phase is outlined as a recursive process of reviewing and refining the potential themes that were generated in the previous phase (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase consists of two levels of examining and refining themes, which will be described below. For this study, the researcher started by identifying candidate themes that were not viable due to insufficient supporting data or excessive diversity within the data. Per Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher commenced with level one, reviewing and assessing the coherence of the coded data extracts within each theme. If themes were not coherent, the researcher identified flaws or misaligned extracts, which required either reworking themes or discarding irrelevant data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Phase two involved analysing the full dataset to determine the credibility of the distinct themes and ensuring that the suggested thematic map appropriately conveyed the data's overall meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once the thematic map was effective, the researcher moved to the next phase of the analysis.

4.4.5.1.5. Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

During phase five, each theme is carefully evaluated, and the overall narrative conveyed by the analysis is examined. Each theme is carefully defined, and appropriate labels are then assigned (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Here, the researcher identified and further developed the themes to be conveyed, finding each theme's essence and the specific data aspect it captures. Consistent with Braun and Clarke (2006), focused and coherent themes were ensured by revisiting collated extracts and organising them into a consistent narrative. Each theme was analysed in detail while identifying what was interesting about the data. Here, the researcher considered how the themes fit into the broader data narrative and research questions. This was done by identifying subthemes within larger themes to provide structure and demonstrate the hierarchy

of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Lastly, the names of each theme were finalised through conceptual coding, ensuring they were concise, impactful, and clearly conveyed the essence of each theme to the reader.

4.4.5.1.6. Phase 6: Producing findings

In accordance with Braun and Clarke (2006), phase 6 commences once the themes have been fully stated, with an emphasis on the final analysis and report writing. During this step, the researcher aimed to present an unambiguous, cohesive, and coherent narrative of the data's story throughout themes, backed up by adequate proof, including pertinent data extracts that highlight the significance of each theme. Furthermore, the write-up went beyond simply presenting data, with extracts woven into an analytical narrative that effectively conveys the overall story and addresses the study's research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.5. Researcher reflexivity and positionality

Guided by the feminist and social constructionist principles underpinning this study, I acknowledge that knowledge is not neutral but is shaped by the researcher's position within social structures of power. My own identity as a White, middle-class, female student in Counselling Psychology inevitably influences my interpretation of the literature on IPV in South Africa.

My academic training predisposes me to view IPV through psychological and systemic lenses, while my social location grants me privilege and distance from the racialised and economic violence that marks the daily lives of many South Africans. I am an insider to the gender-based nature of this violence but an outsider to the specific cultural and racial contexts dominant in the reviewed literature.

Throughout the analysis, I have actively reflected on how my positionality might lead me to overlook certain nuances or to unconsciously reinforce dominant narratives. To mitigate this, I consistently asked

critical questions of the texts: *Whose voices are centred here? Whose are absent? How are race and class being framed?* This process of critical self-awareness was essential in striving for an analysis that not only describes the literature but also interrogates the power dynamics embedded within it.

4.6. Ethical considerations

No formal ethical approval was required, as this study used published or publicly available data. However, several ethical considerations were taken into account. The first ethical consideration is whether the data collected is in the public domain. This was addressed by the design and methodology of this study through the application of the stated inclusion criteria. This study only made use of publicly available articles from peer-reviewed academic journals, ensuring that the collected data is in the public domain. The second ethical consideration is the potential risk of reputational harm to individual authors, academic journals, or research institutions. This risk was addressed because this study is not a systematic review of one institution's research or one author's body of work, therefore, the risk for reputational harm was mitigated. Additionally, the critical appraisal tool that was applied to the articles retained for inclusion in the data set did not require reporting the details of excluded publications, eliminating the risk of reputational damage. These ethical considerations were detailed in an Ethical Standards Protocol, which was subject to departmental review and approval by the Rhodes University Department of Psychology's internal Research Projects and Ethical Review Committee (RPERC).

4.7. Summary

Chapter 4 outlined the research methods and design employed in this qualitative study, including the main aim, objectives, and research questions that guided the investigation. The chapter then detailed the systematic review process, followed by an in-depth explanation of the thematic analysis approach used. It concluded with a discussion of the ethical considerations involved in the study. Chapter 5 will present and analyse the study's findings.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction

The findings of all the reviewed studies that met the inclusion and quality evaluation requirements for this systematic review, as well as the analysis of these, are presented in this chapter. The results are organised according to the two stages of the review, corresponding to the study's research questions. The first stage focused on quantitative studies to address research questions one and two, identifying and evaluating themes and factors contributing to IPV and its construction in this context. The second stage employed qualitative studies to explore how victims/survivors and perpetrators understand and interpret IPV, addressing research questions three and four. The examination of these papers aimed to investigate the construction and understanding of IPV in the South African context. Throughout the review process, a total of 30 studies, of which 13 were quantitative studies and 17 were qualitative studies, were analysed, and relevant details were recorded using a data extraction sheet. The data from 30 papers were synthesised using thematic analysis to investigate how IPV is constructed and understood in the literature about this phenomenon in the South African context. The overarching themes identified through the literature search were structural and social drivers of IPV in South Africa, the social construction of IPV, survivor narratives, and perpetrator perspectives.

5.2. Outcome of the Review Process

5.2.1. Identification of titles

As discussed in Chapter 4, identified keyword(s) and search phrases were used to search electronic databases and manual references in two phases. The first phase, which employed a broad, inclusive search approach, resulted in 14009 records from the selected databases. Due to the large volume of results from this first, general search, a more focused strategy was required. The second phase produced 286 records from the chosen databases and 40 records from the manual reference search using a more focused search

approach. Specifically, the search terms were adjusted to include more precise combinations of keywords. Among the total of 326 articles identified, 93 duplicates were identified and removed, leaving 233 studies from both the database search and manual reference search. From these, only 175 studies met the criteria for the title identification and abstract screening phase, while 58 were excluded due to their lack of relevance to the review.

5.2.2. Screening and critical appraisal

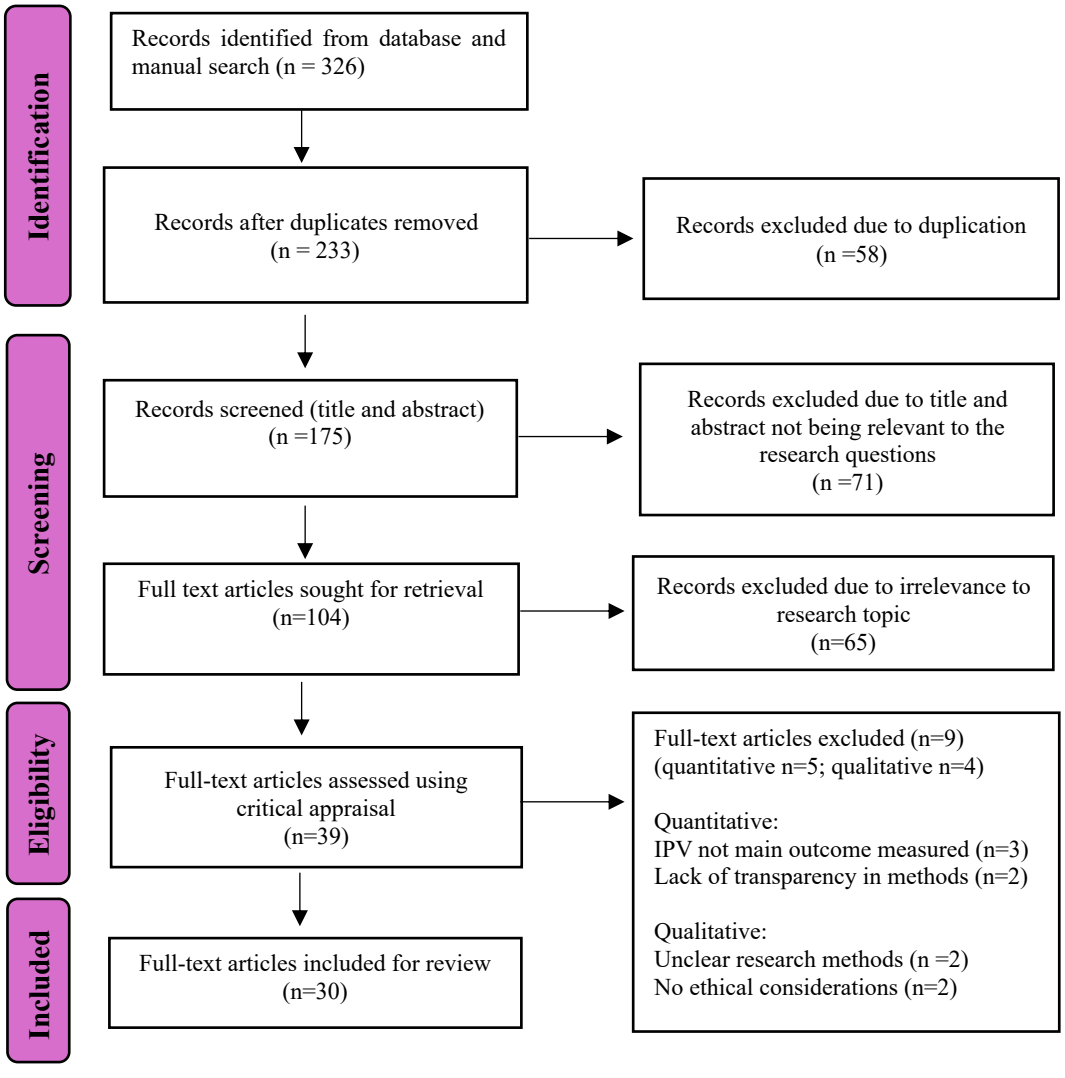
Out of the 175 papers that advanced to the abstract screening stage, 71 were removed according to the predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Among the reasons for exclusion were the unavailability of full-text articles on the Rhodes University library website, ambiguous abstracts, abstracts that did not contain keywords pertinent to the current study, and studies that did not focus on South African populations. Data from all evaluated abstracts was recorded using an abstract summary sheet template (Appendix A). After carefully reviewing 104 full-text publications for relevance to the research questions, 39 papers were chosen for the critical evaluation step.

The quality of the remaining 39 publications (18 quantitative and 21 qualitative studies) was evaluated using the JBI Critical Appraisal Checklists for both Quantitative and Qualitative Research. While the qualitative checklist (Lockwood et al., 2015) concentrated on research clarity, data collection and analysis, researcher reflexivity, and measurement validity, the quantitative checklist (Moola et al., 2020) assessed design appropriateness, sampling, statistical analysis, and bias management. The checklists are provided in Appendices B and C. Of the 39 studies evaluated during the critical appraisal stage, 30 were selected to be included in the final review and proceeded to the data extraction phase. These studies were managed on two self-constructed data extraction sheets in Microsoft Excel (Appendices D and E). Regarding the nine excluded studies based on critical appraisal, two of the quantitative studies lacked methodological transparency, and three did not make IPV the primary focus. The research methodologies of two qualitative

studies were unclear, and another two failed to address ethical considerations, raising concerns about the overall integrity of these studies. The steps of the review process and the activities performed at each stage are depicted in the diagram (Figure 5.1) below, as derived from the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) standards. This graphic is generally considered to be among the most effective ways to depict the systematic review process (Moher et al., 2009).

Figure 5.1

PRISMA flow diagram



5.2.3. Data Extraction

Relevant data were extracted from the 30 studies that satisfied the review's inclusion requirements and managed on two self-constructed data extraction sheets. Appendix D included general study characteristics (author/year, title, reference, country, methodology, design, sample, objectives, and quality assessment), while Appendix E focused on study findings and their relevance to the research questions. The studies selected aligned with the inclusion criteria, addressing both the research objectives and the target population, and consisted of a mix of quantitative (n=13) and qualitative (n=17) approaches.

The 13 quantitative studies focused on IPV and GBV in South Africa, investigating their incidence, indicators of risk, and related social and individual variables among various demographics, including men, women, and adolescents in urban, rural, and peri-urban settings. The various geographical regions of the included studies provided the reviewer with a more thorough understanding of how IPV is constructed and interpreted in the South African literature. Of the 17 included qualitative studies, 12 focused on how victims of IPV made sense of their experience, while 5 focused on how perpetrators made sense of IPV.

For data collection, the most frequently employed methods were interviews (n=17), questionnaires (n=11), and focus group discussions (n=2). Purposive sampling (n=17) and random sampling (n=10) were the most used sampling techniques, with others including secondary data sampling, snowball sampling, and Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS). Appendix D provides a general overview of the included studies, while Appendix E describes the outcomes and significance of the 30 studies encompassed in this systematic review.

5.3. Thematic Analysis

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) work as a guide, this review utilised a thematic analysis to determine how IPV is constructed and understood in the literature about this phenomenon in the South African context. Following the analysis of thirty studies, four predominant themes were identified.

These themes encapsulate the following:

1. Structural and Social Drivers of IPV in South Africa.
2. The Social Construction of IPV: Justifications and Perceptions.
3. Survivor Narratives: Meaning-Making and Coping.
4. Perpetrator Perspectives: Rationalising Violence.

The table below displays the themes and subthemes identified in the reviewed studies, followed by a detailed narrative of the results and a discussion of the findings.

Table 5.1

Emergent themes

Theme	Subtheme(s)
Structural and social drivers of IPV	Cultural and societal norms and beliefs
	Institutional and structural factors
	Intersectionality
Individual and interpersonal triggers of IPV	Substance abuse and IPV
	Intergenerational transmission of violence
Survivor narratives: Meaning-making and coping	Psychological and emotional barriers to leaving
	External societal and cultural pressures
Perpetrator Perspectives: Rationalising violence	IPV, Patriarchy, Culture and Masculinity
	Justifications and rationalisations of abuse

5.3.1. Theme 1: Structural and Social Drivers of IPV in South Africa

The reviewed literature highlights the widespread nature of IPV across South Africa, with varying rates of physical, sexual, emotional, and verbal abuse reported across different regions. What is particularly concerning is how early these patterns seem to emerge, raising important questions about the normalisation of violence within interpersonal and dating relationships. For example, Shamu et al. (2016) found that 30.9% of Grade 8 female learners in Pretoria reported experiences of physical, emotional, or sexual IPV. Given that Grade 8 learners are typically around 14 years old, this suggests that exposure to violence in relationships may begin during adolescence, potentially shaping expectations and experiences in later relationships. Similarly, Zembe et al. (2015) found that 86% of their female participants in the Cape Winelands region with multiple sexual partners had suffered physical or sexual IPV in the preceding year. Gibbs et al. (2018) also found alarmingly high rates, with 65.2% of female participants in their Durban-based study reporting incidents of physical and/or sexual IPV within the same time frame. These findings underscore not only the elevated occurrence of IPV but also the urgent need for early prevention efforts that address relationship norms and challenge the acceptance of violence from a young age.

Furthermore, gender differences in IPV victimisation and perpetration were evident across the reviewed studies. The studies reviewed consistently showed that women were more frequently victims of IPV than perpetrators. Gass et al. (2011) further revealed that women were much more inclined to report being victims of IPV compared to men. These high victimisation rates align with concerning trends in IPV perpetration, with most perpetrators being men across the evaluated studies. For instance, Abrahams et al. (2006) discovered that 42.3% of the men in the study admitted to committing physical violence towards a spouse over the last 10 years, while 8.8% admitted to doing so within the last year. Comparable perpetration rates of physical, sexual, and emotional IPV have been reported across studies, including 8.4% (Jewkes et al.,

2006), 27.5% (Gupta et al., 2008), 10% (Mason-Jones et al., 2016), and 21.81% (Teitelman et al., 2017). Alarmingly, the study by Shamu et al. (2016) among Grade 8 learners revealed a perpetration rate of 39.5%, highlighting the early onset of IPV behaviours.

Three studies by Neshunzhi et al. (2022), Othilia et al. (2021), and Selowa et al. (2022) analysed the experience of male victims of IPV. Financial stress, emotional and sexual abuse, feelings of humiliation, denial, and fear of being labelled as weak were among the experiences cited by participants. They also reported feeling condemned and powerless, which often kept them from getting help (Neshunzhi et al., 2022). Moreover, Selowa et al. (2022) noted that participants cited adultery, unemployment, and a lack of trust as significant factors contributing to their spouses' aggressive behaviour.

While not a primary focus in many of the studies reviewed, geographic variations in IPV rates were observed. For example, Bolarinwa et al. (2023) identified the Western Cape, Free State, and Eastern Cape as regions in South Africa with particularly high rates of IPV. In contrast, Mthembu et al. (2021) discovered that Gauteng had the highest reported lifetime physical IPV rate of 44.8%, with KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape following.

Economic-related IPV prevalence was also found, with rates of IPV in low-income households reported to be much higher. Bolarinwa et al. (2023) report that women in wealthier households were less likely to experience IPV than those in poorer households. Similarly, Mthembu et al. (2021) reported that individuals from their study who were from high socioeconomic level homes were far less likely to have experienced lifetime physical IPV.

The reviewed literature, along with the analysis and coding of the included studies, clearly indicates that IPV in South Africa is strongly influenced by structural and social circumstances that contribute to its widespread incidence. Among the 30 studies included in this review, 14 addressed the structural and social drivers of IPV in South Africa (Abrahams et al., 2006;

Amaechi et al., 2021; Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Bolarinwa et al., 2023; Gass et al., 2011; Gupta et al., 2008; Jewkes et al., 2006; Jewkes et al., 2011; Mathews et al., 2015; Mkhonto et al., 2014; Mmolokoe & Smit, 2024; Mthembu et al., 2021; Slabbert, 2010). This theme examines how broader, macro-level aspects, including cultural and societal norms, institutional and structural factors, and intersectionality influence IPV within the context of South Africa. These factors collectively produce a societal context whereby IPV is perpetuated and, in many cases, implicitly accepted.

5.3.1.1. Cultural and societal norms and beliefs

From the reviewed literature, it became evident that IPV is not something that occurs in solitude; rather, it is ingrained in sociocultural norms, gender roles, and power dynamics that influence how people perceive and react to violence. In their research Abrahams et al. (2006), Amaechi et al. (2021), Boonzaier and de La Rey (2003), Gibbs et al. (2011), Hoosain and Robertson (2023), Leburu-Masigo (2019), Mathews et al. (2015), Mkhonto et al. (2014), Radzilani-Makatu and Chauke (2019), and Shamu et al. (2016) reported that in many South African communities, IPV is often normalised, justified, or disregarded because of patriarchal ideas, conventional gender roles, and cultural practices that support male dominance and female subordination. These strongly rooted norms impact both the perpetrators of abuse, and the difficulties survivors confront when seeking assistance.

This subtheme, therefore, comprises two key aspects, namely gendered social norms and male authority, as well as attitudes toward violence and the cultural acceptance of IPV. Firstly, the pervasive impact of gendered social norms and male authority were found to be a significant component highlighted in the reviewed literature as contributing to the high rates of IPV in South Africa (Abrahams et al. 2006; Amaechi et al., 2021; Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; De Kwaadsteniet, 2017; Gibbs et al., 2011; Gupta et al., 2008; Hoosain & Robertson, 2023; Leburu-Masigo, 2019; Mathews et al., 2015; Mkhonto et al., 2014; Radzilani-Makatu &

Chauke, 2019; Shamu et al., 2016; Zembe et al., 2015). Patriarchal expectations and conventional gender roles heavily influence IPV dynamics in South Africa, with male power and control frequently legitimised by cultural ideals of masculinity and femininity. These male-dominated structures establish and sustain gendered power inequalities in relationships, with males frequently viewed as figures of authority while reaffirming subordination among women (De Kwaadsteniet, 2017; Hoosain & Robertson, 2023; Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019).

