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WE WORK HARD TO DELIVER

# **Rebuilding the Health System: The Relationship between Mental Health and Gender-Based Violence**

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# Introduction

- Despite many government interventions, in partnership with civil society and various other stakeholders, **gender-based violence (GBV) and femicides continue to be amongst the biggest challenges** facing post-apartheid South Africa.
- **Institutions of higher learning have continued to record high cases of gender-based violence (GBV)** despite all efforts put in place to fight the vice.
- This also includes the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender diverse, intersex, queer, asexual and questioning **(LGBTIQA+) communities.**
- Most disturbing fact is that GBV and femicide **statistics available for public consumption are purely based on reported cases** – the figures are likely far much higher as many cases go unreported.
- A by-product of GBV, which the greater part of society is coming to recognise, is its **impact on the mental wellness of victims.**
- **A connection between GBV and poor mental health conditions** (anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has also been observed.

# Purpose

## The purpose of the presentation is:

- To share information and raise awareness on the relationship between mental health and Gender Based Violence (GBV)
- To make recommendations on what can be done to address mental health and GBV, to regain and rebuild the health system

# Defining GBV and Mental Health

- **Gender-Base Violence:**

Any harm that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their factual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

- ❖ It occurs across diverse settings: homes, workplaces, schools, and communities, and affects people of all genders.
- ❖ GBV is often a manifestation of discrimination and inequality based on gender.

- **Some forms of GBV:**

- ❖ Domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence (rape), forced and early marriage, 'honour' crimes, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), physical violence, and human trafficking.

- **Mental health:**

- ❖ An individual's emotional, psychological, and social well-being.
- ❖ Mental health has an impact on people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.
- ❖ It also impacts how they manage stress, interact with others, and make decisions.
- ❖ Gender-based violence (GBV) and mental health conditions are distinct but intertwined global challenges.



# Demographics of Gender-Based Violence and Mental Illness

## Gender-Based Violence

- Globally, 35% of women experience physical and/or sexual abuse, and intimate partners commit 38% of murders of women.
- In South Africa, 51% of women report having been a victim of GBV.
- GBV has always been characterised by female victimhood and male perpetrators.
- As much as men and boys face domestic violence, they cannot be open about it as they fear being labelled negatively.
- In 2019/20, a total of 2 695 women were murdered in South Africa. This means a woman is murdered every three hours (Stellenbosch Women Alumnae Network, 2021).

## Mental Health

- Most mental health disorders are prevalent in women, though mental health disorders can be equally prevalent in all genders.
- Men have a greater percentage of suicide, some of which are linked to gender-based violence.
- In 2021, men died by suicide 3.9 times more than women.
- Suicide is a leading cause of death for men under age 50.

# Demographics of Gender-Based Violence and Mental Illness

## Age

- **Children and young individuals are usually victims** of GBV (bullying and child abuse).
- In older ages **women are more susceptible to GBV.**
- Mental health problems are more common in young adults, with substance abuse being common and severe disorders like sleeping and eating problems.
- Some **65% of young people stated that they had some form of a mental health issue but did not seek help** (Keeley, 2021).
- Older ages have a **high risk of depression, anxiety, and suicide.**

## Socio-economic factors:

- **Economic challenges usually increase chances of GBV**, and societies that are more economically developed have lower rates of GBV.
- Individuals from lower socio-economic segments may suffer more from mental health than their higher social class counterparts due to limited access to coping mechanisms for mental health challenges.



# Prevalence of Gender-based Violence

## **Gang rapes of 8 women (2022):**

- Eight women were sexually assaulted at a mine dump site in West Village, Gauteng, leading to the arrest of over 130 males, most of whom were illegal miners.

## **Violence in schools:**

- In South Africa children-related violence is high.
- Most of the victims are boys and in most cases the violence claims lives.

## **Violence at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs):**

- With 26 HEIs and over 2 million students, statistics show that sexual violence is a major problem on campuses, with 20 to 25% of women reporting sexual abuse at universities
- Recently a young woman was stabbed by their partner at CPUT which incident was captured live and images circulated widely on Social Media.



