Unpacking The Lived Experiences of Gendered Violence Against Queer Individuals and Its Impact on Their Daily Lives in Ncise Village, Eastern Cape, South Africa

Abongile Gawuzela[1], Luvo Kasa[2]

Abstract

This study explores the experiences of gendered violence against Queer individuals shedding light on the intersectional forms of discrimination and violence that they encounter. Queer individuals experience high rates of gendered violence across the globe that is caused by societal norms, legal discrimination, and cultural shame. This qualitative study was conducted in Ncise village, Eastern Cape, South Africa, using the phenomenological design and collected data from 20 participants through in-depth and semi-structured interviews. The study sought to explore how institutional structures, power relationships, and societal norms support and perpetuate violence against Queer individuals. Underpinned by the Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) and cultural Competence as theoretical frameworks, the study sought to transform social attitudes and values as well as influence social work practices and to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to engage with diverse cultural groups, including Queer individuals effectively. This study advocates for the development of social work policies that will safeguard Queer individuals from gendered violence and to spearhead educational initiatives that raise awareness about hate crimes. Ultimately, the study brings advanced knowledge on the complex and multifaceted nature of gendered violence against Queer people, which will guide the development of more effective interventions, legislation and support systems.

Keywords: *Anti-Oppressive Practice, Cultural Competence, Queer, Gendered Violence.*

Introduction

The meaning and application of the term Queer have evolved over time; it was once detrimental to characterise something as peculiar or weird (Barker, 2020). However, within the queer community, it has been reclaimed and employed in a variety of ways (Owen, 2020). According to Graaff (2021), Queer is a general phrase that encompasses a variety of gender identities and sexual orientations that deviate from heterosexual and cisgender norms. Queer includes identities that do not fit into neat classifications like lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities (Gorman-Murray, 2019). Butler (2020) posits that although the term is widely used, its meaning varies depending on personal preference, cultural context, and generational perspectives, with some still associating it with historical implications. For this article, the term "Queer" is used as an umbrella term to promote dignity and visibility, appreciating the complexity and diversity of human identities.

Gendered violence is defined as harmful acts intended at people based on their gender or gender identity, which originate from unequal power relations and cultural norms that perpetuate traditional gender roles (Bates, 2020 ; Moore, 2021). According to Bates (2020), it covers a broad spectrum of abuses, such as physical, emotional, sexual, and economic violence, as well as institutional discrimination and structural injustices. Terwiel (2020) asserts that this type of violence is frequently caused by deeply rooted patriarchal institutions and cultural beliefs that maintain control, dominance, and oppression of specific genders. Terwiel (2020) further alluded that gendered violence mainly affects women, girls, and gender-diverse people, but it can also afflict men in circumstances where traditional ideals of masculinity are weaponised.

Various scholars and agencies point out that gendered violence takes many forms, including intimate relationship violence, sexual harassment, human trafficking, honour-based violence, and violence against Queer people (Balderston, 2017; Towers, 2017; Walby, 2017; World Health Organisation, 2019). Towers (2017) strengthens this argument, by stating that this type of violence has serious consequences, including physical injuries, psychological suffering, social isolation, and economic instability. According to Fitzgerald

---

[1] Walter Sisulu University, Department of Social Work, https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2171-803X
[2] Walter Sisulu University, Department of Social Work, Email: lkasa@wsu.ac.za, (Corresponding Author), https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2988-2070

(2019), gendered violence emanates from power disparities and cultural standards around gender roles, subsequently resulting in a variety of harmful behaviours and systemic problems that disproportionately affect persons based on their gender identity or sexual orientation.

In South Africa, significant legislative progress has been made in combating gendered violence against Queer individuals (Hagen, 2016). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) enshrines the principles of equality and non-discrimination, explicitly prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in Sections 9(3) and (4). The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, 2000 (act No.4 of 2000) reinforces these protections, while the Domestic Violence Act, 1998 (Act No. 116 of 1998) provides a legal framework for addressing domestic violence, particularly affecting Queer individuals.

Kantola (2021) states that although these legislative measures have been put to place, Queer individuals are still subjected to gendered violence. In 2021, at least 19 Queer people were murdered in South Africa, highlighting the severity of the issue (Muller, 2019). However, the extent of violence against this minority remains difficult to determine due to underreporting and inadequate data collection, furthers Muller (2019). Research indicates that 88% of crimes against Queer individuals go unreported or unrecorded, often due to fear of secondary victimisation by the police (Bhaghat, 2020; Gopal, 2020; Graaff, 2021; Judge, 2021; Mkhize, 2020; Muller, 2019).

The lack of adequate data hinders effective policy development and intervention measures, while the Queer community and scholars in the field continue to advocate for improved safety and support. This underscores the need for inclusive legislation and societal change to address these issues (Bhaghat, 2020). According to the UN (2021), the violent victimisation rate for transgender persons (51.5 victimisations per 1,000 individuals aged 16 or older) is 2.5 times higher than that of cisgender individuals (20.5 per 1,000). By examining the experiences of gendered violence against Queer individuals, this paper aims to uncover the institutional barriers that prevent them from accessing justice, safety, and assistance from the designated agencies.

