

## **Economic Challenges on Motherhood and Womanhood and the Issue of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in the South African Society**

Fazel Ebrihiam Freeks

*North-West University, Faculty of Theology, South Africa*

[Fazel.Freeks@nwu.ac.za](mailto:Fazel.Freeks@nwu.ac.za)

Dikeledi Jacobeth Warlimont

*Mzansi Youth leadership Academy NPO/NGO, South Africa, SADC & AU*

[djwarlimont@gmail.com](mailto:djwarlimont@gmail.com)

Pius-Shaun Warlimont

*Mzansi Youth Leadership Academy NPO/NGO, South Africa*

[pswarlimont@gmail.com](mailto:pswarlimont@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

*This paper illustrates economic challenges on motherhood, womanhood, children, and the issue of GBV. It has become evident in numerous families that societal role of mothers has shifted immensely. As a result, many scholars decided to study the various components of motherhood. Hence, the objective of this paper is to comprehend motherhood in society and its acceptance in the domestic domain. Becoming a mother was not the mother's decision, it was a response to sociocultural pressure that held women accountable pertaining to children. Women had distinct motherhood experiences, but it is kept secret from the family and society. The issue of GBV cause mothers to face immense pressure in a morally acceptable motherhood society. Therefore, mothers have a very negative perception of motherhood, particularly in a highly demanding patriarchal society.*

**Key words:** motherhood, womanhood, gender-based violence

**J.E.L classification:** A12, B55, I24, J12, J13, J17

### **1. Introduction**

This paper is a meta-theory analysis or literature review on motherhood, womanhood and GBV. In our current era, one of the most prevalent human rights violations is violence against women, many of whom are mothers. The effects of this abuse and brutality are extensive, negatively impacting the lives of women and girls, as well as their families, communities, and society at large. The elimination and prevention of violence and abuse against women should be a top objective in all communities. Therefore, the two main objectives of this paper are, to describe the adverse consequences of gender-based violence (GBV) as destructive social ills in society. The first objective is to understand the value and significance of women and mothers in society, the second objective is suggesting practical theological ways to address and curb gender-based violence as a destructive form of warfare against women. Studies repeatedly demonstrate the enormous benefits for children of having a mother who is present, nurturing, involved, and concerned. However, many activist organisations disagree with the importance of mothers and women to children and society. Mothers' notable and influential traits, as well as the crucial role they play in the family and society, are often contested. Moreover, motherhood still presents significant and potentially fatal difficulties for women today. One of the most common violations of human rights in our time involves violence and abuse against women, many of whom are mothers. These harmful factors have far-reaching effects, endangering the lives of women, mothers, and girls, as well as their families and societies. The prohibition and prevention of this violent nature and abuse against women and mothers should be a top concern in every family and community.

The family holds great importance in both the church and broader society. The family is seen as having a covenantal nature and plays a significant role in caring for individuals (eds. Botha *et al.* n.d.:84). This article, however, acknowledges the importance of motherhood and the role mothers play in families and society. Also, this article recognises the mother-child bond, which is crucial for a child's healthy development since it serves as a strong force for social interaction and cohesion.

## **2. Literature review**

The literature review in this paper is a met-theory analysis on motherhood, womanhood, children included and the issue of gender-based violence (GBV).

### **2.1. The concept of "motherhood" and meta-studies regarding to motherhood**

Motherhood is a fascinating scholarly and academic topic, according to Huopalaainen and Satama (2019:102), with connections to an embodiment, the performance of gender, materiality, affectivity, femininity, and sexuality, as well as power, structural problems, and patriarchal oppression, and specifically a dense bodily experience that engages the senses (Huopalaainen & Satama 2019:99). Patriarchal societies disadvantage women because social duties are gendered, harmful, and risky to women. Hence, the risk of reducing the experience of motherhood to a patriarchal institution and motherhood as a role forced on women is raised by some authors and scholars who claim that the discourse of motherhood is exclusively focused on. The original meaning is lost if one concentrates too much on the influence of prevalent ideas of motherhood (Frizelle & Kell 2010:27).