# Prevalence of Gender-based Violence: LGBTIQ+ at HEIs

## Discrimination by fellow students

- Students on campus can organise a festival and competition on indigenous/traditional games, and heterosexual students may not want to play with members of the LGBTIQ+ community.

## Allocation of residences

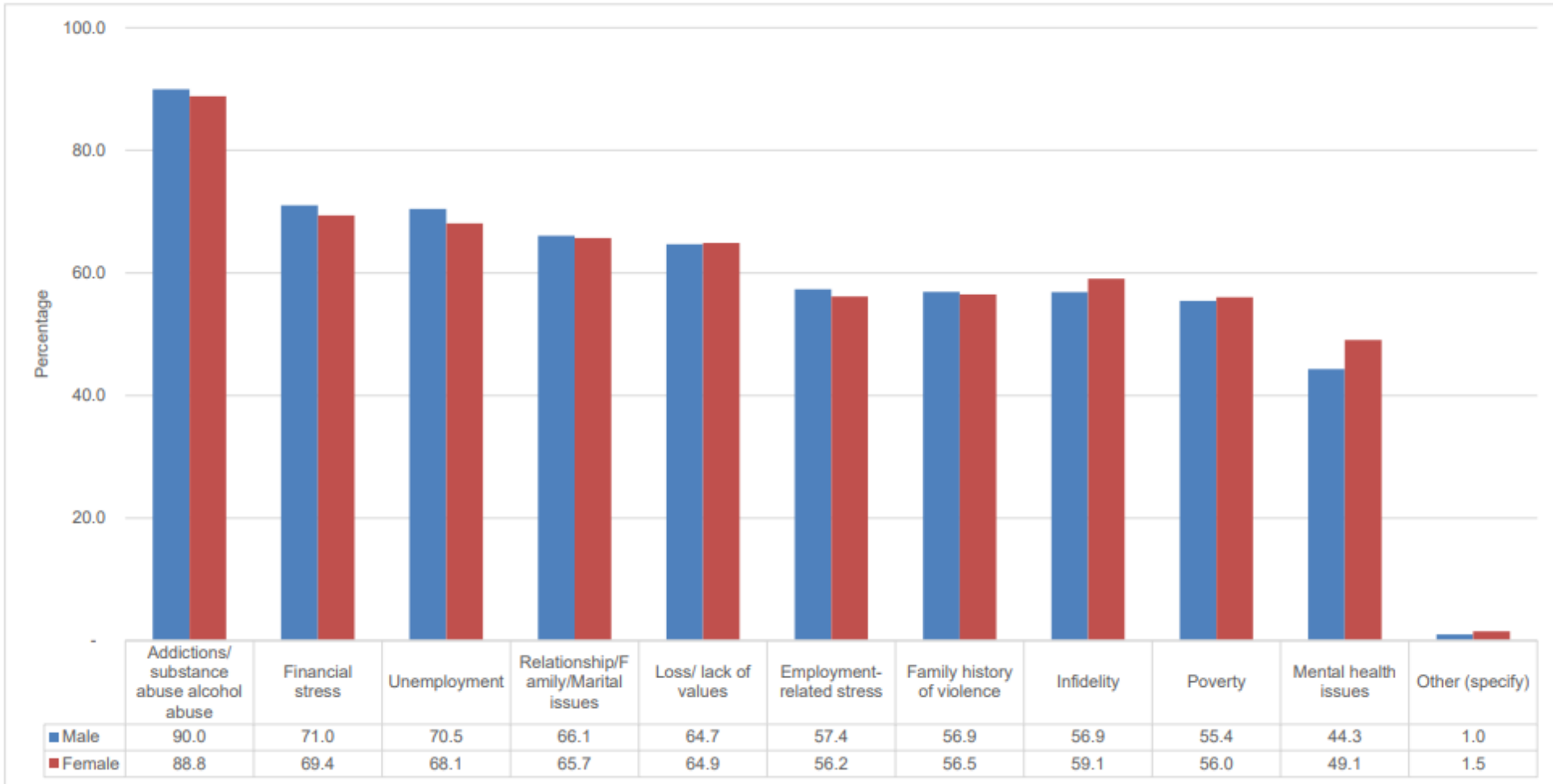
- Residences on this particular campus are “integrated” in terms of gender.
- LGBTIQ+ students are discriminated against by fellow students in residences.

