



GBV AND FEMICIDE. A LITERATURE REVIEW

Inganathi Mzimkhulu^{1*}, Simon Murote Kang'ethe²

^{1,2} Department of Social Work, iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu, Mthatha, Eastern Cape,
South Africa, Postal code 5099

Corresponding Author Email: 222572868@mywsu.ac.za

Abstract: Femicide is the deliberate killing of women and girls because of their gender, frequently by intimate partners or family members, whereas gender-based violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at individuals because of their gender. The purpose of this study is to critically assess the prevalence, causes, effects, and efficacy of current GBV and femicide intervention strategies. Thematic analysis served as the basis for a conventional literature review methodology. Three chapters and eighty journal articles, mostly from 2015 to 2026, were examined. Studies that addressed GBV and femicide in English were the focus of the inclusion criteria; non-English publications and studies that solely addressed workplace bullying or unrelated violence were not. Google Scholar, ResearchGate, EBSCOhost, JSTOR, PubMed, and Sabinet were among the scholarly databases consulted. Thematic findings included the normalization of violence, socioeconomic dependence, psychological and societal effects, gender inequality and patriarchal norms, and gaps in interventions. The study concludes that in order to lower GBV and femicide, more robust law enforcement, economic empowerment, and social transformation are crucial.

Keywords: Gender-Based Violence, Femicide, Patriarchy, Intimate Partner Violence, South Africa

Introduction and Background

Any harmful act directed at an individual or group because of their gender is known as gender-based violence (GBV), which is a global health and human rights concern (Desai & Mandal, 2022). It has strong roots in harmful norms, power abuse, and gender inequality (Ochani et al., 2024). Physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse are all considered forms of gender-based violence. In the past, most communities in sub-Saharan nations adhered to patriarchal cultures that are believed to motivate gender-based atrocities (Kang'ethe, 2014a,b). This is why some culturally oriented researchers have advocated for weakening patriarchal structures as a possible solution to gender-based violence and other related social ills (Kang'ethe, 2009). Gender inequality is perpetuated by patriarchal norms and values that are entrenched within both nuclear and extended family structures (Zikalala, 2026). In South Africa, many women become secondary victims of gender-based violence. Historically marginalized Black African Bantu-speaking communities, who were denied access to socioeconomic opportunities, predominantly reside in townships across the country. As a result of systemic exclusion, women in South Africa remain underrepresented in many economic sectors, leaving many financially dependent on men, including spouses, intimate partners, or other family members (Kangéthe et al., 2025). This economic dependence increases their vulnerability to gender-based violence perpetrated by their male counterparts.

Femicide, on the other hand, refers to the intentional killing of women because of their gender, often perpetrated by intimate partners or family members (Abrahams et al., 2024). It represents one of the most extreme forms of violence against women and girls and is rooted in harmful gender norms, discriminatory beliefs, and misogyny (UN Women, 2022). The increasing



prevalence of femicide may be attributed to the fact that it remains underreported, understudied, and poorly understood as both a public health and human rights issue, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (Reis & Meyer, 2024). Femicide is generally classified into two main categories: intimate partner femicide (IPF), committed by a current or former intimate partner, and non-intimate partner femicide (NIPF). Despite limited data and inadequate documentation in many low- and middle-income countries, global estimates indicate that approximately 89,000 women were intentionally killed in 2022, with about 48,800 of these deaths perpetrated by intimate partners or family members (UN Women, 2022). Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a widespread global phenomenon. According to the World Health Organization, nearly one in three women (30%) have experienced physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives (World Health Organization, 2021). Femicide, often preceded by repeated abuse, represents the most extreme outcome within this continuum of violence.

South Africa has some of the highest rates of GBV and femicide globally, making the issue a critical concern for both academic inquiry and government intervention. Although February is commonly associated with love and celebration, for many women in South Africa, it remains a traumatic and distressing period, with reports indicating that one woman is raped every three hours (Reis & Meyer, 2024). Furthermore, with 10,818 rape cases reported during the first quarter of 2022, South Africa is frequently described as having one of the highest rape rates in the world (Govender, 2023). The country's rate of intimate partner femicide is estimated to be five times higher than the global average. In South Africa, GBV is deeply entrenched in households, workplaces, cultural practices, and societal norms, making it a pervasive and persistent social problem (Kangéthe et al., 2025). The term "violence against women by intimate partners" describes the physical, sexual, and psychological abuse that women endure at the hands of their current or past partners (Cunha & Gonçalves, 2019). In the worst situations, it causes women to perish. According to estimates of this victimization, intimate partners are responsible for about 38.6% of all homicides against women worldwide.