In the studies of Miller-McLemore (1994:20), motherhood can be defined as mothers performing quite a few types of indispensable caring, and who must support one another. Hence, every child's fundamental need is fulfilled by the term *mother*, which conjures up those feelings of joyful, unconditional love and care. Motherhood is further an intentional action that cultivates a self-observance practice that leads to maternal thought (Rose 2015:11). Therefore, the act of motherhood is special and mostly an "untapped resource of theological reflection" (Miller-McLemore 1994:21). Interestingly and appropriately, especially in the context of this article, is that Miller-McLemore indicated in her book, *Also a Mother: Work and Family as Theological Dilemma*, that she faced life's challenges while being pregnant and on the verge of becoming a mother (Miller-McLemore 1994:21). Working full-time to support families presents innumerable challenges for mothers (Miller-McLemore 1994:21). Hence, the responsibilities placed upon women, especially as mothers, are considerably heightened due to the daily obligations and sacrifices that come with parenting. Finding a harmonious balance and sense of purpose in life, while juggling familial responsibilities, proves to be much more challenging and intricate than managing a traditional nine-to-five job and caring for one's family.

In conclusion, it is very significant in the context of this paper when Miller-McLemore asserts that ample theologians are mother figures but only a few have studied the intersection of motherhood and theology (1999:287).

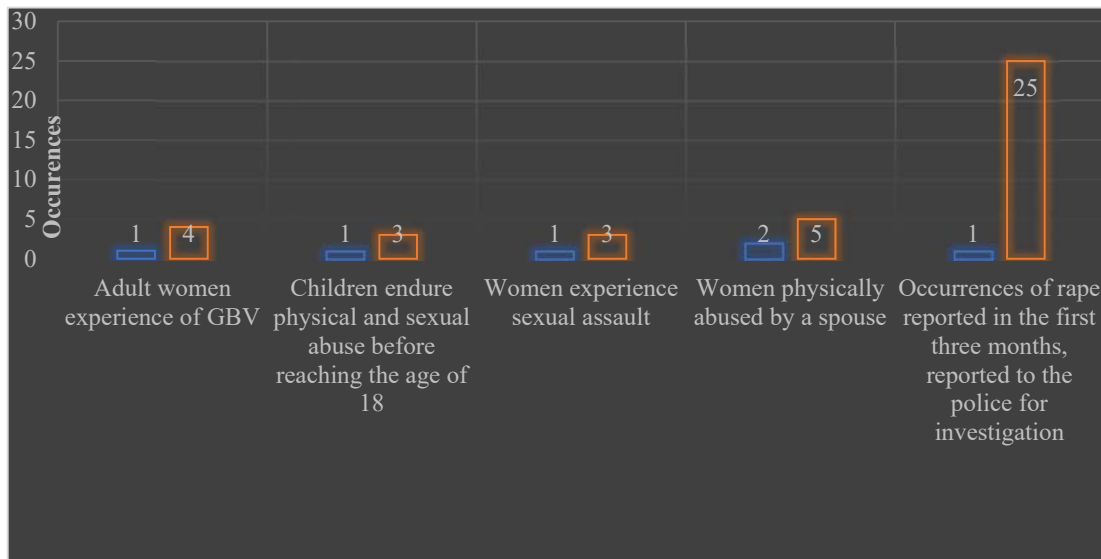
### **2.2. The gender-based violence (GBV) issue in society and its adverse effects on mothers and women in the South African Society: definition and statistics**

Reflecting on the wording used by the United Nations General Assembly meeting conducted in 1993, Finchilescu and Dugard (2018:3) define 'gender-based violence' as "violence against women (mothers) means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life". Wilson (2012:4) adds that GBV "broadly incorporates many behaviours that manifest as physical, sexual, or psychological damage to women and girls". Finchilescu and Dugard (2018:3) also mention that the term encompasses various actions, such as sexual harassment, assault, and rape. This article makes the case that sexual harassment encompasses any harm, illicit behaviour, or physical attack that one person might do against another; it can happen anywhere and is not gender specific.

Mayeza and Bhana (2021) note that GBV and sexual violence pose significant concerns for girls in South African schools. Particularly alarming were the numerous documented cases of GBV during the harsh COVID-19 lockdown, which confined families within their homes. Interestingly, during the lockdown period, more time was spent on addressing abusive relationships and the resulting psychological damage, than on the actual effects COVID-19 had on people worldwide (Mahlangu *et al.* 2022).

