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Factors Associated with the Increase in Violence Against  
Women during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examines the key drivers that contributed to the increase in violence against women (VAW) during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa. Through a systematic review it identifies and analyzes the factors associated with the reported escalation in incidents of violence in the household. The findings show that isolation and barriers to reporting, economic instability and financial dependency, mental health challenges, substance use, and socially accepted patriarchal and religious norms significantly influenced the increased risk of violence of women during the lockdown. Restrictions on movement and lack of social support systems left many victims trapped with their abusers, while financial dependence and job losses forced some women to remain in violent households. Food insecurity and economic hardship further exacerbated stress and conflict, leading to an increase in violence in the household. Alcohol bans and substance withdrawal also intensified household tensions, contributing to the frequency and severity of violence. Additionally, heightened psychological distress, including anxiety and depression, affected both victims and perpetrators, reinforcing cycles of abuse. Cultural and religious beliefs also played a role, as patriarchal norms discouraged women from seeking help or leaving abusive relationships and some religious beliefs and teachings silenced victims from speaking out about their abuse. The study highlights the need for a comprehensive response that includes economic relief measures, strengthened social support systems, accessible mental health services and culturally sensitive interventions in communities. Future research should focus on the need for additional protective mechanisms and increasing education around the factors associated with the increase in violence in these communities.*

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## **List of Abbreviations**

DV Domestic Violence  
GBV Gender-Based Violence  
IPV Intimate Partner Violence  
VAW Violence Against Women  
WHO World Health Organization  
NGO Non-Governmental Organisation  
SRD Social Relief of Distress (Grant)  
UN United Nations

## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented here is my own.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Context

Governments have implemented population quarantine measures as frequently as needed to manage viral outbreaks and prevent large-scale disease transmission (Mittal & Singh, 2020). Historically, quarantines have been effective in containing pandemics, and the Covid-19 pandemic serves as a modern example of such interventions (Mittal & Singh, 2020). In response to the World Health Organization's declaration of Covid-19 as a global pandemic, South Africa swiftly implemented a nationwide lockdown (Broadbent et al., 2020; Stiegler & Bouchard, 2020). In March 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa declared a national state of disaster to curb the spread of the virus, emphasizing the importance of stay-at-home orders and social distancing (Gordon & Sauti, 2022).

While these measures were effective in reducing Covid-19 transmission, they had broad unintended consequences, particularly concerning violence against women (Mittal & Singh, 2020). Reports from South Africa and other parts of the world indicated a surge in domestic violence cases during lockdown periods (Andy et al., 2022; Ndedi & Kem, 2020).

The prevalence of domestic violence in South Africa is among the highest globally, although challenges in accurately assessing its extent persist due to underreporting and societal norms that may discourage disclosure (Britton, 2006).

The historical context of gender-based violence in South Africa is shaped by longstanding societal structures, including patriarchal norms and systems of oppression that have evolved over time (Mshweshwe, 2020). Britton (2006) found that these patterns can be traced back to the colonial period, where gender hierarchies and power dynamics were reinforced through legal and social structures that marginalized certain groups. During the apartheid era, these hierarchies were further entrenched, influencing gender relations and societal attitudes towards masculinity and femininity (Meyiwa et al., 2017). Colonial and apartheid ideologies emphasized particular forms of femininity, often centring on domestic roles and motherhood, which reinforced existing gender roles and hierarchies (Moreroa & Rapanyane, 2021).

Policy developments, such as the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Bill, introduced in 2013, represent efforts to address historical gender inequalities, but concerns

remained about the persistence of violence against women and the extent to which societal attitudes and structural inequalities may increase risk (Meyiwa et al., 2017). Many women and girls experience violence due to their gender and subordinate social status, often without the ability to seek protection or justice (Meyiwa et al., 2017). Such violence is found to be most commonly perpetrated within intimate relationships and cultural contexts, where traditional and rigid gender norms are enforced (Moreroa & Rapanyane, 2021). These factors may contribute to an environment where violence is not always visible or reported, and where victims may come to perceive such experiences as an inherent part of their societal role in the household (Meyiwa et al., 2017).

The Covid-19 Lockdown was necessary to reduce the community spread of the Corona Virus but may also have had psychological and socially disruptive consequences (Mittal & Singh, 2020). This is known as the quarantine paradox; where although the lockdown assisted in lowering the number of Covid-19 infections, it may have also perpetuated already existing structures of inequality, worsening systems of gender inequality (Mittal & Singh, 2020). The complex nature of violence against women highlights intersections with social, economic, religious and cultural factors (Britton, 2006; Moreroa & Rapanyane, 2021; Mshweshwe, 2020), all of which were exacerbated during the Covid-19 Lockdown.

While recent scholarship has explored the rise in violence against women during the Covid-19 Lockdown, more recent studies have explored the South African context. Nobanda et al. (2021) for example, conducted a systematic review on the subject but had a broader focus, synthesising studies from secondary studies and reviews. The current study by contrast systematically reviewed primary research articles, which made it possible to analyse more directly how particular drivers of violence were seen and reported during the lockdown. Methodically, Nobanda et al. (2021) draws primarily from existing conceptual explanations, whereas this dissertation employs a feminist informed theoretical lens, integrating the Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel with the Intersectionality Framework.

The Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel highlights how violence against women is sustained through various tactics of coercion, domination and unequal power dynamics within intimate and domestic relationships. The theory of Intersectionality examines how overlapping social identities like race, gender, class and culture intersect to shape women's experiences of violence. Together, these two frameworks provide a foundation for understanding and analysing the themes explored in this dissertation and will be further discussed in Chapter Two.

Even though the lockdown was required to stop the spread of Covid-19, it exacerbated pre-existing gender inequality, making South African women more vulnerable to assault. This study addresses this issue by systematically reviewing primary research to identify the key drivers of violence during this period. By applying the two theoretical lenses, it offers a deeper understanding of how power, control and intersecting identities influenced women’s experiences of violence during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa.

## 1.2 Definition of Operational Terms

### Defining Violence Against Women

The terms gender-based violence (GBV), domestic violence (DV), and intimate partner violence (IPV) are often used interchangeably, but there are subtle distinctions. Given these overlapping definitions, this study will use the term Violence Against Women (VAW) to encompass all three forms of violence.

Table 1.1: Operational Definitions of Key Terms

Term	Definition	Key References
Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	Acts of violence directed at individuals based on their gender, reflecting societal power imbalances and rooted in gender inequality, abuse of power, and harmful norms. Includes sexual, physical, and emotional violence, as well as neglect.	Ndlovu et al. (2022); UN Women (2025); WHO (2010); Mittal & Singh (2020)
Domestic Violence (DV)	Mistreatment within a household between family members or intimate partners, regardless of age, gender, or sexual orientation. Includes intimidation, physical aggression, and economic, sexual, psychological, and emotional abuse.	Khosa-Nkatini & Mofokeng (2023); Uzobo & Ayinmoro (2021); UN Women (2025)
Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)	A subcategory of DV involving abuse in current or former intimate relationships. Includes sexual coercion, physical threats, intimidation, restriction of movement or	Uzobo & Ayinmoro (2021); WHO (2010)

	access to resources, and threats to kill or harm.	
Violence Against Women (VAW)	Any form of GBV causing or likely to cause physical, sexual, or psychological harm to women. Includes threats, coercion, restrictions on freedom, domestic abuse, sexual violence, and harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage.	Ellsberg et al. (2005); UN Women (2025)

## Defining Operational Terms of the Thematic Analysis

**1.2.5 Isolation and Barriers to Seeking Help** refer to the physical, social, and psychological constraints that prevent individuals experiencing violence from accessing support systems or resources (Stark, 2007; Goodman et al., 2009). They are the extent to which individuals are socially isolated and encounter obstacles that prevent them from accessing support services (Mthembu et al., 2021). These barriers or obstacles can include geographic remoteness, lack of transportation, limited knowledge of available services and cultural or religious restriction (Ellsberg et al., 2005; Mshweshwe, 2020).

**1.2.6 Economic Instability and Financial Dependence** refer to the ways in which limited economic resources, unemployment, and financial control by an abusive partner or family member contribute to vulnerability and entrapment in violent situations (Shamu et al., 2011). Economic abuse includes controlling access to money, restricting employment opportunities, or coercing financial dependence in intimate relationships (Adams et al., 2008; World Health Organisation, 2010).

**1.2.7 Mental and Psychological Stress** refers to the emotional and cognitive impact of violence on survivors, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other psychological conditions (Abrahams & Lund, 2022; Duby et al., 2022; World Health Organisation, 2010). This also includes psychological abuse including gaslighting, manipulation and coercion (UN Women, 2025).

**1.2.8 Alcohol and Substance Use**, in the context of VAW, includes the role of drugs and their relationship to violence, as well as how they are used as coping mechanisms and to further perpetuate it (South African Medical Research Council, 2021). Alcohol and

substance abuse refer to the excessive or harmful consumption of intoxicating substances that impair judgment, lower inhibitions, and increase aggression and can put either the user or others affected by the user's behaviour at risk (Brick, 2012; World Health Organization, 2024).

**1.2.9 Cultural, Religious, and Patriarchal Norms** are systems that shape societal attitudes toward gender roles, power dynamics, and the acceptability of violence (Moreroa & Rapanyane, 2021; Mshweshwe, 2020). These include male authority over women, normalizing control and justifying acts of GBV (Britton, 2006; Mshweshwe, 2020), religious teachings which may also contribute to the perpetuation of harmful gender norms (Moreroa & Rapanyane, 2021) and cultural practices like the expectations of female submission limiting women's autonomy (Ellsberg et al., 2005).

### 1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to identify and analyse the key drivers that contributed to the rise in VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa. This will be achieved through a systematic review of existing literature to uncover the underlying factors that escalated incidents of violence against women.

Research Objectives:

1. To examine how isolation and barriers to seeking help influenced the increase in VAW.
2. To explore how economic instability and financial dependence impacted increased VAW.
3. To assess the role of mental and psychological distress in VAW during the Covid-19 lockdown.
4. To evaluate how alcohol and substance abuse contributed to VAW during the lockdown.
5. To investigate the influence of cultural, religious, and patriarchal norms in maintaining or exacerbating VAW during the lockdown.
6. To apply an intersectional framework to understand how multiple overlapping factors intensified VAW during the pandemic.

7. To apply the Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel to analyse how the factors associated with the increase VAW related to tactics of control in abusive relationships.

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

Understanding the factors that contributed to increased VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown is essential for informing a change in policy, improving support systems for victims, and preventing future crises from further exacerbating inequalities affecting vulnerable populations. By examining the socio-economic, psychological, and structural dimensions of violence against women, this research aims to provide insights that can help shape more effective and inclusive strategies around the factors associated with the increase in VAW.

Furthermore, this study employs the Intersectionality Framework and the Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel to analyse how systemic inequalities and social norms interact to perpetuate VAW. Findings from this study will be valuable for law enforcement, policymakers, NGOs and social service providers seeking to develop targeted interventions that address the root causes of VAW.