Traditional gender roles with males as the head of the household were reported by most of the reviewed studies. For example, almost all IPV abusers (male participants) in the studies by Amaechi et al. (2021), Hoosain and Robertson (2023), and Mathews et al. (2015) came from a background or held attitudes that they should be dominant in their relationships. They saw women as subordinates and expected them to exhibit unwavering respect. In a related vein, Leburu-Masigo (2019) reported on the importance of adhering to the cultural norms of what being a man is. These notions are reflected through statements such as:

> *"A man's role is work, take care of your house, keep the house with food, keep the children clean. And you, as the man, must see that there's no problems in the house. She [the wife] must cook and clean." (Hoosain & Robertson, 2023, p. 5).*
>
> *"She lets me feel like a man, firstly she is obedient, secondly she will not do something contrary to my better judgement, thirdly she respects me." (Mathews et al., 2015, p. 111)*
>
> *Men who are seen not to be culturally in control in their families lose the respect in their social circles and would be called demeaning terms such as: o tshereane [he has lost it as a man], ke seka monna [he is not a fully-fledged man]." (Leburu-Masigo, 2019, p. 7)*

These gendered beliefs were found to enable male participants to dominate and assert authority over women, with violence being used as a method to keep their partners in check and preserve their role as family leaders (Amaechi et al., 2021; Hoosain & Robertson, 2023). In their study, Hoosain and Robertson (2023) found that it is not necessarily role expectations that directly endanger women, but when women fail to satisfy these expectations, their partners often become frustrated and violent, as described by one participant:

> *"When I come home, my wife is drunk, the house is not clean, there's no food, the way I went out of the house the morning is the same way when I come home. That is why I get upset and angry" (Hoosain & Robertson, 2023, p.5)*

Relationship inequity emerged as a significant driver of IPV, with high levels of relationship power imbalance reported by Amaechi et al. (2021), De Kwaadsteniet (2017), Hoosain and Robertson (2023), Mathews et al. (2015), Leburu-Masigo (2019), and Zembe et al. (2015). Shamu et al. (2016) provided more support for these findings by identifying a correlation between gender-related beliefs, social norms, and IPV among Grade 8 learners in Pretoria. Students with gender-inequitable beliefs were more inclined to both engage in IPV and tolerate it when they were the victims. The age of the participants in this study is particularly significant, as it suggests that gender role socialisation processes, which are deeply influenced by culture, play a major role in normalising IPV. For many young people, particularly in their first dating relationships, IPV becomes an expected or even common experience. Similarly, Gibbs et al. (2011) discovered that men who admitted to committing IPV and women who reported being victims had fewer gender-equitable attitudes, with perpetrators also displaying more controlling behaviours. The following excerpts highlight the strong connection among traditional gender roles, gender-inequitable attitudes, and the perpetration and acceptance of IPV:

> *"Don't be deceived. Nobody wants to beat up his wife. What we try to do is to correct them when they are wrong; when they misbehave, …don't show respect. Ehhhhh…it is important to discipline them a little bit. This helps them sit up." (Amaechi et al., 2021, p. 17198)*
>
> *"He must be, like they say, he's the roof" (De Kwaadsteniet, 2017, p. 9)*
>
> *"For me, I thought that that is the way [that a man has the right to control a woman or to discipline a woman using violence]. Yes it was okay" (De Kwaadsteniet, 2017, p. 10)*

Viewing the findings from a social constructionist perspective, dominant social narratives that normalise or justify particular types of violence in intimate relationships were found to have a significant influence on IPV. Social constructionism emphasises how language, cultural

customs, and interactions among people shape and maintain societal norms and expectations surrounding gender roles (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014; Strebel et al., 2006).

According to this perspective, individuals are taught to conform to social standards, which shape shared experiences and the internalisation of these outside realities (Murnen, 2015). This was evident in several studies within this review, which indicated that IPV is often normalised or justified within certain cultural frameworks that portray men as superior and women as inferior. In their studies respectively, Amaechi et al. (2021), Boonzaier and de La Rey (2003), Hoosain and Robertson (2023), as well as Mathews et al. (2015) discovered that IPV is ingrained in cultural conceptions of masculinity and femininity, which hold that men possess the power to rule women and women should be obedient.

Moreover, according to Mkhonto et al. (2014), cultural practices such as the payment of "*lobola*" further create an environment and cultural acceptance of male control over women and exacerbate IPV. Participants in this study conveyed that the payment to the bride's relatives is often interpreted as buying the woman rather than strengthening the tie between the two households, which puts these women at risk, as is reflected by the participant below:

> *"It is because he has told himself that he is not going to allow himself to be controlled by a woman that is to allow a woman to climb on top of his head. A woman must submit to him. So the way I see it, I was supposed to tolerate that pain whereas things should go well for him and he must enjoy" (Mkhonto et al., 2014, p. 342)*

From a feminist and social constructionist standpoint, this pattern does more than report a correlation; it reveals how patriarchal authority is naturalised within academic discourse. By consistently framing lobola as a primary driver, the literature can inadvertently reinforce the very gender hierarchies it seeks to critique, positioning women's subordination and suffering as a culturally inevitable outcome rather than a politically contested power dynamic.

Related to these gendered and cultural norms, masculinity and the protection thereof stood out in the findings of the reviewed studies as heavily influencing IPV. According to research by Boonzaier and de La Rey (2003) and Mthembu et al. (2021), males who hold patriarchal ideas of masculinity that emphasise toughness, control, and power are more likely to perpetrate IPV. These males frequently regard women as their property or as subordinates whose main purpose is to satisfy their needs and wants. Conventional gender roles, as examined by Mathews et al. (2015) and De Kwaadsteniet (2017), depict masculinity as associated with power, authority, and control over women, which can lead to violence when these roles are questioned or violated. Instances where men's masculinity was thought to be harmed were often found to escalate into violence towards their partner (Mathews et al., 2015; De Kwaadsteniet, 2017).

Mathews et al. (2015) found that this applied to three participants in their study, who suffered from sexual performance concerns and expressed profound insecurities and feelings of failure. This resulted in feelings of inadequacy in their romantic relationships since they saw themselves as defective as males. Their struggle to fulfil their partner's desires for intimacy increased their perceived desire to control them, frequently through aggression or threats of violence (Mathews et al., 2015). Moreover, violence was also reported due to challenges to participants' manhood, especially around jealousy. Participants reported feeling humiliated by their partners in public spaces, which led them to use violence to reclaim their manliness (Mathews et al., 2015). One participant reported:

> *"I was still in turmoil from the incident [her not wanting to go with him] that happened earlier. I don't know why I did it, but I smacked her in front of my friends without thinking twice what I was doing. I told her she should not make a fool out of me." (Mathews et al., 2015, p. 115).*

This is furthered by feminist perspectives, which show how these social norms are ingrained in the patriarchal systems that uphold IPV (Walby, 1989; Sultana, 2010). Based on this comprehensive review, findings by Boonzaier and de La Rey (2003) and Mthembu et al. (2021)

indicate that IPV is more common among males who hold patriarchal views about masculinity, which prioritise control, dominance, and strength. Individuals such as these frequently see women as subordinates or assets, considering their main function as satisfying the needs and wants of men. Mazibuko (2017) explains this by arguing that within patriarchal societies, authoritative male rule is normalised, which encourages individuals to accept group subservience as the norm for social order. Moreover, Mathews et al. (2015) and De Kwaadsteniet (2017) found that IPV was frequently observed in situations where men's masculinity was perceived to be compromised. The findings of these studies also support what is argued by Sultana (2010), who states that patriarchy is a deeply ingrained societal framework that moulds people from birth rather than necessarily being an intentional attempt by men to subjugate women. Despite the fact that men often benefit the most from its existence, it is so embedded in society that both men and women might unintentionally support it (Sultana, 2010). This was evident in research by De Kwaadsteniet (2017) and Mathews et al. (2015), where some female victims felt that their male partners had the right to discipline them since they were the heads of the household.

The interplay of manhood/masculinity and violence was particularly evident in studies where IPV was examined during the COVID-19 pandemic. In their research, Amaechi et al. (2021) found that because of the COVID-19 lockdown period, participants' spouses' patriarchal tendencies and consequent use of violence were readily triggered by little disagreements. Due to economic restrictions and job losses during the pandemic, economic difficulties made it more difficult for men to be family leaders, as this position is often measured by their economic contribution (Amaechi et al., 2021). A similar argument is made by Hines and de Jager (2021) as well as Hoosain and Robertson (2023), who contend that participants' financial fragility, as well as the strain of being the main earner for their spouses and families, contributed

significantly to their perpetration of IPV. The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on violence between intimate partners is illustrated below:

> *"Aha…you must look at the change of economic situation during this short period. Due to the emotional stress and anxiety of not being able to provide as the head of the family, we became frustrated. …This leads us to take out the stress through abusing our partners" (Amaechi et al., 2021, p. 17195)*
>
> *"The lockdown was making our ladies lose it. They have to remember who is charge all the time. This "feminist and equality" nonsense sometimes get into their head and make them forget. …You can't forget who is in charge. This is Africa. In our culture, men are in charge even if we are broke." (Amaechi et al., 2021, p. 17198)*
>
> *"My husband has always had this belief that he should be in charge in all things. As a result, I was constantly harassed by him. But this became more severe during Lockdown, because he was now easily triggered. (Amaechi et al., 2021, p. 17198)*
>
> *"We struggled, because we did not have money. And we dependent on the SASSA [South African Social Security Agency] money, and we all had to eat. So, COVID put a lot of pressure on our family. It was also difficult for her [his intimate partner]. It stressed me out completely. I lost my cool many times. I would argue quickly and talk loudly." (Hoosain & Robertson, 2023, p. 6)*
>
> *"And I think that was the cause of increase in numbers of domestic violence and genderbased violence as well. It was spending a lot of time most hours together. And also some of the partners especially male partners, they lost their jobs as well. So it was frustrating for them being at home and unable to provide for their families as well." (Hines & de Jager, 2021, p. 18)*

These findings can be understood through Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. The frustration and violence described by men who are unable to provide are not merely reactions to stress, but manifestations of a profound crisis of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell, 2020). When men cannot access the "patriarchal dividend", the material and status benefits promised for fulfilling the breadwinner ideal, their perceived rightful authority is threatened. In this context, IPV becomes a compensatory mechanism, a material practice to reassert dominance and control when other avenues to achieve hegemonic masculinity are blocked. This demonstrates that hegemonic masculinity is not just a set of attitudes, but a performance with real, and often violent, consequences for intimate partners (Connell, 2020).

The second part of this subtheme revolves around attitudes toward violence and the cultural acceptance of IPV. In their research, Zembe et al. (2015) discovered that 61% of those who participated considered that it was appropriate to hit a woman. These results echo that IPV is

committed in an environment where physical IPV against women is widely tolerated and normalised, with little pushback or condemnation (Zembe et al., 2015). Moreover, IPV is often framed as a private matter, especially if it occurs between married couples. Zembe et al. (2015) found that community members in their study seldom acted to assist a woman experiencing assault from a partner with whom she had a sexual relationship. Women who reported IPV frequently faced suspicion and reproach, as a participant stated:

> *"Others will say "but we normally see you going to his place. . ." so that is how they get away with it. . .even when you say he has raped you, they will still say "but how is that possible when you are with him?" (Zembe et al., 2015, p.10)*

Additionally, Zembe et al. (2015) report on the belief among community members that if a woman does not openly speak about her intolerance towards violence, she consents to physical violence from her partner. These findings indicate that in these studies, IPV was considered normal and, at times, an appropriate or even necessary method for negotiating sex, power, and closeness in relationships (Mathews et al., 2015*;* Zembe et al., 2015). One participant explained this perception as:

> *"There are those that don't like to be beaten and as well maybe the understanding is established in the beginning, and he sees that this girl tells him that I don't like things like this." (Zembe et al., 2015, p.10)*

5.3.1.2. Institutional and Structural Factors

This subtheme investigates how institutional and structural factors, such as socioeconomic status, education, responses from authorities, and access to resources, influence both the occurrence of IPV along with societal reactions. In their studies, Bolarinwa et al. (2023), Gass et al. (2010), Gibbs et al. (2024), Matthews et al. (2015), Mason-Jones et al. (2016), and Mthembu et al. (2021) report on the link found between SES and IPV. These studies argue that IPV is more prevalent among individuals with lower SES, which most likely represents an

accumulation of connected social vulnerabilities, such as inadequate access to social resources in low SES homes, which heightens exposure to IPV (Mthembu et al., 2021).

Importantly, in the South African context, access to stable employment, quality education, and adequate housing remains deeply racialised. The economic disenfranchisement of Black South Africans—stemming from the country's colonial and apartheid past—has left a lasting imprint on patterns of poverty and marginalisation. As argued by Sokoloff and Dupont (2005), IPV is more likely to occur in communities that continue to experience the structural effects of exclusion. Viewing this through a social constructionist lens, it becomes clear that explanations rooted solely in poverty or culture don't just simplify the issue—they reflect and reproduce dominant narratives that have historically been used to pathologise Black, poor communities (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). These framings ignore how systems like racial capitalism and patriarchy have produced the very conditions under which IPV becomes more prevalent (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

According to Gibbs et al. (2018) and Gass et al. (2011), socioeconomic factors such as financial insecurity, job loss, or unemployment are significant triggers for violence in partnerships. These pressures can create an environment in which one spouse, typically the male, exerts control over the other, leveraging financial assets to retain dominance. Expanding on this, Gibbs et al. (2024) reported that determinants associated with the perpetration of IPV were more closely related to economic provision and the capacity to provide in relationships than to explicit instances of food insecurity.

In addition, Bolarinwa et al. (2023) found that women from low-income households often depend primarily on their spouses for economic assistance. As a result, these women become more permissive to IPV, seeing violence from intimate partners as routine and unavoidable, increasing their likelihood of experiencing abuse (Bolarinwa et al., 2023). Similarly, Matthews

et al. (2015) found that despite working numerous jobs, many participants' wives were still required to contribute financially, which they viewed as degrading. Several of the participants believed that their partner's employment diminished their masculinity, for which IPV was used to reclaim some form of control (Matthews et al., 2015).

Looking at this from a feminist perspective, Flynn et al. (2018) argue that because patriarchal economic systems make women financially reliant on males, they are more susceptible to IPV. This was echoed in the findings by Bolarinwa et al. (2023), in which women with limited resources depended mostly on their partners for financial support. This aligns with feminist perspectives as argued by Walby (1989), in which economic oppression becomes a type of gendered structural violence that perpetuates female subordination. Furthermore, forced control—where perpetrators use financial assets to isolate, threaten, and dominate their partners—occurs frequently as a result of economic reliance (Montesanti & Thurston, 2015).

In addition to this, the link between financial insecurity and IPV can be explained by looking at the traditional breadwinner identity tied to hegemonic masculinity, where disparities in power are often reinforced when males who are struggling financially might use violence to establish power and supremacy (Hattery, 2009; Strebel et al., 2006). According to Connell (1995), masculinity is a socially constructed notion that reinforces dominance, aggression, and control. Here, Mazibuko (2017) and Strebel et al. (2006) argue that men who are unable to support their families in times of prolonged unemployment and unstable economic conditions may suffer from a crisis of masculinity, which can escalate violence and the enactment of IPV.

These interpersonal and structural factors do not operate in isolation but are reinforced or challenged by institutional responses to IPV. Research by Hines and Jager (2021), as well as Mkhonto et al. (2014), highlight that local institutions, such as the police or social services, are often ineffective at dealing with IPV perpetration and support for victims. IPV is frequently

regarded as a private matter in which police are often reported to not intervene, as described by a participant:

> *"So those police were saying we must talk it over as family you see" (Mkhonto et al., 2014, p.342).*

These findings can be further understood by integrating insights from social constructionism, feminist perspectives, and hegemonic masculinities. From a social constructionist standpoint, Muehlenhard and Kimes (2014), as well as Strebel et al. (2006), argues that societal conventions influence how authorities and communities view IPV, frequently downplaying its seriousness or characterising it as a private matter. Moreover, the manner in which IPV cases are managed is influenced by language and discourse used in social services and law enforcement, with many responses promoting female subordination and male domination (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014; Strebel et al., 2006).

This is in line with feminist perspectives, which contend that because of deeply embedded gender hierarchies, patriarchal institutions, such as social services and law enforcement, often systematically fail to protect women (Govender, 2023; Sultana, 2010; Walby, 1989). In his research, Govender (2023) found that social services and law enforcement shift responsibility onto the victim instead of the perpetrator, leaving victims without adequate protection and support. This was mirrored in the research findings by Dekel and Andipatin (2016) as well as Mkhonto et al. (2014), which revealed that the police force often resists IPV victims' attempts to act against their abusers. Moreover, research by Gqola (2007) indicates that when victims do report IPV, they are often met with victim-blaming narratives, which further discourage them from seeking justice and reinforce a culture of exemption for perpetrators. These victim-blaming narratives have their roots in patriarchal beliefs that normalise IPV and hold women accountable for their mistreatment (Gqola, 2007).

Hegemonic masculinity is also intricately linked to this systemic failure. As defined by Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinity is the prevalent manifestation of masculinity that validates male authority and female subordination. According to research by Jewkes et al. (2015), hegemonic masculinity functions by framing IPV as a personal issue or a sign of masculine dominance in cultural narratives, which deters social services and law enforcement from intervening.

Another structural factor found to impact IPV in South Africa is levels of education, both among perpetrators and victims. In their study, Gass et al. (2010) found a correlation between higher rates of IPV perpetration and men's lower educational attainment. This association is ascribed to a lack of knowledge about healthy relationship practices, financial instability, and the ongoing enforcement of traditional gender norms. Moreover, according to Gibbs et al. (2024), women with a lower level of education were also more likely to experience IPV because they were more financially dependent on their partners and had less access to information, which made it harder for them to leave violent situations (Gass et al., 2010; Gibbs et al., 2024).

5.3.1.3. The Intersectional Impact of Class, Race, and Location on IPV in South Africa

IPV victims and perpetrators frequently face the consequences of a complex combination of factors, such as economic hardship, cultural standards, public judgement, and institutionalised prejudice, especially in the context of South Africa. These issues are exacerbated in disadvantaged communities, where financial reliance, a shortage of resources, and financial difficulties leave people more vulnerable to abuse (Gibbs et al., 2024; Makongoza & Nduna, 2021; Mmolokoe & Smit, 2024).

As highlighted by Mathews et al. (2015), rural communities usually encounter more isolation, a lack of support from community services, and restricted access to medical and legal services,

making victims more vulnerable to violence and making it more challenging to get out of violent situations. Similarly, Mkhonto et al. (2014) argue that the availability and accessibility of support services such as shelters, counselling, and legal counsel are critical for victims who want to leave abusive relationships. However, in areas where these services are poor or difficult to obtain, victims frequently face additional barriers, such as fears of vengeance or economic hardship, complicating their capacity to escape situations of abuse (Mkhonto et al., 2014).

The connection between intersectionality and IPV is evident in studies by Amaechi et al. (2021) and Hines and Jager (2021), who report that financial insecurity during the COVID-19 lockdown made men feel dissatisfied and powerless, resulting in greater violence toward their spouses. As was reported by a participant:

> *"Due to the emotional stress and anxiety of not being able to provide as the head of the family, we became frustrated. ...This leads us to take out the stress through abusing our partners." (Amaechi et al., 2021, p. 17195).*

Similarly, Gibbs et al. (2024) found that food scarcity and financial difficulties were directly related to IPV perpetration, as men felt pressured to uphold economic supremacy within their relationships. In addition, Amaechi et al. (2021) and Mkhonto et al. (2014) show how financial reliance interacts with insufficient support from institutions and societal norms, limiting opportunities for victims to leave abusive relationships. These economic constraints, coupled with societal norms of gender roles and family honour, create a climate in which leaving an abusive partner is not just difficult, but also frequently considered socially unacceptable (Amaechi et al., 2021; Gibbs et al., 2024; Mkhonto et al., 2014).

From an intersectional viewpoint, IPV cannot be comprehended solely through the lens of gender. It must be examined in light of other overlapping identities, such as race, class, and socioeconomic status, which exacerbate individual vulnerabilities. An intersectional perspective, according to Jewkes and Morrell (2010), acknowledges that IPV is influenced by

the interaction of gender with other social identities and structural injustices, such as race, class, and sexual orientation, rather than being only the product of gender oppression. According to Cho et al. (2013), intersectionality is a feminist perspective that recognises the interconnectedness of oppressive structures and social identities. This viewpoint highlights the ways in which several types of prejudice intersect and worsen, influencing people's actual experiences (Crenshaw, 2013).