Literature Review

Unpacking Gendered Violence and Its Types

Scholars and organisations conceptualise and define gendered violence in various ways (Brown, 2020; Russel, 2020; Sevelious, 2019; Smith, 2020; United Nations, 2019). According to the United Nations (2019), gendered violence refers to aggression or harassment driven by imbalances in power, inequity, and rooted in gender identity, expression, or societal gender norms. Brown (2020) defines gendered violence as any harm or abuse inflicted upon individuals because of their gender. Russel (2020) expands this with the argument that gendered violence encompasses a broad spectrum of violent actions perpetrated against someone due to their gender identity, gender expression or social function.

Many scholars agree that this type of violence is driven by power dynamics and deeply rooted societal norms that sustain gender inequality and oppression (Glaad, 2020; Meyer, 2019; Ryan, 2021; Sevelious, 2019; Williams, 2019). Collins (2019) notes that awhile the terms "gendered violence" and "gender-based violence" are frequently used interchangeably, they have slightly different meanings. Gender-based violence (GBV) specifically refers to violence directed at individuals because of their gender or sex (Crenshaw, 2019). While gendered violence refers to the abuse or harm inflicted upon people because of their gender identity or expression/sexual orientation or perceived gender norms (United Nations, 2020). It includes a variety of actions and structural problems that attack people based only on their gender (World Health Organisation, 2019). Butler (2020) contends that GBV acknowledges the varying ways in which certain types of violence are experienced based on one's gender identity and societal gender standards, while gendered violence refers to violence that both influences and is perpetuated by gender norms and power structures. Lomardi and Testa (2020) argue that gendered violence exemplifies how societal beliefs about gender roles and expectations both generate and sustain violent behaviour. Conversely, Redd (2019) differentiates between the two terms, asserting that gendered violence encompasses not only gender-based

violence but also the broader societal patterns and structures that enable and normalize such violence. Mohan (2020) underscores that gendered violence manifests in various forms, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse, digital abuse, and spiritual abuse. The study will now provide an overview of these different forms of abuse, as outlined by Mohan (2020).

Types Of Abuses

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is defined as the use of physical force to harm or endanger another individual (Levy, 2020). Queer individuals may be subjected to physical abuse due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, leading to both physical and psychological consequences, including injuries, chronic pain, depression, and anxiety (World Health Organisation, 2019). According to Fone (2019), barriers such as fear of stigma, lack of Queer-friendly resources, and internalized shame hinder the seeking of assistance. Physical abuse can also serve to control and regulate the bodies and identities of Queer individuals (Butler, 2020).

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is characterised by using verbal or non-verbal behaviours intended to manipulate, demean, or humiliate someone, resulting in emotional harm or trauma (Bancroft, 2020). Queer individuals often experience emotional abuse from personal relationships, family dynamics, or cultural standards that perpetuate homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia (Meyer, 2019). This form of abuse can lead to anxiety, depression, PTSD, and suicidal ideation (Haas et al., 2021), alongside internalized shame and self-doubt (Szymanski, 2020). Emotional abuse also plays a pivotal role in shaping queer individuals' identities, expressions, and interpersonal relationships (Rankin et al., 2019).

Financial Abuse

Financial abuse is a form of domestic violence involving the manipulation or exploitation of an individual's finances, often by restricting access to money and resources (Bancroft, 2020). Queer people face challenges such as limited access to Queer-friendly resources, fear of persecution, and heightened poverty rates (Meyer et al., 2019). Financial abuse can foster dependency on the abuser, hinder the ability to escape the abusive situation, and limit access to necessary gender-affirming care (Szymanski, 2019). Addressing financial abuse is crucial to promoting the economic stability and well-being of queer individuals (Sange, 2019; Stephenson, 2021; Strick, 2019; Sullivan, 2020).

Digital Abuse

Digital abuse, or cyber abuse, refers to the use of technology to harass, control, or exploit individuals, including Queer individuals (Southwork, 2019). This can involve online harassment, cyberbullying, digital surveillance, the unauthorized sharing of personal images, and hacking (Chibba, 2020). Powell (2019) notes that digital abuse can cause emotional distress, fear of violence, restricted access to resources and support, compromised privacy, and increased marginalization and exclusion for Queer individuals. Ellis and Dasgupta (2023) emphasise that queer individuals may face unique challenges in addressing digital abuse, such as a lack of Queer-friendly online tools and support systems, fear of discrimination or outing when seeking assistance, and limited digital literacy or access to technology.

Theoretical Framework

In unpacking the lived experiences of gendered violence against Queer individuals the article adopted a multi-theory approach, wherein Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) and Cultural Competency theory were specifically selected. Kasa (2024) emphasises that social justice is central to social work, distinguishing it from other professions. Therefore, according to Kasa (2024), incorporating AOP is indispensable. Baines (2020) describes anti-oppressive practice as a framework that addresses and challenges oppressive power dynamics, promoting social justice and equality. Anti-oppressive practice involves recognising and

acknowledging power imbalances and privilege, centering marginalised voices and experiences, challenging dominant narratives and assumptions, fostering inclusive and participatory research methods, and promoting empowerment and social change (Kasa, 2024; Mullay, 2021).