This translates to more than 30,000 female murders per year (Stöckl et al., 2013). Many researchers have been interested in the severity of violence. To gain a thorough understanding of the phenomenon and anticipate and prevent it, many have investigated the factors associated with these deaths (Garcia-Vergara et al., 2022). However, these researchers wonder whether it is still impossible to stop women from dying at the hands of their intimate partners. Despite legal frameworks and awareness campaigns, both globally and locally, incidents continue to rise (Muzamani et al., 2026a). The purpose of this study is to critically examine the body of research on femicide and gender-based violence to comprehend their prevalence, causes, effects, and the efficacy of current intervention techniques.

Problem statement

Gender-based violence (GBV), particularly femicide, remains a persistent and entrenched crisis in South Africa, disproportionately affecting women through violence and psychological harm primarily committed by men (Marques et al., 2026). Many murders occur within close relationships, revealing the danger present even at home. Societal norms driven by patriarchal systems normalize violence, encouraging male dominance (Sontate et al., 2021). Factors such as poverty, unemployment, and financial stress further entrap victims in abusive situations, while harmful beliefs and substance abuse sustain violence (Kangéthe et al., 2025; Platania, 2025). The consequences for victims include severe trauma, mental health issues, and, in the case of femicide, death (Mathewsi, 2025). GBV destabilizes families and communities across



generations, leading to financial instability and overburdening national healthcare, legal, and social services (Wamue-Ngare et al., 2024).

Methodology

A methodology is the overarching plan and justification for the planning, execution, and analysis of a research study (Kapur, 2018). Through a traditional literature review, this study examined GBV and Femicide. To achieve data saturation, the researchers reviewed 98 articles and 3 book chapters published between 2015 and 2026. However, the researchers note that, although the inclusion criteria were for articles published between 2015 and 2025, a few older articles were included because of their rich data. The manuscript was written in English, and non-English publications were excluded. A comprehensive search for pertinent literature was conducted across several academic databases, including ResearchGate, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, JSTOR, PubMed, and Sabinet. Moreover, the review excluded studies that addressed only workplace bullying or GBV. Thematic analysis was used to examine GBV and femicide by reviewing selected articles, coding recurring ideas, and grouping them into themes. The purpose of this research is to critically examine the body of research on femicide and gender-based violence to comprehend their prevalence, causes, effects, and the efficacy of current intervention techniques.

Thematic findings

Table 1

No	Themes
1	Patriarchal Norms and Gender Inequality
2	Socioeconomic Dependence and Structural Inequality
3	Psychological, Physical, and Societal Impacts of GBV/Femicide
4	Normalization of Violence in Intimate Relationships and Stigma
5	Ineffectiveness and Gaps in Current Interventions

Patriarchal Norms and Gender Inequality

These researchers argue that patriarchal systems are a primary driver of gender-based violence (GBV) and femicide (Kang'ethe, 2014a). Disturbingly, GBV and femicide have become global pandemics and continue to be pervasive in South Africa, where women are disproportionately affected by violence predominantly perpetrated by men (Muzamani et al., 2026b). Furthermore, gender-based violence remains a significant concern within South African universities, driven by a complex interplay of cultural and structural factors (Gwiza & Hendricks, 2025). The literature review further reveals that several cultural dynamics contribute to GBV in South Africa, including deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs, harmful gender norms, and culturally sanctioned power imbalances (Dutywa, 2026; Makhene, 2022). The study of Bozkurt et al. (2025) discovered that universities are battling GBV affecting all genders. However, multiple cases of GBV are reported among female students, with largely males being the offenders. Moreover, GBV is entrenched in societal gender norms that strengthen male dominance and subjugate women. Patriarchal beliefs, toxic masculinity, and gendered power dynamics position males in a spot of authority and decision making, meanwhile silencing female voices and perpetuating harmful stereotypes (Bagshaw, 2019; Kangéthe et al., 2025).



On the other hand, femicide, the intentional murder of women based on their gender, is a prevalent and troubling issue globally, with South Africa experiencing a worryingly high rate (Mathebula, 2024). The research demonstrates that the rate at which women are abused, violated, and brutally murdered in South Africa continues to be a source of profound concern and an undeniable blight on society (Ngidi, 2022). According to the literature, the study finds that there are several sociocultural determinants that contribute to femicide in South Africa. The literature revealed that gender norms deeply entrenched in patriarchy, toxic masculinity, and the objectification of women play a major role (Dutywa, 2026; Ngcobo, 2025). Cultural beliefs and practices, such as gender based discrimination, harmful traditions, and societal acceptance of violence, maintain the problem (Mudimeli & Khosa-Nkatini, 2024). Femicide, the murdering of women because they are women, is a vital issue in South Africa, with fatal consequences for individuals and society (Abrahams et al., 2024). Understanding the sociocultural factors that contribute to femicide is critical for developing effective interventions.