In South Africa, one out of four adult women experiences GBV, according to Mahlangu *et al.* (2022). Additionally, their research reveals that one in three children will endure physical and sexual abuse before reaching the age of 18. Motene (cited by Mile 2020:4) argues that statistics only tell half the truth because some crimes go unreported to the police or don't result in charges being brought against the perpetrators. One out of three women will experience sexual assault, and two out of every five women will be physically abused by a spouse (Mohammed, cited by Mile 2020:4). Additionally, Lekabe (cited by Mile 2020:4) indicates that a staggering 380 rapes were reported in educational institutions during the 2019–2020 period, demonstrating the high prevalence of GBV. Vallabh (2022) further contends that African American women are 35% more likely to experience abuse than their white counterparts in America (20,8% of the population).

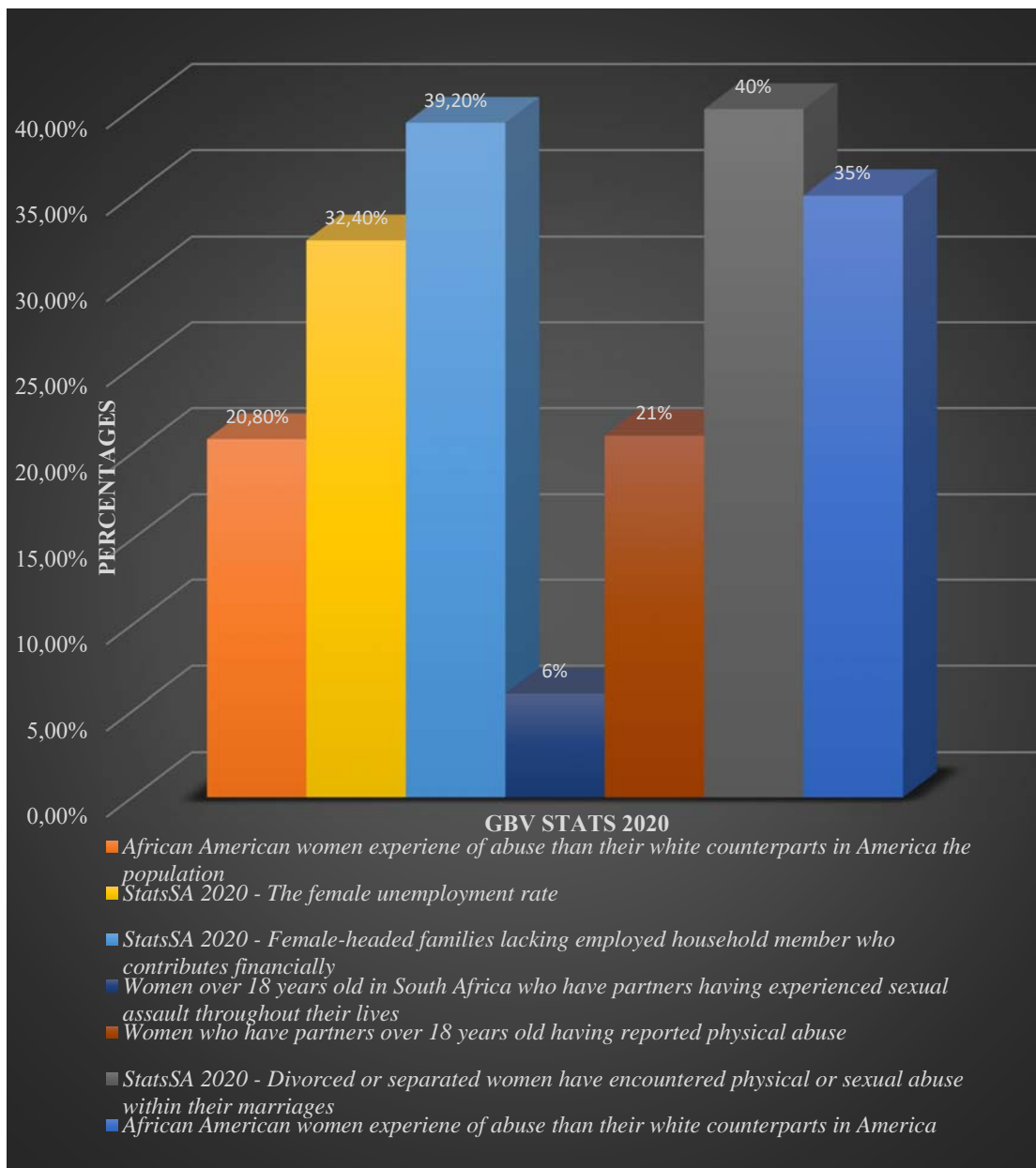
Figure no. 1 GBV and Rape Statistics 2020-2022