## 1.5 Overview of Research Methods

The study was conducted as a systematic review where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to answer the research question. The purpose of this was to synthesize literature and to identify themes and patterns in the drivers of the increase in violence against women during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa. The research process was structured into three primary phases: data collection, data analysis and the presentation of findings and conclusions.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were determined based on three factors: the population, the phenomenon of interest, and the study context or setting. These criteria were important to create a focused and methodical approach to data collection. The data collection phase was further divided into three subsections: the search strategy, the data screening procedures, and the PRISMA chart. The search strategy involved identifying relevant databases, keywords, and search terms to ensure a comprehensive range of studies. The data screening procedures included an assessment of abstracts and full texts to ensure that they align with the research focus. The PRISMA chart provided a visual representation of the selection process, illustrating the number of studies identified, screened, and included in the final analysis.

The data analysis phase involved the examination of the selected studies to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the research question. Thematic analysis was utilized as the primary tool of analysis to interpret and synthesize the findings. This was important for an in-depth exploration of the relationships between the themes and their implications within the broader Intersectionality Framework and the Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel.

The final step was the presentation of findings and conclusions phase to synthesize the identified themes into a cohesive narrative, highlighting key insights and implications for future research and application. This structured methodology ensured a rigorous and systematic approach necessary in investigating the chosen themes and their interconnections within the context of VAW in South Africa during the Covid-19 Lockdown.

## 1.6 Outline of the Thesis

There are five chapters in this thesis, each with a specific function. An outline of the study's structure is provided below:

### **Chapter One: Background and Study Overview**

**Chapter One** introduced the study, providing the rationale and orientation for the research. It outlines the context of the study and defines the operational terms that are used throughout the paper, particularly in chapter 4. Chapter one further explains the rationale for conducting the systematic review, followed by the research objectives and research questions.

Additionally, it presents the study's goals, the significance of the study, and gives an overview of the research methods. Finally, the chapter provides an outline of the subsequent chapters of the study.

### **Chapter Two: Literature and Theoretical Framework**

This chapter provides a review of the literature available with regards to the study and offers insights into already existing research, highlighting gaps that this study aims to address. Additionally, this chapter explores the theoretical framework that guides the systematic review, including the Theory of Intersectionality as well as the Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel. It goes on to explain how these frameworks are used to interpret and contextualize the findings of the research.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The third chapter details the research methodology used for data collection and analysis of the study. It explains the processes followed to select the studies included in the systematic review and explains why and what criteria is used. Additionally, it provides a discussion of the data analysis techniques employed and the ethical considerations addressed in this research.

### **Chapter Four: Results and Discussion**

In this chapter, the results of the study are presented based on emerging themes identified from the data using thematic analysis. The findings are analysed and discussed, highlighting areas where this study may agree or disagree with existing literature. It further provides a discussion the theoretical perspectives of the Theory of Intersectionality and the Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel. This chapter forms the basis for drawing study conclusions and making recommendations for further research and policy development.

### **Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations**

The final chapter summarizes the study's aims and objectives, research questions, and methodology. It presents the conclusions drawn from the findings and offers recommendations for future research and application.

## **1.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided the background and rationale for the study, outlining its objectives and significance. It defined key terms as operationalized within the study and presented an overview of the dissertation structure. Additionally, it summarized the methodological approaches used to collect and analyse data to answer research question and achieve the study's objectives. The next chapter explores the literature on the study and the theoretical frameworks that support the research.

## Chapter 2: Literature and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Introduction

The Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa saw a reported surge in violence against women, intensifying pre-existing gender inequalities and vulnerabilities within society (Andy et al., 2022; Mkhize & Sibisi, 2022; Nduna & Tshona, 2021). This escalation mirrored global patterns observed during crises, as there has been an established link between mass events such as wars and pandemics, and increased domestic violence (Mittal & Singh, 2020; Ndedi & Kem, 2020). In response to the worsening VAW, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa labelled GBV as a pandemic within a pandemic, emphasizing that one woman was killed every three hours in the country (Dlamini, 2020; Mzondi, 2022). He further stated that South Africa experiences "levels of violence that are comparable to countries that are at war" (Mkhize & Sibisi, 2022, p.159), highlighting the severity of the issue and the country's persistently high GBV rates (Dlamini, 2020).

South Africa's long-standing struggle with GBV is deeply rooted in its socio-political history and enduring structural inequalities (Snodgrass, 2016). The legacy of apartheid, coupled with widespread poverty, unemployment, and systemic gender inequalities, has perpetuated cycles of violence, disproportionately affecting women and marginalized groups (Graaf & Heinecken, 2017). While VAW was already at crisis levels before the pandemic, the lockdown period exacerbated existing risk factors, creating conditions that enabled further abuse and limiting victims' access to support networks (Lyons & Brewer, 2022). Similar trends have been documented in past health crises, such as the Ebola outbreak, where heightened economic distress and restricted mobility contributed to an increase in violence against women (Mittal & Singh, 2020; Ndedi & Kem, 2020).

Given the severity and persistence of GBV in South Africa, it is important to examine the key drivers that were associated with its escalation during the Covid-19 Lockdown. This literature review synthesizes findings from qualitative and quantitative studies to identify recurring themes and patterns, providing a nuanced understanding of how the pandemic intensified violence against women. By critically analyzing existing research, this chapter aims to highlight the multifaceted nature of VAW in times of crisis and underscore the urgent need for effective interventions.

#### **Isolation and Social Support factors**

Lockdown measures, such as social distancing and movement restrictions, inadvertently created conditions that exacerbated domestic violence (Van Gelder et al., 2020). The Covid-19 Lockdown measures, such as geographic and physical isolation, significantly contributed to the rise in IPV. Van Gender et al. (2020) found that strategies employed in abusive relationships overlapped with social measures imposed during the lockdown, exacerbating IPV. These strategies include geographic and physical isolation from loved ones, functional isolation, and surveillance and control over everyday activities (Van Gender et al., 2020). Social isolation, therefore, from friends and family, coupled with economic and psychological stress, as well as unhealthy coping mechanisms like excessive alcohol consumption, were named as triggers for increased IPV (Van Gender et al., 2020).

Mojahed et al. (2021) conducted a rapid review to examine the relationship between social and geographical isolation and IPV during the Covid-19 pandemic. The review analyzed multiple studies exploring how restricted movement and limited access to support networks heightened the risk of IPV (Mojahed et al., 2021). Findings indicated that both forms of isolation significantly contributed to increased violence, with key factors including a lack of social and emotional support and physical distance from essential services (Mojahed et al., 2021). These barriers left victims more vulnerable, limiting their ability to seek help or escape abusive environments.

Moreira and da Costa (2020) conducted a narrative review to explore the risk factors associated with IPV and how these were exacerbated by the Covid-19 Lockdown. Their study synthesized existing literature on IPV during the pandemic, drawing from peer-reviewed articles, reports, and policy documents (Moreira & da Costa, 2020). The review focused on studies examining IPV prevalence, risk factors and the impact of public health measures such as lockdowns and social distancing. The findings indicated that the Covid-19 pandemic contributed to a global increase in IPV, as economic instability, social isolation, and restricted access to support services heightened women's vulnerability (Moreira & da Costa, 2020). Moreira and da Costa (2020) emphasized that the pandemic created a dual crisis for women which was both the health risks of the virus and the increased exposure to DV due to confinement with abusive partners

### **Socioeconomic factors**

Mkhize and Sibisi (2022) conducted a study investigating the impact of intimate partner violence on women during this period, employing a mixed-methods approach. Their study

analyzed peer-reviewed articles alongside social media content from platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to capture real-time discussions and experiences (Mkhize & Sibisi, 2022). Additionally, they reviewed news reports and government publications to contextualize their findings within broader policy responses and media narratives.

Their analysis revealed that IPV disproportionately affected South African women of low socioeconomic status, cohabiting with their partners in comparison to women of higher economic standing (Mkhize & Sibisi, 2022). Economic strain emerged as a key driver of IPV, as financial instability, job losses, and increased poverty during the lockdown heightened stress levels within households (Mkhize & Sibisi, 2022). The psychological toll of unemployment further contributed to escalations in IPV, with a study by Van Gelder et al. (2020) emphasizing that financial hardship not only limited women's ability to leave abusive relationships but also exacerbated tensions within domestic settings. These findings highlight the intersection between economic uncertainty and IPV, reinforcing the broader structural vulnerabilities that intensified during the pandemic (Mkhize and Sibisi, 2022).

Gordon and Sauti (2022) compared the psychological and social effects of Covid-19 on persons who had encountered IPV in South Africa and the United States of America. They found that there is a high occurrence of intimate partner abuse among women in both countries, and most of the victims come from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Gordon & Sauti, 2022). Similarly, a narrative review by Evans et al. (2020) aimed at highlighting the surge in IPV during the Covid-19 pandemic, found that economic freedom plays a vital role in reducing IPV. Their study found that victims of IPV found their financial relationship with an abusive partner to be too complicated to end without a backup source of income (Evans et al. 2020). Increased job losses and unemployment as a result of the Covid-19 Lockdown therefore exacerbated financial entanglements, particularly among women of colour (Evans et al., 2020; Gordon & Sauti, 2022).

Odeku (2021) conducted a literature review of literature published in the year 2020 to investigate the socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on impoverished and underprivileged businesses. The study found that the poor black majority were the most impacted by the lockdown (Odeku, 2021). The reason for this was because most of the black majority operate and engage with Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises in their communities and therefore their businesses were the most affected. Unemployment, inequality, poverty and low standard of living have intensified during the pandemic and have unprecedented impact on the businesses of the already impoverished and underprivileged (Odeku, 2021).

### **Alcohol and Substance use as contributing factor**

Nduna and Tshona (2020) explore the link between alcohol abuse and increased aggression toward women, defining alcohol abuse as the "regular or occasional excessive consumption of alcohol causing harm to self and others" (p. 1). Their study draws on secondary literature and policy analysis to examine how substance use contributes to IPV. Similarly, Mittal and Singh (2020) conducted a review of existing studies on DV during the Covid-19 Lockdown, concluding that alcohol consumption played a significant role in the rise of DV incidents in South Africa. Their study found that despite government-imposed restrictions on alcohol sales, individuals continued to access and consume alcohol, rendering the prohibition ineffective. Tisane (2020) supports this argument, using qualitative data from policy reports and media sources to analyze the enforcement of lockdown regulations. Tisane's (2020) study found that regulatory oversight allowed illicit alcohol sales to persist during the lockdown, exacerbating incidents of violence. Collectively, these studies underscore the limitations of policy interventions in addressing substance-related violence during the pandemic, increasing women's risk to violence during the Lockdown.

Backe et al. (2022) conducted a study to explore the intersecting issues of IPV and alcohol abuse in South Africa. Their study was conducted through ethnographic research methods using in-depth interviews and observations among women in Soweto. The results suggest a consistent connection between excessive drinking patterns and IPV, particularly physical and emotional abuse (Backe et al., 2022).