In 2022, of the 89,000 women intentionally killed worldwide, Africa recorded the highest number of reported femicide cases compared to other regions (de Vasconcelos et al., 2024). In South Africa, approximately 27% of women aged 15 years and older have experienced physical or sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner during their lifetime (Kuo et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2022). Scholars have used the term “patriarchal masculinity” to describe social practices and belief systems that promote male superiority over women and reinforce the dominance of masculinity over femininity (Jewkes et al., 2015). According to Deane (2024a), some societies normalize violence against women as a mechanism for enforcing control, while perpetrators often face little or no accountability for their actions. Cultural practices such as dowry and bride price systems may further reinforce gender hierarchies and sustain patriarchal structures (Fulu et al., 2023; Fulu & Miedema, 2015; Kang'ethe, 2023). Within these contexts, men are often socially empowered to regulate women's behavior, and any perceived noncompliance may result in punishment or abuse (Kasungu, 2023).

Socioeconomic Dependence and Structural Inequality

This research highlights how financial instability and economic dependence contribute significantly to gender-based violence (GBV), often manifesting through financial control, transactional relationships, and conflicts over money (Kangéthe et al., 2025). Globally, GBV constitutes a major public health concern and reflects unequal gender relations embedded within societies (Enaifoghe, 2019; Lima & Guedes, 2024). It is also a serious violation of human rights, with far-reaching socioeconomic and developmental consequences for survivors, their families, communities, and society at large (Lata, 2023). Disturbingly, femicide represents the most extreme manifestation of gender-based violence (GBV) and refers to the killing of women or girls because of their gender (Enaifoghe et al., 2021; Maphakela et al., 2026). In societies where practices such as dowry systems are prevalent, women are often treated as the property of their husbands or families, thereby reinforcing patriarchal power imbalances and increasing the risk of femicide (Kang'ethe, 2023; Mphatheni, 2024; Srivastava et al., 2024). Furthermore, women are more likely than men to perform unpaid or underpaid emotional labor, including domestic and childcare responsibilities, which perpetuates long-standing gender stereotypes (Scambor et al., 2019). Simultaneously, men frequently occupy higher-ranking positions across various industries, contributing to persistent wage disparities in which men earn more than women for equivalent work, thereby sustaining gender inequality (Kräft, 2022).



These economic inequalities often place men in positions of power and control over women, particularly when women are unemployed or financially dependent on male partners or family members. Economic dependence may therefore increase women's vulnerability to GBV and limit their ability to leave abusive relationships. The determinants that drive and sustain GBV are closely linked to gendered power inequalities rooted in patriarchy (Javed & Chattu, 2021). GBV and intimate partner violence (IPV) are more prevalent in societies where violence is normalized, and male dominance is socially accepted. Such belief systems may manifest in men's perceived entitlement to sex, rigid enforcement of gender roles, the treatment of women as inferior, and the association of masculinity with control over women (Dutywa, 2026; Khalaf et al., 2022). These attitudes often intersect with additional factors, including limited societal support, substance abuse, harmful religious or cultural practices, socioeconomic inequality, and low levels of women's empowerment (Lwamba et al., 2022).

Survivors of GBV often struggle to leave abusive relationships because of financial dependence on perpetrators (Dutywa, 2026). In some cases, women may remain in relationships primarily for economic support, despite experiencing abuse. Consequently, many victims remain trapped in toxic and dangerous relationships, with some fearing for their lives should they attempt to leave (Nyathi et al., 2024). Furthermore, harsh socioeconomic conditions may compel some women to form relationships with unfamiliar men in pursuit of financial security or material support, thereby exposing them to heightened risks of violence, exploitation, or even death (Ratele, 2022). Therefore, promoting women's economic independence is essential in addressing and combating GBV and femicide.

Psychological, Physical, and Societal Impacts of GBV/Femicide

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a serious global problem that causes severe physical, psychological, and emotional harm to victims (Enaifoghe & Adekola, 2026; Malatjie & Mamokhere, 2024). Femicide, however, represents the most extreme outcome of GBV, resulting in the killing of women because of their gender. Societal norms and attitudes have contributed to this crisis by normalizing harmful practices such as controlling women and using physical violence as a form of punishment (Deane, 2024a). Evidence further suggests that perpetrators often display controlling and abusive behaviors years before committing homicidal acts. These behaviors frequently intensify during the period preceding the homicide, particularly through stalking, surveillance, and persistent monitoring of the victim (Enander et al., 2022).