Source: Mahlangu *et al.* 2022 and Mohammed (Mile 2020:4)

According to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA 2020), the female population in South Africa is approximately 30.5 million, accounting for 51.1% of the country's total population. As of June 2020, the country's overall population was reported to be 59.62 million, based on StatsSA's 2020 data. The female unemployment rate in the country is 32,4% (StatsSA 2020). Additionally, 39,2% of female-headed families lack an employed household member who contributes financially (StatsSA 2020). Regarding assaults, StatsSA (2020) reveals that 49.8% of all investigated cases in the years 2018–2019 were committed by acquaintances of the victims. Approximately 6% of all women over 18 years old in South Africa who have partners have experienced sexual assault throughout their lives, while 21% (over 18 years old) have reported physical abuse. It is also concerning that 40% of divorced or separated women have encountered physical or sexual abuse within their marriages (StatsSA 2020).

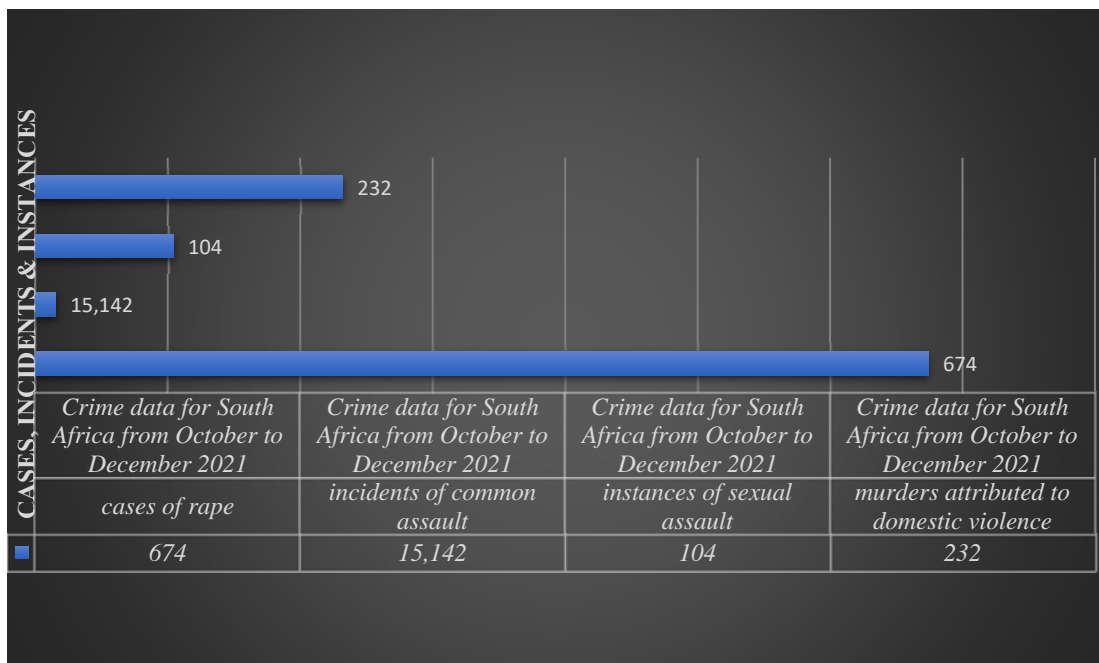
Figure no. 2 GBV Stats 2020



Source: Statistics South Africa (StatsSA 2020) and Vallabh (2022)

Mahlalela (2022) indicated that 10,818 occurrences of rape were reported in the first three months of 2022, but only one out of every 25 of these cases was reported to the police for investigation. Payne and Cruywagen (2022) present the crime data for South Africa from October to December 2021, which include the following statistics: 674 cases of rape; 15,142 incidents of common assault; 104 instances of sexual assault; and 232 murders attributed to domestic violence.

Figure no. 3 Crime data for South Africa from October to December 2021



Source: Mahlalela, Payne and Cruywagen

### 2.3. What are the reasons behind GBV?

Why do mothers (women) and girls experience GBV? Despite several attempts by the South African government to address all types of violence in South Africa, women and girls still endure GBV (Mayeza & Bhana 2021). Poor academic performance, absenteeism, anxiety, despair, and psychological trauma are all consequences of GBV in South African schools (Mayeza & Bhana 2021).