Gutura and Nunlall (2020) conducted a narrative review to discuss the drivers of GBV during the lockdown period. They collected data from existing literature and analysed it using the Frustration Aggression Theory. The basic idea of this theory is that frustration is an event rather than an emotion and that its occurrence raises the probability of acting or responding aggressively (Gutura & Nunlall, 2020). Their study found that economic hardship, lockdowns, and worry produced an ideal environment for increased VAW. Their study also found that even though there is research that states that alcohol may lead to GBV due to its effect on aggression, Gutura and Nunlall (2020) argue that the stress associated with the lack of alcohol during the lockdown period could also have resulted in withdrawal symptoms and increased stress levels, which are associated with GBV as well.

### **Socio cultural factors**

Gibbs et al. (2020) conducted a study focusing on IPV prevention interventions across multiple sites in six countries within the Asia-Pacific region. They used a six-year longitudinal study to examine the factors that increase women's vulnerability to IPV. The study identified factors similar to those identified in a South African analysis (Gibbs et al., 2020). Poverty, patriarchal privilege, and the acceptance of violence in interpersonal relationships were found to be key risk factors (Gibbs et al., 2020). Acceptance of violence in interpersonal relationships occurs when a society normalizes and tolerates violent relationships (Gibbs et al., 2020). Poverty, patriarchal privilege, and the acceptance of violence are amongst the factors that increases women's vulnerability to IPV (Gibbs et al., 2020), a finding consistent with Engelbrecht (2023).

Nduna and Tshona (2020) argue that GBV is deeply intertwined within socially constructed notions of masculinity, reinforcing and sustaining gender inequality. They suggest that such violence is not merely an individual act but a broader societal mechanism through which dominant gender norms are maintained (Nduna & Tshona, 2020). Stressors like economic hardship, poverty, and joblessness which were exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic (Stiegler & Bouchard, 2020), have been associated with increased instances of GBV as some men react to feelings of disempowerment through aggression.

Similarly, in a literature review by Dlamini (2020) that examines how the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed and intensified pre-existing gender inequalities, GBV is defined as “an expression of gender inequality and toxic masculinity” (p. 583). The study describes GBV as another pandemic; one that exists across societies in varying degrees of prevalence and severity, further underscoring its systemic nature and the urgent need for targeted interventions (Dlamini, 2020).

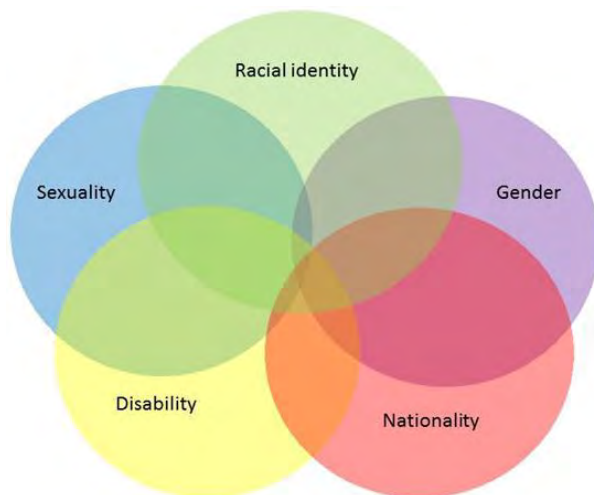
Mshweshwe (2020) conducted a study examining the relationship between African culture and domestic violence. Using a systematic review of both local and international discourse, the study explored explanations for DV in South Africa (Mshweshwe, 2020). The findings of Mshweshwe (2020) suggest that gender hierarchy, along with traditional masculine and feminine roles prevalent in many South African cultures, creates conditions that enable DV. Specifically, the research highlights how rigid gender hierarchies and male dominance within households contribute to the occurrence of DV (Mshweshwe, 2020).

## 2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Violence Against Women:

### 2.2.1 Intersectionality Theory

The Theory of Intersectionality as developed by Kimberle' Crenshaw (1989) provides a framework for understanding the complex interaction of the multiple social and political identities like race, class and sexuality, and how these interactions combine to create unique experiences of privilege and oppression within a power system. The Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel provides a tool for understanding the dynamics of abusive relationships on an interpersonal level, emphasizing the perpetrator- survivor relationship. The integration of this framework and model therefore allows for a more holistic analysis of the factors associated with the upsurge in VAW in South Africa during the Covid-19 Lockdown.

#### Intersectionality Theory



*Fig 1: The Intersectional Framework illustrating overlapping identities of individuals*

*This diagram illustrates the concept of intersectionality showing how different identities of individuals in society can intersect and overlap to produce various experiences of privilege and oppression. Each circle represents a different identity and additionally, the overlapping areas show how various elements work together to shape a person's lived reality.*

The Theory of Intersectionality was developed by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 from her work on Black Feminists and Activists (Olanlesi-Aliua et al., 2024). This theory posits that unequal power relations can overlap and deepen their impact on the individual or group, therefore producing specific forms of inequality or discrimination like racism, classism and sexism. The theory was designed to address how traditional systems of analysis, such as feminism and anti-racism, frequently neglected the ways in which overlapping systems of discrimination affect people from many oppressed groups (Carastathis, 2014).

By applying an intersectional lens, the aim is to understand and address the context of the specific forms of inequality that were heightened during the Covid 19 Lockdown period and how these factors can be associated with the increase in VAW reported.

### 2.2.2 The Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel



Fig 2 Duluth Model:

*The Power and Control Wheel (A circle divided into 8 parts. Surrounding the circle are the words “physical, violence, sexual.” Eight segments entail the following: 1. Using Intimidation; 2. Using Emotional Abuse; 3. Using Isolation; 4. Minimizing, Denying, and Blaming; 5. Using the Children; 6. Using Male Privilege; 7. Using Economic Abuse; 8. Using Coercion and Threats. In the centre of the wheel, there is another circle that states “Power and Control.”)*

The Power and Control Wheel of the Duluth Model of Domestic Violence provides a tool for understanding the complex interaction of the various factors that come into play in violence against women. It was first developed in 1981 in focus groups at Duluth women’s shelter and is based on the experiences of over 200 women who had been abused by their partners (Chavis & Hill, 2008; Rankine et al., 2017).

The Power and Control Wheel illustrates the various tactics perpetrators use to dominate their victims (Rankine et al., 2017). In this study, it serves as a comprehensive tool

alongside the Intersectionality Theory to understand the multifaceted nature of violence against women during the Covid 19 Lockdown in South Africa on an interpersonal level. It highlights how the pandemic's unique circumstances intensified existing abusive behaviours and created new challenges for victims and new ways of applying tactics by perpetrators.

The wheel places power and control at the centre; the rim of the wheel represents the physical and sexual violence or the threat of physical and sexual violence that is used to enforce the underlining tactics to achieve dominance which is represented by the 8 segments of the wheel. These 8 tactics or segments include using Intimidation, Emotional Abuse, Isolation, Minimising, Denying and Blaming Behaviour, Using Children, Male Privilege, Economic Abuse and Coercion and Threats (Chavis & Hill 2008).

### **The 8 tactics of the Power and Control Wheel (RCC, 2024):**

#### **1. Male Privilege:**

This refers to the societal advantages that men have over women; defining what the male and female roles are in the household, to reinforce male dominance and entitlement.

#### **2. Emotional Abuse:**

This involves undermining the victim's sense of self-worth through constant criticism, name-calling, humiliation, and diminishing their accomplishments.

#### **3. Economic Abuse:**

The abuser controls the victim's access to financial resources, making them financially dependent. This includes withholding money, preventing the victim from working, or sabotaging their employment opportunities.

#### **4. Isolation:**

The abuser isolates the victim from friends, family, and support networks, limiting their external contact and support.

#### **5. Intimidation and Threats:**

Abusers use intimidation to instil fear and maintain control. This can involve destroying property, displaying weapons, harming pets, or making threatening gestures.

#### **6. Minimizing, Denying, and Blaming:**

Abusers often minimize the abuse, deny that it occurred, or blame the victim for their actions. This manipulates the victim into doubting their reality and feeling responsible for the abuse.

### **7. Using Children:**

Abusers manipulate their victims by using children as leverage. This can involve threatening to harm the children, taking them away, or using them to relay messages.

### **8. Coercion and Threats:**

Coercion involves forcing the victim to comply with demands through threats or actual violence. This can include making the victim do illegal things, threatening to leave, or telling them they will be harmed if they don't comply.

## **Limitations of the Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel**

While the Duluth Model provides a useful framework for understanding the interpersonal dynamics of power and control within abusive relationships, it has also been critiqued on its lack of cultural sensitivity and its tendency to overemphasise power and control while overlooking other intersecting drivers of violence (Bohall et al., 2016). The Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel was developed in a Western setting and assumes a universal experience of domestic violence. It therefore risks overlooking the broader structural and socioeconomic drivers of violence in different societies (Pence & Paymar, 1993; Ptacek, 2010).

In South Africa, where legacies of Apartheid, gender inequalities, poverty and high unemployment rates intersect, the Duluth Model on its own cannot fully capture the complexity of women's experiences of abuse. For example, while the model highlights power and control tactics such as economic abuse and isolation, it does not fully capture how these intersect with systemic factors such as race, class, or access to resources, which often determine the extent of women's vulnerability and their capacity to seek support (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality Theory, therefore, strengthens this framework by situating individual experiences of power and control within broader socio-political structures, ensuring a more nuanced analysis of violence against women in South Africa during the Covid-19 Lockdown. By integrating the Duluth Model with an intersectional lens, this study aims to account for both the micro-level tactics of abuse and the macro-level structures that sustain violence against women.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe the details of the methods employed to conduct a comprehensive review of the drivers of the increase in VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown period in South Africa. A systematic literature review was conducted based on the SLR guidelines (Mohamed et al., 2021) and was guided by the methodological protocols proposed by Khan et al. (2003), which emphasize a structured approach to identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing literature.

Additionally, the review incorporated the PRISMA framework, which provides a standardized method for reporting systematic reviews (Aromataris et al., 2024). This approach ensured that both quantitative and qualitative studies were systematically assessed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

This study is guided by the integration of the Theory of Intersectionality and the Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel. The combination of these aims to highlight the intersecting identities of and the systemic inequalities that affect the individuals who experience VAW. While the Power and Control Wheel focuses on specific tactics abusers use to exert power and control over victims, the Intersectionality Theory examines how these tactics interact with broader systems of oppression like racism, classism, and sexism to highlight the complexity of the factors associated with the upsurge in VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown.

For example, as demonstrated by the body of literature reviewed in chapter two, socioeconomic factors have evidently been associated with the increase in VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown (Engelbrecht, 2023; Odeku, 2021). The Power and Control Wheel names Economic Abuse as a tactic used to maintain power and control over the victim (Chavis & Hill, 2008; Rankine et al., 2017). The theory of Intersectionality is then used to highlight the broader social structures like race and class, that exacerbate the victim's risk to VAW. This combination will therefore allow for a dual analysis of the micro-level interpersonal abusive relationship as well as the macro-level systems perpetuating the inequalities exacerbating the risk of VAW.