A feminist analysis of the political and economic elements that support violence against women reveals a complicated web of structural injustices that consistently disadvantage women in Ghana and South Africa (Bazaanah & Ngcobo, 2024; Enander et al., 2022). Women face economic challenges such as unequal pay and limited access to resources, which increases their susceptibility to violence (Bazaanah & Ngcobo, 2024). Due to societal and historical factors, this widespread issue is particularly severe in countries such as South Africa and Ghana (Davhana-Ngwenya, 2023). Due to severe physical harm inflicted by her intimate partner on a non-intimate partner, women who have survived GBV may have physical issues that prevent them from walking again. She won't be able to work for herself and her kids, for example, because she won't be able to walk again. As a result, others are informed that their severe womb injuries will prevent them from becoming pregnant after experiencing GBV (Enaifoghe & Adekola, 2026; Govindsammy, 2024).



The research highlights that entrenched societal norms and gender roles perpetuate GBV, affecting women's physical, mental, and reproductive health (Shalak et al., 2023). South Africa experiences high rates of sexual assault, female homicide, and domestic abuse, with GBV worsening the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Enaifoghe & Adekola, 2026). With South Africa experiencing the highest HIV prevalence in the globe, extinguishing the drivers of GBV is topical and long overdue (Kang'ethe, 2020, 2021, 2022a; Kang'ethe, 2024; Kangethe, 2023)

The consequences of gender-based violence extend far beyond immediate physical harm, often resulting in long-term mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Farooq, 2024; Kang'ethe, 2022a; Ketwa & Kang'ethe, 2024; Stein et al., 2025). Addressing GBV effectively, therefore, requires a comprehensive understanding of its health-related impacts and broader policy implications.

Despite ongoing advocacy initiatives and policy interventions, such as the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (2020–2030), health systems continue to face challenges in integrating GBV responses into standard healthcare services. Consequently, many survivors continue to experience persistent physical, psychological, and psychosocial difficulties without adequate support (Burris, 2022; Kieser, 2023). Emotionally, survivors of GBV may experience feelings of shame, guilt, and fear, which often lead them to conceal the abuse by hiding injuries or making excuses for the perpetrator's behavior (Meinhart et al., 2024).

Normalization of Violence in Intimate Relationships and Stigma

The study argues that gender-based violence (GBV), particularly intimate partner violence, is widespread and often leads to femicide (Mofokeng & Simelane, 2024). It further highlights that repeated abuse within relationships frequently goes unreported due to the normalization of violence (Calvino & Matadi, 2023). For many women, the home is not a place of safety but rather a site of risk and harm. This study draws on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, later refined as the bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1994), to frame the analysis and examine the underlying factors and structures that drive GBV (Mestvirishvili et al., 2025; Özdoğru, 2011; Tong & An, 2023). The framework considers how harmful community practices such as forced marriages, "Ukuthwala," and the misrepresentation of "lobola," alongside stigma and social judgment, discourage the reporting of violence (Chikono & Kang'ethe, 2026; Kang'ethe, 2026).

Additional contributing factors include rigid gender roles, male entitlement, and societal corruption, which may shield perpetrators and perpetuate cycles of GBV in South Africa. Substance abuse, including alcohol and drug use, is also identified as a significant contributing factor, often used to justify or exacerbate violent behavior (Machisa et al., 2023; Mtotywa et al., 2023).

Ineffectiveness and Gaps in Current Interventions

Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) remains a persistent crisis that shows no signs of abating in the twenty-first century (Swemmer, 2021). Despite international treaties and national legislation, South Africa's GBVF rates continue to rise, with significant increases observed during the COVID-19 lockdown. According to Kang'ethe (2022), and supported by Baloyi (2023), approximately 87,000 complaints related to gender-based violence were reported to police within the first week of the national lockdown in South Africa. South African Police Service (SAPS) data from 2015 to 2020 further indicate that seven women are killed daily, while one in five women experience GBVF (Deane, 2024b; Nkosikhona Simelane et al., 2023).