Garcia (2020) defines Cultural Competency as the ability to collaborate and communicate effectively with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Owen et al. (2020), emphasize that cultural competency involves recognising power dynamics and cultural humility. It requires understanding and respecting cultural differences as well as adapting procedures to meet specific needs. Hansen (2020) notes that maintaining cultural competency demands continuous learning and self-reflection to address systemic biases and barriers The theories of Cultural Competency and Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) intersect in important ways, particularly in the context of working with marginalized groups such as queer individuals. Both frameworks emphasize the importance of prioritizing the voices and lived experiences of marginalized communities.

AOP, as Kasa (2024) explains, is focused on transforming social attitudes and practices to better serve marginalized individuals, particularly those within the queer community. Crenshaw (2019) also underscores that AOP aims to uplift the voices of these communities, ensuring their experiences are central in the transformation of social work practices. Similarly, Cultural Competency aims to equip practitioners with the tools to engage meaningfully with culturally diverse groups, including queer individuals (Kidd & Witten, 2019). Thus, both theories are centred on creating a space where marginalized voices, especially queer individuals, are heard and their needs addressed.

Cultural competency theory, as Owen (2020) notes, requires individuals to reflect on their own prejudices and cultural presumptions, especially regarding gender and sexuality. This introspection is mirrored in AOP, where practitioners are urged to recognize and challenge their biases to avoid perpetuating oppression. Butler (2020) highlights that both frameworks emphasize the importance of owning up to one's prejudices and recognizing how these can impact practice. Therefore, the intersection lies in the mutual emphasis on self-awareness and self-reflection to develop more empathetic and effective practices.

Castillo (2022) highlights the need to recognize intersectionality, the interconnectedness of multiple aspects of identity, such as gender, race, and sexuality. This is a crucial point where Cultural Competency and AOP intersect, particularly when considering queer individuals. Both frameworks advocate for a nuanced understanding of the diverse experiences of marginalized individuals, where various factors intersect and influence their experiences of oppression. This is crucial in developing practices that address the specific needs of queer individuals who may face multiple layers of marginalization.

By merging AOP and Cultural Competency, the research aims to advance a comprehensive strategy to address societal and institutional factors that affect queer individuals. Rudd & Stack (2020) argue that both frameworks, when applied together, can drive transformation by addressing both individual and structural issues of oppression. The merging of these frameworks enables practitioners to foster a more inclusive community that recognizes the diverse needs of queer people while challenging societal structures that perpetuate inequality. Both theories aim to create more inclusive social work practices by focusing on the empowerment and support of marginalized individuals, particularly queer individuals. Their intersection lies in the shared goals of transforming attitudes, promoting self-awareness, recognizing intersectionality, and creating a more just and inclusive society. When combined, these frameworks offer a comprehensive strategy for addressing the complex societal and institutional challenges faced by queer individuals.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative approach which focuses on gathering and analysing non-numerical data to gain insights into people's experiences, perspective, and meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2020). This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of Queer individuals who have experienced gendered violence. This study adopted phenomenological research design, which Creswell (2019), describes as an approach that seeks to explore and describe the lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings of individuals or groups. This design allowed the researchers to understand the

experiences of participants without imposing preconceived assumptions and/or biases. The in-depth interviews to collect that data, whilst thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected data.

The study sample comprised 20 participants, drawn from a population that includes Queer individuals, healthcare workers from Ncise clinic, community leaders, social workers from the Department of Social Development, and service providers from a community-based organization. Most of the Queer participants were between the ages of 18 and 40, with most being unemployed. This sample reflects the diverse perspectives and experiences of individuals directly impacted by gendered violence and those who provide support within the community.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussions

The researcher has presented the findings in the form of tables, and participant quotes. To get data from Queer individuals, social workers, community leaders, police officers and nurses, researchers have used qualitative research techniques including focus groups and in-depth interviews. Throughout the presentation, Queer individuals from Ncise have participated. The response rate, participant demographic information, and thematic findings presented in tables will all be included.

Table 1. Demographic Data of Participants

NUER OF PARTCIPANTS	AGE	SEXUAL IDENTITY	NATIONALITY	EMPLOYMENT STATUS	LEVEL OF EDUCATION
1.	18	QUEER	SOUTH AFRICAN	UNEMPLOYED	MATRIC
2.	21	QUEER	SOUTH AFRICAN	UNEMPOLYED	UNIVERSITY STUDENT
3.	35	FEMALE	SOUTH AFRICAN	EMPLOYED	NURSE
4.	28	MALE	SOUTH AFRICAN	EMPLOYED	POLICE OFFICER
5.	31	FEMALE	SOUTH AFRICAN	EMPLOYED	POLICE OFFICER
6.	25	FEMALE	ZIMBABWEAN	UNEMPLOYED	MATRIC
7.	42	QUEER	SOUTH AFRICAN	UNEMPLOYED	GRADE 8
8.	29	QUEER	SOUTH AFRICAN	UNEMPLOYED	UNIVERSITY DROPOUT
9.	27	MALE	SOUTH AFRICAN	EMPLOYED	MALE NURSE
10.	30	QUEER	SOUTH AFRICAN	UNEMPLOYED	GRADE 11
11.	57	MALE	SOUTH AFRICAN	UNEMPLOYED (COMMUNITY LEADER)	GRADE 11
12.	63	MALE	SOUTH AFRICAN	UNEMPLOYED (COMMUNITY LEADER)	GRADE 7