A 15-year-old girl named Mahlalela writes poetry to describe the experiences of GBV victims in South Africa. She believes that victims' requests should be given more consideration (Mahlalela 2022). According to Vallabh (2022), young black women from underprivileged neighbourhoods are the most vulnerable and frequently experience GBV. In South Africa, the police and the government are failing to protect all women from the harmful behaviour of men (Vallabh 2022). Making GBV illegal is insufficient (Vallabh 2022). Women should have access to the police so they can report their abuse and file complaints against the offenders (Vallabh 2022). Women are occasionally abused by family members and the community when they do have access to the police (Vallabh 2022). There is no structure in place to help the victims of prejudice against women, which they are also subjected to (Vallabh 2022).

In conclusion, psychological counselling is crucial to addressing the wrongdoing of the perpetrator (Mayeza & Bhana 2021). Schools must establish a secure setting where instruction and learning can occur fearlessly and freely (Mayeza & Bhana 2021). Criminals must bear the costs of their behaviour and deeds and be held accountable for the wrongs they have committed in families and society. It is crucial that local churches address GBV by giving women the tools they need to advocate for their right to nonviolence in South Africa.

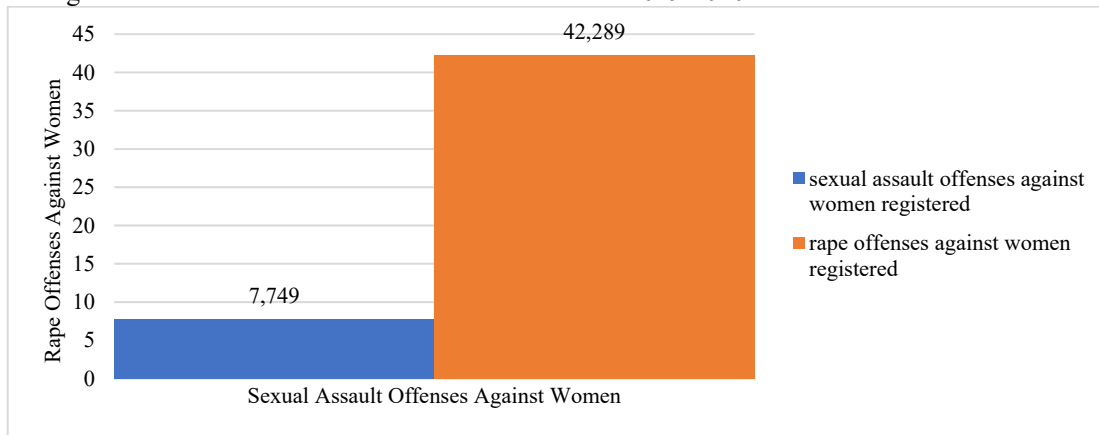
### 2.4. Womanhood and crimes against women in the South African society

#### 2.4.1. Serious crimes against women

Rape, sexual assault, physical violence, and verbal abuse are very serious crimes, and have been present throughout history, dating back as far as the existence of human civilisation. *What does rape*

*mean in the context of this article?* Rape occurs when a man coerces a female into sexual activity without mutual consent. Rape is described as widespread and common in South Africa by Gouws (2022:1). Gouws bases her claim on the crime data of the South African police, which show that in 2019/2020, 42,289 rapes and 7,749 sexual assault offenses against women were registered. Gouws also noted that the rate of rape in South Africa is the highest in the world, surpassing that of war-torn nations. The fact that men rape women for power rather than out of lust or sexual desire makes it evident that rape is a social and societal problem (Gouws 2022:2).

Figure no. 4 Crime Data of the South African Police 2019/2020



Source: Gouws (2022:2)

#### 2.4.2. Political interferences

Gouws (2022:2) rejects the African National Congress (ANC) Women's League's suggestion that men who commit rape should undergo chemical castration at the ANC's policy conference in Gauteng. Gouws contends that because men believe they are the owners of the women, castration will never put an end to rape (Gouws 2022:2).

The Conversation published an article on August 4, 2022, by Amanda Gouws, a political science professor at the University of Stellenbosch, in response to the rape of eight young women in Krugersdorp. Near an abandoned mine in Krugersdorp, more than 80 undocumented, illegal mineworkers allegedly assaulted eight young women who were filming a music video (Gouws 2022:2). According to Eyewitness News (Gouws 2022), 17 men's DNA will be analysed as part of the ongoing Krugersdorp gang rape inquiry.