The effect of intersectionality was evident in studies included in this systematic review, such as those by Gibbs et al. (2024), Makongoza and Nduna (2021), and Mmolokoe and Smit (2024). These studies highlight how IPV is exacerbated in disadvantaged communities, where financial reliance, a shortage of resources, and financial difficulties leave people more vulnerable to abuse (Gibbs et al., 2024; Makongoza & Nduna, 2021; Mmolokoe & Smit, 2024). According to Mathews et al. (2015), victims of IPV are more likely to experience violence and find it more difficult to leave violent circumstances in rural areas due to increased isolation, a lack of community services assistance, and limited access to legal and medical facilities. Moreover, this systematic review of literature found that women are more vulnerable to violence as a result of gender imbalances caused by patriarchal social institutions, which also overlap with IPV. Traditional gender hierarchies normalise IPV by promoting male dominance and placing women in subservient roles, as noted by Amaechi et al. (2021), Mkhonto et al. (2014), and Jewkes et al. (2006). Rigid gender norms in these cultural contexts frequently justify aggressive behaviour and male dominance, which intensifies abusive cycles (Amaechi et al., 2021; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Mkhonto et al., 2014; Jewkes et al., 2006).

Another aspect found to intersect with IPV is discrimination against marginalised racial and ethnic groups in legal and social support structures, resulting in poorer rates of reporting and less trust in authorities. For example, Hines and Jager (2021) discovered that structural disparities, including racial and socioeconomic inequities, hampered survivors' capacity to

receive assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Mthembu et al. (2021) report that Black African women in their study who were unemployed and from lower SES groups were at higher risk of IPV, yet encountered the most institutional barriers when pursuing legal and social assistance. In a related vein, Mthembu et al. (2021) found that unemployment is a significant factor in the dynamics of IPV, especially for male perpetrators who feel a loss of status and control over their families, thus resorting to violence to assert dominance.

Furthermore, as argued by Amaechi et al. (2021), Mkhonto et al. (2014), and Jewkes et al. (2006), gender imbalance, which is often inherent in patriarchal cultures, intersects with IPV to create an environment in which women are more likely to experience violence. Gender inequality adds to IPV because conventional gender roles frequently normalise male domination and justify aggressive behaviour (Amaechi et al., 2021; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Jewkes et al., 2006; Mkhonto et al., 2014).

While these findings offer valuable insights, adopting a social constructionist lens means stepping back to question how IPV is framed in the literature and what that framing might obscure (Shefer, 2010). Much of the earlier research reviewed (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Mkhonto et al., 2014; Jewkes et al., 2006) relies heavily on empirical data without always situating its findings within a clear theoretical framework. As a result, a particular narrative tends to emerge—one that implicitly links IPV to poverty, Black African masculinities, and so-called "traditional" cultural practices. This narrative, while grounded in lived realities, risks reinforcing harmful and racialised assumptions, particularly in the South African context (Dolby, 2001; Shefer, 2010).

Shefer (2010) argues that given the country's apartheid history and its enduring legacies, the connections drawn between IPV, SES, and culture are not neutral. Access to education, stable employment, and basic services remain deeply racialised, with Black South Africans

continuing to bear the brunt of systemic inequality (Seekings & Nattrass, 2008). When IPV is predominantly discussed through the lens of poverty or cultural norms, it can position the problem within certain communities, rather than acknowledging how structural and historical factors have created conditions of vulnerability. This kind of framing can unintentionally pathologise poor, Black communities and divert attention from the broader systems, such as patriarchy, capitalism, and state neglect, that sustain both IPV and the inequalities it intersects with (Shefer et al., 2015). To move away from reproducing these narrow associations, it is necessary to distinguish between culture and patriarchy and to understand how race and class shape people's exposure to violence—not because of who they are, but because of the broader structural forces that limit their access to safety, autonomy, and justice (Dolby, 2001; Shefer, 2010; Shefer et al., 2015).

5.3.2. Theme 2: Individual and interpersonal triggers of IPV

The second theme depicts more personal, micro-level factors that may contribute to the onset of IPV, which includes substance abuse and the intergenerational transmission of violence.

5.3.2.1. Substance abuse and IPV

This subtheme explores the role of substance use (alcohol and drugs) as a catalyst for IPV perpetration and victimisation in the context of South Africa. Gass et al. (2011), Gibbs et al. (2018), Gibbs et al. (2024), Jewkes et al. (2006), and Teitelman et al. (2017) all found that alcohol usage is a major predictor of IPV. Shamu et al. (2016) reported similar findings within their sample of 2,839 Grade 8 learners, where alcohol use was associated with a threefold increased risk of experiencing IPV. Throughout these studies, alcohol was repeatedly mentioned as a disruptive factor that interrupted conventional nonviolent relationship dynamics, increasing the chance of conflict and aggressiveness (Gass et al., 2011; Gibbs et al., 2018; Gibbs et al., 2024; Jewkes et al., 2006; Shamu et al., 2016; Teitelman et al.,2017).

Research by Gibbs et al. (2024) revealed three possible pathways in which substance use exacerbates IPV. Firstly, substance use added to conflict in partnerships by reducing communication among partners, allowing disagreements to arise more rapidly and severely. Secondly, men's drinking behaviours frequently compromised their capacity to meet financial obligations to their partners and children (Gibbs et al., 2024). Lastly, Gibbs et al (2024) revealed that IPV is often perpetrated toward female participants when their male partners experience their masculine identity as being challenged by their girlfriends' drinking in public, a reflection that they have no control over them. These pathways are depicted in the excerpts below:

> *"If you are in love with someone who drinks you know you will there's always be fighting, there's going to be fights" (Gibbs et al., 2024, p.6)*
>
> *"Once you drink your mind changes, you no longer have a conscience that will tell you about what you are doing." (Gibbs et al., 2024, p. 6)*
>
> *"I don't want her to go out, if she wants alcohol, she must tell me I will buy it for her and she can drink indoors because she is lowering my image in front of other men." (Gibbs et al., 2024, p. 7)*

In a similar vein, participants in Boonzaier and de La Rey's (2003) study acknowledged the difficulties when residing with a partner who abused alcohol or drugs, with financial problems being a major concern in their reports. When men were unable to obtain money for alcohol or drugs, they frequently became hostile and, in some cases, violent, as is depicted in the passage below:

> *"My sister would give me clothes. Now when I get home, then I have to go and sell those things that she gave me. I must go and sell it so that he can smoke. One day, he hit me on the back with a broom. I was totally purple, the way he hit me. Just because I sold the sweater and I only got 10 Rand 4 for it. And he wanted 25 Rand for that sweater, and I must go back to that people and tell them I want the other 15 Rand, or they must leave it." (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003, p. 1022).*

As reported by Dekel and Andipatin (2016) and Slabbert (2010), victims of IPV frequently accept that alcohol consumption and violence are linked, which contributes to the normalisation of abusive behaviour. The following quotes demonstrate this:

> *"I just stayed in the relationship and I accepted it was part of, you know, whenever he would drink he would hit me, the next day he would apologize, it was part of our life" (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 20)*
>
> *"My boyfriend uses tik and then he gets otherwise. If he is under the influence, I stay out of his way. He threatens and calls me names." (Slabbert, 2010, p. 141)*

A critical tension emerges when contrasting the framing of substance abuse as a primary driver of IPV with the findings on systemic economic stress discussed elsewhere in this review. The dominant narrative within the literature often positions alcohol and drug use as a direct cause of violent behaviour, a framing that implicitly locates responsibility within the individual perpetrator's lack of control or moral failing. However, this stands in contradiction to the equally prevalent evidence that economic deprivation, unemployment, and the stress of failing to provide are powerful triggers for IPV. From a social constructionist perspective, this contradiction is not merely a gap in the data but a significant ideological divergence. The substance abuse narrative individualises and pathologises the problem, focusing intervention on treatment and personal responsibility. In contrast, the economic stress narrative contextualises and politicises IPV, pointing toward the need for structural and economic transformation. The fact that both explanations coexist in the literature, often without resolving this tension, reveals how the discourse on IPV perpetration fluctuates between holding individuals accountable and acknowledging that their actions are shaped by broader, oppressive systems for which they are not solely responsible.

5.3.2.2. Intergenerational transmission of violence

This subtheme investigates how early experiences with violence normalise adult IPV by sustaining learned behaviours and prolonging cycles of violence. In their study, Gass et al. (2011) found that exposure to violence was the strongest predictor of IPV among their 1715 participants, with observing domestic abuse by parents linked to perpetration and victimisation across all responders. Similarly, Gupta et al. (2008) indicated that 27.7% of individuals were

exposed to parental violence, and 75.1% reported experiencing violence in their community. Of the 834 participants, 21.6% had suffered abuse as children, and this was found to be a significant predictor for IPV perpetration as well as victimisation (Gupta et al., 2008).

De Kwaadsteniet (2017) and Lau and Stevens (2012) revealed similar findings, in which individuals related their IPV perpetration to childhood experiences with violence and parental abuse. Men who raped a non-partner reported greater violent childhood experiences, emphasising the long-term influence of early trauma on violent behaviour (Jewkes et al., 2006). While this might seem counterintuitive, since one might expect that those who experienced violence would want to avoid it, this repetition can be explained through social constructionist, feminist, and hegemonic masculinities perspectives. From a young age, repeated exposure to violence can act to normalise it, shaping how individuals understand relationships and power (Burr & Dick, 2017). When combined with gender role socialisation, especially within hegemonic forms of masculinity that value dominance, emotional control, and toughness, violence becomes seen as an acceptable or even expected way of asserting oneself (Morrell et al., 2012). Feminist theorists such as Hunnicutt (2009), Sultana (2010), and Walby (1989) have long argued that patriarchal systems reinforce these ideas, framing violence as a means of maintaining male control, particularly in intimate relationships. Moreover, this was specifically the case for young men who saw their mothers abused, as is depicted in the quotations below:

> *"My experience as a child was that I often saw my father hit my mother… but as time went by I can't really say what the problem was when they fought but all of us [as the family] came through it." (De Kwaadsteniet, 2017, p. 35)*
>
> *"That makes, especially us young guys to be violent ...our backgrounds, they do counts.... We are filled with anger" (Lau and Stevens, 2012, p. 429).*

These findings suggest that perpetrators of IPV often learn from their observations and experiences that violence is a suitable method for settling disagreements between intimate

partners and maintaining male dominance in the household (Abrahams et al., 2006; De Kwaadsteniet, 2017; Gass et al., 2011; Gupta et al., 2008; Lau and Stevens, 2012)

5.3.3. Theme 3: Survivor Narratives: Meaning-Making and Coping

This theme delves into how survivors perceive and negotiate their experiences, emphasising the psychological and emotional components that shape their understanding and response to IPV. Important to note are the findings from Amaechi et al. (2021), Boonzaier and de La Rey (2003), Dekel and Andipatin (2016), Hines and Jager (2021), Leburu-Masigo (2019), Makongoza and Nduna (2021), Mkhonto et al. (2014), Radzilani-Makatu and Chauke (2019), as well as Slabbert (2010) who report that the majority of their participants recognised their partners actions as abuse ranging from subtle verbal degradation, humiliation, and dominating behaviour to serious physical violence, economic abuse and sexual abuse. These experiences are depicted in the quotations below:

> *"He actually abuses me, all the abuse there is. Physically, mentally, sexually. That's everything I get from him. You know, if I wanted a dress, I had to cry for a dress. And you know how I had to pay him? I had to pay him sexually to get a dress." (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003, p. 1009)*
>
> *"And then there is the verbal abuse. I do not mind all the physical stuff, but the words ... they hurt the most. Your bruises disappear, but the words ...they remain." (Slabbert, 2010, p.131).*
>
> *"My intimate partner would sometimes expose private matters about me in public when pretending to be under the influence of alcohol and these would include my inability to bear children. As a way of putting me down, he would use demeaning words such: Ke go folositse mo tereneng ya mafetwa [It's a favour that I choose to marry you], o sekobo [you ugly thing] ga o motho wa go ratwa [should I leave you, nobody will ever love you]." (Leburu-Masigo, 2019, p.6)*
>
> *"My ex-boyfriend was abusing me economically, emotionally and physically. He did not give me money to buy household necessities, yet he wanted to bath, eat and dress in clean clothes. On top of that, he even instructed me never to wear trousers and isolated me from my friends and relatives." (Leburu-Masigo, 2019, p.6)*
>
> *"He went on the whole evening. He kicked me and he shouted at me and called me names throughout the night. We could not sleep. He also does not give me money to buy food for the kids……He then started to beat me and how could I say, also abused me sexually. (Slabbert, 2010, p.135).*

Throughout the reviewed studies, it became evident that women make meaning of IPV using a variety of frameworks, which are often shaped by societal expectations, personal experiences,

and social expectations (Amaechi et al., 2021; Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Hines & Jager, 2021; Leburu-Masigo, 2019; Makongoza & Nduna, 2021; Mkhonto et al., 2014; Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019; Slabbert, 2010). The most frequently mentioned cause for IPV was the exercise of power and dominance (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; Slabbert, 2010). In her study, Slabbert (2010) reports that 80% of participants understood their experiences of IPV as being a way their partners exerted control over them, especially where they were allowed to go and what they were allowed to do. Victims described these controlling behaviours as including being constantly watched, locked up, or threatened with being killed if they were to stay away from their partners too long, as is indicated below:

> *"He is also very jealous. I am not allowed to talk to anybody, then he wants to beat me. He wants to know the whole time where I am going. I cannot even go to town alone. He wants to keep watch over me the whole time. I feel trapped" (Slabbert, 2010, p.142)*
>
> *"He locks me in the house and takes the keys" (Slabbert, 2010, p.142)*
>
> *It means I have been his slave...Previously I was offered a job at Krugersdorp, he refused that I go there. He refused that I go to a day care centre here in Centurion, he refused stating that he doesn't want a wife who sleeps wherever." (Mkhonto et al., 2014, p. 342)*

Viewing these experiences through the lens of hegemonic masculinities, power hierarchies are maintained through the use of control strategies such as social exclusion, movement monitoring, and financial deprivation (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Jewkes et al., 2015; Rizvi et al., 2014). Social isolation, financial hardship, and movement limitations all work to decrease victims' sense of autonomy and maintain their ongoing subordination in the partnership. As argued by McVittie et al. (2017) this is specifically evident in modern Western and Westernised cultures, where the concept of ideal hegemonic masculinities is often linked to traits that are commonly associated with men, like bravery, aggressive behaviour, assertiveness, near-invulnerability to adversities, and a resolute attitude in the face of difficulty. Within this framework, men who internalise these ideals may feel pressure to assert control within their intimate relationships, and any perceived challenge to their masculinity may lead to violence, manipulation, and controlling actions (Mazibuko, 2017; Morrell et al., 2012).

According to feminist theory, these patterns of control are not isolated acts of violence but manifestations of patriarchal systems that sustain gender inequality (Sultana, 2010; Walby, 1989). Jewkes and Morrell (2010), as well as Sultana (2010), argue that tactics aimed at exerting control represent larger gendered power disparities that limit women's options and uphold male supremacy. IPV is therefore not just an interpersonal issue but is facilitated by cultural norms that normalise male dominance and demand female submission (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Mthembu et al., 2021).

Moreover, research by Dekel and Andipatin (2016) as well as Leburu-Masigo (2019) revealed that victims of IPV made sense of their experiences at the hands of normative gender roles. Women who made meaning from their experiences in this way often held the belief of traditional patriarchal gender stereotypes, which portray men as powerful authority figures while placing women in submissive and docile roles (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Leburu-Masigo, 2019). From a social constructionist perspective, Muehlenhard and Kimes (2014) argue that gender roles and standards are socially constructed and upheld by social norms, language, and interactions between individuals rather than being innate or set. Within this framework, survivors may internalise dominant gender norms, shaping how they interpret their relationships and respond to abuse. These dynamics are evident in the quotations below:

> *"In our culture, it is a given that our intimate male partners ought to be given the leading role, failing which the relationship is bound to fail. This we follow even when the partners are not gainfully employed. The teachings are further emphasised in the church we are part of, where submission to male partners is expected in order to sustain our marriages and relations." (Leburu-Masigo, 2019, p.7)*
>
> *"He must be, like they say, he's the roof" (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 10)*
>
> *"For me, I thought that that is the way [that a man has the right to control a woman or to discipline a woman using violence]. Yes it was okay" (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 10)*

Moreover, Boonzaier and de La Rey (2003) as well as Dekel and Andipatin (2016) contend that victims frequently construct their experience of IPV by detaching the abuse from the

perpetrator by ascribing it to aspects that are out of the perpetrator's control, such as early childhood experiences and substance use. Participants in these studies relayed the following:

> *"He [her ex-husband] also came out of an abusive childhood. His father also abuses his mom so I've got a soft spot for him."(Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 20)*
>
> *"He would grab me by my hair, he would drag me outside and he would hit me, but he would be under the influence of drugs." (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 20)*
>
> *"He's a person, very softhearted. He's got very good values. He's a person that cannot let out what he feels, so he waits till the alcohol talks. And once a deed is done, then he like sort of, "Oh shit." Then, it's too late." (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003, p. 1012)*

Similarly, Boonzaier and de La Rey (2003) report that participants in their study made sense of their abuse by separating the good present inside their abusers from the bad, which is abuse. IPV is then understood by these participants as an expression of their partner's tensions, which is an internal force beyond their control. Boonzaier and de La Rey (2003) further argue that in the act of portraying their partners as typically good and nonviolent, women in this study characterise violence as a deviation from the norm. These views are displayed below:

> *"And um, then everything was, everything is okay, you know. He's a very good man….If he starts with his drinking, then he's not a good person anymore. Then, the worst and the ugly stuff come out of him." (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003, p, 1012)*
>
> *"He's normally very sweet tempered. But when he gets angry like that and the eyes is bulging." (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003, p, 1012)*

With regard to coping with the enormous weight that IPV has on individuals, the reviewed literature contains a wide variety of coping mechanisms employed by victims of IPV. For example, Dekel and Andipatin (2016), Hines and Jager (2021), as well as Radzilani-Makatu and Chauke (2019) report that victims often justify or minimise the seriousness of their abuse, while blaming themselves, as is reported below:

> *"I was more blaming it [the abuse] on myself, well he says that, it's because of me that he's beating me and I was blaming myself, well maybe it's me, maybe I should listen to him more, you know things like that, so, yeah, I blamed myself actually" (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 23)*
>
> *"I just accept that the situation is not that bad, so one can live with what is happening" (Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019, p. 13465)*

Boonzaier and de La Rey (2003) and Slabbert (2010) also recognised drinking as a coping method for escaping and temporarily numbing the emotional and psychological pain produced by IPV. For many survivors, drinking allows them to forget about their suffering, suppress unpleasant feelings, and temporarily escape reality. A participant in Slabbert's (2010) study noted that:

> *"No, he doesn't drink, but I do. Before the Lord, I am the one who drinks... I drink just that I do not know what goes on and that I can forget my sorrow... the life he leads me... I drink that I don't feel the pain of the beating." (Slabbert, 2010, p.174)*

Drawing support from friends and community members was reported as another coping strategy. Slabbert (2010) found that the majority of abused women turn to close friends and neighbours when the abuse they experience gets too much, as is depicted below:

> *"I also have a good very friend to whom I can talk. I go to her to escape from my circumstances." (Slabbert, 2010, p.156)*
>
> *"If he beats me too much, I go to the neighbours and that man will come and talk to him." (Slabbert, 2010, p.156)*

Contrary to the above, Boonzaier and de La Rey (2003), Hines and Jager (2021), Mkhonto et al. (2014), and Slabbert (2010) report that some IPV victims showed resilience in the face of their abusive experiences. Resilience was expressed in different ways, ranging from enduring hardships to finding strength in adversity, turning to religion, and demonstrating a determined fighting spirit as depicted below:

> *"I'm a very strong person inside, and due to that, um, it has always been my way of thinking that you can do anything else to me, but I won't allow you to break my spirit. You can hit me, you can kick me around, but you not gonna take away from me what I value, and that's my dignity." (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003, p. 1023)*
>
> *"...you are not a victim, you weren't the abuser. It is not your fault that were abused." (Hines & Jager, 2021, p. 31)*
>
> *"But I am on my own now for three months. He still tries to come to me at night, but I lock the door. I do not want him there. He makes it too hard and he will beat me again...I have a life without him now..." (Slabbert, 2010, p. 168)*
>
> *"Sometimes I kneel and pray and my emotions normalise" (Mkhonto et al., 2014, p. 343)*
>
> *"I will get to the top, even if the pressure is sometimes too much. I am a fighter and he won't get me down" (Slabbert, 2010, p. 172)*