13.	40	QUEER	SOUTH AFRICAN	EMPLOYED	GRADE 12
14.	22	QUEER	SOUTH AFRICAN	EMPLOYED	GRADE 12
15.	32	FEMALE	SOUTH AFRICAN	EMPLOYED	SOCIAL WORKER
16.	37	FEMALE	SOUTH AFRICAN	EMPLOYED	SOCIAL WORKER

Table 1 above shows the demographic information of all the research participants. The first column of table 1 shows the number of participants. The second column in table 1 shows the age of the participants that were interviewed. The study was conducted with Queer individuals between the ages of 18-40 years old, nurses at the age of 27 and 35, police officers at the age of 28 and 31, community leaders at the age of 57 and 63, social workers at the age of 31 and 37 and community members at the age of 25. The third column in table 1 shows the sexuality of each participant, showing the variety of sexuality, not focusing on the gender.

Table 1 column four shows the nationality of each participant not all the participants are South Africans, there is only one participant that is Zimbabwean. The fifth column of Table 1 shows the employment status of participants and the seventh and final column of table 1 shows the level of education of the participants. Only one is still in university doing their third year, five of them are professionals, one did not go to High School and seven others ended in High School grades.

Table 2. To Explore the Experiences of Gendered Violence Against Queer Individuals

Theme	SUB-THEME	PROBES
To explore the experiences of gendered violence against Queer individuals.	Please provide the challenges that you are faced with daily as Queer people in your village.	Homophobia Discrimination Rejection Bullying Name calling Fear Harassment and depression

Homophobia

All the Queer individuals in this village have stated that they have experienced homophobia, and its rate is very high. The Queer individuals are living in fear in their village because they receive both verbal and non-verbal homophobia. The non-verbal homophobia is inclusive of physical abuse as they are beaten, bruised, and severely injured for their sexuality. Some of the participants who identify as gay men mentioned that the get physically abused by community members with the justification that they are evoking their masculinity therefore they should fight back. Some say that the abusers beat them to provoke them to fight back so that their masculinity can be evoked as men.

Participant Two mentioned that "*I was coming from the local tavern in the village at around nine at night, was a bit drunk, and I became attacked, physically injured by two men and they took my money and phone. They said that they were doing this because I was a gay person and that I was bringing shame towards the men of the village. I woke up the next morning to report to the police station*".

Participant four and five: "*Singamapolisa siqapheleinto yokuba izinga labantu abazochaza amatyala okuhlukunyezwa ngenxa yesini sabo liphezulu kakhulu kule lali yase Ncise. Abanye babo bazoxela ukuba bayabethwa, abanye bayadlwengulwa, abanye bayagxothwa emakhayeni wabo abanye kuthwthwa amazwi ahlabayo ezikolweni zabo kunye nasekuhlaleni. Abamkelekanga*" (As police officers, we have noticed that there is a high rate of gendered

violence against Queer people, such as physical abuse, sexual assault, rejection from families, and hate speech from their peers at school and from their community).

Queer people deal with homophobia, or fear and loathing, in numerous aspects of their existence (Rosenfeld, 2018). It can be damaging to queer people's mental health and general well-being for them to endure verbal abuse, which includes being called homophobic insults (Katz-Wise, 2017).

The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) reports that 1 in 5 Queer people may experience hate violence at some point in their lives, making them particularly impacted by it (NCAVP, 2020). Moreover, a Human Rights Campaign survey revealed that 1 in 2 transgender women of colour has experienced physical assault at some point in their lives, making them especially susceptible to hate crimes (HRC, 2019).

Discrimination

All Queer individuals did state that they are experiencing discrimination due to their sexuality. Queer individuals are treated unfairly or differently, they are being treated as outsiders. This other one participant stated that she was being discriminated at her university by other students, some even judge her, telling her that she does not appreciate what God has given her, and she wants to change to being a male.

Participant seven stated that *"Since the first year of my degree I have been experiencing abuse as a Queer individual. Some students were making hate speech towards me, making negative remarks towards me. This negatively affected my mental health and my academics, and I then decided to drop out of University, I could not handle the stress, embarrassments"*. Discrimination due to sexuality is a widespread problem that impacts those who identify as Queer (The Trevor Project, 2020). Discrimination of this kind can take many different forms, such as discrimination in the workplace, housing market, public accommodations, healthcare, and education (Human Rights Campaign, 2020). Meyer and Katz-Wise (2017) argue that discrimination based on sexuality can have serious consequences, including physical health problems, social isolation, economic instability, and mental health conditions like PTSD, depression, and anxiety.