ANC member Pule Mabe said to News24 that this tragedy should serve as a wake-up call and that the South African government needs to act against these unauthorised miners and immigrants (Pijoo 2022). Gouws (2022:2-3) indicated that the state is "missing the point" in his argument. They are pursuing illegal miners while ignoring the pressing issue of the rape and sexual assault of eight young women.

In her account, Landman (2012:5) shares the story of Mmankwanti, a woman who experienced sexual assault by the father of her unborn child. At the time, Mmankwanti was preoccupied with financial concerns and the well-being of her pregnant child. Financially dependent on her mother and already having two additional children, Mmankwanti's mother was more concerned about her daughter's safety than the actual rape. In other words, the mother prioritised her child's health over her personal anguish from being raped. Lerato, whom Landman (2012:6) also interviewed, is the subject of another story. When she was five years old, the daughter of Lerato (now 13) was sexually assaulted by her mother's stepbrother. Lerato was affected by this incident and had ideas of being sexually assaulted.

In summary, Lerato is willing to take the chance of going to jail because she feels so deeply guilty for her daughter's rape-related pain. The latter was offered by their church's pastor, who based his suggestion on Proverbs 22:15 (The Good News Bible): "A good spanking will teach them how to behave, but children just naturally do silly, careless things". As the mother who feels responsible for

not shielding her child while she was assaulted and abused, Lerato must now deal with her mental trauma. But the fact of the matter is, nobody has the right to rape or sexually abuse another person.

### 2.4.3. Are motherhood and womanhood valuable domains in our current society?

Motherhood and womanhood still present significant and potentially fatal problems to women and mothers simultaneously. Even so, they continue to play a crucial role in the family and community, and this function is a strong motivator for social contact and cohesion. In terms of pregnancy and connection, the paper by Erato *et al.* (2022:743) brought attention to the fact that mothers who have lost pregnancies describe motherhood as being more fundamental than mothers who have not. The mother-child bond is also essential for a child's proper growth. Although motherhood is still seen as the pinnacle of womanhood, there hasn't been enough research done on the concept in South Africa (Frizelle & Kell 2010:26).

McQuillan *et al.* (2008:3) assert that women often perceive motherhood as a barrier to achieving career success. Therefore, the price of motherhood and womanhood is frequently undervalued by women. Technological innovations such as dishwashers, formula, and birth control pills, to name a few, have reduced the practical burdens of motherhood for many women throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, the value and essence of motherhood have evolved over time. Scholars have studied a wide range of diverse facets of mothers and motherhood over the past 20 years (Schmidt *et al.* 2022:57). Regarding experience, very little has been written about women's experiences throughout most of history and the past 30 years according to the study by Rose (2015:3). To the point, no studies to my knowledge have assessed whether the value and importance of motherhood is a constant trait. Due to experiences, it might alter.

In the paper by Erato *et al.* (2022:742), the value and essence of motherhood can be viewed as a woman's preference for her maternal identity and motherhood. In conjunction with the paper of Erato *et al.* (2022), this article has the notion of the significant value of motherhood and womanhood in the domains of the family and society, most specifically in the lives of children. Every child's fundamental need is fulfilled by the term *mother*, which conjures up images of joyful, unconditional love and care. Even studies consistently demonstrate the positive effects on children's life of having a mother who is present, nurturing, attentive, and involved. Children eventually will exhibit fewer externalising behaviours when parents utilise constructive discipline with them, reminding them and discussing the norms and expectations with them (Okorn *et al.* 2022:129). Notwithstanding, the value and importance of motherhood, womanhood, and mothers to children, family and society are opposed by numerous activist groups. Many criticise the special talents that women and mothers possess, as well as the crucial role that they play in the family.

The practice of motherhood, which refers to the task of mothering and encompasses meeting the physical, emotional, and socialisation requirements of children, is theorised to be one of the two terrains of motherhood that are interconnected, according to Frizelle and Kell's (2010:27) study.