Alarming,ly, perpetrators are often granted bail and may return to the same communities as their victims, thereby placing survivors at continued risk (Dutywa, 2026). The legal system is frequently perceived as failing to adequately protect women, and in some instances, it becomes a deterrent to reporting abuse (Kang'ethe, 2022b; Mkwanzanji & Nathane-Taulela, 2024). Due to GBVF, the constitutional right to dignity, as enshrined in South Africa's 1996 Constitution, is violated daily. The release of offenders without due diligence by law enforcement authorities, as perceived by sections of society, undermines the fundamental protection of GBV victims. Consequently, victims' rights to life, freedom, and safety are severely compromised, while perpetrators often remain unaccountable and continue to pose threats within communities. In cases of femicide, the right to life is irrevocably violated (Nodangala & Masumbe, 2023). However, the state often fails to ensure effective justice, with suspects released on bail and accountability measures inconsistently applied. In some cases, individuals in positions of influence appear to evade proper investigation and prosecution. For instance, the murder of Namhla Mtwā—who was shot multiple times outside her home in Mthatha—generated widespread public outrage, yet no arrests or charges have reportedly been made to date (eNCA, 2025).

According to Bencomo et al. (2022), GBV is a severe and urgent human rights violation requiring immediate and sustained intervention. Systemic patriarchy and entrenched historical inequalities continue to drive high levels of violence against women in South Africa. Despite various policy reforms, femicide, sexual assault, and domestic violence remain pervasive, undermining human dignity and threatening societal stability (Kumari et al., 2025). The scale of the problem is further illustrated by official statistics showing that rape cases accounted for 42,780 of the 53,498 sexual offenses reported between April 2022 and March 2023. In addition to these figures, the economic burden is substantial, while some members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) contribute to secondary victimization through victim-blaming practices, which retraumatize survivors, erode trust in law enforcement, and discourage reporting (Dutywa, 2026; Motseki, 2025).

Conclusion

Disturbingly, femicide and gender-based violence (GBV) remain persistent human rights and public health crises in South Africa and globally. This literature review argues that entrenched gender inequality, toxic masculinity, and patriarchal norms significantly increase women's vulnerability to violence and death. Structural inequalities and socioeconomic dependence often trap women in abusive relationships, while poverty, unemployment, and financial reliance frequently prevent victims from seeking help or leaving abusive partners. Evidence further shows that GBV results in long-term social and health consequences for survivors and their families, including physical injury, psychological trauma, depression, and anxiety. Femicide represents the most extreme form of GBV, occurring when women are killed because of their gender. Stigma and the normalization of violence within intimate relationships contribute to underreporting and repeated victimization. These challenges are further exacerbated by substance abuse, harmful cultural practices, and weak community support systems. Although legal frameworks and intervention strategies exist, South Africa's justice system often fails to adequately protect victims and hold offenders accountable. Ultimately, addressing and eradicating GBV and femicide requires comprehensive prevention strategies, effective law enforcement, and sustained social and structural transformation.



Recommendations & Way forward

The government needs to strictly enforce current femicide and GBV laws, ensuring severe punishment without unnecessary bail. Femicide and gender-based violence (GBV) continue to be serious social and human rights issues that call for immediate, concerted, and long-term solutions in all spheres of society. To address these problems and ensure survivor-centered responses, better case handling, and greater accountability within the criminal justice system, police officers and justice officials must receive ongoing training. To combat harmful gender norms, patriarchal beliefs, and cultures of silence that continue to normalize violence against women and vulnerable groups, community awareness campaigns must be expanded. Moreover, mandatory GBV education programs that support gender equality, respect, healthy relationships, and human rights awareness from an early age should be implemented by educational institutions, including schools, colleges, and workplaces. Empowering women economically is crucial for lowering their susceptibility to abuse and dependency. To help women become financially independent and socially empowered, governments and stakeholders should prioritize job creation, entrepreneurship support, and skill development opportunities.

Also, to ensure that survivors receive both immediate protection and long-term support, it is necessary to expand access to safe shelters, counseling services, trauma care, and emergency support systems in both urban and rural communities. Accessible medical, psychological, and social services can enhance comprehensive survivor care by incorporating GBV response mechanisms into primary healthcare systems. By encouraging community accountability, denouncing violence, and promoting positive cultural values, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and community stakeholders can also play a big part in the fight against GBV. Additionally, since alcohol and drug abuse are frequently associated with higher risks of domestic and gender-based violence, programs to prevent substance abuse should be strengthened. Accurate GBV and femicide data collection, monitoring, and reporting systems are also necessary for effective intervention to guide policy creation, resource allocation, and evidence-based solutions.

Furthermore, the media must act responsibly by avoiding victim-blaming narratives and instead using their platforms to educate society, raise awareness, and advocate for the protection of women's rights and dignity. Sustainable progress can only be achieved through strong collaboration between government institutions, non-governmental organizations, law enforcement agencies, healthcare providers, educational institutions, and communities. Ultimately, combating GBV and femicide requires a collective commitment to social justice, shared responsibility, and national action aimed at protecting the lives, safety, and dignity of women and all vulnerable individuals in society.

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Conflict of interest

Authors declare no interest of conflict



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