Rejection

All the participants mentioned that they have experienced rejection due to their sexuality. They experience rejection mostly from their families because their families state that they bring shame and embarrassment to them and that they do not accept their nature. They state that their families believe that they see them as people who are demon possessed and unholy. Participant one stated that *"Ndadlwengulwa ngutamci elalini kuba esithi ufuna undifundisa isifundo sokuba ndizazi uba ndiyintombi, mandingazijiki isini sam"* (I was raped by my uncle who lives in the village, saying that he wants to teach me a lesson and so that I can know me that I am a female not a male, therefore, I should act accordingly). She stated that even when she reported to her family, they did not take her seriously.

Participant eight stated that *"Growing up, I was constantly told that being gay was wrong, that I was going to hell. It took me a long time to realize that those messages were not about me, but about the ignorance and fear of others."*

Many queer people suffer from the painful and frequent experience of being rejected by their family and community (Kosciw,2018). According to statistics, 40% of homeless youth identify as Queer, and the main reason for homelessness is family rejection (Williams Institute, 2012). According to The Trevor Project (2020), 60% of Queer youth also report feeling rejected by their families, which raises their risk of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. It is because queer people may hide their identities or avoid social situations to prevent further rejection, this rejection can also result in social isolation (Meyer, 2023).

Bullying

All Queer individuals indicated that they have experienced bullying, even other community member stated that she has seen Queer individuals being bullied in their community due to their sexuality. Participant

eleven even stated that *"Finding friends when you're transgender, that to me is one of the hardest parts because you don't find a lot of friends. And when you do, a lot of them will leave you just because you're different."* Also, participant 14 said that *"I was bullied starting at age 9, when my peers identified me as 'different'... I suffered substantial mistreatment from my peers that was both verbal and physical."*

According to available literature, Queer people frequently face specific challenges, such as geographical isolation and a lack of supportive resources (Duran, 2021; Gamarel, 2020; Halkitis, 2019; Kasa, 2021; Ozdere, 2023). Brammer and Kahle (2020) opine that Queer people in rural regions may be more vulnerable to identity-based victimization because of geographic isolation and an often-conservative value system that can create an unwelcoming environment for Queers. Bullying is a widespread and devastating problem that disproportionately impacts Queer people, especially in rural areas (Bryan, 2020). Queer individuals have reported being verbally harassed at school because of their sexual orientation (Kosciw, 2014). Furthermore, the Human Rights Campaign discovered that queer people in rural regions are more likely to face bullying and harassment, with 85% reporting being bullied at school (HRC, 2019).

Name Calling

Individuals that abuse Queer people have made it a norm to call Queer people names that are improper or rather rude, these names are so mean and disrespectful towards Queer individuals. Names such as *"isitabane, imoffie, nongayindoda, sisi bhuti"*. These names are used to call Queer individuals in this community even from a young age such name calling of queer people has been normalized.

Participant thirteen stated that *"I remember this other day like it was yesterday, when I was called sisi bhuti at work by my manager just for making a small mistake, I became so offended and everyone at work found it funny as a result they all laughed at me".* Participant fourteen stated that *"At school my classmates, used to call me nongayindoda or nongayi, body shamming me simply because of my sexuality and because of me being masculine".*

According to Walker (2020) name-calling directed at Queer people is a harmful kind of verbal abuse that attacks them because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Such criticizing labels perpetuate incorrect assumptions and reinforce popular prejudices, further marginalizing the Queer community (Walker, 2020). These damaging slurs can vary from insulting labels to dehumanizing remarks, and they frequently seek to insult or suppress individuals, and it can have serious emotional and psychological implications, such as decreased self-esteem, anxiety, sadness, and feelings of isolation (Onaguga, 2021).

Fear

Queer participants disclosed that they constantly live in fear of being killed, rapes, hate speech because most people in their community do not accept and understand them. They also make threats; some end up being raped.

Participant seven stated that *"I had lived in fear in university of being threatened by men or rather male individuals, some even come to my room and knock threatening me that they will rape me or beat me up if I do not open my door".*

She even stated that *"The fear doesn't go away. You can't just be yourself without worrying about being harassed or worse. Even when I'm in a safe space, the anxiety doesn't leave me."* She even decided to drop out of university.

Participant seven mentioned that *"Living as a gay person in some areas means constantly looking over your shoulder, always fearing that one wrong move will lead to hate being thrown your way."*

Fear in Queer people is generally caused by a combination of societal prejudice, discrimination, and the internalized stigma that comes with being excluded and many queer people fear being rejected by their families, friends, or communities, as well as being subjected to physical or emotional assault because of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Hall, 2020). The anxiety is heightened by the possibility of being rejected in a variety of settings, including schools, workplaces, and even public areas and the constant danger

of verbal harassment, bullying, or worse, physical assault fosters an environment in which Queer people may feel unsafe or uncomfortable in their own flesh (Owens, 2018).