### 3.2 Research Design

The study is conducted as a systematic review, aimed at synthesizing existing literature to identify themes and patterns related to the increase in violence against women during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa. An exploratory approach was applied to identify a wide

range of factors, to uncover new insights and highlight knowledge gaps contributing to the increase in violence in South Africa.

A SLR expands on an already existing body of knowledge, to highlight and evaluate the gaps in current understanding of topics (Khan et al., 2003). Unlike traditional narrative reviews, systematic literature reviews use transparent, scientific, and reproducible methods, reducing subjectivity (Ferrari, 2015). To address a certain research question, it is beneficial to gather all relevant articles and materials that meet the predetermined inclusion criteria. This approach minimizes the risk of bias at every stage of the review process, including search, identification, appraisal, synthesis, analysis, and summarization of research findings (Ferrari, 2015).

By adhering to established guidelines and frameworks, the review aims to maintain objectivity and ensures a balanced and comprehensive evaluation of the available literature. An exploratory systematic literature review was used to uncover new insights and patterns as well as to highlight areas where further investigation is needed.

### 3.3 Research Question

*What are the factors associated with the increase in violence against women during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa?*

To further refine and operationalize this question, the PICOC Framework for SLR was used (Mengist et al., 2020):

- **Population (P):** Women in South Africa
- **Intervention (I):** Covid-19 Lockdown measures
- **Comparator (C):** Period before the Covid-19 Lockdown measures
- **Outcome (O):** Increase in incidents of violence against women
- **Context (C):** Low Socio-economic country

The PICOC framework provides a clear structure for the research question, ensuring that the review addresses the key components relevant to understanding the increase in violence against women during the pandemic (Mengist et al., 2020).

### 3.4 Systematic Review Steps

According to Khan et al. (2003), the steps for conducting a systematic review include:

**3.4.1 Formulating the Research Question** The guiding research question for this SRL as stated above

### **3.4.2 Planning**

- To ensure a comprehensive search, Scopus was used as a research database for a broad range of peer-reviewed journal articles from many disciplines.
- Establishing search terms to operationalize the research question. The search was organized around the keywords Gender Based Violence, Gender-Based Violence, Domestic Violence, Intimate Partner Violence, Violence Against Women, Abuse, South Africa, Covid-19 Pandemic, Corona Virus, Lockdown, accepting both full terms and abbreviations. The following Boolean search terms were used: (“Domestic Violence” OR “Gender Based Violence” OR “Intimate Partner Violence” OR “Violence Against Women”) AND (“South Africa”) AND (“Covid-19 Pandemic” OR “Lockdown”)
- Inclusion Criteria:
  - Research published from January 2019 to December 2023.
  - Research focused on South Africa and any ethnic or language group.
  - Studies explicitly mentioning intimate partner violence, domestic violence, gender-based violence, violence against women, covid-19 pandemic, or lockdown.
  - Peer-reviewed journals and articles.
- Exclusion Criteria:
  - Abstracts or citation-only papers.
  - Articles without the full text available.
  - Articles not available in English.
  - Articles not written about/ during the pandemic period
- If articles use quantitative methodology they may be included if:
  - The findings/conclusion makes qualitative deductions of the research

### ***3.4.3 Identifying Publications Relevant to the Study***

The systematic review involves exploring relevant literature using the Scopus database. Scopus is a source-neutral abstract and citation database organised by independent subject matter experts who are renowned leaders in their disciplines (Elsevier, 2024). The Scopus database gave access to many articles where the full text and citation were available.

### ***3.4.4 Assessing Study Quality***

This step assesses the suitability of individual studies to address the research question. The review focuses on articles published between January 2019 and December 2023 that address intimate partner violence, domestic violence, gender-based violence, and the effects of quarantine measures during the Covid-19 lockdown in South Africa. Only peer-reviewed articles from credible sources identified through the Scopus database search engine are included.

The Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) protocol for systematic reviews (Aromataris et al., 2024) is used to examine full-text articles for eligibility. Studies were first identified, then underwent preliminary screening based on their titles and abstracts. A full-text review was then done to assess whether they met the criteria for being included to be analysed.

- Initial Search and Data Collection

The initial search was done on databases Sabinet, Google Scholar, Scopus and SciELO. A final database was selected due to availability of South African based articles, consistent search results and the advanced search option. Using the predefined themes listed above, the search yielded 58 articles.

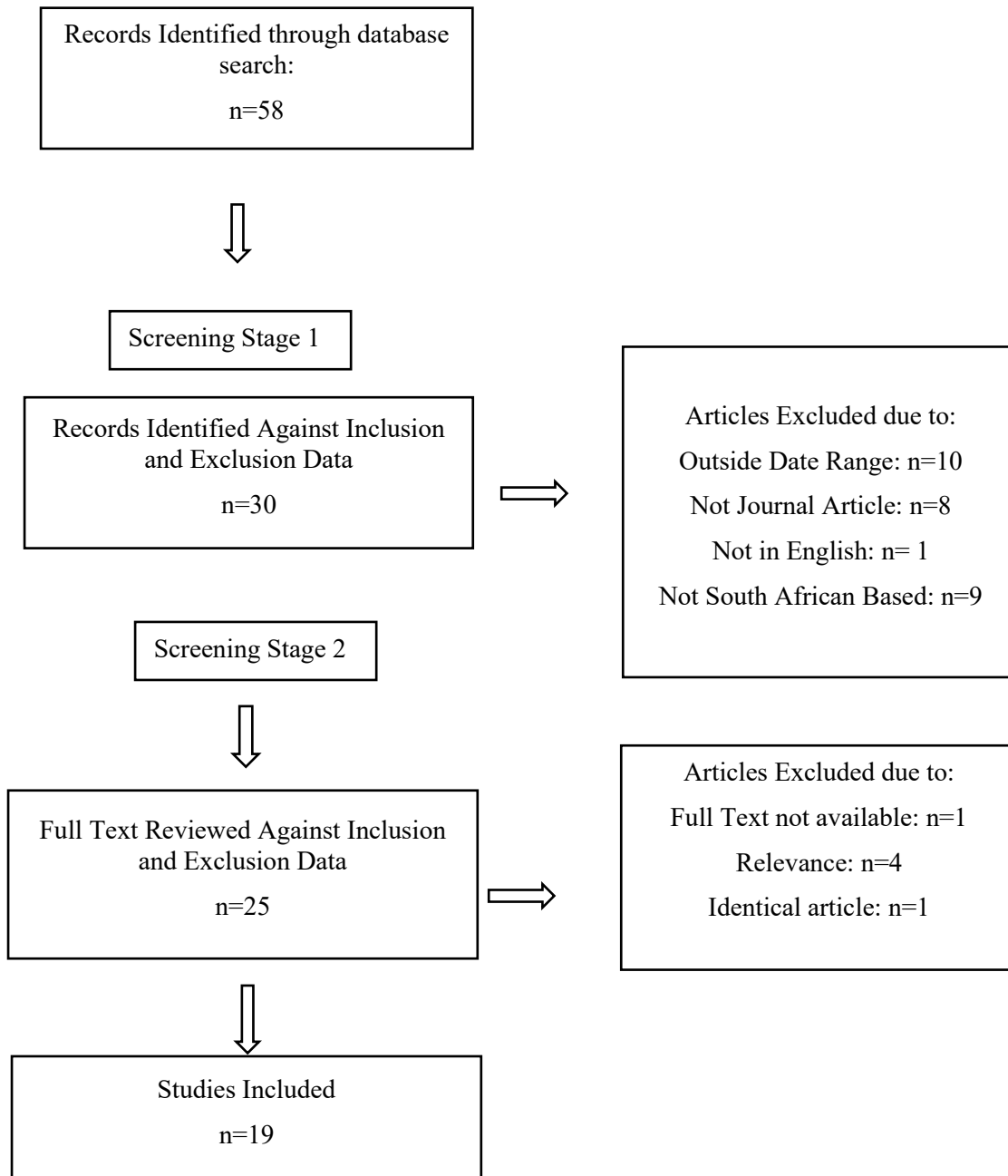
- Screening

The first screening stage included a title and abstract evaluation where the articles were cleared against the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the removal of duplicate articles, papers not written about South Africa or those not available in English. This step yielded 30 results.

- Full article review

A full text review was then conducted on the remaining articles. Studies were again evaluated against the inclusion and exclusion criteria and whether they focused on the factors associated with the increase in violence against women during the Covid 19 Lockdown in South Africa. This review yielded 20 results.

See Figure 3 below of the PRISMA Flow Diagram to illustrate the process used to screen for research data.



**Fig 3**

*PRISMA Flow Diagram showing number of records at each stage of the process providing a transparent view of the screening and selection process.*

### 3.5 Data Extraction

Data was extracted from the studies selected using the JBI extraction form (Lockwood et al., 2024). Using this form is useful in that it ensures consistent data recording to minimize the risk of bias. The categories of the form include author name/s and publication year, study methodology, study's location, key findings and frameworks or theories used. An example of the JBI extraction form used in this study is provided in the appendix, labelled figure 2.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

This stage of the SLR aims to identify recurring themes and patterns found in the data (Khan et al., 2003) relating to the increase in violence against women during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa. With regards to the exploratory nature of this review, the results from the included studies were arranged and interpreted using thematic analysis, highlighting gaps and understudied areas in the literature while enabling the identification of important themes (Khan et al., 2003).

Once the literature was assessed and selected, a thematic analysis was conducted, following Clarke and Braun's (2017) six key steps:

1. **Familiarizing oneself with the data-** To get a general idea of the research's conclusions, extracted data are examined. This step entails creating a preliminary list of codes and rereading the studies for increased accuracy.
2. **Generating initial codes-** Common themes, concepts, and drivers of VAW are coded, paying special attention to the tactics of abuse identified by the Power and Control Wheel.
3. **Identifying themes-** Codes are then grouped into broader themes to reflect patterns across the studies.
4. **Reviewing themes-** Themes are refined by reviewing them across studies to ensure that no important information is overlooked. Some themes are then merged or redefined to answer the research question.
5. **Defining themes-** Each theme is then clearly defined and labelled in relation to the research question. These will be the factors associated with the increase in VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa.

6. **Presenting findings and conclusions-** In this step, themes are organised for the next chapter where the theoretical framework chosen will interpret the findings.

### **Ensuring Intercoder Reliability and Reflexivity**

To improve transparency and rigor in thematic analysis, initial codes were created based on both the material read and the theoretical frameworks that guided the research. These addressed economic abuse, isolation and a lack of social support, psychological abuse, physical abuse, substance misuse, cultural or religious justification, mental health consequences, and patriarchy or gender standards. During the coding procedure, the author applied the codes to the retrieved data in a systematic manner, noting trends, repetitions, and anomalies.

To ensure intercoder reliability, an independent researcher coded studies with the same framework. Discrepancies in coding were reviewed until an agreement was established, with code definitions refined as needed for clarity and consistency. This iterative procedure reduced subjective interpretation while ensuring that themes accurately reflected the facts. Reflexivity was maintained by keeping a reflective notebook throughout the investigation, which documented how the researcher's personal perspectives and assumptions influenced interpretation.