While the existing research on IPV in South Africa primarily focuses on female victims and male perpetrators, a minority of studies have examined men as victims of IPV. Of the reviewed studies, only three examined the occurrence of IPV amongst males (Neshunzhi et al., 2022; Othilia et al., 2021; Selowa et al., 2022), revealing several significant findings. Firstly, the most common types of IPV against men were found to be emotional and psychological abuse, which typically took the shape of manipulation, verbal abuse, and humiliation (Neshunzhi et al., 2022; Othilia et al., 2021; Selowa et al., 2022):

> *"This was problematic behaviour focused on humiliating me in an aggressive way which sometimes was done publicly and affected me mentally. So, I guess I was abused verbally and emotionally. I mean how can you say anything you want to me without choosing words. She called my family with names such as their mentally ill and she also addressed me as a mad person by saying "you're crazy and the whole community knows about it".(Selowa et al., 2022, p. 20571)*

Secondly, experiences of financial abuse and economic control were also found in the reviewed literature, whereby women who are the main breadwinners manipulate and denigrate their male partners through financial leverage (Neshunzhi et al., 2022). Participants in the study by Neshunzhi et al. (2022) describe the financial abuse they experience as:

> *"Eish, things are tough, really things are tough. It is so unbearable, so unbearable. Especially when you are no longer working. A woman will make you to be always penniless, eeh… She will make sure that everything to be hers of fall under her. She has total control, that ensures you are penniless." (Neshunzhi et al., 2022, p. 20612)*
>
> *My wife like taking control in almost everything in the house, even when I give her money to buy household items, she just uses money as she likes and food security is compromised before the end of the month, and..... I do not get paid twice in the month" (Neshunzhi et al., 2022, p. 20613)*

Moreover, although it has been reported less frequently than for women, physical violence towards men was conveyed. Participants in Selowa et al.'s (2022) study experienced being tossed by empty containers or having their spouses beat them on the head, while others reported having been kicked, hit, and stabbed with sharp items:

> *"For me it was physical abuse. I remember that during our first year of dating she didn't know how to play with because she once kicked me so hard on my leg to a point where I couldn't walk properly. She said she was playing. I was also once stabbed with a sharp object in my arm because she found me chatting with other women in my phone." (Selowa et al., 2022, p. 20570)*

Although IPV against men is not as commonly recognised, when it does happen, social denial and legal bias are frequently the subsequent reactions (Neshunzhi et al., 2022; Othilia et al., 2021; Selowa et al., 2022). Across these studies, a pervasive theme emerged: the stigma attached to being a male victim of IPV. This stigma leads many male victims to remain silent and avoid reporting their abuse due to fear of disbelief or judgment (Neshunzhi et al., 2022; Othilia et al., 2021; Selowa et al., 2022). Some of the participants' reflections illustrate these challenges:

> *"If my wife beats me and I sustain injuries I will go to hospital, but I will not tell them that it was my wife who injured me. It is better to say I had a fight with another man at a bar." (Othilia et al., 2021, p. 17928)*
>
> *"If I tell people, they will think I am a coward or a fool; they will gossip about me and they will think I am weak." (Othilia et al., 2021, p. 17928)*
>
> *"Just imagine if I try to tell police officers that my wife beats me, they are likely to not take me seriously." (Othilia et al., 2021, p. 17928)*

Selowa et al. (2022) report that male victims are further silenced by cultural and social norms that reinforce the notion that men should endure abuse without seeking help, while the widespread misconception that males cannot experience IPV further exacerbates their disbelief and isolation. This could be attributable to rigid gender norms that frame men as dominant and women as submissive, as is depicted in the views below:

> *"A community is expecting men to not express their feelings when being abused. Social norms by social expectations leaves a man with no other option but to not cry out for help when they are victims. I never reported or reached to anyone as men are supposed to be strong" (Selowa et al., 2022, p. 20572)*
>
> *"Society think female cannot abuse males. I was beaten, withhold from having access to money and verbally abused. I became homeless because of abuse and when you tell people they turn to not believe you. The stereotype in society for saying that you're a man and can't be beaten by a woman creates a bad social stigma" (Selowa et al., 2022, p. 20572)*

Moreover, in their research, Othilia et al. (2021) found that some of their participants do not recognise their partners' actions as abuse, instead normalising physical violence as a form of emotional expression, as is portrayed by the excerpt below:

> *"I do not see assault by my wife as abuse because usually when she slaps me, she is just showing me that she is unhappy with what I might have done. One time she hit me so hard with an umbrella that I bled. I did not tell anyone because I know it is not really abuse, she was just angry" (Othilia et al., 2021, p. 17928)*

From these studies, it was evident that male victimisation remains considerably underreported and socially dismissed because of inflexible gender norms that define men as dominant and women as submissive (Neshunzhi et al., 2022; Othilia et al., 2021; Selowa et al., 2022). These studies also highlighted the fact that male victims of IPV often do not report their abuse as they fear that the authorities would not believe them or that they will be shamed (Neshunzhi et al., 2022; Othilia et al., 2021; Selowa et al., 2022).

While this thematic analysis has highlighted how IPV is experienced, justified, and resisted in diverse ways across the South African context, it is important to critically reflect on the patterns emerging from the literature. Many of the studies reviewed focus on IPV perpetrated by poor, Black men, often within contexts of prior trauma and patriarchal cultural norms. This construction risks rendering IPV across race, class, and cultural boundaries invisible (Mshweshwe, 2020). As feminist and intersectional scholars have argued, IPV is a pervasive issue that transcends socioeconomic and racial boundaries (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991). However, South African literature often underrepresents White, middle-class perpetrators or Eurocentric patriarchal influences, potentially reinforcing a racialised and classed image of violence as a problem specific to "marginalised" masculinities (Boonzaier, 2008; Crenshaw, 1991). This selective visibility of IPV may inadvertently obscure the broader systemic nature of IPV and limit a more holistic understanding of how it operates across society (Boonzaier, 2008).

5.3.3.1. Psychological and Emotional Barriers to Leaving

This subtheme addresses the psychological and emotional factors that hinder victims of IPV from leaving their abusive relationships. These factors include romanticised ideas of love and normalisation of abuse, self-blame, and internalised responsibility, as well as the perceived duty to fill the role of a "good wife". As argued by Boonzaier and de La Rey (2003) as well as Dekel & Andipatin (2016), victims of IPV often remain in abusive relationships as they view these relationships through the lens of romantic or fairy-tale love, where abuse is perceived as a natural aspect of relationships. These discourses on women's experiences of violence highlight how cultural ideals of the "perfect partner" keep women bound to abusive relationships (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016). These narratives suggest that men are only occasionally violent and that such behaviour is a normal part of any relationship. As a result, women may downplay or justify the abuse, believing that true love requires endurance (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016). The following quotations illustrate these conceptions:

> *"I thought that the abuse, that maybe it's part of life and I'd told myself, 'well, maybe it should be like that." (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 22)*
>
> *"I just took a knife and I just stab him and they [the hospital staff] said to me 'you could have killed him' and I said 'there's nothing wrong with it. He did it to me so I just did it back to him.' It [the abuse] was normal for me that if there's arguments you like just like hit it right or you fight it out" (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 22)*

Moreover, internalised responsibility and self-blame also emerged as a factor keeping victims of IPV in abusive relationships. Dekel and Andipatin (2016), Radzilani-Makatu and Chauke (2019), and Slabbert (2010) argue that many victims believe that the abuse is their fault, and they take ownership of their partner's violent behaviour. This view is frequently perpetuated by the abuser, who shifts responsibility to the victim, making them believe that their conduct caused the violence (Slabbert, 2010). Consequently, victims may remain in the relationship, assuming that if they improve their behaviour, the abuse will end. Moreover, victims often

remain out of fear of retaliation, as abusers frequently threaten harm if they attempt to leave (Slabbert, 2010). The perceptions are displayed in the excerpts below:

> *"I was more blaming it [the abuse] on myself, well he says that, it's because of me that he's beating me and I was blaming myself, well maybe it's me, maybe I should listen to him more, you know things like that, so, yeah, I blamed myself actually" (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 23)*
>
> *"Although I cannot tell what I have done that irritates him. But I think I am at fault sometimes" (Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019, p. 13463)*
>
> *"These days husbands kill their wives if they leave them. I do not want to die. I fear him so much and feel it is better when I am here" (Radzilani-Makatu &Chauke, 2019, p. 13464)*

The reviewed literature also revealed that some victims of IPV remain in their abusive relationships as they believe that they are fulfilling their role as women. This includes offering love, care, and kindness to temper the "male hardness" of their abusers (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003). Similar ideas were portrayed in Dekel and Andipatin (2016), where participants reported that for them to be considered a "good wife", they had to be caring and stay in their abusive relationships, as shown below:

> *"For me it was like, I had two children but it was like um having three children, because I had to pamper them, I had to pamper him, I had to see that he is happy, I had to see that they're happy" (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 11)*

Similarly, Dekel and Andipatin (2016) report that participants believed that their spouses could change, therefore, they were hesitant to disclose the abuse or end the relationship. Despite the abuse, participants in this study expressed that they felt guilty and responsible for their partners' distress, which prohibited them from reporting the abuse (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016). These discourses are depicted below:

> *"I said to him 'I'm gonna go to the police station, I'm gonna report you.' I went to the police station. I was sitting there like, literally crying, and I had a black eye and I just walk out again because I felt ashamed, and I went back and I said 'you'll change you will change.' I thought I could change him" (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 13)*
>
> *"If I'm going to the police, I would visit him because my conscience is gonna, you see? I did locked him up and that will stay in my brain" (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 12)*

5.3.3.2. External Societal and Cultural Pressures

Beyond the psychological and emotional factors keeping victims in abusive relationships, factors such as economic entrapment/dependence, societal norms, cultural and religious expectations, and weak institutional support play a crucial role in keeping victims trapped in a cycle of violence (Bolarinwa et al., 2023; Gass et al., 2011; Mkhonto et al., 2014; Mthembu et al., 2021; Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019; Slabbert, 2010).

Throughout the reviewed studies, economic entrapment/dependence of victims on perpetrators was the most reported reason for remaining in abusive relationships. Studies such as Bolarinwa et al. (2023), Gibbs et al. (2018), Mkhonto et al. (2014), Mthembu et al. (2021), and Slabbert (2010) show how women in low-income areas or rural areas often endure economic entrapment, in which they remain in violent relationships owing to their lack of financial freedom. Slabbert (2010) reports that 60% of the participants in this study had left their partners at least two times but returned due to financial limitations.

Similarly, Gass et al. (2011) also underline how economic difficulties, including gendered financial reliance, exacerbate women's susceptibility to IPV, since they may feel trapped or incapable of getting help. In these studies, it was evident that when victims of IPV, particularly women, face economic difficulties, they become more reliant on their relationships, which further perpetuates gendered power structures (Gass et al., 2011; Mthembu et al., 2021; Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke; 2019; Slabbert, 2010). Participants from these studies reported the following:

> *"I wanted to leave him, but I need his money to survive." (Slabbert, 2010, p. 147)*
>
> *"I am unemployed, so staying with him is better because he provides for the family" (Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019, p. 13464)*
>
> *"I am trapped. I need to stay. I won't make it on my own with all the children. I also need the money from him." (Slabbert, 2010, p. 147)*

Combined with the lack of sufficient funds to support themselves, Slabbert (2010) reports that a lack of literacy could also be a factor that keeps victims in abusive relationships, as these individuals find it more difficult to find employment. These views are displayed below:

> *"I really want a job, but it is difficult. I only have grade 7. (Slabbert, 2010, p. 151)*
>
> *"I never went to school. I cannot find a job. They are looking for someone who can read." (Slabbert, 2010, p. 151)*

Moreover, as reported by Radzilani-Makatu and Chauke (2019), victims often remain in abusive relationships for the sake of their children's welfare, as they would not be able to care for them on their own, which was often experienced in combination with familial pressure. A dominant patriarchal family discourse that children need two parents in a household for healthy development and to be considered an ideal family was also reported as a reason for remaining in abusive relationships (Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019). These discourses are displayed below:

> *"I want my children to grow in a normal family with both parents staying together" (Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019, p. 13464)*
>
> *"I didn't wanted [didn't want] to raise my kids without a father because I never had a father that raised me.... So I wanted to give my kids the best" (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 11)*
>
> *"You as a mother don't have the right ways to tell a boy, then the father can come in there" (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 10).*
>
> *"I am afraid I might get another husband who will be worse than this or who will not show any love to my children. Although this one is abusive, he loves his children" (Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019, p. 13464)*
>
> *"My mother also witnessed the abuse and she was actually the one that always told me that 'no, stay in the relationship because of the sake of your kids' and then she would tell me 'what are you going to do if the man is gonna leave you?' and I would listen to the things that she say"(Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 21).*

Following the economic constraints experienced by IPV victims, conformity to gendered societal and cultural conventions, as well as religious expectations, was often highlighted as reasons for victims' continued involvement in violent relationships (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; Dekel and Andipatin, 2016; Leburu-Masigo, 2019; Mthembu et al., 2021; Zembe et al., 2015). Many victims maintained the gendered notion that a man is the head of the household

and thus can make decisions, which reinforced male authority and female obedience. As participants explained:

> *"He's a man, he always tells me; he's a man, and I'm a woman, and there's a big difference between us. A woman's got no willpower. She can be used. You can just do with her whatever you want to" (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003, p. 1023).*
>
> *"In our culture, it is a given that our intimate male partners ought to be given the leading role, failing which the relationship is bound to fail." (Leburu-Masigo, 2019, p. 7).*
>
> *"Culturally a woman has to belong to her husband's place, whatever happens one has to tolerate and appreciate that she is married" (Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019, p. 13459).*
>
> *"He will beat you. . .you will be crying "hhh, hhh, hhh" and yet you know you could fight back, you know he is your size, but because you want him to be a man, you let him. . . [because] you also don't want to be associated with a boy. . .[so] you toughen him, you make him a man." (Zembe et al., 2015, p. 10)*

Furthermore, IPV was often considered a private matter, with women supposed to suffer abuse in secret rather than seek outside help. Slabbert (2010) discovered that 80% of the participants in her study considered that abuse should be endured in silence. As discussed previously, participants' narratives suggested that highly rooted gender norms hindered women from confronting or reporting their abusers. This reflects how cultural norms and gender socialisation encourage silence to preserve family honour, reinforcing patriarchal control and discouraging help-seeking (Sultana, 2010; Walby, 1989). From a feminist perspective, this silence is not simply a personal choice but the result of structural power dynamics that position women as subordinate and responsible for maintaining domestic harmony (Sultana, 2010; Walby, 1989). From a social constructionist perspective, this reflects how cultural norms position IPV as a personal issue, reinforcing silence and contributing to the normalisation of violence within relationships (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014). As participants in Leburu-Masigo's (2019) study expressed:

> *"We grow up with the knowledge that violence between two intimately connected adults is a private matter. Our parents suffered in silence and here we have grown into the women we are. There is a saying in the Setswana culture: Ga gona ntlo e e sa neleng [there is no household devoid of challenges]. After all, no human being is perfect and as a result, we are not the first lot to suffer violence." (Leburu-Masigo, 2019, p. 8).*
>
> *"With rape inside marriage or with my intimate partner, I would never report it outside the confines of my family, though I am aware where to go to for help. I would rather start with a*

> *family conference comprising the elders. If this does not help, my next option would rather be to go to the church priest, or even the social workers – they are more private than being seen at a police station, where there is no privacy." (Leburu-Masigo, 2019, p. 8).*

In addition to societal norms, religious responsibilities impacted women's decisions to remain in violent relationships as reported by Dekel and Andipatin (2016), Mthembu et al. (2021), and Radzilani-Makatu and Chauke (2019). Many victims held the view that their status as wives was religiously decreed and that quitting would violate religious principles. As one participant stated:

> *"I was like God wants me to be here [in the abusive relationship], and I need to pray and trust God" (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 15).*

Similarly, as found in the studies by Boonzaier and de La Rey (2003), Dekel and Andipatin (2016), as well as Radzilani-Makatu and Chauke (2019), religious ideology contributed to victims' unwillingness to leave violent marriages. Many victims internalised religious teachings emphasising the sacredness of marriage, feeling that enduring abuse was part of their spiritual responsibility. Religious bodies and leaders frequently supported this view, opposing divorce and encouraging victims to stay in their marriages despite continued abuse (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019). These experiences are depicted in the quotations below:

> *"You know the Catholic beliefs are totally different from the other religions. The Catholic priest will try to keep your marriage together no matter what. They say you must take your cross and bear it." (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003, p. 1015).*
>
> *And you know, like with the Moslems, if you go to them, they always talking about reconciling and things like that. And I mean, when I went to the judicial council, I told the imam, "Listen here, I want my divorce." So he told me no, but I must reconcile with my husband. I left there, and I thought, I thought to myself, "It seems to me these people aren't prepared to help me." (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003, p. 1015).*
>
> *"My reason for staying with him is that he is my husband and I am a Christian. The bible does not promote divorce" (Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019, p. 13463).*
>
> *"They [religious leaders] told me to stay in the relationship and give it another try" (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 15).*

From a feminist theoretical standpoint, the narratives of religious duty and the imperative to be a "good wife" must be analysed as more than personal beliefs; they are powerful ideological tools of patriarchal control. The invocation of religious doctrine to discourage leaving an abusive marriage, as seen in the data, demonstrates how patriarchal power co-opts spiritual frameworks to enforce female subordination and silence dissent. This positions endurance as a moral virtue and leaving as a spiritual failure, effectively trapping women in abusive relationships under the guise of religious fidelity (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 15). Thus, the personal struggle described by survivors is a direct reflection of a broader structural oppression that uses culture and religion to maintain gendered power imbalances.

Furthermore, the belief in marriage as sacred and lifelong contributed to women's reluctance to seek help or leave abusive relationships. This is also expressed in the study by Radzilani-Makatu and Chauke (2019), where participants remained in abusive relationships due to the stigma attached to being a divorced woman. One participant explained:

> *"People do not trust divorcees. They will blame you for no reason. It is safe to be with your own husband than being single" (Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019, p. 13463).*

These narratives highlight the role of religious teachings in reinforcing traditional gender roles that prioritise marital endurance over personal well-being. Across several studies, religious ideology emerged as a key factor influencing how women understood and responded to abuse (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019). In many cases, religious leaders and institutions did not offer support to survivors but instead reinforced expectations that women should preserve the relationship at all costs. This often meant discouraging separation or divorce, even in the face of sustained violence (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019). These expectations are part of broader cultural and institutional narratives that frame IPV as a private issue and affirm men's authority within the home (Leburu-Masigo, 2019). From a social

constructionist standpoint, such gender roles and religious norms are not innate or unchanging—they are socially produced and upheld through everyday interactions and discourses (Burr & Dick, 2017). This dynamic can contribute to the ongoing acceptance of IPV and the silencing of survivors, especially within faith-based communities (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019).

Jewkes et al. (2002, 2015) and Morrell et al. (2012) have shown that traditional gender ideologies, frequently supported by religious doctrines, play a critical role in sustaining hegemonic masculinities. These masculinities value control, dominance, and authority over women, and often frame the use of violence as a legitimate response to perceived challenges to male power (Jewkes et al., 2002; Jewkes et al., 2015; Morrell et al., 2012).

Aside from psychological, cultural, and religious pressures, structural failures also play an important role in keeping victims in abusive partnerships. Victims are frequently discouraged from seeking help or trying to leave abusive relationships because they have lost trust in the police system, and their communities have been passive in helping victims of IPV, intervening in abusive circumstances, and holding perpetrators responsible (Bolarinwa et al., 2023; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Gass et al., 2011; Mkhonto et al., 2014). According to Bolarinwa et al. (2023) and Gass et al. (2011), the stigma associated with IPV, as well as societal acceptance of some forms of violence in intimate relationships, produce an environment in which victims feel alone, embarrassed, and unsupported. In their research, Dekel and Andipatin (2016) as well as Mkhonto et al. (2014) report that when victims of IPV acted against their abusers, they were met with resistance from the police force. This was often linked to IPV being a private matter, as participants explained:

> *"I phoned for the cops, but the cops they didn't come ... They said they coming but they didn't come. I went there [to the police station] and then I tell the police but ... they said I must sit there. I was sit there about four hours, I don't get help" (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 13)*
>
> *"When I called the police they said this is a domestic problem, they can't do anything"(Dekel & Andipatin, 2016, p. 13)*

> *"So those police were saying we must talk it over as family you see" (Mkhonto et al., 2014, p. 342)*

Makongoza and Nduna's (2021) study found that young South Africans lacked institutional assistance as well. One participant described how law enforcement's unwillingness to engage was influenced by negative attitudes toward IPV victims:

> *"the police mentioned that they don't want to get involved because they are used to children who come and open restraining orders for one day, and the next day when they are all lovey dovey with their partners they will come and cancel…that's why policeman don't take us serious because we are not serious ourselves. And the police cannot work like that and they end up thinking that we enjoy being beaten…" (Makongoza & Nduna, 2021, p. 9)*

These findings can be understood more deeply through the lens of social constructionism, which highlights how dominant narratives shape institutional and community responses to IPV (Burr & Dick, 2017). When violence is socially constructed as a private or domestic issue, as seen in how police minimise or dismiss reports, it becomes normalised, and the responsibility for intervention is shifted away from the state and onto the victim (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014; Strebel et al., 2006). These discourses reinforce the notion that IPV is a personal matter to be resolved within the household, further entrenching silence and inaction (Makongoza & Nduna, 2021).