For Queer people, this anxiety might show as subtle, everyday anxieties and they may be concerned about being accidentally exposed, or they may be hesitant to express affection in public for fear of being judged or threatened (Owens, 2018). Ruberg and Ruelos (2020) argue in contexts where acceptance is not guaranteed, gay people may be motivated to disguise or minimize their identities to prevent confrontation or violence. This concern is especially strong in areas with hostile legislation or social climates, where the legal system may fail to protect individuals from discrimination or hate crimes (Hall, 2020).

Harassment

Participants stated they have been experiencing harassment in this village. Another participant stated that even when he is walking in the streets, he becomes harassed even by children that play in the streets and that hurts him a lot. Even another participant stated that she has seen harassment happening in the Queer individuals in the streets. Some individuals would even voice out mean words and Queer individuals feel unsafe.

Participant eight stated that *"I have had people follow me around in stores, whispering behind my back, or even outright staring and making comments. It's not just uncomfortable; it's frightening. You never know if it will escalate."*

"There was a time I was walking around the neighborhood and someone yelled isitabane at me from a passing car. It's one of those moments that are never erased from your memory with you. I didn't feel safe, and I still don't sometimes."

"I was walking down the street with my partner, just trying to enjoy our day, and a group of men started shouting slurs at us. It felt like I was being attacked just for existing."

Queer people are frequently the targets of harassment, which can range from covert microaggressions to overt physical and emotional abuse (Koshyl, 2021). It can happen in a variety of settings, such as public areas, workplaces, educational institutions, and social groups or families (Koshyl, 2021). Prejudice and intolerance toward people because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression are frequently the fundamental causes of this harassment and verbal abuse is a prevalent type of harassment in which gay people are the targets of insults, slurs, and disparaging remarks regarding their identity (Powell, 2020).

Insulting slurs like *"isitabane, imoffie"* as well as less obvious comments that disparage someone's gender or sexual orientation, can be among them (Powell, 2020). Since verbal harassment frequently targets people in public or in ordinary settings, like while strolling down the street or having informal discussions, it can be particularly harmful and since many Queer people feel pressured to conceal their identities to escape verbal attacks, this concern can result in anxiety and self-censorship (Worthen, 2023).

Depression

Queer individuals have and are still experiencing depression in their lives. Due to being harassed and talked about by other community members and their school mates. This leads to stress, toxic habits like being involved in substance abuse to relief pain, stress and just to be out of this world mentally.

Participant nine stated that *"As a nurse I have dealt with Queer patients experiencing depression, mental health issues, the ones that have been raped feel like something has been taken away from them, they are not themselves anymore. So, we give them anti-depressants"*

Participant fifteen stated that *"Sometimes, I wake up and feel like I'm suffocating under the weight of pretending to be something I'm not. It's exhausting, and I don't know how to keep going when I feel so alone in this world."*

Queer depression is a complicated and complex problem that is frequently influenced by both internal emotional challenges and external social influences (Huang, 2021). Queer persons experience difficulties, like marginalization, discrimination, and a lack of acceptance from friends, family, or society at large, which may lead to depression. Feelings of sadness, loneliness, and despair might result from these stressors' profound emotional and psychological consequences (Huang, 2021).

According to Muller (2019) social stigma and prejudice are major causes of depression in queer people. It is because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, Queer people especially those who are openly Queer may be subjected to harassment, bullying, or marginalization and whether at work, school, or in public places, this continual exposure to negativity can foster a hostile environment that undermines one's sense of value and self-esteem (Jack, 2023). In addition to escalating feelings of loneliness and isolation, the fear of rejection or rejection from loved ones can also trigger the beginning or exacerbation of depression (Cisek, 2023). Internalized homophobia or transphobia, a type of self-hatred that can arise when one internalizes social negative assumptions about their identity, is another weight that many Queer people must bear (Cisek, 2023).

Recommendations

Implement culturally sensitive, community-wide education programs to challenge misconceptions about Queer identities.

By including a variety of cultural viewpoints in the curriculum and guaranteeing inclusivity, culturally sensitive community-wide education initiatives can be successfully put into place to clear up myths regarding Queer people. These programs are to be created with an awareness of the cultural contexts in which they are presented, taking into consideration past experiences, language, and beliefs that might affect how the community views Queer individuals. For example, including the experiences and contributions of Queer people from certain cultural groups might help to break stereotypes and promote understanding. Furthermore, bridging the knowledge gap can be achieved by addressing popular misconceptions and the complex realities of Queer individuals from diverse backgrounds, as well as by adopting inclusive language.

Include Queer topics in school curricula to foster acceptance from a young age.

By raising awareness and understanding of various sexual orientations and gender identities, incorporating Queer issues into school curricula can be crucial in encouraging acceptance from an early age. Teachers can provide students with a variety of role models and viewpoints by highlighting the experiences and accomplishments of Queer people by including Queer-inclusive content into courses like social studies, literature, and history. For instance, talking about historical persons who identified as Queer or reading novels with Queer characters helps to normalise these communities and remove prejudices. Students can also learn about the flexibility of gender identity and sexual orientation by participating in age-appropriate conversations about these topics, which fosters empathy and respect. In addition to lowering stigma and promoting acceptance in a formative educational environment, ensuring that Queer subjects are covered in the curriculum sends a strong message about the importance of diversity.

