Gender-based violence in adult education: The experiences of rural learners and adult educators

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Abstract

Gender constitutes an integral part of both individual and collective uniqueness, and it is distressing that gender-based violence (GBV) remains persistent in education. Gendered violence is a scourge globally, more particularly for educational institutions – which are often imagined to be peaceable and immune to acts of aggression. Around the world, instances of GBV continue to surface at an alarming rate, and South Africa is no exception. The prevalence of violence based on gender continues to threaten the drive towards inclusive education, as contemplated in various policies. Despite South Africa transitioning from apartheid in 1994, it is disturbing that challenges remain in terms of access to education. Although adult learning was implemented as a strategic initiative in the quest for inclusive education in this country, worryingly, GBV continues to pose a threat to the effectiveness of such programmes in rural communities. This chapter seeks, through the lived experiences of adult learners and adult educators in rural areas, to unearth the dynamics of GBV as it relates to adult learning. To investigate their experiences, data was collected using interviews. The findings of the study revealed that GBV remains prevalent as a result of power dynamics, attitudes and socialisation, and social learning, among other factors. As the findings indicate, while it is challenging for traditional South African societies to address GBV, there is a need for all educational stakeholders to spread awareness and advance equality where GBV is most common.

Introduction and background

Worldwide, gender-based violence (GBV) is rooted in the very same gender inequality and discrimination that cause gendered gaps in learning. Gendered violence is a human rights abuse on a massive scale, with immeasurable impact on individuals' health, as well as on the welfare of society and the economy at large, which, in turn, have a negative effect on educational achievement (Fergus & Van 't Rood 2013). Accordingly, GBV is seen as a pandemic in itself, as evidenced by research findings which reveal that it affects as many as one-third of women globally in the course of their lives (World Bank 2019). While GBV is gender-neutral, evidence of disproportionate victimisation of women tends to lead to the view that GBV is only about women. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2013), 35% of women globally are victims of non-partner sexual violence or physical and/or sexual intimate-partner violence (IPV). Notably, the United Nations (UN) defines GBV as physical, sexual or psychological injury or suffering perpetrated on women, which includes threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, which happens both in their public or private life (WHO 2021). Sabria and Granger (2018) argue that GBV occurs as a result of the normative role expectations related to gender, as well as uneven power dynamics between genders. It comprises acts of violence, which may be physical, sexual, and/or psychological, that are directed toward people or groups based on their biological sex and/or expected gender roles in society. This may involve partner and non-partner rape and sexual assault, domestic/intimate-partner violence (IPV) (including dating/relationship violence), sexual harassment, stalking, sexual exploitation and trafficking, forced marriages and child marriages, genital mutilation of women, and other harmful gendered behaviours (Fergus & Van 't Rood 2013).

Around the world, the issue of GBV on campuses continues to surface at an alarming rate. In developed countries like the United States, increasing awareness of the problem has been bolstered by several high-profile cases of sexual abuse and harassment, including cases involving prestigious institutions, where victims have spoken out against the harm done to them, as well as about their subsequent challenging journeys within the university and the law enforcement agencies (Bagley, Natarajan, Vayzman et al. 2012; Finchilescu & Dugard 2021). In developing countries such as Ethiopia (see Mamaru, Getachew & Mohammed 2015), Zambia (see Menon 2015) and Nigeria (see Agbaje, Arua, Umeifekwem et al. 2021), the incidence of GBV at institutions of higher learning continues to be a matter of significant concern. South Africa is not exempt from this scourge, and it is widely accepted that the nation is grappling with an astronomically high incidence of GBV (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation [CSVR] 2016; Finchilescu & Dugard 2021; Wilkinson 2017). Consequently, socio-economic conditions in local townships, oftentimes worsened by the troubled history of apartheid, have produced an environment which promotes violence against women (Mosavel, Ahmed & Simon 2012).

Since the country's democratic transition in 1994, South Africa has ratified several international instruments aimed at reducing the prevalence of GBV. The policy framework of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (UN 1948), which is a landmark document in the history of human rights, provides the basis for the measures in the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (UN 1995), and Article 4 of the African Union Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (African Union [AU] 2003). The authors of this chapter urge African governments to prioritise the reduction of violence against women in both the public and private spheres, as well as implement specific strategies to protect victims and punish offenders as recommended in the Policy Framework to Address Gender-Based Violence in the Post-School Education and Training System (DHET 2019). Also advocated is the identification of the causes of violence against women, as well as the provision of support services to victims. In spite of these commitments, and regardless of the policies listed below, GBV remains a somewhat permanent fixture in South Africa (Dlamini 2021).