From a feminist perspective, this institutional inaction reflects the persistence of patriarchal structures that fail to protect women and instead maintain the status quo (Sultana, 2010; Walby, 1989). As noted by Govender (2023), patriarchal institutions often uphold gender hierarchies by disregarding women's safety and transferring the burden of resolution back onto victims. This aligns with what Mkhonto et al. (2014) describes, where women are told to "talk it over as family", reinforcing the idea that violence is expected to be endured.

Furthermore, the perception that victims are complicit, as in the quote from Makongoza and Nduna (2021), demonstrates how hegemonic masculinity not only legitimises male dominance but also casts doubt on the credibility of female victims. As Connell (1995) and Jewkes et al.

(2015) argue, hegemonic masculinity is maintained not only through acts of violence but also through institutional practices that dismiss or invalidate women's experiences. These dynamics reveal how broader gendered power relations shape the conditions under which victims are ignored, shamed, or disbelieved (Connell, 1995; Jewkes et al, 2015)

5.3.4. Theme 4: Perpetrator Perspectives: Rationalising Violence

While norms in society and cultural conventions contribute to the experience of IPV among victims, they also influence how offenders explain and justify their conduct. This theme examines how perpetrators view and justify their behaviour, offering insight into the internalised beliefs that drive their actions. These viewpoints provide an understanding of how power dynamics, gender norms, and personal narratives contribute to IPV in the context of South Africa.

Key studies, including Amaechi et al. (2021), Boonzaier and de La Rey (2003), De Kwaadsteniet (2017), Gibbs et al. (2018), Jewkes et al. (2006), Lau and Stevens (2012), Mathews et al. (2015), and Zembe et al. (2015), provide insight into the explanations used by perpetrators to justify IPV. Perpetrators frequently use cultural, social, and personal explanations to justify violence, portraying it as discipline, a response to provocation, or an inherent component of relationships. The literature demonstrates how offenders of IPV frequently explain their actions using discourses of masculinity, control, and respect, portraying violence as a reaction to feelings of shame, jealousy, or threats to their masculinity (Amaechi et al., 2021; Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; De Kwaadsteniet, 2017; Gibbs et al., 2018).

5.3.4.1. IPV, Patriarchy, Culture and Masculinity

Violence as a method for asserting dominance and maintaining control over intimate partners was a frequently discussed theme in the reviewed literature. This subtheme explores how perpetrators see IPV as an acceptable approach for disciplining their partners as well as

reinforcing established gender norms. The concept of "traditional" masculinity emerged as a dominant discourse theme. In the reviewed studies, many perpetrators were connected with ideas of manhood fostered by traditions or prominent cultural figures (Amaechi et al., 2021; De Kwaadsteniet, 2017; Lau & Stevens, 2012). For example, participants in the studies by De Kwaadsteniet (2017) and Lau and Stevens (2012) recalled:

> *"Yeah, I believe that I am the head of the house ... So the girl must wash the dishes, you must wash the clothes so I must do the man's job to clean the yard to paint the house, car stuff." (De Kwaadsteniet, 2017, p. 43).*
>
> *"Our fathers taught us that if a woman disrespects you, you should hit her." (Lau & Stevens, 2012, p. 431).*
>
> *"It's my culture .... If you don't beat a woman up, you're not a man." (Lau & Stevens, 2012, p. 431).*
>
> *"I took it like olden days, like Shaka Zulu ... m[e]n, like our culture, we are abusive" (Lau & Stevens, 2012, p. 431).*

This belief is supported by Amaechi et al. (2021), who found that most of the offenders came from backgrounds in which they believed men were supposed to be the dominant figures in relationships. They saw women as subordinates and therefore expected them to exhibit unwavering respect. Similar narratives were reported in De Kwaadsteniet (2017), where violence was used by participants to both scare their spouses into submission and demonstrate their intent to establish greater dominance over the relationship. These notions are depicted in the excerpts below:

> *"Don't be deceived. Nobody wants to beat up his wife. What we try to do is to correct them when they are wrong; when they misbehave…don't show respect. Ehhhhh...it is important to discipline them a little bit. This helps them sit up." (Amaechi et al., 2021, p. 17198)*
>
> *"I only beat my wife once because she disrespected them. Because I was staying at home and I didn't as much money as I used to, made her think that she could do anything she wanted. I needed to correct that. ...You know women can sometimes be like children. You have to discipline them to keep them in check" (Amaechi et al., 2021, p. 17198)*

An important feature of this point of view was that many perpetrators saw themselves as cultural norm enforcers, with the authority to monitor and regulate their female partners' behaviour (Amaechi et al., 2021; De Kwaadsteniet, 2017; Lau & Stevens, 2012). This control

permeated many elements of a woman's life, including the clothes she was allowed to wear and overall behaviour, which aligned with societal standards of how a "wife" should act (De Kwaadsteniet, 2017). Similar findings were reported by Lau and Stevens (2012), where participants used violence to discipline their partners for alleged misconduct. These beliefs are exemplified by the quotations below:

> *"I say 'why you dressing like this? You mustn't come here in my house with the dress like this because you [are] a wife... You are not a girlfriend." (De Kwaadsteniet, 2017, p. 42).*
>
> *"So by beating her, I thought maybe I think she wouldn't do [these] things again, because the minute she will misbehave or whatsoever, she'll get it, the hiding" (Lau and Stevens, 2012, p. 434)*

Moreover, participants in Lau and Stevens' (2012) study reported using violence in response to peer pressure and the desire to preserve their social standing. This is consistent with McVittie et al. (2017), who argue that hegemonic masculinity is strongly linked to dominance and violence in many cultures, pressuring men to perform power in order to avoid social rejection. Jewkes et al. (2015) similarly found that men often act violently to align with social norms that associate masculinity with control and toughness. This view is depicted in the quotation below:

> *"My peers, it was important that they must see me as a person who has control over my love affair .... It's just this peer thing. That is why I was beating her for things that she was not doing, because I was trying to maintain that status that I must not be a joke." (Lau & Stevens, 2012, p. 432)*

Additionally, violence as a disciplinary tool was commonly used for wrongdoings, such as suspected infidelity, disobedience, or challenges to male authority (Makongoza & Nduna, 2021). The reviewed literature revealed that the majority of IPV perpetrators upheld that their jealousy and possessiveness were expressions of their love for their partner, but it often ensued in controlling actions and violence (Makongoza & Nduna, 2021). In the study by Mathews et al. (2015), feelings of sexual ownership and jealousy were found to leave men feeling helpless, driving perpetrators to punish their partners to express and display their masculinity. The act

of violence thus becomes a desperate effort to recapture the control perpetrators of IPV believe they have lost, as depicted below:

> *"I became jealous; I did not want her to be with other guys, I wanted us to sort of stay in her house and not go out ... I just wanted her to myself; I became possessive over her and I cut her braids, and after cutting her braids I told her now I know the guys will not worry her anymore ..." (Mathews et al., 2015, p. 114)*
>
> *"We had arguments; there was no other men in her life-of this I am certain; it was just that I was malicious ... I can remember one day I came from work and that Sunday I wanted to visit a work friend [male] and she wanted to accompany me. I insisted she could not go with me. What did was very wrong; I went into the house and came out with a broomstick, and I gave her two blows here [pointing to his side]" (Mathews et al., 2015, p. 114)*
>
> *"I beat her up for a lie" (Lau & Stevens, 2012, p. 430)*
>
> *"I don't want to lose her, so that's why I act violent to her" (Lau & Stevens, 2012, p. 430)*

Mathews et al. (2015) further argue that perpetrators view IPV as a form of discipline or protection, reinforcing social expectations of male authority. These views reflect the influence of hegemonic masculinity and social constructionism, in which male control is associated with care, and violence becomes normalised. Graaff and Heinecken (2017) and Muehlenhard and Kimes (2014) argue that ideas about love, jealousy, and relationships are shaped by social norms, which may lead to control and violence being misinterpreted as affection. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), as well as Jewkes et al. (2015), highlight how hegemonic masculinity perpetuates the belief that men should regulate their partners, positioning possessiveness and dominance as markers of masculinity.

The examined research highlights the importance of cultural and societal norms in normalising IPV as a means of control. In many cases, perpetrators held patriarchal ideas and saw violence as a legitimate response to challenges that threatened their authority (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Jewkes et al., 2015; Mathews et al., 2015). According to Boonzaier and de la Rey (2003), some men justify IPV by arguing that it is important to manage their partners and prevent them from "stepping out of line". Similarly, Mathews et al. (2015) discovered that perpetrators commonly justified their violent behaviour by referring to cultural standards, in which men had

been taught to show authority by resorting to violence when necessary. Across the literature, perpetrators often shifted blame to external factors such as infidelity (Hoosain & Robertson, 2023), disobedience (Makongoza & Nduna, 2021), financial strain (Amaechi et al., 2021), and childhood adversity (De Kwaadsteniet, 2017; Mathews et al., 2015), further reinforcing the narrative that IPV is a reaction rather than an act of power.

5.3.4.2. Justifications and Rationalisations of Abuse

Instead of admitting their acts are abusive, many offenders create narratives that transfer blame to other variables such as alcohol, stress, provoked action, early childhood experiences, or their partner's behaviour (De Kwaadsteniet, 2017; Gupta et al., 2008; Lau & Stevens, 2012; Mathews et al., 2015). This reduces their degree of responsibility and allows them to see themselves as victims of circumstances rather than perpetrators. De Kwaadsteniet (2017) and Gupta et al. (2008) report that justifications for these beliefs and the use of anger were often linked to early childhood experiences and social learning discourses. Mathews et al. (2015) further argue that adverse childhood experiences not only increased perpetrators' potential for aggression but also left them feeling insecure, distrustful, and diminished their self-worth. Moreover, Lau and Stevens (2012) report that perpetrators in their study were using psychological terminology to minimise their accountability by implying that their "rageful self" was an unavoidable reaction to adverse environmental conditions and not an intentional action. These views are depicted in the excerpts below:

> *"My experience as a child was that I often saw my father hit my mother... but as time went by I can't really say what the problem was when they fought but all of us [as the family] came through it." (De Kwaadsteniet, 2017, p. 35).*
>
> *"That makes, especially us young guys to be violent ...our backgrounds, they do counts .... We are filled with anger." (Lau and Stevens, 2012, p. 429)*
>
> *"I grew up with my grandmother…so I was always waiting for my parents, so I grew up pissed off, always waiting for empty promises…" (Lau and Stevens, 2012, p. 429)*

Moreover, perpetrators acknowledged having difficulty managing their anger and resolving problems without resorting to violence, which helped to normalise IPV as a way of expressing frustration (Mmolokoe & Smit, 2024). In a related vein, participants in De Kwaadsteniet's (2017) study defined IPV as some sort of emotional release, implying that it helps to reduce tension in the relationship, therefore justifying their abusive behaviour as displayed in these quotations:

> *"So it happened I build, build, build, build.... then it just happened one day that I just had enough, then I slapped her" (De Kwaadsteniet, 2017, p. 47).*
>
> *"I was angry and I forced her to go with me to my place to have sex with me." (Mmolokoe & Smit, 2024, p. 22500)*

Another predominant narrative reported in the reviewed literature was that IPV perpetrators transfer blame away from themselves by assigning their actions to the impact of substances. In their studies, Abrahams et al. (2006), Gass et al. (2011), Gibbs et al. (2018), Gibbs et al. (2024), Jewkes et al. (2006), Makongoza and Nduna (2021), Mathews et al. (2015), Mmolokoe and Smit (2024), Slabbert (2010), and Teitelman et al. (2017) respectively report that alcohol and drug abuse leads to increased violent behaviour within intimate partnerships. Abrahams et al. (2006), Gass et al. (2011), and Jewkes et al. (2006) discovered that alcohol consumption, whether by the perpetrator or the victim, was frequently cited in participants' descriptions of IPV, implying that substance abuse plays an important role in increasing aggressive behaviour.

A prevalent element in participant accounts was the function of alcohol in compromising judgement and decreasing inhibitions, resulting in increased violence and conflict. In a recent study by Gibbs et al. (2024), participants highlighted many ways in which alcohol caused aggression in relationships. They emphasised that intoxication weakened self-control, that men's alcohol consumption frequently interfered with their capacity to meet their financial obligations, and that drinking was generally seen as unsuitable for women, particularly because of its close association with cheating (Gibbs et al., 2024). One participant noted that:

> *"Once you drink your mind changes, you no longer have a conscience that will tell you about what you are doing." (Gibbs et al., 2024, p. 6)*

Moreover, the reviewed studies also revealed that the intersection of gender norms and alcohol use contributed to perpetrators committing IPV. For example, Abrahams et al. (2006) note that 24.1% of men who attempted to rationalise IPV blamed a woman's drinking as a contributory cause. This was also reported by Gibbs et al. (2024) and Makongoza and Nduna (2021), who found that men were angry because they saw women as disrespectful for disregarding traditional conventions that prohibit women from consuming alcohol in public. As was depicted by a participant in the below quotation:

> *"I have beaten two of my ex-girlfriends who use to drink alcohol, I use to beat them up with a belt." (Gibbs et al., 2024, p. 7).*

A significant theme in the discussion regarding IPV is how perpetrators remove themselves from their acts of violence. In the study by Lua and Stevens (2010), many perpetrators outlined their behaviour as distinct from their "real" selves. Here, violence was depicted as an atypical or unusual episode as opposed to an illustration of their character, as illustrated by a participant:

> *"I'm not that person. I only act[ed] violent at that time" (Lau & Stevens, 2010, p. 428).*

One way this distancing is accomplished is through narratives that portray violence as an underlying biological trait, something within individuals that is ignited by external factors. Lau and Stevens (2010) report that this outlook is connected to discourses about male emotional instability, which are frequently framed using language like "loss of control" or "violent outburst". Some participants regarded their anger and violence as instinctive and spontaneous, reinforcing the belief that their acts were outside their control (Lua & Stevens, 2010).

These kinds of justifications may also help clarify why many quantitative studies on IPV perpetration report largely individualised risk factors, such as alcohol use, stress, and childhood

trauma. From a social constructionist perspective, these explanations are not just neutral or personal accounts—they are shaped by broader discourses that allow men to present themselves as shaped by difficult circumstances rather than as accountable perpetrators (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014). In doing so, Muehlenhard and Kimes (2014) argue that perpetrators may maintain a sense of social acceptability by positioning violence as an outcome of external pressures, rather than intentional harm. This process aligns with Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity, where power is not only exerted through dominance but also sustained through the kinds of narratives that frame male violence as justified or inevitable. In this way, the act of explaining violence becomes part of performing masculinity–one that preserves control, authority, and emotional detachment (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). From a feminist perspective, these rationalisations risk obscuring the underlying gendered power relations that facilitate IPV (Sultana, 2010; Walby, 1989). By focusing on individual pathology or trauma, these narratives draw attention away from the structural and cultural conditions that normalise male violence and allow it to continue unchallenged (Sultana, 2010; Walby, 1989).

5.4. Concluding discussion

Across the thematic findings of this review, it is evident that IPV in South Africa cannot be understood as a purely individual or interpersonal phenomenon. Rather, it is deeply embedded in structural conditions, institutional responses, and cultural norms. To synthesise the findings of this review in relation to the four guiding research questions, several key patterns emerged across the literature. These patterns not only illuminate the dominant constructions of IPV within the South African context but also reveal how survivors and perpetrators make sense of their experiences, how societal and structural forces shape IPV, and how coping strategies are informed by intersecting identities and contextual factors. By framing IPV through the lenses

of social constructionism, feminist theory, and hegemonic masculinities, this discussion foregrounds the intersecting dimensions of IPV in South Africa.

5.4.1. What are the general themes in the research literature on IPV about the factors that contribute to IPV in South Africa?

The reviewed literature consistently identifies a range of structural and interpersonal factors that contribute to IPV in South Africa. These include socioeconomic, cultural, and historical influences that intersect to create environments where IPV is normalised and sustained (Bolarinwa et al., 2023; Mthembu et al., 2021). Socioeconomic inequality, unemployment, and early exposure to violence are widely recognised as key risk factors, often increasing financial strain and dependency within intimate relationships (Gass et al., 2011). These conditions foster power imbalances, which may escalate into controlling or violent dynamics (Abrahams et al., 2006; Amaechi et al., 2021; Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; Gibbs et al., 2011; Hoosain & Robertson, 2023; Mathews et al., 2015; Shamu et al., 2016). Additionally, substance misuse also emerges consistently across studies as a significant trigger and justification for abuse (Gibbs et al., 2018; Jewkes et al., 2006; Shamu et al., 2016; Teitelman et al., 2017). Institutional responses to IPV also play a significant role. Several studies describe how police, social workers, and service providers often fail to intervene effectively, treating IPV as a private matter and thereby discouraging survivors from seeking help (Mkhonto et al., 2014; Hines & Jager, 2021). This contributes to the ongoing cycle of violence by reinforcing silence and inaction (Hines & Jager, 2021).

In addition to interpersonal factors and institutional responses, IPV is shaped by cultural norms, gender role socialisation, and hegemonic masculinity that position men as authority figures and primary providers (De Kwaadsteniet, 2017; Hoosain & Robertson, 2023; Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019). Here violence is often framed as a means of reasserting control in the face of perceived disrespect or emasculation (De Kwaadsteniet, 2017; Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke,

2019). This framing is reinforced through early socialisation in families, communities, and institutions such as religious organisations (Hattery, 2009; Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014). While these findings identify the drivers of IPV found in South African literature, the way in which they are framed in the literature also reveals deeper insights into how the phenomenon is socially constructed, a focus explored in the next section.

5.4.2. What do the identified themes in the research literature about factors contributing towards IPV in South Africa reveal about how this phenomenon is constructed?

When viewed through a social constructionist lens, the answer to how IPV is constructed becomes clear. The phenomenon is not presented in the literature as a neutral fact, but is actively built through specific, recurring discourses. It is constructed as a problem inherently linked to poverty and Black masculinities, while the violence in middle-class or White households is largely invisible (McVittie et al., 2017). It is constructed as culturally sanctioned through the emphasis on practices like *lobola*, often at the expense of a deeper critique of the universal patriarchy they reflect (Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). It is constructed as interpersonally triggered by substances or childhood trauma, which, while significant, can individualise a problem that is fundamentally structural. Therefore, the literature does not simply document IPV; it participates in shaping a narrative that locates the problem within specific bodies, cultures, and individuals, thereby diverting focus from the overarching systems of power that enable it.

When analysing how IPV is constructed in South Africa, the literature demonstrates that it is not a singular or individual concern, but rather a societal phenomenon shaped by larger cultural, historical, and institutional causes. The identified patterns in the literature show that IPV is profoundly established in South Africa's sociocultural fabric, where gendered power dynamics, economic inequality, and patriarchal norms shape how IPV is interpreted and accepted. Theoretical frameworks, including feminist theory, social constructionism, and hegemonic

masculinity, provide critical lenses to unpack the structural and ideological forces that contribute to the normalisation of IPV.