Partner with traditional leaders to create dialogues about the harmful effects of gendered violence.

Traditional leaders are important partners in changing cultural perceptions about gender norms and violence because they frequently have a lot of power and are well-respected in their communities. Educational programs can use these leaders' influence to encourage good change by holding open discussions with them about the harm that gendered violence causes to both persons and communities. By creating an atmosphere where both viewpoints collaborate to combat harmful practices, these collaborations can aid in bridging the gap between contemporary legal frameworks and traditional values. Moreover, by making the discussion more approachable and relatable for the population at large, traditional leaders can play a significant role in spreading ideas like gender equality, respect, and non-violence in community settings.

Establish safe spaces within the community for Queer individuals to share experiences and find support.

This can be accomplished by planning frequent meetings, support group gatherings, or social gatherings with qualified facilitators, social workers who make sure the environment is welcoming and considerate of all identities. Setting clear rules for humanity, privacy, and nonjudgment is essential to ensuring that everyone feels comfortable sharing their individual stories. The area should also be accessible, both geographically and in terms of meeting the needs of different Queer subgroups, such as transgender people, people of colour, and persons from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Working together with local Queer organisations and mental health specialists can help offer resources and counselling to Queer people.

Implications for Social Work

Exploring the lived experiences of gendered violence against Queer people has significant implications for social work, especially when it comes to offering trauma-informed, inclusive, and culturally competent care. Social workers learn more about the complex interactions between gender identity, sexual orientation, and social marginalisation when they investigate the lived experiences of Queer people who are victims of gendered violence (Seahorn, 2020). According to research, Queer individuals, particularly those from diverse backgrounds, are more likely to experience physical, mental, and sexual violence, which is frequently made worse by prejudice and stigma in society and therefore, the study emphasizes the urgent need for social work to address both health and safety issues as well as more systemic injustices society (Barnes, 2020; Butler, 2020; Meyer, 2019; Seahorn, 2020; Stanley, 2021).

Social workers should be crucial in promoting laws that shield Queer people from discrimination and violence while also establishing safer environments for empowerment and healing in both community and clinical settings (Crawford & Kafafy, 2022). Furthermore, interacting with the Queer community in a way that honours their identities and life experiences might promote trust and make interventions more successful (Donovan & Barnes, 2020). Along with critically analysing their personal prejudices, social workers must comprehend how heteronormativity and cisnormativity might influence their work to promote inclusivity in advocacy and service delivery (Ghaziani & Rupp, 2019).

Conclusion

According to Stanley (2021), gendered violence against Queer people demonstrates the widespread impact of heteronormativity and systematic discrimination, indicating that Queer people are more likely to suffer physical, emotional, and psychological harm. This violence stems from cultural norms and institutional biases that marginalise and stigmatise non-heteronormative identities (Stanley et al., 2021; Meyer, 2015). Queer folks' stories highlight the necessity of fostering inclusive environments and increasing legal protections to lessen the risks they encounter (Hines et al., 2021). Furthermore, the study underlines the importance of education and activism in challenging discriminatory practices and increasing societal acceptability (Mayo, 2022). By tackling the institutional and cultural elements that contribute to this violence, scholars, politicians, and activists can work together to create safer and more equal settings for queers. This underlines the necessity of continuing inquiry and intervention to deconstruct the barriers to equality and safety for underrepresented populations.

References

Alam, M. K. (2021). A systematic qualitative case study: questions, data collection, NVivo analysis and saturation. Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal, 16(1), 1-31.

Barker, M. (2020). Reinventing identity: The challenge of queer. Journal of Gender Studies, 29(1), 34-41. doi: 10.1080/09589236.2019.1679897

Bates, E. A. (2020). "No one would ever believe me": An exploration of the impact of intimate partner violence victimization on men. Psychology of Men & Masculinities, 21(4), 497.

Bhagat, A. H. (2020). Queer necropolitics of forced migration: Cyclical violence in the African context. Sexualities, 23(3), 361-375.

Brim, m., & ghaziani, a. (2016). Introduction: queer methods. Women's studies quarterly, 44(3/4), 14-27.

Butler, J. (2020). Critically queer. In Playing with fire (pp. 11-29). Routledge.

Butler, j. 2020. Critically queer. Playing with fire. Routledge.

Crawford, A. T., & Kafafy, M. (2022). The role of social work in addressing queer violence: Trauma-informed practices. Social Work and Social Welfare Journal, 47(1), 45-59.

Donovan, C., & Barnes, R. (2020). Help-seeking among lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender victims/survivors of domestic violence and abuse: The impacts of cisgendered heteronormativity and invisibility. Journal of Sociology, 56(4), 554-570.

Duran, A. (2021). "Outsiders in a niche group": Using intersectionality to examine resilience for queer students of color. Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 14(2), 217.

Elman, R.A. (2013). Gender Violence. The Oxford University handbook of gender and politics, 236-258.

Gainsbury, S. M. (2017). Cultural competence in the treatment of addictions: Theory, practice and evidence. Clinical psychology & psychotherapy, 24(4), 987-1001.