South Africa has committed itself to achieving the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN 2016). Goal 5 of the Agenda involves gender equality and advocates for the eradication of violence against women and girls in all its forms, in both the public and the private spheres. This includes sexual exploitation, other forms of exploitation, and trafficking. In addition, South Africa is party to several international treaties on GBV and has thus established fairly strong legislative frameworks such as the Prevention and Combatting of Trafficking in Human Persons Act 7 of 2013 (RSA 2013), the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 (RSA 2007a) and the Domestic Violence Act (DVA) 116 of 1998 (RSA 1998a; see, also, Moolman 2016). Similarly, various Acts such as the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000 (PEPUDA) (RSA 2000a), the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 (RSA 1998b), the Code of Good Practice on the Handling of Sexual Harassment Cases in the Workplace (RSA 2005) (developed under the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998) (RSA 1998b), the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 (RSA 2007b), the Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011 (RSA 2011), the DVA (RSA 1998a), and the recently published National Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Strategic Plan (RSA 2021), all aim to eliminate gendered violence in both the public and the private spheres.

The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 (RSA 1997), the Continuing Education and Training Act 16 of 2006 (RSA 2006) and the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 (RSA 1998c) lay the foundation for non-discrimination and equality amongst all people in the post-school education and training (PSET) system. Despite these policy frameworks, cases involving GBV continue to make headlines. It has therefore become apparent that the educational sphere is one among many sectors where South Africa has very sound legislation but deplorable practice. While many instances of GBV are not reported (Fergus & Van 't Rood 2013; Finchilescu & Dugard 2021; Ryan 2020), research on how this phenomenon manifests itself in adult education in South Africa is sorely limited.

The importance of adult education is recognised by several international declarations which have reaffirmed the right of adults to education, with such recognition dating back to the promulgation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948). Yet, on the African continent, progress remains slow in terms of achieving ambitious goals relating to inclusive education, the reason being that the global agenda is oftentimes dominated by the quest for universal primary education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] 2020). This has the undesired effect of sidelining adult education, which is unfortunate given its possible role in accelerating efforts to reduce negative social ills and promote active citizenship. This chapter therefore seeks to examine the prevalence of GBV, and the related experiences of a group of rural learners and adult educators in a South African adult education programme.

Statement of the problem

The historical legacies of racial and socio-economic discrimination have played a crucial role in the social formation of violent masculinities in South Africa. Arguably, the country's apartheid past has instilled aggression in masculine gender identities (Dunaiski 2013; Eagle 2015; Finchilescu & Dugard 2021). For most black men, apartheid created a 'struggle masculinity' which normalised and legitimised violence, which was, however, abruptly made redundant by the 1994 democratic transition in the country (Dunaiski 2013). Apartheid, with its enforcement of forced removals and migrant-labour patterns, left most South African homes with unusually patterned family structures, in which approximately half of all families are female-headed (Ryan 2020). This has had major implications for poverty levels in the country, with single-parent homes and female-headed households making up the poorest families, where domestic violence is highly prevalent. This domestic violence has often been blamed on the over-reliance of women on their male partners. Inclusive of apartheid's enduring legacy of violent subjugation, socio-economic dislocation and exclusion, Finchilescu and Dugard (2021) posit that the high unemployment rate, socio-economic inequality, and prevalent patriarchal and gendered norms are underlying factors which act as drivers of GBV in South Africa. Although it is difficult to obtain accurate statistics on gendered violence, since most incidents go unreported, South Africa has a high incidence of such cruelty, including violence against gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual and queer/questioning (LGBTIAQ) people, and against women and girls (VAWG) (Dartnall & Channon 2021). While people of all genders can be perpetrators and victims of different forms of violence, men are most frequently the perpetrators of violence, particularly intimate-relationship and/or sexual assault, and women and children are most frequently the victims (Dartnall & Channon 2021; Dartnall & Jewkes 2013).