The reviewed literature emphasises the role of patriarchy, poverty, and apartheid's historical legacy in the development of IPV (Muluneh et al., 2021). Feminist theory contributes to understanding IPV as an expression of systemic gender hierarchies that support male dominance and female subordination (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Sultana, 2010). This theoretical lens focuses on how social institutions, from the family to the state, promote unequal power dynamics that justify violence against women (Sultana, 2010). Intersectionality expands on this analysis by demonstrating how IPV is exacerbated by race, class, and other forms of inequality (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 2013). In South Africa, the combination of colonialism, apartheid, economic inequality, and cultural patriarchy produces unique vulnerabilities for marginalised individuals, who frequently face IPV within a system of intersecting oppressions (Crenshaw, 2013). Thus, IPV must be viewed not only through a gendered lens but also through an intersectional perspective that demonstrates how diverse social identities influence the way individuals are exposed to and experience violence (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 2013; Graaff & Heinecken, 2017; Sultana, 2010).

Social constructionist perspectives illustrate how dominant discourses normalise IPV by shaping gender roles, relationships, and institutional responses (Strebel et al., 2006). These viewpoints emphasise that gender roles and religious norms are socially constructed and reinforced via everyday encounters, language, and institutional practices (Burr & Dick, 2017). Masculinity and femininity are expressed in ways that reinforce existing inequalities, with dominant ideas portraying men as powerful and women as submissive (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014). These norms are reinforced by media, cultural conventions, and interpersonal relationships, making IPV intelligible within a framework of expected gender behaviour (Burr & Dick, 2017; Lamb & Snodgrass, 2013).

Furthermore, social constructionism indicates how institutional discourse influences responses to IPV. As Muehlenhard and Kimes (2014) and Strebel et al. (2006) argue, societal norms frequently downplay IPV, portraying it as a private or interpersonal matter rather than a systemic issue. The language employed in police reports, judicial procedures, and social service investigations typically mirrors and perpetuates gendered power disparities, implicitly supporting male authority and female submission (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014). These institutional behaviours contribute to cultural attitudes that condone or minimise violence, making protest and accountability more difficult to achieve (Burr & Dick, 2017). This contributes to societal minimisation of IPV and silences opposing narratives that question the status quo (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014; Strebel et al., 2006).

The consistent association between IPV and low SES, childhood exposure to violence, and patriarchal norms reflects the dominant narrative in much of the South African literature. A striking finding in the literature is the disproportionate focus on IPV primarily as a problem within marginalised communities, especially among impoverished Black men (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). This creates a racialised and classed representation of violence that obscures its presence in a middle-class, White context (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Mshweshwe, 2020). These exclusions are not neutral; they give rise to a social narrative in which violence is viewed as a problem of the "other". This diverts attention away from how hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal ideology are present across all racial and socioeconomic contexts (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Mshweshwe, 2020).

While social constructionism explains how gender roles are created and sustained, hegemonic masculinity provides a specific content (the dominant ideals of manhood) that is constructed and valorised in ways that perpetuate violence (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The concept of hegemonic masculinity is thus fundamental in understanding how IPV is created and maintained. The reviewed literature shows that dominant masculine ideals (such as control,

toughness, sexual entitlement, and emotional stoicism) create an environment in which IPV is both justified and anticipated (Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). Men are socialised to these ideals from a young age, and deviations from them (such as financial insecurity or perceived emasculation) frequently result in violent attempts to reclaim control (Jewkes et al., 2009). An example of this masculine ideal is the breadwinner role (Mazibuko, 2017). The literature shows that when men experience financial insecurity or perceive themselves as failing in this provider role, it can result in violent attempts to reassert control and authority within intimate relationships (Mazibuko, 2017). Such responses are frequently reiterated by cultural narratives, reinforced by institutional practices, and endorsed by peers (Hattery, 2009). In this way, hegemonic masculinity impacts individual behaviour while also sustaining social understandings of masculinity that normalise and legitimise IPV (Mazibuko, 2017; Strebel et al., 2006).

5.4.3. What does the literature reveal about how victims/survivors make sense of IPV in the context of South Africa?

The reviewed literature demonstrates how survivors' understandings of IPV are affected by various cultural, relational, and emotional variables, highlighting that survivors' narratives are often experienced and understood in highly gendered ways (Amaechi et al., 2021; Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; Makongoza & Nduna, 2021; Slabbert, 2010). It becomes clear that many individuals do not perceive violence as an explicit violation but rather interpret it within prevailing social and relational contexts. For example, some survivors portray abuse as the product of their partner's difficulties, such as substance abuse, unresolved trauma, or emotional suppression, thereby distancing the abuse from the abuser (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; Slabbert, 2010). At the same time, cultural and religious narratives which encourage male dominance and female submission frequently become internalised, influencing survivors' perceptions of violence as acceptable or even justified (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003). Such

interpretations demonstrate not only individual explanations but also the impact of larger patriarchal ideologies in which perseverance, forgiveness, and family preservation are socially valued virtues for women (Amaechi et al., 2021; Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003).

From a social constructionist perspective, this meaning-making is not neutral (Strebel et al., 2006). Gender roles, religious values, and relational norms are socially constructed and constantly reproduced through interactions, institutions, and the media (Strebel et al., 2006). Survivors frequently reference culturally permitted relationship narratives that depict males as inherent leaders and women as caregivers or moral anchors (Jewkes et al., 2003). Additionally, feminist theory can be utilised to contextualise survivors' experiences as part of larger systems of gendered power (Walby, 1989; Sultana, 2010). Survivors frequently describe feeling accountable for the violence or for preserving the relationship, which has been formed by structural and symbolic inequities (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). Religious precepts, family pressure, and economic dependency can exacerbate these dynamics, deter help-seeking and encouraging silence (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). These narratives reflect what Sultana (2010) and Walby (1989) describe as the systemic reproduction of female subordination in both the private and public realms.

Despite this, many survivors displayed resilience, exhibiting dignity, autonomy, and a willingness to fight abuse even when confronted with overwhelming social standards (Hines & Jager, 2021; Mkhonto et al., 2014). Many women adopt coping strategies such as emotional detachment, confiding in friends or neighbours, and seeking spiritual or psychological strength (Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Hines & Jager, 2021).

However, survivors' attempts to seek help are frequently met with institutional inactivity. From a feminist perspective, such inaction indicates the continuance of patriarchal systems that fail to safeguard women and instead sustain the existing order (Sultana 2010; Walby 1989).

Govender (2023) contends that institutions consistently reinforce gender hierarchies by neglecting women's safety and shifting the weight of resolution back to victims. This is consistent with the findings of Mkhonto et al. (2014), who urged women to "talk it over as a family", underscoring the assumption that violence should be experienced in silence rather than challenged through official routes.

5.4.4. What does the literature reveal about how perpetrators of IPV make sense of their actions in the context of South Africa?

According to the reviewed literature, perpetrators of IPV in South Africa frequently interpret and justify their actions based on culturally sanctioned beliefs, gendered expectations, and structural disparities (Amaechi et al., 2021; Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003; De Kwaadsteniet, 2017; Gibbs et al., 2018). Rather than recognising their actions as abusive, perpetrators frequently justify them as a sort of punishment, a reaction to provocation, or a display of masculine identity. Other common explanations include drinking and drug abuse, disobedience, emotional distress, and early childhood experiences (De Kwaadsteniet, 2017; Gibbs et al., 2024; Gupta et al., 2008; Teitelman et al., 2017). These justifications commonly aim to reduce responsibility while promoting control and entitlement as justified responses to perceived threats and are not accidental but rather socially constructed within a context where patriarchal norms and hegemonic masculinity are deeply entrenched (Amaechi et al., 2021; De Kwaadsteniet, 2017; Lau & Stevens, 2012).

Meaning-making, from both social constructionist and feminist perspectives, is shaped by dominant cultural and institutional discourses that define acceptable gender roles and power dynamics (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014; Sultana, 2010). The literature revealed that in many South African contexts, IPV is not regarded as inappropriate or criminal conduct, but rather as a socially understandable (if not acceptable) expression of authority, especially in male-dominated families (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). When their power is challenged or women

are thought to be straying outside of culturally set gender boundaries, perpetrators may see violence as a valid means of regaining control (Hoosain & Robertson, 2023; Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019). Feminist theorists argue that such rationalisations are embedded in patriarchal structures that naturalise male dominance and delegitimise female agency (Sultana, 2010; Walby, 1989). As a result, violence becomes a means for men to reclaim power in the face of perceived emasculation, particularly in situations of poverty or unemployment, which jeopardise their status as providers (Mazibuko, 2017; Strebel et al., 2006).

Furthermore, the concept of hegemonic masculinity provides insight into how violent behaviour is not only tolerated but, in some situations, encouraged (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; McVittie et al., 2017). IPV is frequently linked to a particular masculine ideal that associates manhood with toughness, emotional control, and dominance (McVittie et al., 2017). Men may grow to see violence as a required, even expected, approach for exhibiting strength and retaining status both inside their relationships and in the larger community (Hattery, 2009; Strebel et al., 2006). This ideal is especially powerful in communities facing economic marginalisation when traditional forms of masculine identity (such as being the breadwinner) are difficult to achieve (Mazibuko, 2017; Strebel et al., 2006). In certain instances, violence may replace other forms of power, allowing men to reclaim authority and social standing (Amaechi et al., 2021; Mazibuko, 2017).

The research also highlights that some perpetrators downplay or minimise the seriousness of their conduct, which is often made possible by institutional failure (Hines & Jager, 2021; Mkhonto et al., 2014). When police, social workers, or courts downplay or ignore IPV, offenders may feel justified in their actions (Hines & Jager, 2021). This adds to a larger climate of impunity in which perpetrators are not only pardoned but also frequently unquestioned in how they comprehend or justify their conduct (Mkhonto et al., 2014). These findings emphasise

the significance of addressing not only the behaviours but also the ideologies and gender norms that justify IPV.

5.5. Summary

This chapter outlined the key findings of the systematic review, focusing on how IPV is represented in the South African research literature. The analysis was structured around several core themes, including the broader structural and social factors that shape IPV, the ways in which perpetrators justify their actions, and how survivors make sense of and cope with their experiences. These themes were explored using the theoretical frameworks of social constructionism, feminist theory, and hegemonic masculinity. The chapter also included a concluding discussion that brought together the main insights from the review in relation to the study's four research subquestions. In the next chapter, the overall conclusions of the study will be presented, along with a reflection on its contributions, limitations, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Introduction

The primary objective of this two-stage systematic review was to compile high-quality research evidence related to how IPV is constructed and understood in the literature about this phenomenon in the South African context. This final chapter brings the study to a close by summarising the key findings and reflecting on their significance in relation to the original aims and research questions. The chapter begins with an overview of the main results drawn from the thematic analysis, followed by a reminder of the study's focus and methodological approach. It then reflects critically on the design and process of the review, acknowledging both the strengths and limitations of the chosen methods. In doing so, it considers how credible and trustworthy the study is and what contributions it makes to the wider field of research on IPV in South Africa. Finally, the chapter outlines areas where further research is needed, particularly considering the gaps and silences identified in the literature.

6.2. Summary of Key Findings

This study explored how IPV is understood, experienced, and represented in the South African research literature. Drawing on a thematic analysis of 30 peer-reviewed studies, the findings were interpreted through the lenses of social constructionism, feminism, and hegemonic masculinity. Five key themes emerged, each illuminating the multifaceted nature of IPV and the ways in which it is sustained by intersecting interpersonal and structural forces.

Firstly, the review highlighted how IPV is deeply embedded within intersecting structural and social inequalities, with poverty, education, race, and institutional inaction playing a significant role in shaping both the occurrence of IPV and the social responses to it (Abrahams et al., 2006; Amaechi et al., 2021; Bolarinwa et al., 2023; Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Gass et al., 2011; Gupta et al., 2008; Jewkes et al., 2006; Jewkes et al., 2011; Mathews et al., 2015; Mkhonto et

al., 2014; Mmolokoe & Smit, 2024; Mthembu et al., 2021; Slabbert, 2010). SES plays a critical role in shaping vulnerability, with women in impoverished communities often remaining in abusive relationships due to financial dependence and limited support networks (Gibbs et al., 2024; Makongoza & Nduna, 2021). However, these risks are not only economic. The enduring effects of apartheid continue to shape access to opportunity along racial lines, meaning that Black South African women, especially in rural or under-resourced areas, face structural disadvantages that exacerbate their exposure to IPV (Mthembu et al., 2021; Seekings & Nattrass, 2008). This pattern is also visible in how IPV is framed in the literature, with much of the research focusing on disadvantaged Black communities (e.g., Amaechi et al., 2021; Mathews et al., 2015; Zembe et al., 2015). While this reflects a genuine concentration of vulnerability, it also risks reinforcing narrow or stereotypical representations, potentially obscuring the prevalence of IPV across more privileged or racially diverse groups (Seekings & Nattrass, 2008; Shefer et al., 2015).

These intersecting inequalities influence not only the lived experiences of IPV but also how institutions respond to it. Participants in several studies described dismissive attitudes from police and social services, where IPV was often treated as a private or trivial matter (Hines & Jager, 2021; Mkhonto et al., 2014). Such responses are not isolated but are shaped by broader patriarchal ideologies that normalise male authority and undermine the seriousness of violence against women (Govender, 2023; Sultana, 2010). In contexts where victims are already economically or socially marginalised, access to justice becomes even more limited, further entrenching cycles of silence and disempowerment (Mthembu et al., 2021).

The second theme addresses individual and interpersonal factors associated with IPV, particularly substance use, emotional stress, and exposure to violence during childhood (Gass et al., 2011; Gibbs et al., 2018, 2024; Shamu et al., 2016; Teitelman et al., 2017). Alcohol was commonly cited as a trigger for violent outbursts and used as a justification for abusive

behaviour, particularly when coupled with rigid gender expectations (Gibbs et al., 2024). Many studies noted that perpetrators had histories of witnessing or experiencing violence at home, suggesting a normalisation of abusive dynamics over time (Gass et al., 2011). While it might seem counterintuitive that exposure to violence would foster its continuation, theories of social construction and hegemonic masculinity offer insight: early experiences help construct ideas about power, control, and masculinity. Within this framework, violence becomes a learned and socially reinforced method of asserting dominance, especially in environments where emotional expression is suppressed and control is valorised (Burr & Dick, 2017; Hunnicutt, 2009; Morrell et al., 2012).

Survivor narratives formed the third theme, offering insight into how IPV is made sense of within cultural, religious, and community frameworks (Makongoza & Nduna, 2021; Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019; Slabbert, 2010). In many cases, IPV was presented as a regrettable but bearable part of romantic or marital life, particularly when ideas of perseverance, sacrifice, and family honour were valued (Makongoza & Nduna, 2021; Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019). From a feminist and social constructionist standpoint, these meanings are not fixed, but shaped by dominant discourses that valorise female endurance, silence, and self-sacrifice (Burr & Dick, 2017; Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014). These cultural scripts align with hegemonic masculinity, where male control is exerted subtly through restrictions on women's mobility, finances, and social connections (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Jewkes et al., 2015). In spite of this, many survivors showed agency by using a variety of coping mechanisms, such as religious faith and resilience, as well as seeking treatment and ultimately leaving abusive situations (Amaechi et al., 2021; Dekel & Andipatin, 2016; Makongoza & Nduna, 2021).

The fourth theme centred on the ways in which perpetrators rationalised their actions. Across the studies, men commonly attributed their behaviour to external stressors, such as provocation, unemployment, or emotional trauma, thus distancing themselves from moral responsibility

(Amaechi et al., 2021; De Kwaadsteniet, 2017; Lau & Stevens, 2012). From a social constructionist perspective, these justifications are not neutral; they reflect and reproduce dominant discourses that allow men to maintain a sense of victimhood or entitlement while evading accountability (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014). These narratives are further underpinned by patriarchal logics that frame violence as a legitimate response to disobedience, disrespect, or threats to male authority (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Jewkes et al., 2015).

Traditional gender roles were also referenced in these accounts, with violence presented as discipline or even a misguided kind of affection (De Kwaadsteniet, 2017; Mathews et al., 2015). These behaviours do not evolve spontaneously; they are moulded by broader social expectations that associate love with control and domination with masculinity (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 2014). According to feminist scholars, such rationalisations obscure the systemic basis of IPV by portraying it as contextual or personal rather than structural (Sultana, 2010; Walby, 1989). In doing so, they strengthen the conditions that allow for and sustain such violence.

Taken together, these themes highlight that IPV in South Africa cannot be understood solely as a private or individual matter. Rather, it is produced and sustained through wider systems of inequality that intersect across economic, cultural, and institutional levels. The findings show how dominant gender roles, patriarchal ideologies, and structural marginalisation shape both the perpetration of IPV and the responses to it. Drawing on feminist, social constructionist, and hegemonic masculinity perspectives, this review has shown that IPV is not an isolated expression of conflict but a reflection of entrenched hierarchies of power, control, and inequality. Any response to IPV must therefore attend to these broader forces, addressing not only interpersonal violence but the social and structural conditions that allow it to persist.

6.3. Revisiting the Focus and Aims

The focus of this study was to examine how IPV is constructed and understood in the literature about this phenomenon in the South African context. Using a qualitative systematic review, this study applied thematic analysis to identify and interpret common themes across the selected studies. In doing so, the following subquestions served as a guide for the study:

1. What are the general themes in the research literature on IPV about the factors that contribute to IPV in South Africa?
2. What do the identified themes in the research literature about factors contributing towards IPV in South Africa reveal about how this phenomenon is constructed?
3. What does the research literature reveal about how victims/survivors make sense of IPV in the context of South Africa?
4. What does the research literature reveal about how perpetrators of IPV make sense of their actions in the context of South Africa?

6.4. Reflecting on the Design and Methodology

This study used a two-stage systematic review to explore the literature on IPV in the South African context. The rationale behind this approach was to gather a comprehensive understanding of how IPV is constructed, understood, and experienced, using both quantitative and qualitative studies to address the different research subquestions. The first stage focused on quantitative studies to explore broad trends and patterns related to IPV risk factors, while the second stage focused on qualitative studies to capture more in-depth narratives from survivors and perpetrators.

The choice to conduct a qualitative systematic review using thematic analysis provided a methodical but adaptable framework for finding recurrent themes in the literature. The study was able to critically analyse the institutional and social discourses that support the main

themes in addition to identifying them by using theoretical lenses including social constructionism, feminism, and hegemonic masculinity. This method made it possible to interpret the results in a more nuanced way, especially when it came to how structural inequity, cultural norms, and gendered power dynamics influence IPV.

Only peer-reviewed research from South Africa was chosen in order to maintain the analysis's contextual foundation and direct relevance to the geopolitical and cultural setting in which IPV takes place. Overall, the methodological approach enabled both depth and breadth in the review of existing literature and was appropriate to the study's objectives. Drawing conclusions regarding how IPV is framed and interpreted in South African research was made possible by the combination of a theoretically informed thematic analysis and a structured systematic review procedure.

6.5. Limitations and Contributions of the Study

While the systematic review approach allowed for a structured and in-depth analysis of the South African IPV literature, there were constraints that may have influenced the scope and depth of the findings.

One limitation was the choice to only include peer-reviewed publications written in English. This could have resulted in the exclusion of important studies published in other languages or accessible through grey literature, such as reports from NGOs or community-based organisations.

Moreover, the researcher's prior beliefs and understanding could have influenced the selection process of studies for the review, potentially introducing selection bias and limiting the study. However, this limitation was mitigated by applying a critical appraisal tool.

Lastly, because the study relied exclusively on secondary data, it was impossible to interact directly with participants or investigate their experiences in greater depth. Although the qualitative results from previous research were rich and insightful, other groups' voices (such as LGBTQ+ survivors) were mostly absent from the sample. This limits the findings' generalisability to diverse social environments. Despite these limitations, the study provides a meaningful contribution by offering a theoretically grounded and critically engaged synthesis of how IPV is constructed and understood within South African academic literature.

6.6. Criteria for Validation and Credibility

To ensure the validity and credibility of this systematic review, certain critical criteria were followed throughout the procedure. These procedures were taken to guarantee that the findings are valid, and accurate, and can be used to guide future research on IPV in South Africa.

Firstly, the process of selecting studies was carried out in a transparent manner, with clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. These criteria were designed to ensure that only studies directly relevant to the review were included. A comprehensive search was conducted across multiple academic databases using specific keywords related to IPV in South Africa. Any duplicate records were removed, and the full texts of the selected studies were carefully reviewed for eligibility. Every step of this process was thoroughly documented to ensure transparency and reproducibility.

Secondly, to ensure the quality of the studies included in this review, several established tools were used to assess their methodological rigor. Quality assessment tools, such as the JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Quantitative and Qualitative Research, were applied to evaluate each study. This process ensured that only studies with sound research designs and appropriate methodologies were included, strengthening the credibility of the review's findings.