## Unequal treatment in health facilities

- Literature suggests that gays and lesbians are on the receiving end of unequal treatment from health facilities.
- Stereotyped views may lead to sub-optimal treatment.

# Drivers of GBV and Mental Health Conditions

Percentage of persons aged 16 years and above by what they think causes violence against women and children by gender, 2020/21



Source: Stats SA (2021)



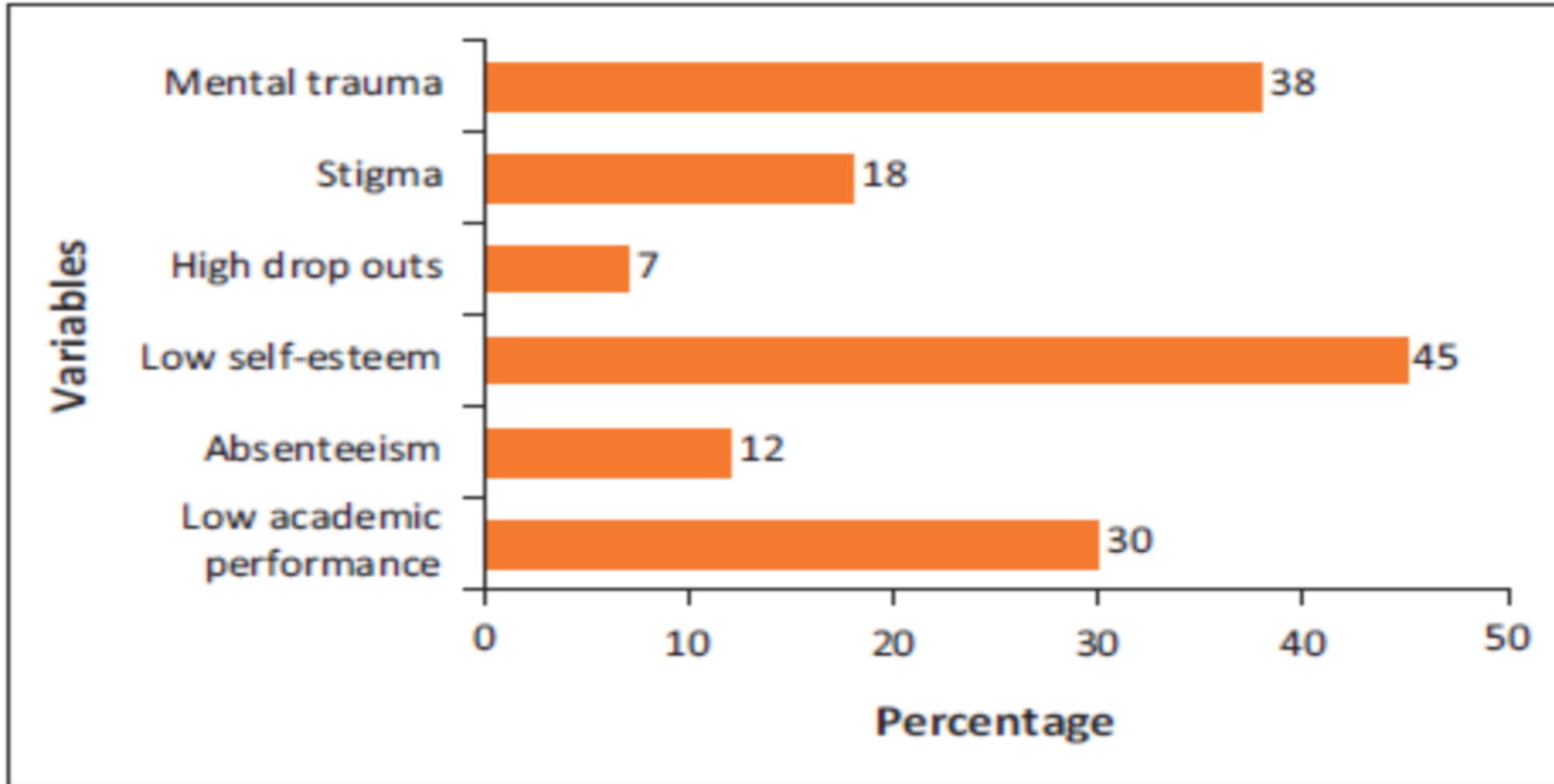
# Relationship between GBV and Mental Health