Contextualising adult education in South Africa

Learning is a dynamic, diverse and continuous process that takes place throughout one's life. Thus, because of the continuous increase in socio-economic and technological development in society, individuals are always seeking ways that encourage the acquisition of new information and skills, allowing them to remain relevant in an ever-changing environment (Addae 2016). This makes lifelong learning a basic human need. According to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA 2016), adult education and training (AET) is intended to promote lifelong learning and personal growth in order to enable individuals to successfully adjust to South Africa's rapidly changing economic, social and political atmosphere. While 'learning' occurs throughout one's life, 'education' occurs at some moment (or at several stages) in one's life. (Baatjes & Baatjes 2008). Therefore, education has evolved into a tool for promoting economic growth and addressing structural inequalities in society (Human Sciences Research Council [HSRC] 2017).

To achieve these aims, there is a need to address adult education and literacy (particularly in disadvantaged and marginalised areas) by providing adults with basic skills for the labour market and allowing them to enhance their children's access to quality education (HSRC 2017). Adult education is thus an expansive discipline which integrates basic and continuing education, technical and vocational education, higher education, and professional development provided by various agents such as the state, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), enterprises, companies, and private providers through formal, non-formal and informal education (Baatjes & Baatjes 2008). The policies relating to adult education programmes claim to be making education more inclusive in character, simply because everyone in society – regardless of socio-economic background – is given the opportunity to learn basic skills such as writing, reading and numeracy (Moyo 2014). The reality however, is that, for various reasons, some adults have never benefited from formal schooling.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (the Constitution) (RSA 1996) legislates the right to basic education for all South Africans, including adults. The Bill of Rights, in section 29(1) of the Constitution, recognises the right to basic education (including adult basic education [ABE]) and further education, which the government must make available and accessible progressively (RSA 1996). Different measures and regulatory frameworks have been developed over the years to promote adult education and training and to affirm its importance as part of social change and growth (HSRC 2017). Amongst these are the Skills Development Levies Act 9 of 1999 (RSA 1999) and the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 (RSA 1998c), which enable the establishment of sector education and training authorities (SETAs) – the custodians of education and training in diverse sectors such as banking, manufacturing, and information technology, among many others (HSRC 2017; Walters 2006).

Thus, to allow for the development of public and privately owned adult learning centres, funding for adult education, quality assurance procedures for the sector, as well as public centres governance, the Adult Education and Training Act 52 of 2000 (RSA 2000b) was promulgated (HSRC 2017). It must, however, be noted that, despite appearing promising, the Adult Education and Training Act 52 of 2000 was repealed in 2015. There have been numerous reforms in the South African education sector. One notable change was the splitting of the Ministry of Education into two ministries in 2009, ultimately leading to establishment of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (HSRC 2017). The DHET has become the overseer of AET (DHET 2015). In keeping with this transformation, recent significant changes in the AET sector have been chronicled in a DHET document called National Policy on Community Colleges (DHET 2015).

While the importance of adult education programmes in South Africa's nation-building agenda is well understood, very few scholars have attempted to examine the effects of adult education programmes on the socio-economic profiles of those who benefit from them (Rabothata 2016). Also important to interrogate, are the experiences of adult learners and the link that exists between adult education and GBV, which runs in both negative and positive directions. This prompted the authors to examine the prevalence of GBV, and rural learners' and adult educators' experiences of such violence, in a South African adult education programme.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach. The population for the study was composed of five adult educators and ten adult learners (of whom seven were women and three were men) in a rural adult education learning centre in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Worth noting is that few male adult learners were available to serve as study participants because, generally, there are not many male students in community education and training centres classes. Data was collected using interviews, and interview responses were thematically analysed.

Drivers of gender-based violence in adult education in South Africa

While there have been considerable efforts to reduce and, ultimately, combat GBV, the incidence thereof remains persistently high worldwide. South Africa has made significant policy strides towards establishing a transformative and progressive democracy, yet levels of violence remain persistently high in this

country (Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities [DWYPD] 2020; Farber 2020; Gould, Mufamadi, Hsiao et al. 2017). In fact, South Africa is ranked as one of the most violent societies in the world, accounting for one of the highest murder rates outside of conflict zones (DWYPD 2020; Institute for Economics & Peace 2020). The prevalence of GBV in South Africa has been attributed to gender inequalities and patriarchal gender norms which relegate women to the fringes of society, where they are oftentimes dependent on their male counterparts for their survival (Mudau & Obadire 2017). GBV in South Africa manifests itself in several forms, including violence against women and girls, violence against LGBTQIA+ persons, femicide, IPV, or domestic, structural or sexual violence (SaferSpaces 2017). But what are the drivers of GBV in South African adult education, as revealed by adult educators and learners in a study of adult education in rural South Africa?