The identification of economic abuse is an example of practical coding: studies describing financial control, employment restrictions, or denial of access to money were coded under this theme, emphasizing the link between individual abuse tactics and broader structural inequalities highlighted by the Power and Control Wheel and Intersectionality Theory. By carefully linking codes to specific examples in the literature, the analysis provides a clear account of how themes evolved, keeping the study's credibility and reliability.

## **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

- **Identifiable user content:** Since this study is an SLR, no personally identifying user content was used.

- Data Integrity: Data collected from all studies was accurately extracted and reported.
- Bias Minimization: A comprehensive search strategy and predefined inclusion/exclusion criteria was used to minimize risk of bias.
- Proper Citation: All sources were correctly cited, using APA 7<sup>th</sup> edition to give credit to the original authors of the data and to adhere to plagiarism laws.
- Transparency and Accountability: Any possible conflicts of interest were declared, and the approach and steps were documented in a transparent manner.

### 3.8 Limitations

There is a limited scope of available research. Research on the factors that contributed to the rise in VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown is limited, especially when it comes to the South African context. Literature on this topic may still be emerging and therefore reducing the scope of results. With it only being four years after the Covid-19 outbreak, more research may still be emerging, and the risk of publication bias is possible with results relying solely on what has been published between 2019 and 2023. Due to the multilingual nature of South Africa, some vital research may also have been excluded because of the language criteria used in this research. It may therefore be useful to conduct future research to include the official languages of South Africa.

## Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the systematic literature review aimed to identify the factors associated with the increase in violence against women (VAW) during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa. The results are organized into thematic categories derived from the data synthesis process, informed by the guiding theoretical framework of the Power and Control Wheel.

The chapter begins by summarizing the characteristics of the included studies, providing an overview of their designs and methodologies, geographic contexts and main findings. This is followed by thematic findings, highlighting the recurring patterns and drivers of VAW identified in the literature found.

This chapter serves as a foundation for the discussion that follows, which will interpret these findings in relation to the research question and broader societal implications.

#### 4.2.1 Table 1: Overview of included studies

Table 1 below provides a comprehensive overview of the studies included in the systematic review. It includes details such as the authors, year of publication, study design, sample characteristics, key findings, and relevance to the research themes.

<b>Author (s) &amp; Year</b>	<b>Study design and Methodology</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Relevance to Study (Themes and Keywords)</b>
Hartmann et al., 2023	Quantitative design: Cross-sectional survey conducted with males and females aged 13-24	Key associations identified between psychological well-being and GBV during the Covid 19 Lockdown among young people living with and without HIV.	Peri-urban communities in Cape Town	Increased GBV during Lockdown; Economic Factors
Buqa, 2022	Narrative methodological approach integrating interviews and literature	Lockdown measures increased GBV as victims were confined with perpetrators. Intersecting factors like patriarchal culture, economic hardship, gender inequality and religious beliefs contributed to the prevalence of GBV.	Pretoria South Africa	GBV during Lockdown, theology, intersectionality, socioeconomic factors
Manomano, 2021	Qualitative Literature review	The pandemic highlighted existing vulnerabilities such as unemployment, domestic violence, poverty and corruption. A need for culturally responsive social work practices was emphasized.	South Africa	Poverty and unemployment; lack of access to resources for reporting DV during Covid-19
Dekel & Abrahams, 2021	Telephonic interviews conducted with 16 women aged 21 - 52 from abuse shelters	Lockdown measures exacerbated factors associated with IPV, such as economic stress and over crowdedness,	Gauteng, Kwa-Zulu Natal and Western Cape	Power and control; economic stress; isolation; social support; fear of infection/ manipulation.
Mbunge, 2020	Qualitative literature review	GBV continued to increase during the pandemic and some victims had to choose between staying with their abusers or leave them and risking hunger.	South Africa	Food insecurity; economic stress, isolation and substance abuse.
Engelbrecht, 2023	Cross-sectional survey	Perceived increases in DV were associated with above average stress levels among	Urban metropolitan areas	DV; job loss; changes in income; food security,

		female primary caregivers in vulnerable families.		financial coping strategies.
Abrahams & Lund, 2022	Cross-sectional study	Findings highlight a bidirectional relationship between DV and common mental disorders (CMDs). Participants who experienced DV at the baseline interview, experienced probable CMD and those who experienced CMD experienced probable DV.	Low socioeconomic communities in Cape Town	CMDs; food insecurity; economic stress, domestic violence.
Gordon & Sauti, 2022	Comparative analysis: literature review	Covid-19 stressors, such as lack of social support, the ban of alcohol sales and fear of increased police presence and brutality contributed to IPV increases. Many women from low socioeconomic communities were most affected	South Africa and the USA	IPV and isolation; alcohol access; black majority; low socioeconomic community.
John et al., 2023	Mixed methods study including in-depth interviews and online surveys	The early pandemic policies made increased GBV risk and decreased victim support. Health care services, police services and access to justice for GBV were not prioritised.	SA, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria	GBV policy; healthcare; shelters, police services; justice
Kwinana et al., 2023	Semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis	Sexual violence increased due to stress associated with confinement during the lockdown. Reports decreased but violence persisted. Predominantly black female victims.	Thuthuzela Care Centre, Eastern Cape	Sexual violence; GBV; isolation; healthcare
Mahlangu et al., 2022	Exploratory qualitative study: telephone interviews thematically analysed	Study found a link between low socioeconomic class and increased risk for DV. Most women from low SES reportedly	Gauteng Province	IPV; socioeconomic class; confinement; food insecurity.

		experienced emotional partner violence due to lack of food and necessities.		
Duby et al., 2022	Surveys and qualitative interviews	Lockdown heightened experiences of mental distress of adolescents and young women. Fear of DV, strained family relationships and heightened poor mental health.	Six South African districts spanning over Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Free State, Mpumalanga, Kwa-Zulu Natal and Northwest.	Mental health; strained family relationships; confinement; domestic violence; financial stress.
Mashau, 2022	Practical missiological-approach, applied to a biblical case study	Lockdown increased family susceptibility to DV. There is a need to reimagine a biblical praxis that is life affirming liberating to victims of GBV.	South Africa	Gender-Based Violence within the African family unit; power and control, patriarchy and religion.
Hoosain & Robertson, 2023	Qualitative case study design collecting data through interviews	Perpetrators returned to the same relationship after having been arrested for GBV due to lack of social support. Men need to be equipped with coping skills to deal with stress and anxiety influenced by factors exacerbated by the pandemic. Masculinity and men's positionality in the community depends on financial power.	Three rural regions in Western Cape South Africa	Conflict resolution; social support; lack of financial freedom; GBV; emotional regulation; power relations; gender roles.
Mubangizi et al., 2023	Qualitative paradigm grounded in primary data from interviews and focus group discussions	The spike in GBV was attributed to women mocking their husbands and making fun of them for losing their jobs. Chiefs argued that when a husband faces job loss, it can lead to strained interaction with his wife.	Matatiele and Winnie Madikizela Mandela Local Municipalities	Unemployment; GBV; rural contexts; substance abuse, gender roles.
Nduna & Tshona, 2021	Qualitative rapid desktop review of surveys and police reports	Increased risk of poly violence against women during the lockdown. The ban of alcohol sales may have encouraged binge drinking, having psychological effects and possibly leading to DV. Closure of support	South Africa	Poly-violence; socio-economic factors; alcohol ban; female sexual roles.

		services and DV shelters meant more women stayed with their perpetrators. Some men who were used to multiple sexual partners may have been frustrated by being isolated with one partner, increasing the possibility of violence.		
Gregory et al., 2022	Rapid review mapping	Stay-at-home directives led to increased risk of domestic abuse (DA) for women and children. Overcrowding in households and stress associated with income loss and the ban of alcohol and cigarettes led to tension increasing the risk of DA. Increased risk of gender-based violence as women may be experiencing emotional and physical abuse in their homes.	Middle income countries: South Africa, UK, Ireland and Australia.	Social media; DA; government, policy; isolation.
Segalo, 2022	Visual and creative analysis using embroidery and applying decolonial feminist approach.	VAW is an almost accepted phenomenon in patriarchal society with violence from apartheid still resonating in. The covid-19 outbreak has worsened the terror of VAW in the household.	Gauteng province	GBV; decolonial feminism; isolation; patriarchy; power and control.
Baloyi, 2021	Qualitative research design: Practical theological analysis	Men who adhered to traditional patriarchal views were more likely to express their dominance through violence. Historically, the church has played a part in reinforcing the patriarchal views of dominance. Certain theological teachings and interpretations have perpetuated gender inequalities.	South Africa	Patriarchy and theology. Subordinating and persecuting women.

### **4.2.2 Table 1 Summary**

The studies included in the review encompass a range of methodologies, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. The research context includes various geographical regions within South Africa, with a focus on populations experiencing challenges with violence related to the Covid-19 Lockdown period. The included studies highlight themes and keywords around isolation, economic difficulties, class, food insecurity, mental health, patriarchy, religion, culture, and substance use. The findings highlight the complex interplay of these factors in shaping individuals' experiences and vulnerabilities of intersectional violence in households.

## **4.3 Thematic Findings**

This section presents the integrated thematic findings derived from the synthesis of both quantitative and qualitative literature. Key themes emerged from the analysis of the factors associated with the increase in violence against women during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa. These themes integrate numerical trends from quantitative studies with narrative insights from qualitative research to provide a comprehensive and holistic perspective. Themes were determined according to relevance to the study and significance to the theoretical framework the Theory of Intersectionality and the Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel. The table below illustrates these findings.

### **4.3.1 Table 2: Thematic analysis of key findings**

Table 2 below synthesizes the key themes emerging from the literature, categorizing the findings under relevant theoretical and conceptual frameworks. It illustrates how different studies contribute to understanding the dynamics of "power," "control," and "systemic barriers", all of which have been triggered during the Covid-19 Lockdown period.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Year of Publication</b>	<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Duluth Model: Power and Control Tactic</b>	<b>Intersectionality Framework</b>
<b>Isolation and Barriers to Seeking Help</b>							
	John et al.	2023	Women across multiple African countries	SA, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria	Early pandemic policies increased GBV risk and reduced victim support	Neglect by authorities	Women faced institutional barriers to reporting abuse, particularly in low-resource settings.
	Dekel & Abrahams	2021	16 women aged 21-52 from 5 abuse shelters	Rural and Urban Shelters in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape	Lockdown exacerbated factors associated with IPV such as economic stress and overcrowding	Isolation; economic abuse; fear of infection/manipulation	Women in shelters reported intensified isolation and stress due to socioeconomic and health vulnerabilities
	Kwinana et al.	2023	Predominantly Black female victims	Thuthuzela Care Centre, Eastern Cape	Sexual violence exacerbated by stress associated with	Sexual coercion; isolation	Women in marginalized communities faced heightened vulnerability due

					lockdown; Reporting decreased despite continued violence		to systemic neglect and confinement stress.
	Gregory et al.	2022	Women and children	Middle- income countries	Stay-at-home orders led to possible increased domestic abuse due to overcrowding and financial stress	Isolation; intimidation	Women in overcrowded households experienced more risks due to systemic and relational factors.
<b>Economic Instability and Financial Dependence</b>							
	Mubangizi et al.	2023	Rural couples	Matatiele and Winnie Madikizela Mandela Local Municipalities	GBV spike linked to job loss; Violence escalation affected by financial tension in households	Intimidation; threats	Women in rural areas experienced heightened IPV due to economic tensions and rigid gender roles.