- **Survivors of GBV are more likely to experience mental health challenges** - experience anxiety, despair, PTSD, drug abuse and suicidal thoughts.
- They have a higher risk of developing mental and physical health problems.
- **Gender-based violence and mental health form a vicious cycle in most cases.**
- Victims who are mentally unhealthy are usually bound to be perpetrators in some cases.
- **Women with severe mental illness are more likely to fall victim to violence.**
- It is estimated that they are **6 times more likely to experience sexual assault or violence** during their lifetime.

# Relationship between GBV and Mental Health

- **Depression and anxiety:** victims of gender-based violence end up having a sense of worthlessness, fear and worry.
- **Suicidal thoughts:** gender-based violence victims are at risk of engaging in suicidal activities as a result of overwhelming emotional stress and anxiety.
- **Isolation:** victims may choose to disassociate themselves from society and other people in a bid to process thoughts and deal with trauma.
- **Substance abuse:** gender-based violence victims may resort to substance abuse to cope with trauma and triggers of previous events.
- **Re-victimization:** individuals who have experienced GBV may be at a higher risk of encountering further violence, leading to a cycle of victimization.

# GBV and Mental Health at Higher Learning Institutions



Source: Samakao & Manda (2023)



# Effects on Health System

- A costing study in 2015 estimated that **GBV costs South Africa between ZAR 24-42 billion annually** (KPMG, 2017). However, the true impact is severely underestimated.
- Additional societal costs that compromise sexual and reproductive health, mental health, social well-being, productivity, mobility, and capacity of survivors to live healthy and fulfilling lives are not fully considered.
- **Strain on the healthcare system** due to increased demand for healthcare services.
- An estimated **1.75 million people annually seek healthcare** for injuries resulting from violence.
- An estimated **16% of all HIV infections in women could be prevented** if women did not experience domestic violence from their partners.
- Women who have been raped are at **risk of unwanted pregnancy, HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections.**
- **Over a third of women who have been raped develop PTSD**, which, if untreated persists in the long term, causes depression, suicidality and substance abuse.



# Proposed Institutional Responses

- **Develop and implement educational programs that raise awareness** about GBV, its different forms, and its impact on mental health.
- Include **mandatory training sessions or courses for students, faculty, and staff** to promote understanding, empathy, and bystander intervention.
- **Mandatory training for lawmakers** (e.g., SAPS, Judicial officials) on how to receive and respond effectively to GBV cases.
- Provide access to confidential counseling services, crisis intervention, and mental health resources.
- **Promote mental health awareness campaigns** that destigmatise seeking help.
- Research GBV and mental health prevalence on **university campuses to inform action and prevention strategies**.
- **Strengthen collaborations** between lawmakers, local NGOs, community organizations, mental health providers, and professional bodies to **strengthen support networks and resources**.
- **Develop strategies, policies and initiatives** that specifically address the unique challenges faced by the LGBTIQ+ community regarding GBV and mental health.
- **Partnership between academic institutions/employers with National School of Governance** – design programmes on GBV and mental health
- **Normalise psychotherapy** in the workplace, learning institutions etc.



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# Thank you!



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