Attitudes and socialisation

Cultural traditions of violence, gender roles, and male entitlement are catalysts in the occurrence of GBV in adult education in South Africa. This is because such traditions legitimise gendered violence and may further result in biases in the responses given to incidents of GBV. As one female participant posited:

> *[M]en still believe that it is their world; they have too much ego and believe that whatever they say, is final. For instance, when issues are raised in classes, they want their views to be accepted, given that most of them are fathers at home. As a result, we women feel inferior in the classroom. (Female learner 2)*

This participant's view reveals how socialisation and ingrained attitudes entrench and foster male superiority and dominance in an adult learning set-up. That men are socialised to dominate women shapes those attitudes which entrench violence against women; hence male learners seek to assert their 'authority' over their female counterparts. These sentiments were corroborated by a male participant, who stated:

> *Our culture teaches us that men are the head of the house, so women must respect us … . Even from childhood, a boy is valued more than a girl, because a boy continues the family name and legacy. Girls, on the other hand, will eventually leave and they start new families where they are married. (Male learner 3)*

The proliferation of sustained patriarchy (a male-dominated society which subjugates and excludes women from influence) has resulted in a toxic form of masculinity that seeks to dominate women in order to prove masculinity (Sarieddine 2018). This is exemplified by the view that socialisation into such attitudes happens in varied contexts, and that 'toxic masculinity' is promoted by both male and female members of society (Connell 2013). Toxic masculinity, which

can be referred to as socially constructed definitions of masculinity, can be harmful to society, women, and even to men themselves (Elliot 2018). This was revealed by one participant who opined:

> *The problem of GBV, in my opinion, starts from home. When a child is growing, male and female people surround the child – it is not just a matter of men promoting toxic masculinity. Playfully, parents and guardians use terms like 'big boy' for boys and 'little girl' for girls. This sort of entrenches the ideal that boys are stronger than girls … . As a result, boys grow up with strong persuasions that they are stronger and better than girls. (Female adult educator 4)*

While it is commonplace to assume that toxic masculinity is a result of male attitudes, the above view reveals that this assumption is flawed and misleading. Men *and* women appear to have a role in the production of toxic masculinity, which, in turn, drives the incidence of GBV.

The foregoing views of learners and adult educators alike corroborate the findings of an investigation into the influence of socialisation on gendered violence, which revealed that females are socialised into submitting to males, while males tend to be socialised into dominating females (Fry, Skinner & Wheeler 2019). This is due to the fact that men tend to face 'pressure' from their male peers to display masculinity by initiating dominance and control over women and girls. This often results in the formation of toxic masculinities, which are usually evident in an overcompensation for insecurities through sexual conquest, and this directly contributes to GBV (Fry et al. 2019). Mudau and Obadire (2017) extend this argument by postulating that, in traditional communities where patriarchy is rife, women are seen as unfit for the workplace; thus educational attainment is deemed a luxury. This is because patriarchy ranks men higher than women, and therefore provides a social structure that grants men uncontested authority (Mudau & Obadire 2017). Studies have revealed that, in patriarchal societies, women are believed to be powerless and dependent on men. A case in point can be drawn from how men in these societies control every aspect of life, for example in the reproduction process, the number of children to bear, and the type of work women should do (Mudau & Obadire 2017; Sikweyiya, Addo-Lartey, Alangea et al. 2020). GBV against female learners, both at home and at school, may thus be viewed as a reinforcement of male dominance – especially because more women than men opt for adult basic education in South Africa (Aitchison & Land 2019; Statistics South Africa [Stats SA] 2015; UNESCO 2020). GBV thus becomes validated as an acceptable means of enforcing male dominance over women, by men who feel threatened by women being empowered through the agency of education. Socialisation and attitudes therefore play a central role in the perpetration of GBV in various forms in adult education settings.