In addition, there is the key question of what makes a good mother, which is entwined with concepts of gender, womanhood, and childhood. The social identity of motherhood is mediated by mothering and entails women creating their own conceptions of who they are as mothers. Because it recognises how mothers actively create their identity as mothers, the emphasis on social identity is crucial. The notion of parenthood, according to Schmidt *et al.* (2022:59), has been increasingly construed normatively as a responsible act. Parents, especially mothers, are expected to devote time and effort to raising their children. This includes developing a strong emotional bond with their children by putting their needs above their own. When a mother is actively engaged with her child and physically present, she is more attuned to his/her needs and desires (Schmidt *et al.* 2022:62). Furthermore, mothers play a crucial role in ensuring their child's physical and cognitive growth, making them the most capable individuals to secure their children's successful development and future (Schmidt *et al.* 2022:63).

### **3. Research methodology**

To accomplish their predetermined research aims, researchers use methodology as a strategic framework or navigational guide. According to Vyhmeister (2008:38), methodology serves as the means by which the previously stated goal is carried out. It clarifies, in essence, how researchers intend to collect, examine, and evaluate information in order to answer their research questions or hypotheses. It is imperative to employ particular approaches designed to effectively tackle the distinct challenges and complexities of individual research problems, given the diversity of study themes (Smith, 2008:157). As such, the methodology used in this research paper is a literature review. The authors of this paper utilize journals, papers, and literature reviews to pinpoint trends, occurrences, and scenarios (Tveitereid & Ward (2022:7). The academic journals, magazines, and books with both national and international publishing houses are among the academic work that the authors look through for the literature analysis. Also, the North-West University (NWU) electronic databases ATLAS, EBSCO HOST, NEXUS, SCOPUS, ISI, and ISAP were used to conduct a thorough literature review. In addition, this work is guided by the following research question: In order to enable women and mothers to occupy their rightful position within the family, society, and even the church, how can gender-based violence be curbed?

### **4. Findings**

#### **4.1. The value and significance of women and mothers in society**

Miller-McLemore (1994:215) confirmed the value and significance of motherhood and womanhood by elucidating it as the function of *caring women* and describes it as a type of spiritual tribulation or labour centered in love (Wolfteich 2017:155). According to Wolfteich (2017:157), a mother serves as a spiritual guide for her children and bears equal responsibility for their upbringing as their father. According to Jansen and Wifler (2019:16–19), the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ transforms women, and the definition of female remains universal. According to Leskosek (2011), womanhood nowadays is defined as being a woman who loves her house and is drawn to motherhood by her innate desire to raise her children in a family, whether they are married or not.

According to Frahm-Arp (2016), mothers also make sure their children get quality time with both parents, live in a clean and healthy environment, and obtain a decent education. For a child to grow up in a stable family and a loving home, they need to get enough love, care, and stability. According to Richter et al. (2010), children who are the target of war suffer not just from humiliation but also from a sense of disorientation and loss.

In summary, women are the cornerstones of their households and communities. Being mothers to both their own and other children makes them easy prey for abuse and violence. As a result, both the damaging version of GBV inflict great suffering for women, mothers, including children. When GBV is committed against women and mothers, they typically suffer a considerable loss of self-worth, human dignity, shame, and character.

#### **4.2. Practical theological ways to address and curb gender-based violence as a destructive social ill against women**

The number of women and mothers abuse by men in South Africa has increased dramatically, indicating that criminal sanctions are insufficient to deter men from committing violent crimes (Yesufu 2022:90). In order to denounce and file charges against the perpetrators of GBV, women and mothers should have appropriate access to the police (Vallabh 2022). Women and children should receive support in many forms as GBV survivors, such as medical care, housing, and psychological support. It should be a top priority for people to become advocates and learn how to speak out against GBV. It is necessary to hold workshops, training sessions, and equipping events to educate households, churches, and families. GBV must be eradicated by society (Mavis & John 2020:49). Rather than being condemned, written off, or given harsh criticism, men should be



included and actively involved in efforts to stop men from abusing women. Ending violence and gender-based violence against women and children requires collaboration with men.

## 5. Conclusions

This article focused on the concepts of ‘motherhood’, ‘womanhood’, and children and the issue of gender-based violence. In the South African society, motherhood and womanhood are being ravaged by several social destructive ills, including GBV. A patriarchal idea is the exclusion and marginalisation of mothers and women from family, society, and even the church. Furthermore, if patriarchy is to be reduced, it must affect all social structures and formations. Unfortunately, the current world does not always offer a promising future for mothers, women, and children. Within society, it is essential to recognise and appreciate the immense capacity and moral responsibility that mothers and women possess in upholding the integrity of families and society. They deserve commendation and admiration for their invaluable contributions.

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