Furthermore, to ensure clarity and consistency throughout the review, essential terms were thoroughly defined and utilised consistently. Definitions of words such as “intimate partner violence”, “hegemonic masculinity”, and “patriarchal norms” were properly established and followed, eliminating the possibility of misinterpretation and making sure that the findings were based on a clear conceptual framework.

Lastly, throughout the review process, a commitment to reflexivity was maintained to ensure that the analysis was not unduly influenced by personal biases or assumptions. Given my academic focus in counselling psychology, I was mindful of how my perspectives could influence the interpretation of the data. To minimise potential bias, I regularly sought feedback from my research supervisor, ensuring that the analysis remained objective and grounded in the research process.

6.7. Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the gaps identified in the literature, there are several areas where further research is needed. Future research could benefit from a deeper focus on the experiences of IPV in specific, yet under-studied, communities. For example, much of the existing research focuses on IPV in low-income or marginalised populations. More research is needed to investigate the patterns of IPV within white, middle-class groups. Moreover, while IPV is becoming more widely recognised in Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and other sexual and gender minorities (LGBTQ+) communities, there is still a lack of research into the unique issues that survivors encounter. Future research must intentionally explore the dynamics of IPV in under-represented populations, including LGBTQ+ partnerships and across socio-economic and racial groups, to challenge the current pathologising narrative. Research into the intersection of IPV, sexual orientation, and gender identity could help close gaps in services and support networks for LGBTQ+ individuals.

6.8. Summary

This chapter brought together the key findings of the study and reflected on their broader significance. Through a systematic review of the South African IPV literature, the analysis highlighted how structural inequality, hegemonic gender norms, and cultural narratives shape both the occurrence of IPV and how it is understood by survivors and perpetrators. The study also reflected on the methodological approach and its limitations, noting the challenges and value of synthesising qualitative data from existing research. Despite these limitations, the study contributes a critical, theoretically informed perspective that interrogates dominant narratives and draws attention to what is often excluded or overlooked in IPV discourse. The chapter concluded by considering the credibility of the study and offering recommendations for future research that can further unpack the complexities of IPV across different social contexts in South Africa.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Template of the abstract summary sheet

Authors & year of publication	Reference	Clear statement of research aims	Appropriate methodology	Appropriate research design	Reflexivity	Ethical issues considered	Were the research findings clear?	Is the research valuable?	Inclusion criteria met	Included in next phase

Appendix B: JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Quantitative Research

Reviewer_____ Date_____

Author_____Year_____ Record Number_____

	Yes	No	Unclear	Not applicable
1. Were the criteria for inclusion in the sample clearly defined?	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Were the study subjects and the setting described in detail?	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Was the exposure measured in a valid and reliable way?	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Were objective, standard criteria used for measurement of the condition?	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Were confounding factors identified?	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Were strategies to deal with confounding factors stated?	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Were the outcomes measured in a valid and reliable way?	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Was appropriate statistical analysis used?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Overall appraisal: Include ☐ Exclude ☐ Seek further info ☐

Comments (Including reason for exclusion)

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_____
_____

Appendix C: JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research

Reviewer_____ Date_____

Author_____Year_____ Record Number_____

		Yes	No	Unclear	Not applicable
1.	Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology?	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.	Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives?	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.	Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.	Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.	Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results?	☐	☐	☐	☐
6.	Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?	☐	☐	☐	☐
7.	Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice- versa, addressed?	☐	☐	☐	☐
8.	Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented?	☐	☐	☐	☐
9.	Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.	Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Overall appraisal: Include ☐ Exclude ☐ Seek further info ☐

Comments (Including reason for exclusion)

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Appendix D: Data extraction spreadsheet (General summary of the included studies)

	Author(s) and year of publication	Title	Sample and setting	Study objective(s)	Study design	Data collection	Data analysis method
1.	Abrahams et al. (2006)	Intimate partner violence: Prevalence and risk factors for men in Cape Town, South Africa.	1,378 men employed across three municipalities in Cape Town, South Africa.	To examine the prevalence and risk factors of IPV among men in Cape Town.	Cross-sectional study	Interviews using a computer-generated random sample technique to recruit participants.	Descriptive statistics and logistic regression
2.	Bolarinwa et al. (2023)	Spatial distribution and predictors of lifetime experience of intimate partner violence among women in South Africa.	2,410 women of reproductive age who had ever experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime in South Africa.	To assess the spatial distribution and predictors of lifetime IPV among women in South Africa.	Cross-sectional study	Survey using secondary data from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), which relied on a stratified two-stage sampling method to ensure national representativeness.	Spatial analysis, multivariate logistic regression
3.	Gass et al. (2011)	Gender differences in risk for intimate partner violence among South African adults.	1,715 married or cohabiting adults in South Arica who took part of the South Africa Stress and Health (SASH) study.	To analyse gender differences in risk for intimate partner violence victimization and perpetration according to childhood and adult risk factors.	Cross-sectional study	Surveys using data from the SASH study that used multiple-stage area probability sampling.	Descriptive statistics and logistic regression
4.	Gibbs et al. (2018)	Associations between poverty, mental health and substance use, gender power, and intimate partner violence amongst young (18-30) women and men in urban informal settlements in South Africa: A cross-sectional	Young people (18–30 years) residing in urban informal settlements in Durban, South Africa that formed part of the Stepping Stones and Creating Futures	To investigate associations between poverty, mental health, substance use, gender power, and IPV.	Cross-sectional study	Self-completed questionnaires using a cluster randomised sample strategy.	Structural equation modelling

	Author(s) and year of publication	Title	Sample and setting	Study objective(s)	Study design	Data collection	Data analysis method
		study and structural equation model.	cluster randomized control trial.				
5.	Gibbs et al. (2024)	Couples, alcohol use and experience of intimate partner violence among young women in urban informal settlements in Durban, South Africa: A mixed methods study.	Young women in urban informal settlements in Durban, South Africa.	To explore the relationship between alcohol use and IPV in couples.	Mixed methods study	The study employed self-completed questionnaires using convenience sampling.	Qualitative and quantitative data analysis
6.	Gupta et al. (2008)	Physical violence against intimate partners and related exposures to violence among South African men.	South African men who had ever been married or had ever cohabited with a female partner.	To examine physical IPV and related exposure to violence among South African men.	Cross-sectional study	Survey (South Africa Stress and Health Study), which used a multistage area probability sampling method to select participants.	Descriptive statistics and logistic regression
7.	Jewkes et al. (2006)	Rape perpetration by young, rural South African men: Prevalence, patterns and risk factors.	Men aged 15–26 years residing in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.	To explore the prevalence, patterns, and risk factors for rape perpetration by young men.	Cross-sectional study	Questionnaires using data from the Stepping Stones randomized controlled trial, which employed a cluster random sampling method.	Descriptive statistics and regression analysis
8.	Jewkes et al. (2011)	Gender Inequitable Masculinity and Sexual Entitlement in Rape Perpetration South Africa: Findings of a Cross-Sectional Study.	1,737 South African men from the general adult population.	To examine gender inequitable masculinity and sexual entitlement as risk factors for rape perpetration.	Cross-sectional study	Self-completed questionnaires with using Audio Enhanced Personal Digital Assistants. Participants were recruited using a two-stage random sampling method.	Statistical analysis using chi-square and regression
9.	Mason-Jones et al. (2016)	Intimate partner violence in early adolescence: The role of	Young adolescents (N=2 839) from 41 public high schools in	To explore the role of gender, socioeconomic factors, and the school in	Cross-sectional study	A self-administered paper questionnaire using a two-stage	Descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis

	Author(s) and year of publication	Title	Sample and setting	Study objective(s)	Study design	Data collection	Data analysis method
		gender, socioeconomic factors and the school.	the Western Cape region of South Africa.	IPV during early adolescence.		random sampling method.	
10.	Mthembu et al. (2021)	Prevalence and factors associated with intimate partner violence among adolescent girls and young women in South Africa: Findings from the 2017 population-based cross-sectional survey.	Adolescent girls and young women (aged 15–24 years) in South Africa.	To investigate the prevalence and factors associated with IPV among adolescent girls and young women.	Cross-sectional survey	Data from the South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence, Behaviour, and Communication Survey, completed in 2017. Participants were selected using a multistage stratified random sampling procedure.	Descriptive and multivariate analysis
11.	Shamu et al. (2016)	Prevalence and risk factors for intimate partner violence among Grade 8 learners in urban South Africa: Baseline analysis from the Skhokho Supporting Success cluster randomised controlled trial.	2,839 Grade 8 learners from 41 public high schools in around Pretoria, South Africa.	To explore IPV prevalence and risk factors among school learners.	Baseline analysis from the Skhokho Supporting Success cluster randomized controlled trial	Self-completed questionnaires using a cluster random sampling method to recruit participants.	Descriptive statistics and regression analysis
12.	Teitelman et al. (2017).	Childhood sexual abuse and sociodemographic factors prospectively associated with intimate partner violence perpetration among South African heterosexual men.	871 men who reported GBV and were residents of townships near East London in Eastern Cape Province, South Africa	To explore if a history of childhood sexual abuse and other sociodemographic characteristics were investigated as predictors of severe intimate partner violence against women.	Prospective cohort study.	Secondary data from a randomized controlled trial of an HIV risk reduction intervention. Self-completed questionnaires using audio computer-assisted self-interviewing (ACASI).	Longitudinal logistic generalized estimating equations
13.	Zembe et al. (2015)	Intimate partner violence, relationship power inequity and the role of sexual and social risk	Quantitative: 259 young women (ages 16–24 years) residing	This study aims to investigate the incidence and factors that contribute	Mixed methods study	The quantitative data was gathered from a wider bio-	Quantitative: RDSAT 5.6 software for weighted population

	Author(s) and year of publication	Title	Sample and setting	Study objective(s)	Study design	Data collection	Data analysis method
		factors in the production of violence among young women who have multiple sexual partners in a peri-urban setting in South Africa.	in the Cape Winelands region, Western Cape. Qualitative: 36 young women (16–24 years) and 6 men (23–32 years) recruited at local alcohol-serving venues in the Cape Winelands region.	to IPV, as well as the role of relationship power imbalances, sexual and social risk factors, in facilitating violence among young women aged 16-24 who disclosed having more than one partner in the previous three months in a peri-urban area of the Western Cape, South Africa.		behavioural survey (BBS) of women with several sexual partners. Qualitative: Focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Participants were recruited using Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS)	estimates and multiple logistic regression. Qualitative: content analysis
14.	Amaechi et al. (2021)	Feminist reflections on the impact of the South African national COVID-19 lockdown on the upsurge of gender based violence in Mahwelereng Township of Limpopo Province, South Africa	Residents of Mahwelereng Township, Limpopo Province, South Africa	To explore the impact of the South African COVID-19 lockdown on GBV.	Qualitative feminist reflection	Interviews using purposive and snowball sampling techniques to recruit participants	Thematic content analysis
15.	Boonzaier and de La Rey (2003)	“He's a man, and I'm a woman” cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity in south African Women's narratives of violence.	15 women between the ages of 30 and 52 years from Mitchell’s Plain, in the Western Cape province of South Africa.	To examine cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity in women’s narratives of violence.	Qualitative narrative study	In-depth interviews using purposive sampling.	Narrative and thematic analysis
16.	De Kwaadsteniet (2017)	Male perpetrators’ construction of masculine identity: Attitudes and beliefs on intimate-partner violence	12 men who had been apprehended for a domestic violence-related offence and referred, by the court or the South African Police Service, to Khulisa Social	To examine male perpetrators’ constructions of their masculine identity, and to determine how this influences their attitudes and beliefs on intimate-partner violence.	Qualitative study	Semi-structured interviews using purposive sampling.	Thematic and discourse analysis

	Author(s) and year of publication	Title	Sample and setting	Study objective(s)	Study design	Data collection	Data analysis method
			Solutions to attend a diversion programme in Mitchell's Plain and Gugulethu.				
17.	Dekel and Andipatin (2016).	Abused Women's Understandings of Intimate Partner Violence and the Link to Intimate Femicide	Seven South African women, aged 23 to 50 years, with a history of different manifestations of IPV	To explore how women survivors of intimate partner violence understand the abuse they endured and the possible link to intimate femicide	Exploratory qualitative research design	Semi structured interviews using purposive sampling.	Thematic analysis
18.	Hines and Jager (2021)	Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic.	Women survivors of IPV and social workers who facilitated telephonic counselling during the pandemic. 7 participants, 4 were survivors of IPV and 3 were social workers	To explore women's experiences of IPV and telephonic counselling during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Qualitative study framed by a decolonial feminist framework and narrative approach	Semi-structured narrative interviews using purposive sampling.	Decolonial, Intersectional Narrative Analysis (DINA)
19.	Hoosain and Robertson (2023)	Men's narratives of gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic: Oppressor and oppressed.	Eleven men who committed acts of GBV during the pandemic, as well as 15 social workers and police officers who work in three rural regions in the Western Cape, South Africa.	To explore men's narratives of GBV during COVID-19 and the professionals collaborating with the men to include the views of perpetrators in GBV policy and practice.	A qualitative case study design with feminism used as the theoretical framework.	Semi structured interviews using purposive sampling.	Narrative and thematic analysis
20.	Lau and Stevens (2012)	Textual transformations of subjectivity in men's talk of gender-based violence.	12 men from three men's groups in Johannesburg, South Africa. Participants comprised a convenience sample of 1 'white' and 11 'Black' men.	To investigate the reasons for men's aggressive acts against their intimate female partners.	Qualitative study	In-depth interviews using convenience sampling.	Discourse analysis

	Author(s) and year of publication	Title	Sample and setting	Study objective(s)	Study design	Data collection	Data analysis method
21.	Leburu-Masigo (2019)	Urban and rural women's experiences of intimate partner violence.	30 Women from the Ngaka Modiri Molema District, Northwest, South Africa.	To investigate and explain the actual experiences of IPV among women in both urban and rural areas.	Qualitative study	In-depth interviews and focus group discussions with semi-structured questions using purposive sampling.	Thematic content analysis
22.	Makongoza and Nduna (2021)	Awareness and rejection accounts of intimate partner violence by young women in Soweto, Johannesburg, South Africa.	Young women from South Africa, aged 13 to 23 years	To investigate the perceptions and experiences of young women in Soweto, Johannesburg.	Qualitative, exploratory research	In-depth semi structured interviews using purposive sampling.	Thematic and discourse analysis
23.	Mathews et al. (2015)	'So now I'm the man': Intimate partner femicide and its interconnections with expressions of masculinities in South Africa.	20 men, aged 18–51 years, who were imprisoned for killing an intimate partner in two prisons in the Western Cape Province, South Africa.	To better comprehend men who murder their partners, investigate how males justified their use of violence, and examine how they interpreted the circumstances that led to the murder.	Qualitative study	In-depth semi-structured interviews using purposive sampling.	Thematic analysis
24.	Mkhonto et al. (2014)	Experiences of women on intimate partner violence in a public hospital in Tshwane, South Africa: gender-based violence.	Ten women experiencing IPV were selected at a public hospital in Tshwane, South Africa.	To investigate the experiences of women with IPV in a public hospital located in Tshwane, South Africa.	Qualitative study	In-depth semi-structured interviews using purposive sampling.	Content analysis
25.	Mmolokoe and Smit (2024)	Social determinants of gender-based violence perpetrated by men in the North West province, South Africa.	10 men from the Ngaka Modiri Molema district and 10 social workers from each of the districts (Ngaka Modiri Molema, Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, Dr. Ruth Segomotsi Mompati, and Bojanala) in the North West Province.	To analyze social determinants of GBV perpetration by men.	Qualitative study	Telephonic in-depth interviews using purposive sampling.	Thematic analysis

	Author(s) and year of publication	Title	Sample and setting	Study objective(s)	Study design	Data collection	Data analysis method
26.	Neshunzhi et al. (2022)	A Rare Phenomenon: Experiences of Abused Men by Partners in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, South Africa	Seven men from the Vhembe district in Limpopo South Africa.	To investigate partner abuse experiences of men in South Africa's Vhembe District, Limpopo Province.	A qualitative explorative descriptive and contextual research design.	In-depth interviews using purposive sampling.	Thematic analysis
27.	Othilia et al. (2021)	"It is shameful": Experiences of physically abused men by their female partners in a rural community of South Africa.	Ten married men, ages 32 to 56, from a rural community in Limpopo, South Africa.	To investigate the experiences of married males who have been physically abused by their wives.	Qualitative study	In-depth interviews using convenience sampling.	Thematic analysis
28.	Radzilani-Makatu and Chauke (2019)	Gender-based violence: exploring the concept through the eyes of abused married women.	Ten Tshivenda (5) and Xitsonga-speaking (5) women between the ages of 35 and 55 from the Vhembe District of South Africa.	This study examined how Tshivenda and Xitsonga-speaking women in abusive relationships perceive gender-based violence.	Qualitative exploratory design	In-depth interviews using purposive sampling.	Thematic analysis
29.	Selowa et al. (2022)	Experiences of Young Males on Gender-Based Violence at a Selected Village in Limpopo Province, South Africa.	Ten young males between the ages of 18 and 35 who had suffered GBV residing in the Lwamondo village in Limpopo, South Africa.	The study investigated the GBV experiences of young men in Lwamondo Village, Limpopo.	Qualitative study	In-depth unstructured interviews using purposive sampling.	Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).
30.	Slabbert (2010)	The experiences of low-income female survivor of domestic violence	Twenty women, between the ages of 23 and 49, residing in Cape Town and not earning more than R4000 per month.	To better understand the experiences of low-income female survivors of domestic abuse by concentrating on their coping strategies and environmental resources.	Qualitative study	In-depth interviews using purposive sampling.	Thematic analysis

Appendix E: Data extraction spreadsheet (Outcome and applicability of the included studies)

	Author and year of publication	Title	Study design	Findings	Relevance to topic
1.	Abrahams et al. (2006)	Intimate partner violence: Prevalence and risk factors for men in Cape Town, South Africa.	Cross-sectional study	• A high prevalence of intimate partner violence against women, with 42.3% of men reporting physical violence against a partner in the past 10 years and 8.8% reporting physical violence in the past year. • Several key risk factors for men's use of intimate partner violence, including justifying hitting women, having frequent conflict with partners, and conflict over the man's infidelity. • The importance of addressing gender inequality and the normative use of violence as underlying factors for men's violence against intimate partners.	• The study estimates the prevalence of IPV in South Africa while highlighting major risk factors, including as violence-normalizing attitudes and beliefs, relationship dynamics, and infidelity issues. • It emphasises how gender disparity and cultural tolerance give rise to the justification for beating women, with violence viewed as an acceptable dispute resolution.
2.	Bolarinwa et al. (2023)	Spatial distribution and predictors of lifetime experience of intimate partner violence among women in South Africa.	Cross-sectional study	• IPV varied within South Africa, with Western Cape, Free State, and Eastern Cape identified as significant hotspots for IPV. • Women from wealthier households were less likely to experience IPV compared to those from poorer households. • Cohabiting women and previously married women were at higher risk of experiencing IPV compared to currently married women.	The study highlights important risk variables for men's use of IPV, such as wealth inequality and marriage status, and indicates that structural injustices such as impoverishment and marital instability contributes to the high incidence of IPV in South Africa.

	Author and year of publication	Title	Study design	Findings	Relevance to topic
3.	Gass et al. (2011)	Gender differences in risk for intimate partner violence among South African adults.	Cross-sectional study	• Women were significantly more likely than men to report IPV victimization, while rates of perpetration were similar between genders. • Risk factors for IPV differed by gender, with men more likely to report predictors for perpetration and women more likely to report predictors for victimization. • Alcohol abuse/dependence was a significant risk factor for both perpetration and victimization across genders.	• It contributes to the research questions by investigating the causes and conditions of IPV, with a focus on gender-specific indicators of risk including drinking. • It emphasises how gender inequalities in reporting IPV reveal power disparities and societal norms that normalise or conceal behaviours. • The findings also address gender disparities by demonstrating how gendered norms impact susceptibility and experiences.
4.	Gibbs et al. (2018)	Associations between poverty, mental health and substance use, gender power, and intimate partner violence amongst young (18-30) women and men in urban informal settlements in South Africa: A cross-sectional study and structural equation model.	Cross-sectional study	• Household food insecurity was associated with increased intimate partner violence (IPV) experience for women, but not directly associated with IPV perpetration for men. • For men, factors associated with IPV perpetration were more strongly linked to economic provision and attempts to provide, rather than absolute experiences of food insecurity. • Gender inequitable attitudes and male controlling behaviours were central drivers of IPV for both women and men.	• The study associates food insecurity with IPV in women, while systemic variables underline its prevalence. • Gendered attitudes and male dominance were found to be major contributors to IPV, with economic hardship and preconceptions recognised as significant risk factors for male perpetrators.
5.	Gibbs et al (2024)	Couples, alcohol use and experience of intimate partner violence among young women in urban informal settlements in Durban, South Africa: A mixed methods study.	Mixed methods study	• Among young people living in urban informal settlements in South Africa, alcohol use was common and where heavy alcohol use was present in relationships, it	• The study examines IPV prevalence, especially among young people in urban informal settlements with high alcohol consumption.