Power dynamics

GBV is also motivated by attitudes of toxic masculinity which create the need to dominate women and legitimise violence as a tool of oppression and of enforcing sexual acceptance. The need of men who display this toxic masculinity to maintain or attain power and dominance may thus manifest itself through femicide, economic subjugation, and physical, emotional or verbal abuse, among other forms of assault. A male participant noted:

> *Just like in the community, women suffer the most in terms of GBV … These things are happening daily. When a woman, for example, rejects romantic advances by a man – whether an adult educator or a fellow learner – she goes through hell. There was a female learner who is rumoured to have rejected the advances of an adult educator; she suffered and ended up dropping out. The adult educator would always tease her in class, [and] the rest of the class sort of joined in [in] making fun of her. (Male learner 1)*

From the above response, clearly GBV in the domain of adult education may be premised on a failure to accept rejection, which becomes more pronounced when it involves someone in a position of authority/power. Such blatant abuses reveal how deep-seated power dynamics entrench GBV in adult education. Similar sentiments were proffered by a female participant:

> *It is difficult to say 'No' to romantic advances from male students. If you say 'No', they bully you and they can come up with lies – for example, that you are a prostitute. They will spread these lies and tarnish your reputation. I have heard stories of adult educators who try to get involved with female students – I think it is difficult to say 'No' to someone who oversees your life as a learner. And who do you report to? The community? They will say you seduced the adult educator. Other lecturers? They are colleagues and they may decide to support each other against you. It is a losing battle. (Female learner 7)*

The above sentiments reveal how deep-rooted power imbalances and the abuse of authority influence the perpetration of GBV, even in an adult education setting. Importantly, such power dynamics are not limited to adult educators, but also involve learners. This was highlighted by a male participant:

> *Some of these female teachers are bossy; they think we are their kids. They come to class trying to impose their will on us, while some of us here are old enough to be their fathers. In our culture, women should honour men regardless of status – even in the community. (Male learner 2)*

The foregoing perspective reveals an intrinsic predisposition towards being domineering and demanding respect – even within the confines of education.

The basis of this may have its roots in the culture of neopatriarchy, which pits men as better than women and therefore worthy of reverence. 'Neopatriarchy', here, refers to a traditional patriarchy, especially that embedded in religion. An adult educator also weighed in on this topic:

> *Adult classrooms are difficult to navigate … . I try to treat all my learners with respect, but sometimes some learners appear to demand preferential treatment … . Some of these learners expect me to be submissive to them, just because I am a woman. I have suffered a lot of emotional abuse because of my stance towards equality in the classroom … . I have been accused of being un-African, and in more extreme instances I have been called a prostitute in the community – this affects not just me, but my family as well. (Female adult educator 1)*

The participants appeared to signal that, in an adult education environment, male learners and adult educators were more likely than their female counterparts to perpetrate GBV against their female counterparts. Thus, patriarchy plays a significant role in inculcating GBV.

Importantly, systemic humiliation which devalues and debases women renders them 'inferior' to their male counterparts and serves to perpetuate gendered forms of violence (Goitseone & Goitseone 2020; Mudau & Obadire 2017). As Snodgrass (2016) concludes, the current neopatriarchal backlash against gender equality in South Africa provokes and sustains the subjugation of women, casting them as victims and perpetuators of pervasive patriarchal values. This means that it is not uncommon for women to engage in practices that engender patriarchal traditions in society. Similarly, the foregoing views find credence in the conclusion that the subjugation of women by men tends to be viewed as a legitimate and normal display of masculinity. Accordingly, it is not uncommon for women to view toxic masculinity as the status quo (Ratele 2015; Snodgrass 2016). Our study participants' responses revealed that toxic masculinity and neopatriarchal practices have severe implications for access to adult education, as they aid GBV. Power imbalances are thus strong drivers of GBV in adult education classrooms.