	Mahlangu et al.	2022	Men and women aged 18+ from low to high-income households	Gauteng Province	Socioeconomic class linked to increased risk of DV; Lack of necessities increased emotional partner violence	Economic abuse; isolation	Women in low socioeconomic groups faced compounded stressors due to resource scarcity and confinement.
	Engelbrecht	2023	Female primary caregivers	Urban metropolitan areas	Perceived increased DV linked to stress among female primary caregivers	Economic abuse	Women in urban low-income households experienced heightened stress due to financial strain.
	Mbunge	2020	Women facing food insecurity	South Africa	GBV reportedly increased; Some victims stayed with abusers to avoid hunger	Economic abuse; threats	Women in low-income communities faced heightened vulnerability due to food insecurity and dependency.
	Manomano	2021	Women in low-income communities	South Africa	Pandemic highlighted vulnerabilities such as unemployment, domestic violence,	Economic abuse; isolation	Women in poverty faced compounded challenges due to systemic unemployment

					poverty, and corruption		and resource gaps.
	Hartmann et al.	2023	Males and Females ages 13-24 living with and without HIV	Peri-urban communities in Cape Town	Key associations between psychological well-being and GBV during the Covid-19 lockdown	Economic abuse; emotional manipulation	Young people from peri-urban areas faced unique challenges due to limited resources and existing health vulnerabilities.
<b>Psychological and Emotional Distress</b>							
	Abrahams & Lund	2022	Women experiencing DV and CMDs (common mental disorders)	Low socioeconomic communities in Cape Town	DV linked to CMDs. A bidirectional relationship was found between DV and CMDs.	Economic abuse	Women in low-resource areas and food insecure households experienced compounded mental health issues due to ongoing violence
	Duby et al.	2022	Adolescents and young women	Six South African districts	Lockdown worsened mental distress, fear of DV,	Emotional manipulation, isolation	Adolescent girls and young women faced vulnerabilities

					and family strain		due to factors like youth, gender, and poverty.
<b>Alcohol and Substance Use</b>							
	Nduna & Tshona	2021	Women experiencing poly-violence	South Africa	Alcohol bans and service closures increased risk of IPV; Women left vulnerable	Isolation; intimidation; sexual coercion	Women faced increased risk to poly-violence due to policy and systemic factors intersecting with socioeconomic factors.
	Gordon & Sauti	2022	Women in low-income communities	South Africa and USA	Covid-19 stressors (lack of support, alcohol bans, police brutality) contributed to increased IPV	Isolation; intimidation	Women in low-income communities faced compounded risks due to relational stressors.
<b>Cultural, Religious and Patriarchal Norms</b>							

	Baloyi	2021	Women in religious communities	South Africa	Certain theological teachings and interpretations were found to perpetuate gender inequalities.	Emotional abuse; manipulation, Using male privilege	Women in patriarchal and religious communities experienced increased risk of abuse due to systemic and relational difficulties.
	Hoosain & Robertson	2023	26 men and women (adult men, social workers and policemen)	Three rural regions in Western Cape	Perpetrators returned to abusive relationships after arrest due to lack of social support	Emotional abuse; Using male privilege	Women in rural communities faced increased difficulties due to systemic lack of resources and patriarchal norms.
	Segalo	2022	Women in low-income communities	Gauteng Province, South Africa	VAW is an almost accepted phenomenon in patriarchal society with violence from apartheid still resonating in. The covid-19 outbreak has worsened the terror of VAW	Economic abuse; Using male privilege	Women faced systemic and relational barriers rooted in apartheid-era structures and cultural norms.

					in the household.		
	Buqa	2022	A Black man and a Coloured woman; both of Christian religion	Pretoria and Alexandra, South Africa	Lockdown measures contributed to increased GBV; Patriarchal culture, economic hardship, gender inequality, and religious beliefs contributed to prevalence of GBV.	Isolation; Manipulation, Using Male Privilege	Patriarchal norms and religious beliefs disproportionately impacted women from low-income households.
	Mashau	2022	Women in religious African families	South Africa	Calls for reimagining biblical teachings to better support victims of GBV. Lockdown increased family susceptibility to DV.	Religious control; normalization of abuse	Women in religious communities faced barriers to reporting abuse due to cultural norms.

### 4.3.2 Table 2: Summary of Thematic Findings

Table 2 above synthesizes the key themes emerging from the literature, categorizing the findings under the relevant theoretical and conceptual framework of the Theory of Intersectionality and under the relevant themes of the Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel. It illustrates which themes the different studies have been categorised under and how these contribute to understanding the dynamics of power, control and systemic barriers. Key findings from the included studies under the themes "isolation and barriers to seeking help," "economic instability and financial dependence," "psychological and emotional distress," "alcohol and substance use," and "cultural, religious, and patriarchal norms " have been discussed in the section below.

#### 4.3.3.1 Theme 1: Isolation and Barriers to Seeking Help

The findings of this study suggest Isolation and Barriers to Seeking Help as factors associated with the increase in VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa. Isolation and systemic barriers limit an individual's ability to access social support, legal protection, and resources (Goodman et al., 2009; Stark, 2007;). These are defined as the extent to which individuals are socially isolated and encounter obstacles that prevent them from accessing support services (Mthembu et al., 2021).

This finding is consistent with Kwinana et al. (2023), Mahlangu et al. (2022), Dekel and Abrahams (2021), Manomano (2021), Gregory et al., (2022) and Gordon and Sauti (2022). Mahlangu et al. (2022) highlighted that a lack of social support left victims isolated and without viable means of escaping abusive situations. This aligns with findings from Dekel and Abrahams (2021) who reported that stay-at-home orders and travel restrictions heightened women's vulnerability to abuse by increasing their physical and emotional isolation. Similarly, Kwinana et al. (2023) found that despite ongoing sexual violence during the lockdown, reporting decreased, further emphasizing the barriers victims faced in seeking help.

Manomano (2021) identified the absence of mandatory regulations requiring health practitioners to report adult abuse in South Africa, which contributed to underreporting. The study noted that while 40 percent of men abuse their partners, only a small fraction of these cases are officially recorded. Gregory et al. (2022) further pointed out the lack of public health campaigns aimed at supporting perpetrators of violence against women, leaving gaps in

intervention strategies that could have mitigated abusive behaviour. Together, these studies highlight how systemic issues limited victims' ability to access support.

Gordon and Sauti (2022) found that policies implemented during the lockdown unintentionally exacerbated levels of violence against women. Reported police brutality in particular, discouraged victims from seeking justice, as fear of law enforcement deterred women from reporting their perpetrators (Gordon & Sauti, 2022). This finding aligns with John et al. (2023), who found that early pandemic policies reduced victim support and increased GBV risk, leaving many women trapped in abusive environments. These studies demonstrate how systemic issues and restrictive policies compounded isolation and created barriers that prevented victims from seeking help during the pandemic.

The Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel identifies Isolation as one of the tactics used in abusive relationships to maintain power and control over victims (Chavis & Hill, 2008). It is regarded as any action taken to limit the free movement of victims (Eaton et al., 2020; Pence & Maymar, 1986). In this study, although the factors Isolation and Barriers to Seeking Help during the Covid-19 Lockdown were not directly caused by perpetrators, they nevertheless contributed to an increase in VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa (Dekel & Abrahams, 2021; Gordon & Sauti, 2022; Kwinana et al., 2023).

#### 4.3.3.2 Theme 2: Economic Instability and Financial Dependence

The findings suggest that economic instability and financial dependence played a role in exacerbating VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa. Economic instability and financial dependence can be understood as the extent to which survivors rely on their partners financially, often limiting their ability to leave abusive relationships (Shamu et al., 2011). This reliance can involve financial control, where perpetrators withhold money or sabotage financial independence, further restricting survivors' autonomy (Adams et al., 2008). Such economic abuse may prevent survivors from leaving abusive situations due to financial insecurity (Postmus et al., 2012; Adams et al., 2008).

These findings align with Mubangizi et al., (2023), Mbunge (2020), Dekel and Abrahams (2021), Hartmann et al., (2023) and Abrahams and Lund (2022). Mubangizi et al. (2023) identified economic instability as a driving force behind the rise in VAW, reinforcing the idea that financial stress increases household tensions and, in turn, the likelihood of IPV. Similarly, Mbunge (2020) found that many GBV perpetrators were the primary breadwinners, forcing their female partners into a devastating predicament; to either endure abuse or face

economic hardship, including hunger, if they chose to leave the relationship. This study found that financial entrapment significantly limited women's autonomy and ability to escape abusive situations, further compounding their vulnerability.

The link between economic stress and IPV was also evident in Dekel and Abrahams' (2021) study, which found that men who experienced job loss or financial instability during the pandemic were more likely to resort to violence to reassert dominance within the household. This aligns with broader findings from Hartmann et al. (2023), who highlighted that economic hardship in South Africa is particularly severe, with higher-than-average levels of poverty and unemployment contributing to a volatile domestic environment.

Food insecurity was another critical aspect of economic instability that played a role in increasing IPV risk (Abrahams & Lund, 2022). Abrahams and Lund (2022) found that domestic violence was closely linked to food insecurity, which intersected with race and poverty, including employment status, receipt of government grants, and overcrowded living conditions. Women in lower-income communities, particularly those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, faced heightened risk due to systemic inequities that limited their access to economic resources and support networks (Abrahams & Lund, 2022).

Mahlangu et al. (2022) further reinforced this connection, reporting that food insecurity among low-income households had both direct and indirect links to VAW. The scarcity of essential resources heightened stress within households, increasing tensions and making women more susceptible to emotional, psychological, and physical abuse (Mahlangu et al., 2022; Mbunge, 2020; Mubangizi et al., 2023). Overall, these findings illustrate how economic instability and financial dependence served as compounding factors in cases of VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown. The findings highlight that women's inability to secure financial independence, coupled with structural inequalities such as poverty and food insecurity, left them trapped in cycles of abuse with limited options for escape.

The Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel identifies economic abuse as a strategy used by perpetrators to maintain control over victims, often by limiting access to finances, employment opportunities, or essential resources (Chavis & Hill, 2008). The findings suggest that economic instability and financial dependence, compounded by structural inequalities, played a significant role in increasing women's vulnerability to VAW during the lockdown. The intersection of poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, and financial control was found to create conditions in which many survivors were unable to seek help or leave abusive

situations (Abrahams & Lund, 2022; Mahlangu, 2022; Mbunge 2020), reinforcing patterns of coercive control.