	Author and year of publication	Title	Study design	Findings	Relevance to topic
				was associated with higher rates of women's experience of intimate partner violence (IPV). • Participants described both direct pathways linking alcohol to conflict in relationships, such as through disinhibition and men's inability to fulfil financial obligations, as well as indirect pathways through the association between alcohol, respectability, and cheating, and young men's attempts to control their female partner.	• It links alcohol to conflict, highlighting disinhibition and economic strain as factors in male IPV perpetration. • The research also identifies alcohol-related behavioural and relational risks, particularly men's control over their partners.
6.	Gupta et al. (2008)	Physical violence against intimate partners and related exposures to violence among South African men.	Cross-sectional study	• Over a quarter (27.5%) of South African men reported perpetrating physical violence against their most recent female intimate partner. • Men who witnessed parental violence were nearly 4 times more likely to perpetrate violence against their intimate partners. • Men who experienced physical abuse as a child were over 3 times more likely to perpetrate violence against their intimate partners.	• The study highlights the high prevalence of IPV among men in South Africa and identifies key risk factors like childhood abuse and witnessing parental violence.
7.	Jewkes et al. (2006)	Rape perpetration by young, rural South African men: Prevalence, patterns and risk factors.	Cross-sectional study	• Rape perpetration was highly prevalent among the young men surveyed, with 16.3% reporting having raped a non-partner or participated in gang rape, and 8.4% reporting having raped an intimate partner.	• The study focusses on the frequency of sexual violence in IPV, showing major risk factors for men such as negative childhood experiences, higher socioeconomic position, and risky behaviours.

	Author and year of publication	Title	Study design	Findings	Relevance to topic
				• Both types of rape were associated with adverse childhood experiences, higher socioeconomic status, and engagement in other risky behaviours like physical partner violence, transactional sex, and having more sexual partners.	• It demonstrates how systemic gender imbalance and violent normalisation contribute to sexual violence.
8.	Jewkes et al. (2011)	Gender Inequitable Masculinity and Sexual Entitlement in Rape Perpetration South Africa: Findings of a Cross-Sectional Study.	Cross-sectional study	• Over 27% of men in the sample reported having raped a woman, indicating a very high prevalence of rape perpetration. • The authors conclude that population-based prevention measures are essential to complement criminal justice responses, and that addressing gender inequity and dominant ideas of masculinity are key to rape prevention.	• The high rate of rape emphasises the seriousness of IPV, particularly sexual assault. • Gender disparity and toxic masculinity were found to be important contributing factors, reflecting cultural forces that encourage men's use of IPV.
9.	Mason-Jones et al. (2016)	Intimate partner violence in early adolescence: The role of gender, socioeconomic factors and the school.	Cross-sectional study	• 10% of participants reported perpetrating physical violence and 5.9% sexual violence in their intimate relationships in the previous 6 months, with higher rates of perpetration and victimization reported by boys compared to girls. • Perpetration of physical and sexual IPV was associated with being a victim, higher age, low scores on school connectedness and feelings of school safety, and more negative feelings about school appearance. • Victimization of physical and sexual IPV was associated with being a perpetrator, having	• The research conducted identifies several risk factors for juvenile IPV, including bad school experiences and detachment. • It demonstrates that, in addition to individual behaviours, structural factors such as school environment and social integration contribute to youth IPV.

	Author and year of publication	Title	Study design	Findings	Relevance to topic
				repeated a school year, and lower scores on feelings of school safety.	
10.	Mthembu et al. (2021)	Prevalence and factors associated with intimate partner violence among adolescent girls and young women in South Africa: Findings from the 2017 population-based cross-sectional survey.	Cross-sectional survey	• The prevalence of lifetime physical intimate partner violence (IPV) experience among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) aged 15-24 years in South Africa was 13.1%. • Lifetime physical IPV experience was inversely associated with residing in high socioeconomic status (SES) households and residing in rural informal/tribal areas compared to urban areas. • AGYW experiencing lifetime physical IPV had higher odds of reporting psychological distress compared to their counterparts.	• The study suggests that socioeconomic and geographic factors impact IPV, with rural and low-income areas possibly fostering gender inequity and violence as normative.
11.	Shamu et al. (2016)	Prevalence and risk factors for intimate partner violence among Grade 8 learners in urban South Africa: Baseline analysis from the Skhokho Supporting Success cluster randomised controlled trial.	Baseline analysis of a cluster randomized controlled trial	• There was a high prevalence of physical, emotional and sexual intimate partner violence (IPV) experience by girls (30.9%) and perpetration by boys (39.5%). • Factors associated with girls' experience and boys' perpetration of IPV included childhood trauma, gender inequitable attitudes, corporal punishment at home and school, alcohol use, and poor school engagement.	• This research emphasises the high prevalence of IPV in teen relationships, which affects both young women (victims) and young men (perpetrators). • Male respondents' risk factors include inadequate school attendance, childhood trauma, gender unjust beliefs, alcohol usage, and the use of corporal punishment.
12.	Teitelman et al. (2017).	Childhood sexual abuse and sociodemographic factors prospectively associated with intimate partner violence perpetration among South African heterosexual men.	Prospective cohort study.	• Among participants with a steady female partner, 21.81% reported perpetrating intimate partner violence in the past year at baseline.	• The findings demonstrate the high incidence of IPV against women in South Africa. • Childhood trauma, excessive drinking, employment status, and sexual impulse

	Author and year of publication	Title	Study design	Findings	Relevance to topic
				• Having a history of childhood sexual abuse, binge drinking, being employed, and more difficulty controlling sexual impulses to use a condom were associated with self-reported IPV perpetration in the past year.	control were found to be significant risk factors for IPV perpetration. • These elements mirror larger cultural and personal challenges, such as the normalisation of violence and entitlement.
13.	Zembe et al. (2015)	Intimate partner violence, relationship power inequity and the role of sexual and social risk factors in the production of violence among young women who have multiple sexual partners in a peri-urban setting in South Africa.	Mixed methods study	• The study found extremely high rates of intimate partner violence (IPV), with 86% of young women with multiple sexual partners reporting physical or sexual IPV in the past 12 months. • Sexual IPV was significantly associated with transactional sex and age mixing, which reinforced power imbalances and male sexual entitlement. • The qualitative findings revealed that transactional sex and age mixing increased women's vulnerability to IPV.	• The significant prevalence highlights the seriousness of IPV among young women, particularly those in complex sexual and relational settings such as having many partners. • Transactional sex and age mixing represent cultural and relational variables that contribute to gender injustice and male superiority, both of which are significant risk factors for IPV.
14	Amaechi et al. (2021)	Feminist reflections on the impact of the South African national COVID-19 lockdown on the upsurge of gender based violence in Mahwelereng Township of Limpopo Province, South Africa	Qualitative feminist reflection	• The main findings were that the interplay of changes in family financial structure, household confinements, and cultural violent dispositions enabled and justified gender-based violence during the COVID-19 lockdown in the Mahwelereng township.	• The study found that survivors may perceive IPV as a reaction to external constraints such as financial difficulties, lockdowns, and cultural normalisation, making it difficult to identify as an outlier. • Perpetrators may justify their behaviour based on cultural beliefs and outside forces, such as financial strain or tight limitations, reinforcing patriarchal attitudes that promote IPV.

	Author and year of publication	Title	Study design	Findings	Relevance to topic
15.	Boonzaier and de La Rey (2003)	“He's a man, and I'm a woman” cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity in south African Women's narratives of violence.	Qualitative narrative study	• Women in abusive relationships construct contradictory and ambiguous gendered identities that reflect their complex and shifting experiences of violence. • Women's experiences of abuse are shaped by the broader socioeconomic and cultural context, particularly poverty and deprivation. • Women engage in various forms of resistance and agency in response to the abuse, rather than being passive victims.	• Victims, especially women, may shift their viewpoints and identities in reaction to societal and cultural factors. • Their understanding of IPV is influenced by personal encounters and broader cultural processes. • The interaction of poverty, cultural norms, and gendered identities influences how victims deal with and understand their experiences.
16.	De Kwaadsteniet (2017)	Male perpetrators’ construction of masculine identity: Attitudes and beliefs on intimate-partner violence	Qualitative study	• Witnessing violence as a child, substance abuse, and peer pressure were identified as key risk factors for male perpetrators of IPV. • Male perpetrators tended to blame their partners' substance use for the abuse and felt they had the right to reprimand their partners if they did not act according to the men's expectations.	• This study found that perpetrators frequently deflect accountability, believe they have the power to control, and justify their conduct using prior experiences (e.g., childhood violence) and external reasons (e.g., pressure from peers or substance abuse).
17.	Dekel and Andipatin (2016)	Abused Women's Understandings of Intimate Partner Violence and the Link to Intimate Femicide	Exploratory qualitative research design	• The women drew on discourses of femininity, romantic love, and other social constructs to justify remaining in abusive relationships, as contemplating femicide was too threatening. • The women's understandings of intimate partner violence and intimate femicide were shaped by the social context in which their abusive experiences occurred.	• This study found that survivors may internalise harmful gender norms and romantic ideals, which influence their acceptance of abuse, making it difficult for them to fully recognise the extent of their victimisation or the associated risks.

	Author and year of publication	Title	Study design	Findings	Relevance to topic
				• The women's stories were embedded in gendered discourses that positioned women as submissive and men as dominant in the household.	
18.	Hines and Jager (2021)	Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic.	Qualitative study framed by a decolonial feminist framework and narrative approach	• IPV and gendered violence are deeply entrenched in South Africa, with survivors' experiences predating the COVID-19 pandemic. • The pandemic exacerbated the silencing and stigma surrounding IPV, with survivors framing counselling as a private space to share their experiences. • The pandemic disrupted the previously private nature of IPV, with social workers facing challenges in maintaining confidentiality during telephonic counselling.	• The results highlight how victims of IPV in South Africa see their lived experiences as heavily impacted through both historical and contemporary issues, such as the epidemic. • Victims' responses are impacted by stigma from society, concerns regarding confidentiality, and a desire for confidential settings to express what they have experienced.
19.	Hoosain and Robertson (2023)	Men’s narratives of gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic: Oppressor and oppressed.	A qualitative case study design with feminism used as the theoretical framework.	• The men in the study were the perpetrators of GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic, but they returned to the same intimate relationship after being arrested for GBV. • There was a lack of resources and support available for perpetrators of GBV during the pandemic. • The men's normative role expectations and positionality as marginalized black men in rural communities contributed to the perpetration of GBV during the pandemic.	• The results from this study shed light on how institutional inequity, cultural norms, and a lack of rehabilitation resources influence offenders' sense-making, resulting in IPV as both a manifestation of anger and a declaration of conventional masculinity.

	Author and year of publication	Title	Study design	Findings	Relevance to topic
20.	Lau and Stevens (2012)	Textual transformations of subjectivity in men's talk of gender-based violence.	Qualitative study	• Men used various discursive strategies to negotiate their "post-violent identities" and shift their subject positions. • Men drew upon broader social discourses to rationalize and legitimize their violent behaviours against their intimate partners. • Men's accounts revealed contradictory constructions of masculinity, aligning with both hegemonic ideals and positions of disadvantage.	• These findings show that perpetrators use discursive tactics to rationalise and explain their violent behaviour, frequently referring to social notions of masculinity.
21.	Leburu-Masigo (2019)	Urban and rural women's experiences of intimate partner violence.	Qualitative study	• Women experience multiple forms of intimate partner violence, including emotional, physical, sexual, and financial abuse. • Unequal power relations and cultural norms that promote male dominance contribute to intimate partner violence. • There is a culture of silence surrounding intimate partner violence, as women are reluctant to report abuse due to social and economic dependence on their partners.	• The findings indicate that survivors have trouble recognising IPV due to abuse varieties, gender power imbalances, societal silence, and a variety of social, economic, and cultural reasons that prevent reporting and getting treatment.
22.	Makongoza and Nduna (2021)	Awareness and rejection accounts of intimate partner violence by young women in Soweto, Johannesburg, South Africa.	Qualitative, exploratory research	• Participants reported direct and indirect experiences of IPV through witnessing interparental and interpersonal violence. • There was a progressive shift in perceptions from absolute tolerance of relationship violence to rejection of it, but victim-blaming and relegating	• The findings from this study demonstrates how exposure to IPV, changes in attitudes towards violence, and the centralisation of masculine attributes such as rage might influence victims' perceptions of abuse.

	Author and year of publication	Title	Study design	Findings	Relevance to topic
				relationship violence to the private realm still existed. • Participants used essentialization of masculine qualities such as anger to construct and understand men's use of violence in relationships.	
23.	Mathews et al. (2015)	'So now I'm the man': Intimate partner femicide and its interconnections with expressions of masculinities in South Africa.	Qualitative study	• The men sought to perform exaggerated versions of predominant ideals of masculinity, emphasizing extreme control and dominance over their female partners. • The men viewed killing their partners as an ultimate means of taking back control in a context where gendered relationships legitimize men's use of violence to assert power and control. • The men's psychological vulnerabilities, shaped by adverse childhood experiences, intersected with the social context to influence their intimate relationships and lead to the killings.	• This study demonstrates how offenders make meaning of their behaviours by relating them with cultural notions of masculinity, justifying their violence as an acceptable means to exercise power and control. • The study also highlights the role of psychological susceptibilities and societal expectations in generating violent behaviours.
24.	Mkhonto et al. (2014)	Experiences of women on intimate partner violence in a public hospital in Tshwane, South Africa: gender-based violence.	Qualitative study	• The main findings were the severe physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual health effects of IPV experienced by the women. • Cultural factors like patriarchy, "lobola", and the view of IPV as a private matter exacerbated the violence. • The women demonstrated resilience through their spirituality, motivation, and desire to care for	• These findings demonstrate how victims' perceptions of IPV are influenced by its severe consequences, cultural norms that support acceptance, and their own resilience and coping methods. • Survivors may see IPV as part of a larger cultural narrative, but they also rely on individual resilience and other's experiences to manage and overcome the violence.

	Author and year of publication	Title	Study design	Findings	Relevance to topic
				their children, and reported benefits from sharing their experiences.	
25.	Mmolokoe and Smit (2024)	Social determinants of gender-based violence perpetrated by men in the North West province, South Africa.	Qualitative study	• Anger, toxic masculinity, emotional and physical abuse, alcohol/drug abuse, insecurities, and financial strain were identified as key factors triggering GBV perpetrated by men. • Lack of education, lack of life skills, cheating and financial issues were also cited as reasons for men perpetrating GBV	• This research emphasises how offenders make meaning of their violence by blaming social, relational, or personal circumstances, thereby avoiding direct responsibility. S
26.	Neshunzhi et al. (2022)	A Rare Phenomenon: Experiences of Abused Men by Partners in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, South Africa	A qualitative explorative descriptive and contextual research design.	• Experiences of multifactorial causes of abuse such as lack of financial resources, lack of intimacy, lack of decision-making in relationship and interference from family members and in-laws.	• These findings show how male victims contextualise IPV within an interconnected network of relational and systemic issues, while also emphasising the significance of professional and social assistance in navigating their experiences and seeking resolution.
27.	Othilia et al. (2021)	"It is shameful": Experiences of physically abused men by their female partners in a rural community of South Africa.	Qualitative study	• Men who are physically abused by their female partners experience feelings of shame, denial, and helplessness. • Male victims of domestic violence fear being ridiculed and disbelieved by society and helping professionals if they seek help. • The societal perception and treatment of male victims of domestic violence perpetuate their negative feelings and prevent them from seeking help.	• The results presented underscore the distinct obstacles that male victims confront in recognising and managing IPV, emphasising the role of societal norms, emotional responses, and structural obstacles in defining their experiences.

	Author and year of publication	Title	Study design	Findings	Relevance to topic
28.	Radzilani-Makatu and Chauke (2019)	Gender-based violence: exploring the concept through the eyes of abused married women.	Qualitative exploratory design	• Women in abusive marriages view GBV as perpetrated by men (husbands) against women (wives), where men use their power and control to dominate and abuse their wives. • These women encountered various social, physical, and psychological challenges, including anger and aggression towards children, fear of their husbands, low self-esteem, sleeplessness, depression, and social stigma. • Women stay in these abusive marriages due to various factors, including cultural and religious reasons, self-blame, fear of stigma, financial dependence, and concerns for their children's well-being.	• The results of this study show how female survivors perceive IPV through the interplay of systemic gendered dynamics, individual experiences, and pressures from society, which influences how they cope and ways of making decisions.
29.	Selowa et al. (2022)	Experiences of Young Males on Gender-Based Violence at a Selected Village in Limpopo Province, South Africa.	Qualitative study	• Infidelity, unemployment, lack of trust or insecurities, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and financial abuse were the main factors contributing to GBV among young males. • Social stigma and separation from family and friends were challenges faced by young males. • Young males used substance abuse, social support, support from Munna Ndi Nnyi organization, and religion as coping mechanisms.	• The results presented here shed light on how male victims of IPV perceive and resolve their difficulties, emphasising the importance of stigma, networks of support, and individual coping methods in influencing how they perceive IPV.
30.	Slabbert (2010)	The experiences of low-income female survivors of domestic violence	Qualitative study	• Victims of GBV experienced significant stress, trauma, and control from their abusive partners,	• The results of this study offer a comprehensive picture of how low-income women interpret their

	Author and year of publication	Title	Study design	Findings	Relevance to topic
				with physical, emotional, and economic abuse being common. • Low-income and low education levels were major barriers preventing these women from leaving their abusive situations. • The women's social networks, including family, friends, neighbours, and the church, as well as professional services, provided important resources and support.	encounters with IPV as affected by both personal obstacles and structural barriers.

Appendix F: Coding summary table

Study Excerpt/Quote	Initial Code	Subtheme	Theme
"She lets me feel like a man… she is obedient, she respects me." (Mathews et al., 2015, p. 111)	Obedience as respect; Gender role expectations	Male authority and gendered expectations	Cultural and societal norms and beliefs
"I told her she should not make a fool out of me." (Mathews et al., 2015, p. 115)	Masculinity threatened; Public humiliation	IPV, Patriarchy, Culture and Masculinity	Perpetrator perspectives: Rationalizing violence
"The lockdown was making our ladies lose it... this 'feminist and equality' nonsense." (Amaechi et al., 2021, p. 17198)	Patriarchal backlash; COVID-19 and IPV	Masculinity crisis and economic stress	Structural and social drivers of IPV
"We struggled... I lost my cool many times." (Hoosain & Robertson, 2023, p. 6)	Economic strain; Emotional overwhelm	Financial insecurity and violence	Structural and social drivers of IPV
"He must be... he's the roof." (De Kwaadsteniet, 2017, p. 9)	Male as provider; Masculine identity	Cultural and societal norms and beliefs	Structural and social drivers of IPV
"If you are in love with someone who drinks you know you will there's always be fighting, there's going to be fights" (Gibbs et al., 2024, p.6)	Substance use	Substance abuse and IPV	Individual and interpersonal triggers of IPV
"Although I cannot tell what I have done that irritates him. But I think I am at fault sometimes" (Radzilani-Makatu & Chauke, 2019, p. 13463)	Self-blame	Psychological and emotional barriers to leaving	Survivor narratives: Meaning making and coping
"It's my culture .... If you don't beat a woman up, you're not a man." (Lau & Stevens, 2012, p. 431).	Dominant culture	IPV, Patriarchy, Culture and Masculinity	Perpetrator Perspectives: Rationalising violence

Appendix G: An example of a mind map used in this study's coding process.