Social learning

Social learning theorists propose that social behaviour is learnt when an individual observes the behaviour of others, as well as the consequences of that behaviour (Bandura 1977). Arguably, individuals undergo three phases of learning social behaviour: the ideation of appropriate behaviour, the enactment of this perceived appropriate behaviour, and the adoption of such behaviour if it has positive outcomes (Gagnon 2018). This perspective may find legitimacy in adult education milieus, given the exponentially high incidence of violence in South Africa (Institute for Economics & Peace 2020). In this regard, a female participant explained:

> *From the community to the school, men dominate everything. I have lost count of how many cases of assault and sexual violence in the community have been reported, but nothing happens. The perpetrators still walk free, and it is normal to have nothing happening. We have accepted that this is our reality – even when it comes to school; what can be different here? (Female learner 5)*

This view suggests that a lack of law enforcement on the part of the relevant authorities sends a salient message that appears to signal a gap between what is unacceptable in law and policy, in contrast to what is unacceptable to people in society, including those who are, or should be, in positions of law enforcement. Consequently, learners who are victimised tend to feel powerless to deal with, or confront, GBV, even if they encounter it in an adult education setting. A male participant opined:

> *Sometimes the violence which we see happening across the country gets imported into the schooling environment. If nothing is being done about violence against women in the community, how can the school be expected to be different? Our societies appear to make it okay for men to be abusive to women. This is just not right. The law is also failing us, because the perpetrators of GBV continue to walk free; in other words, ... law enforcement has made it alright for women to be abused. There are no direct consequences for crime, so it almost appears as though perpetrating crime has incentives. (Male adult educator 3)*

The lack of consequences for perpetrating GBV appears to encourage this phenomenon. The male adult educator's argument is premised on the perception that GBV within the domain of adult education is symptomatic of the high levels of GBV in the wider South African society. As one participant added:

> *The learners that come to school here are coming from the community. The community has taught them how to behave and what is acceptable ... . We know what is wrong and what is right, but it is difficult to just start implementing these things in school. Equality has been preached for a long time now, but changing the culture of violence will take more than just speaking. (Male learner 3)*

The learner identified that cultural norms that are passed down from one generation to the next play an important role in perpetuating toxic masculinities which legitimise violent behaviour. In addition, the transmission of violence from the community to the school is also of concern in the production and reproduction of violence.

The responses of the study participants revealed that GBV which manifests itself in the adult education environment is a consequence of behaviours learnt in childhood and reinforced in adulthood. This is because violence has, for some

time now, been associated with the absence of serious consequences or punishment for perpetrators (Bleich, Findling, Casey et al. 2019). Consequently, a good starting point is to explain how lethargic policing has enabled perpetrators of GBV, given that a functional criminal justice system can play an important role in ensuring that victims of GBV are able to access justice. In most cases, the police are often the first responders, and are responsible for gathering evidence, ensuring that victims access medical treatment, and finding them a safe haven. Social learning happens when an individual makes sense of social interactions based on the outcomes, in order to arrive at socially acceptable behaviour (Connell 2013; Gagnon 2018; Marcou 2018). The general consensus is that no one is born violent, but an inclination towards perpetrating violence is birthed when attitudes and behaviours of violent conduct are learnt over time, thanks to being legitimised through the agency of action or inaction (Demos & Segal 2013; Fry et al. 2019). Notably, social learning contributes significantly to the perpetration of GBV in adult education classrooms.

Family, schools and religion

Another crucial influence that was identified during a discussion of the causes and drivers of GBV in adult education was the role of social institutions – the family, school, and religious institutions. Importantly, victims of violence tend to normalise abuse after either experiencing it repeatedly or seeing it happening without inhibition (Bleich et al. 2019). Thus, from childhood, individuals learn how to treat others by witnessing how people are treated. There is evidence that individuals who are exposed to violence at institutions of socialisation (the home, church or any other setting) from a young age have a high likelihood of being involved in violence as adults, as either victims or perpetrators (Fry et al. 2019). This is because violence which unfolds in these settings is normalised when perpetrators and victims find justification in their life experiences. A female participant explained:

> *In our church, we are taught to be submissive to male figures … . Even when the male person is younger than you, you must respect them because they are men. Church leaders can even beat you up if you are caught breaking the laws of the church – they are allowed [to]. This is the church I grew up in, so even when I come here to school, I am aware of my position as a woman. (Female learner 4)*

As the participant indicates, social institutions play a prominent role in the production of violence, rather than becoming sanctuaries of equality and peace. A male participant added:

> *People who are raised in violent homes end up thinking that violence is a normal way of communicating or responding … . To tell these people that you can communicate without using violence is difficult. Some become repeat victims of violence, especially women – they suffer more because of GBV. (Male learner 4)*

It is not uncommon for victims of GBV to suffer repeatedly at the hands of aggressors or perpetrators of violence. Violence which happens in spaces of socialisation is highly likely to form part of the fabric of society, because such institutions are central in shaping an individual (Bandura 1977). A female participant weighed in thus on the aspect of institutions of socialisation:

> *While we deal with adult learners, it is important to note that these learners were children at some point in their lives, and they were taught certain things which form part of their personalities. For example, a child who grew up in a home where anger and violence are seen as legitimate responses, may grow up believing that these are appropriate responses. It is not uncommon for such a child to grow into a short-tempered adult who responds to conflict violently. (Female adult educator 2)*

The above response reveals that the social setting in which an individual is raised – especially the family, which is the primary institution of socialisation – plays a central role in the production of GBV. In similar vein, churches and schools may further entrench GBV, as these are also places where socialisation happens.

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that the gendered violence experienced in adult education is a product of socialisation from childhood, where children are socialised into attitudes about themselves and in respect of people of different genders and other identity forms (Connell 2013; Griner, Vamos, Thompson et al. 2020). Experiences of sexual abuse or other types of violence within an institution of socialisation oftentimes distort notions of healthy sexuality into inappropriate justifications for violent conduct and a failure to develop healthy boundaries, among other things (Jordan, Combs & Smith 2014). This usually degenerates into communication and coping styles that rely on denial, a reinterpretation of violent experiences, and avoidance (Connell 2013; Mahlori 2016; Spies 2020). As supported by the foregoing statements, institutions which are tasked with socialising individuals also play a significant role in producing GBV in adult education in South Africa.

The cost of GBV in adult education

As discussed, GBV occurs in markedly different forms, and has diverse effects. This means that, while some forms of GBV may be subtle, there are other, more explicit manifestations thereof which may result in the death of victims. The following segment focuses on the cost of GBV in adult education, as revealed by the participants in this study.

Physical injury

GBV which involves physical assault may result in physical injury for the victims. Such injuries may stem from acts such as punching, the use of weapons (knives, clubs, iron bars, etc.) against a victim. It is estimated that, in South Africa, as many as 1.75 million people annually seek treatment for injuries resulting from violence (SaferSpaces 2017). With regard to the adult education setting, a male participant posited:

> *Some people have been grievously injured as a result of GBV, both in … society and sometimes at school. You find that some matters that start at school are sometimes finished off away from the school, and some people really get hurt. (Male learner 3)*

The reality of GBV is that it sometimes results in physical injury and, as noted by the learner, such harm may be inflicted either within the schooling environment or away from it, despite having started at school. A female participant commented:

> *We used to attend with a lady who was involved in a dispute with her spouse regarding school. They ended up fighting because the spouse did not want her to attend school … . The husband beat her with a club, and she had to be hospitalised. She now walks with a limp. (Female learner 6)*

This observation reveals that GBV has the potential to cause physical injury and disability. Some of the injuries resulting from gendered violence may include wounds, muscular injuries, brain trauma, skeletal injuries, nerve injuries, etc. (Biribawa, Nuwemastiko, Oporia et al. 2020). In some instances, the injuries may be fatal or result in disability.

Mental health problems

GBV is associated with poor long-term mental health, which manifests itself as anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Mental health challenges may, in some instances, result in suicide, unless the victim receives mental health counselling and other support. In this regard, a male participant noted:

> *GBV results in pronounced mental health problems for the victims … whether they be adult educators or learners. A person who survives GBV is never the same again … . They need psychosocial support in order to cope. This, for me, is one of the challenges we have in rural settings; we need to grow awareness. The trauma of surviving GBV is too great for one to stomach. (Male adult educator 3)*

The impact of mental health problems is likely to be more pronounced in rural and traditional settings, where mental health awareness is likely to be relatively

low. Adult educators and learners who survive GBV need considerable assistance in order to cope with the trauma of being a victim of gendered violence. A female participant explained:

> *When someone for example is sexually assaulted, they may find it difficult to shake off the feeling of unworthiness which grips them. You feel dirty and less human; you blame yourself for the GBV. Without professional assistance, it is difficult for one to get back [on] [one's] feet again. (Female learner 5)*

These perspectives, as expressed by learners and adult educators, reveal the more subtle effects which GBV has on victims – effects which cannot always be seen, but are nonetheless debilitating. Service providers should be aware that, compared with the general population, women who have experienced violence may require additional psychological support (Cools & Kotsadam 2017). It is also important to recognise the enduring impact of the violence that has occurred, and to tailor outreach and treatment services accordingly (Hossain, Pearson, McAlpine et al. 2021). Interventions with regard to GBV need to take cognisance of the mental health concerns which victims of gendered violence express.

Educational outcomes

Another theme that arose from a discussion on the cost of GBV in adult education was that of educational outcomes. With GBV come increased rates of absenteeism, weaker academic performance, and increased dropout rates. In some instances, where the adult educator is a victim of GBV at the hands of learners or fellow adult educators, the result may be absenteeism from work, which has a negative impact on the quality of education. In this regard, a female participant reasoned:

> *When you are harassed and attacked because you are a woman, you can try to be strong. You think that you have to be strong – for your kids and what you want to achieve. But at some point, you can no longer take it; you are always depressed and even thinking about school makes you sad. It is not nice being nervous in class because you fear what may happen ... . Even your concentration levels go down. You can begin to daydream and 'wander away' in your thoughts during classes. (Female learner 4)*

While victims may attempt to be resilient in the face of gendered attacks, sustained aggression will have a marked effect on their academic and educational outcomes. The scourge of GBV in adult education was also demonstrated by a female participant who added:

> *We are not robots, we are human. When someone says something or makes unwelcome advances towards you, you feel it and it makes you uncomfortable. Many of my female learners are being harassed and, in*

> *some cases, it is related to their decision to go back to school and pick up from where they left [off]... . Sometimes you just have to sit down with the victim and offer pastoral care to the learner as a means of psychosocial support. (Female adult educator 3)*

A male adult educator offered a perspective on his own experiences with regard to GBV in adult education:

> *One thing that is not said enough, is why we do not seem to attract young men from the community. Sometimes you can think that just because they are male and there is a lot of patriarchy in our societies, then automatically they have access to education. Most of the young men in the community are afraid of being called names and jeered at because they are men, and society expects them to be educated. I am not saying that women do not go through the same, but I am just giving another side to the issue of why we have [fewer] men than women in adult learning. (Male adult educator 4)*

It is apparent, therefore, that, although both men and women are affected by GBV, women bear the brunt of violence at the hands of men. The foregoing responses reveal that GBV affects all genders, yet women remain in the majority as victims of GBV in adult education settings. In this regard, learners who experience GBV are usually more likely to perform below standard and have a higher dropout rate than their counterparts who have not suffered abuse (Beyene, Chojenta, Roba et al. 2019). Additionally, a victim of GBV may experience the inability to concentrate or study, their grades may start falling, they could become disruptive in class, fail to attend lessons or even drop out of school (Hossain et al. 2021; Wondimu 2019). Female learners may also suffer from low self-esteem, a lack of confidence, an inferiority complex, fear of the unknown, etc. (Wondimu 2019). Gendered violence therefore has a varied yet marked effect on educational outcomes in adult education.

Conclusion and recommendations

The study has demonstrated that there are multiple forms of GBV, which have varied effects on both the victims and the perpetrators. The findings revealed that violence at the adult education institution in this study is largely driven by unequal power dynamics and hardened attitudes, and by socialisation, social learning and social institutions, such as schools and the family. The study further revealed that learners and adult educators in the study point to three prominent themes in relation to the effects and cost of GBV in their education, namely physical injury, mental health issues, and negative educational outcomes. While the sample size was relatively small, and the investigation cannot claim to have extensively unearthed the experiences of adult learners and adult educators, it

could form the basis for further research in enhancing gender equity in adult education. Therefore, the recommendation is that more psychosocial support be offered to adult learners in order to improve coping strategies in the face of GBV. The study also proposes that more programmes be initiated to raise awareness of gender equality. Lastly, the authors recommend that there be more coordinated systems of reporting and follow-up on any instances of gendered violence which occur within the domain of adult education.

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