#### 4.3.3.3 Theme 3: Mental and Psychological Distress

The findings of this study suggest that mental and psychological distress were key factors associated with the increase in VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa. Mental and psychological distress refers to the emotional and cognitive strain individuals experience due to exposure to prolonged stressors, uncertainty, fear, and trauma (Abrahams & Lund, 2022; Duby et al., 2022). This includes fear of violence and infection (Duby et al., 2022), family stress and tension (Kwinana et al., 2023), and common mental disorders such as anxiety and depression (Abrahams & Lund, 2022).

These findings align with Duby et al., (2022), Engelbrecht (2023) and Abrahams and Lund (2022). Duby et al. (2022) found that family confinement and the lack of social interaction intensified feelings of powerlessness, frustration and anger during the lockdown. These heightened emotions often manifested in violent outbursts within the home, increasing the risk of IPV (Duby et al., 2022). The isolation imposed by lockdowns removed crucial coping mechanisms, such as support from friends and extended family, leaving victims with little to no reprieve from abusive situations (Duby et al., 2022). This aligns with Engelbrecht's (2023) findings, which revealed that perceived increases in domestic violence within communities were linked to above-average stress levels. The prolonged stress of lockdowns and economic strain added to the psychological burden of both survivors and perpetrators, reinforcing patterns of violence and making it more challenging for victims to seek help or leave abusive relationships (Duby et al., 2022, Engelbrecht, 2023).

Abrahams and Lund (2022) found that women who experienced psychological or sexual abuse were nearly three times more likely to suffer from common mental disorders (CMDs), such as depression and anxiety. This aligns with Duby et al. (2022), who highlighted that prolonged exposure to IPV has been linked to severe mental health disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. These psychological consequences not only impact immediate well-being but also have long-term effects on survivors' ability to rebuild their lives, secure employment, and establish independent living situations (Abrahams & Lund, 2022; Duby et al., 2022).

According to the Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel, emotional abuse, intimidation, and coercive control contribute significantly to mental health challenges, trapping

survivors in a cycle of psychological dependency and distress (Chavis & Hill, 2008; Rankine et al., 2017). Perpetrators may manipulate victims through gaslighting, verbal abuse, and constant surveillance, exacerbating their distress and reinforcing control (Rankine et al., 2017).

The findings of this study highlight the complex relationship between mental health and VAW, where psychological distress arises not only from abuse but also from the heightened stress of the lockdown and pre-existing mental health conditions. These factors were found to interact in complex ways, contributing to an increased risk of VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa (Abrahams & Lund, 2022; DUBY et al., 2022).

#### 4.3.3.4 Theme 4: Alcohol and Substance Use

The findings of this study suggest that alcohol and substance abuse were factors associated with the increase in VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa. Alcohol and substance abuse refer to the excessive or harmful consumption of intoxicating substances that impair judgment, lower inhibitions, and increase aggression and can put either the user or others affected by the user's behaviour at risk (Brick, 2012; World Health Organization, 2024).

These findings align with Dekel and Abrahams (2021), Kwinana et al., (2023), Nduna and Tshona (2021) and Gordon and Sauti (2022). Dekel and Abrahams (2021) found that the lack of access to alcohol and cigarettes led to heightened stress levels in households, exacerbating the risk of IPV. In households where men were dependent on substances, the sudden inability to access them, due to both legal restrictions and financial hardship, led to increased aggression, with men attempting to reassert dominance through violence (Dekel & Abrahams, 2021).

Kwinana et al. (2023) also highlighted a link between alcohol use and increased physical and sexual violence, emphasizing that substance use plays a significant role in shaping power dynamics within abusive relationships. Alcohol impairs judgment, lowers inhibition, and escalates aggression, thereby contributing to the risk of more severe and frequent episodes of IPV (Kwinana et al., 2023). Similarly, Nduna and Tshona (2021) found that the alcohol ban during the Lockdown period in South Africa, may have had unintended consequences, as some individuals resorted to binge drinking when they did gain access to alcohol, resulting in negative psychological effects on families and contributing to the prevalence of domestic violence. The lack of regulated alcohol consumption during this period may have fuelled erratic behavioural patterns, further endangering vulnerable women in abusive households (Tisane, 2020).

The study by Gordon and Sauti (2022) suggested that the alcohol ban during the strictest lockdown (level 5) may have led to a temporary reduction in the severity of VAW, implying that alcohol was a significant contributing factor to IPV. However, as restrictions eased and alcohol became more accessible again, rates of violence spiked once more, highlighting the complex relationship between substance use, aggression, and VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown (Gordon & Sauti, 2022).

The Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel also identifies substance use as a contributing factor to abusive relationships, as perpetrators may use intoxication as an excuse for their actions while simultaneously blaming victims for provoking violence (Chavis & Hill, 2008; Rankine et al., 2017). The findings of this study highlight that substance abuse is both a trigger and a risk factor for VAW, particularly during the Covid-19 Lockdown period (Dekel & Abrahams, 2021).

#### 4.3.3.5 Theme 5: Cultural, Religious and Patriarchal Norms

The findings of this study suggest that cultural, religious, and patriarchal norms were associated with the persistence and escalation of VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa. Patriarchal norms refer to deeply embedded societal beliefs and practices that prioritize male dominance and control over women, often reinforcing gender inequality and justifying forms of violence as means of maintaining power (Baloyi, 2021).

These findings align with Baloyi (2021), Buqa (2022), Mubangizi et al., (2023), Segalo (2022), Mashau (2022) and Hoosain and Robertson (2023). Baloyi (2021) and Buqa (2022) found that patriarchal structures and traditional notions of masculinity contributed to the increase in VAW during the lockdown period. These structures were found to often reinforce male authority, leading men to use violence as a means to assert dominance over women (Baloyi, 2021). Similarly, Mubangizi et al. (2023) found that this pattern of control was particularly evident when men's economic roles were threatened, demonstrating how financial instability interacted with patriarchal expectations to exacerbate violence.

Segalo (2022) highlighted how cultural norms in many South African communities normalize VAW, making it more difficult for survivors to recognize abuse or seek support. Mashau (2022) further emphasized that this normalization created additional barriers for survivors, discouraging them from reporting abuse or seeking protection.

Similarly, Hoosain and Robertson (2023) found high rates of interpersonal GBV among male participants, framing it as an expression of male dominance in an unequal society that

structurally favours men. They observed that in rural regions, where patriarchal norms are deeply embedded, women faced compounded difficulties due to a lack of social support and systemic resources (Hoosain & Robertson, 2023).

The influence of religious teachings on IPV was also evident in the literature. Buqa (2022) found that Christian doctrines often reinforced male superiority, with some religious leaders promoting the belief that women were “created inferior to men” (p. 6). Similarly, Baloyi (2021) found that certain theological interpretations perpetuated gender inequalities, further increasing women’s risk of experiencing violence. In some cases, religious institutions played a direct role in preventing women from leaving abusive relationships, discouraging divorce and prioritizing family unity over personal safety (Baloyi, 2021; Buqa, 2022).

The intersection of these cultural, religious, and patriarchal norms created multiple systemic barriers for women seeking help (Buqa, 2022, Segalo, 2022). Many survivors of IPV faced stigma when attempting to report abuse, as societal expectations often placed the blame on them for failing to conform to traditional gender roles (Mashau, 2022). The Covid-19 Lockdown exacerbated these challenges, as economic dependency, social isolation, and male authority within the household were reinforced (Baloyi, 2021; Buqa, 2022; Mashau, 2022; Segalo, 2022).

The Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel identifies male privilege and cultural justification as key mechanisms that sustain abusive power dynamics (Chavis & Hill, 2008). The findings of this study emphasize how cultural, religious, and patriarchal norms intersect to maintain systemic gender-based violence, limiting women’s ability to seek protection or social support (Mashau, 2022; Segalo, 2022;). Their study further highlights how pre-existing inequality in society was further perpetuated during the Covid-19 Lockdown, exacerbating the risk for increased VAW.

#### 4.4 Intersectionality Framework and the Complex Nature of VAW

The Intersectionality Framework highlights how multiple overlapping factors contributed to the increase in VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa. Intersectionality, as introduced by Crenshaw (1989), acknowledges that women experience violence differently depending on their intersecting social identities, such as race, class, socioeconomic status, and mental health status (Olanlesi-Aliua et al., 2024). The studies found highlight how the Covid -19 Lockdown exacerbated these vulnerabilities, illustrating how structural inequalities shaped the experiences of survivors.

Economic instability intersected with gendered power dynamics, where women dependent on their partners for financial support faced significant barriers to leaving abusive relationships (Mahlangu et al., 2022). Financial distress, compounded by food insecurity and job losses, heightened tensions in households, leading to an increase in the risk associated with intimate partner violence (Abrahams & Lund, 2022; Mubangizi et al., 2023). Women from low-income households, in particular, were disproportionately affected, as they had limited access to resources, shelters, or alternative means of financial independence (Manomano, 2021; Mbunge, 2020).

Mental and psychological distress was found to have interacted with other risk factors, such as isolation and substance use, to create an environment of heightened emotional instability (Duby et al., 2022). Fear of infection, anxiety due to lockdown restrictions, and pre-existing mental health conditions contributed to increased stress levels within households, making intimate partner violence more likely (Engelbrecht, 2023). Additionally, the psychological impact of violence made it more difficult for survivors to seek help, reinforcing cycles of abuse (Abrahams & Lund, 2022).

Cultural and patriarchal norms also played a crucial role in shaping the experiences of women during the lockdown. The intersection of religion, cultural beliefs, and patriarchal ideologies reinforced gendered power structures that normalized violence and was found to limit women's ability to challenge their abuse (Baloyi, 2021; Buqa, 2022). Women in traditional or religious communities were often discouraged from reporting violence or seeking help, as they were expected to maintain family unity and uphold submissive roles (Mashau, 2022).

Using the Theory of Intersectionality to understand VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown reveals how systemic and structural factors collectively contributed to increased risks for women. The thematic analysis further highlights this through the overlapping of different factors from the same studies and authors. Mahlangu et al. (2022) for example, highlighted the intersection of socio-economic status and isolation and found that women from different socioeconomic standings were affected differently by the isolation associated with the lockdown period. This study highlights how intersections of gender, race, class and socio-economic status interact complexly, increasing the risk of VAW during the pandemic.

## 4.5 Chapter Summary

The findings of this study illustrate the complex and multifaceted nature of VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa. The thematic analysis highlights key factors such as isolation, economic instability, mental distress, substance abuse, and patriarchal norms that were associated with the rise in VAW. Each of these factors not only influenced VAW individually but also intersected, exacerbating women's vulnerability to abuse. The lockdown conditions of the pandemic created an environment where already existing social, economic, and psychological challenges were intensified, reinforcing cycles of power and control that underpin violence against women.

# Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the study findings and offers recommendations based on the analysis. It also outlines the study's limitations and suggests areas for further research. The chapter aims to synthesize key insights from the study and highlight their implications for future research, policy and application in crises.