Gamarel, K. E. (2020). Minority stress, mental health, and substance use among LGBTQ+ individuals. Journal of Clinical Psychology, 76(1), 1-13. doi: 10.1002/jclp.22866

Garcia, L., & Mendez, P. (2020). Safe Spaces: The Role of Community Support in Protecting Vulnerable Groups. Journal of Community Health, 39(4), 401-414.

Germain, C., & Knight, C. (2020). The life model of social work practice: Advances in theory and practice. Columbia University Press.

Ghaziani, A., & Rupp, L. J. (2019). Sexuality and social work practice: A critical examination of theory and praxis. Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling, 13(2), 117-132.

Gorman-Murray, A. (2019). Queer geographies: An introduction. Journal of Homosexuality, 66(8), 1029-1034. doi: 10.1080/00918369.2018.1555965

Graaff, K. (2021). The Implications of a narrow understanding of gender-based violence. Feminist Encounters, 5(1), 1-12.

Graaff, K. (2021). The Implications of a narrow understanding of gender-based violence. Feminist Encounters, 5(1), 1-12.

Hagen, J. J. (2016). Queering women, peace and security. International Affairs, 92(2), 313-332.

Halkitis, P. N. (2019). Out in time: The public lives of gay men from stonewall to the queer generation. Oxford University Press.

Hall, W. J., Ruiz Rosado, B., & Chapman, M. V. (2019). Findings from a feasibility study of an adapted cognitive behavioral therapy group intervention to reduce depression among LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer) young people. Journal of clinical medicine, 8(7), 949.

Human Rights Campaign. (2020). A Guide to State and Local Laws and Policies.

Judge, M. (2021). Queer at 25: a critical perspective on queerness, politics and futures. Journal of Asian and African Studies, 56(1), 120-134.

Kasa, L. (2024). Queer Affirmative Practice in Africa: A Social Work Practice Model for Working with LGBTQIA+ People. Research in Social Sciences and Technology, 9(1), 279-290.

Kasa, L. (2021). Experiences oOf Homophobia bBy tThe Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex And Asexual Students In Selected Institutions Of Higher Learning iIn ORr Tambo District Municipality, Eastern Cape Province (Masters ThesisDoctoral dissertation, Walter Sisulu University).

Katz-Wise, S. L., Hyde, J. S., & Bigler, R. S. (2017). Sexual orientation and mental health: A systematic review of the literature. Journal of Sex Research, 54(4-5), 421-444.

Mayo, C. (2022). LGBTQ youth and education: Policies and practices. Teachers College Press.

Merry, S.E. (2011). Gender Violence: A cultural perspective, john wiley & sons.

Meyer, D. (2015). Violence against queer people: Race, class, gender, and the persistence of anti-LGBT discrimination. Rutgers University Press.

Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. Psychological Bulletin, 129(5), 674-697.

Mkhize, S., Nunlall, R., & Gopal, N. (2020). An examination of social media as a platform for cyber-violence against the LGBT+ population. Agenda, 34(1), 23-33.

Moore, H. (2021). The problem of explaining violence in the social sciences. In Sex and violence (pp. 138-155). Routledge.

Müller, B. M. (2019). Under Priscilla's eyes: state violence against South Africa's queer community during and after apartheid. Image & Text, (33), 1-36.

Muller, R. T. (2019). Journal of Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 20(4), 537-548. Trauma and the LGBTQ+ community.

Nadan, Y. (2017). Rethinking 'cultural competence'in international social work. International Social Work, 60(1), 74-83.

Owen, G. (2020). Cultural Studies, 34(1), 1-18. Queer theory and the productive possibilities of disorientation.

Owens, R. E. (2018). Queer kids: The challenges and promise for lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. Routledge.

Ruberg, B., & Ruelos, S. (2020). Data for queer lives: How LGBTQ gender and sexuality identities challenge norms of demographics. Big Data & Society, 7(1), 2053951720933286.

Seahorn, N. (2020). Lived Experiences of Gay Men and Barriers to Reporting Intimate Partner Violence (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University).

Smith, R. (2020). Gender Violence: Causes, Consequences, and Interventions. Gender Studies Quarterly, 22(1), 85-98.

Stanley, E. A. (2021). Atmospheres of violence: Structuring antagonism and the trans/queer ungovernable. Duke University Press.

Terwiel, A. (2020). What is carceral feminism? Political Theory, 48(4), 421-442.

The Trevor Project. (2020).

UN Women. (2020). Violence against women and girls. Retrieved from https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women

Walby, S., Towers, J., Balderston, S., Corradi, C., Francis, B., Heiskanen, M., ... & Strid, S. (2017). Conceptualising violence and gender. In The concept and measurement of violence against women and men (pp. 31-56). Policy Press.

Walker, A. (2020). "I'm not like that, so am I gay?" The use of queer-spectrum identity labels among minor-attracted people. Journal of Homosexuality.

Warner, M. (2012). Queer and then? The chronicle of higher education, 1,1.

Whittington, K. (2012). Queer studies in iconography, 33,157-168.

World Health Organization. (2019). Violence against sex workers. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/news-room/q-and-a/detail/violence-against-sex-workers