## 5.2 Aim and Purpose of Study

The primary aim of this study was to conduct a systematic literature review to explore the factors associated with the increase in violence against women during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa. The study sought to explore how these factors interacted complexly to influence the increase in VAW. The various dimensions of power and control, particularly in the context of isolation, economic stability, food insecurity, mental health, patriarchy, religion, culture, and substance use were found and highlighted in this study. Through thematic analysis, this study aimed to identify patterns and gaps in the existing literature, contributing to a deeper understanding of the increase in VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa.

## 5.3 Summary of Study Findings

The study findings revealed several recurring themes that highlight the complex interplay of factors influencing VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa.

### **Isolation and Barriers to Seeking Help:**

The Covid-19 Lockdown placed restrictions on movement and social interactions, exacerbating isolation among victims of VAW and limiting any forms of social support. Many women were confined with their abusers, making it difficult to seek help or access support services. The closure of shelters and support networks further reduced avenues for help and escape. The findings indicate that barriers such as fear of police brutality, lack of access to available shelters and resources for help, and the isolation associated with the lockdown regulations contributed to increased vulnerability.

### **Economic Instability and Financial Dependence:**

Economic hardship, job losses and financial dependence on abusers were found to be key factors associated with increased VAW during the lockdown. Many women faced the

difficulty of having to decide between staying in abusive relationships for economic survival or leaving and facing food insecurity and poverty. The study found that economic abuse, such as withholding money or restricting employment opportunities, further entrenched control over victims. Tensions associated with food insecurity and joblessness also increased the risk of abuse in the household, with perpetrators using violence to re-assert dominance in the household.

#### **Mental and Psychological Distress:**

It was found that the psychological impact of the lockdown, combined with ongoing abuse, led to heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder among victims of abuse. The study found that prolonged exposure to abuse exacerbated mental health conditions, making it more difficult for victims to seek help or make informed decisions about their safety. This further perpetuated struggles with mental health within the household, highlighting a complex cycle between abuse and mental health issues.

#### **Alcohol and Substance Use:**

The study revealed that alcohol and substance use contributed to escalated risk of violence against women. While the lockdown led to temporary bans on alcohol sales, illicit alcohol consumption persisted, contributing to increased aggression and violent outbursts in households. Additionally, substance withdrawal symptoms led to heightened stress, further exacerbating risks and instances of violence.

#### **Cultural, Religious, and Patriarchal Norms:**

Deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs and rigid gender norms were found to have played a significant role in justifying and sustaining VAW in communities. The study found that many women were discouraged from leaving abusive relationships due to cultural expectations of female submission and religious teachings that emphasized family preservation over personal safety. These norms reinforced power imbalances and limited women's ability to seek protection or justice.

## **5.4 Conclusions Drawn from the Study Findings**

The findings of this study highlight the significant impact of the Covid-19 Lockdown on increased VAW in South Africa.

These themes collectively illustrate the multifaceted nature of VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown and highlight the need for comprehensive interventions to address these challenges due to the intersecting nature of the factors highlighted.

Isolation and barriers to seeking help left victims afraid to approach law enforcement leading to fewer options for safety, with many shelters being at capacity or too distant, while economic instability heightened victims' dependence on abusive partners. Mental and psychological distress contributed to victims' entrapment in violent relationships, while alcohol and substance use exacerbated aggression and household conflicts, further increasing the risk associated with violence toward women in the household. Additionally, cultural, religious, and patriarchal norms legitimized violence and discouraged women from seeking assistance. These factors did not operate in isolation but intersected to create an environment where VAW was exacerbated during the Covid-19 Lockdown. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach that includes economic empowerment, mental health support, policy reforms, and cultural shifts towards gender equality and a greater understanding of how these factors influence each other and exacerbate violence. Many of these challenges were already experienced by communities before the Covid-19 Lockdown period but have been exacerbated by its occurrence and associated regulations.

It is also important to consider how these results intersect with the theoretical frameworks which guide this study. The Duluth Model: Power and Control Wheel emphasizes tactics such as isolation, economic abuse and coercion as mechanisms of abuse. The findings of this study affirm this framework. Isolation during lockdown, for example, mirrors the control tactic of the Power and Control Wheel, although it was only indirectly imposed by the perpetrator and directly by government-imposed restrictions. This highlights how structural and systemic conditions replicated and intensified the dynamics of control described by the Duluth Model.

Similarly, the theme Economic Instability and Financial Dependence aligns with the Duluth Model's emphasis on economic abuse. However, the study's findings also highlight the complex interaction with broader socioeconomic policies, increasing women's vulnerability to violence.

## 5.5 Recommendations

To mitigate the factors that contributed to the rise in VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown, several key recommendations are proposed.

Firstly, it is important to strengthen support services for victims. This includes ensuring that shelters remain operational during times of crisis and that victims have access to emergency hotlines and online counselling services. Creating online service platforms that are more easily accessible through less technologically advanced cellphones may be beneficial in increasing avenues for social support and for reporting violence. These initiatives could be coordinated through the Department of Social Development in partnership with NGOs, ensuring that both physical infrastructure (shelters, safe houses) and digital access (low-data platforms, toll-free hotlines) are maintained during emergencies.

Secondly, economic empowerment programs should be implemented to reduce financial dependency on abusive partners and increase economic literacy for victims. This can include providing job training programs, financial assistance, and access to microloans for women. An example of this is the Covid-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant which was introduced as a sustainable form of income support for unemployed people. To ensure sustainability, the Department of Small Business Development and local municipalities could provide skills training, mentorship, and market access for women entrepreneurs, while also integrating survivors of violence into existing social protection schemes.

Thirdly, expanding mental health services is necessary in understanding and addressing the psychological impact of abuse. Community-based interventions should focus on providing trauma-informed care and psychological support for victims, focusing on more sustained ways to educate victims as well as perpetrators around mental health. This could be led by the Department of Health in collaboration with community health workers and faith-based organisations, with training provided for counsellors, social workers, and lay health workers to ensure accessible and affordable mental health support at the community level.

Fourth, stronger regulations around alcohol sales and substance abuse treatment programs should be established to decrease the link between substance use and domestic violence. The aim of these would be to increase psychoeducation around the effects of substance and alcohol abuse and their effects on increased risk of VAW. Sustained ways to work through stress can also be introduced, decreasing the reliance on substances and leading

to greater independence even during times of crisis. The Department of Social Development and local rehabilitation centres could implement community-based awareness campaigns, expand access to treatment programmes, and integrate stress-management interventions such as peer-support groups.

Lastly, long-term interventions should focus on challenging cultural, religious, and patriarchal norms that perpetuate gender-based violence in the household and community at large. This can be achieved through community engagement, educational initiatives and activations, and media campaigns that promote gender equality and challenge harmful stereotypes. Religious leaders and elders in the family are also encouraged to spend time explaining the harmful effects of violence in the household and highlighting the need to experience other ways of communication and respect in the marriage. To operationalise this, the South African Council of Churches, traditional authorities, and gender advocacy groups could lead dialogue sessions, theological reinterpretation initiatives, and training for community leaders, ensuring that cultural and religious spaces become platforms for promoting gender equity.

## 5.6 Limitations and Areas for Further Research

With the use of secondary data, some data like the lived experiences of victims may not have been fully captured in the study. Additionally, the scope of this study was limited to South Africa and further research is needed to explore how these factors manifest in different cultural and regional contexts. Another limitation is the focus on a systematic literature review, which does not capture real-time data or evolving trends as it is limited to a time. Future research should consider studies that incorporate firsthand accounts from survivors, law enforcement officials, and service providers to incorporate real life experiences and have the voices of victims and perpetrators heard through the study. Investigating the role of digital platforms in reporting and addressing VAW during crises could also offer new insights into modern intervention strategies. Further research should also examine the long-term effects of the Covid-19 Lockdown on survivors of VAW and the effectiveness of post-pandemic policy interventions and how technology or industrialisation has been used to increase avenues made available for women to report and find shelter from abuse.

## 5.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the study's conclusions, emphasizing the key factors that contributed to the increase in VAW during the Covid-19 Lockdown in South Africa. The findings highlighted the role of isolation and barriers to seeking help, economic instability and financial dependence, mental distress, substance use and cultural norms in exacerbating violence against women. Based on these findings, recommendations were made to strengthen support services, promote economic empowerment and literacy, expand mental health resources, regulate substance use, challenge religious and cultural norms around gender roles and overall increase education around these issues. The chapter also outlined the study's limitations and suggested areas for further research, highlighting the need for continued investigation into effective strategies for addressing VAW in crisis situations. This study contributes to the broader understanding of violence against women and provides a foundation for policy development and efforts aimed at preventing future escalations of VAW in and out of crisis.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: JBI Extraction Tool and Example:

### JBI QARI Data Extraction Tool for Qualitative Research

Reviewer \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Author \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

Journal \_\_\_\_\_ Record Number \_\_\_\_\_

#### Study Description

Methodology|

\_\_\_\_\_

Method

\_\_\_\_\_

Phenomena of interest

\_\_\_\_\_

Setting

\_\_\_\_\_

Geographical

\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural

\_\_\_\_\_

Participants

\_\_\_\_\_

Data analysis

\_\_\_\_\_

Authors conclusions

\_\_\_\_\_

Comments

\_\_\_\_\_

Complete

Yes

No

**Fig 4**

*Example of the JBI extraction form used during the data extraction process.*

**Example of JBI Qualitative Data Extraction Tool completed for the study by Mahlangu et al. (2022):**

**1. Author(s):**

Pinky Mahlangu, Andrew Gibbs, Nwabisa Shai, Mercilene Machisa, Rachel Jewkes

**2. Year: 2022**

**3. Geographical Context: South Africa**

**4. Setting:**

The study investigates the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on women and children's experiences of violence within homes in South Africa.

**5. Cultural Context:**

The research focuses on South African households across various socio-economic statuses during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

**6. Participants:**

Women and children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in South Africa.

**7. Methodology and Method:**

Qualitative study using in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather detailed personal experiences.

**8. Phenomena of Interest:**

Experiences of violence in the home during the Covid-19 lockdown.

**9. Data Analysis:**

Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes related to violence during the lockdown.

## **10. Authors Conclusions**

The study suggests the need for socio-economic interventions to mitigate the risks of domestic violence during pandemics. Structural and social relief measures should be strengthened to reduce job and income loss and address food insecurity. Additionally, psychosocial support should be provided to mitigate the mental health impacts of pandemics and lockdowns.

## **11. Findings:**

The lockdown was found to have unprecedented negative economic impacts on families and exacerbated some of the risk factors for violence against women and children in the home in South Africa. Some women reported experiences of emotional violence. Experiences of physical violence were mostly amongst children. The risk factors for women and children's experiences of violence in the home differed by socio-economic class. Job losses and reduction in earnings resulted in food insecurity, which was found to be a key driver of violence in most low socio-economic status (SES) families.

Confinement in the home with spouses was an unfamiliar and difficult experience, associated with conflict and perpetration of violence by men in high SES families. Participants across socio-economic groups reported high levels of stress with limited psychosocial support available during the lockdown.

## **12. Comments:**

The study highlights the differential impact of socio-economic status on experiences of VAW during the Covid-19 lockdown in South Africa. It also highlights the intersectional nature of the factors associated with the increase of VAW.