

Fogohlela seropeng: Exploring the Sepedi proverbs and women's abuse within marriages in Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality, Limpopo Province

by

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Abstract

Sections 10 and 12 of Constitution of the Republic of South Africa guarantee every person with right to dignity and freedom from all forms of violence including marital abuse, while Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998 provide with extreme protection from domestic violence with purpose of curbing Gender based-violence and femicide. Despite the efforts of these legislations, marital abuse still persists. In Sepedi culture, the proverb *fogohlela seropeng* which translated into “brush your thigh”, figuratively meaning “endure in the marriage”, continues to influence women to remain in abusive relationships in order to preserve family dignity. Limited research exists on how this proverb is interpreted by married women and how it shapes their experiences of abuse, as well as family and institutional responses.

This qualitative study explored how Sepedi proverbs, particularly *fogohlela seropeng* are interpreted by 22 women aged 32 to 65 years in Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality, Limpopo Province, and how it inform their decisions to remain in abusive marriages.

Semi-structured interviews in Sepedi language were conducted. Purposive and snowballing samplings were used. Data was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that *fogohlela seropeng* is interpreted as a cultural mandate to endure abuse and prioritise family reputation over safety. The study recommended community education to challenge harmful cultural norms, training of frontline officials on victim-centred approaches and economic empowerment programmes for women.

Key terms: *Fogohlela seropeng*, gender-based violence and femicide, married women, marriage, marital abuse, Sepedi proverbs.

Declaration

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Dedication

This research study is dedicated to my late mother, Ngwanaboshego Mosehla Moshidi (Hunadi a' Malope le Pebetse) and maternal grandparents, Mmabalane (Pebetse a' Monare le Hunadi) and Mamodiane David Mosehla (Malope a' Monare le Mahlako), whose courage inspires my commitment to justice and dignity for all women.

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List of acronyms

CPR	Child Protection Register
DoJCD	Department of Justice and Constitutional Development
DSD	Department of Social Development
DVA	Domestic Violence Act
EMLM	Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality
GBVF	Gender-based Violence and Femicide
NRSO	National Register for Sex Offenders
NSP	National Strategic Plan
SAPS	South African Police Service
SLT	Social Learning Theory

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) represents a pervasive and severe human rights violation globally (Limpopo Department of Transport and Community Safety 2024: 1). Beyond physical injuries, GBVF result in psychological trauma and economic losses, with nations losing up to 3.7% of their Gross Domestic Product (Enaifoghe, Dlelana, Durokifa & Dlamini 2021: 142). Marital abuse, a component of GBVF, affects one in six women who are killed by their spouses (Sibanda 2019:3).

The African continent records the greatest amount of GBVF globally, with 18,100 women killed by intimate partners (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2021: 4). Cabo Verde emerged as the first African nation to prioritise GBVF response by empowering women through human rights promotion, followed by Lesotho, Botswana, Namibia, Tanzania, South Africa, and Mauritania (M'Cormack-Hale, Patel & Diouf 2023: 5). Although many states acknowledge GBVF as public health and human rights issue, cultural norms often normalise marital abuse. An Afrobarometer study indicated that many Africans consider domestic violence as a private matter which require minimal public intervention.

In South Africa, GBVF remains a national crisis. South Africa ranks among the top ten African nations with the highest rate of GBVF (Muluneh, Stulz, Francis & Kingsley Agho 2020: 20). Statistics South Africa (StatsSA 2021) reported that 14% of married women experienced physical abuse, while 4% experienced sexual abuse. This 18% represents only reported cases. These incidents have several direct and indirect costs for both victims and society as a whole (Oosthuizen, Martin & de Villiers 2024: 3).

In the province of Limpopo, 77% of women have experienced GBVF (Department of Social Development 2021: 22). In 2022, Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality (EMLM) was classified as the second Municipality with a high rate of GBVF in Sekhukhune District Municipality. In June and November 2025, Dennilton Police Station, which serves Ward 6 of EMLM, recorded a high rate of cases of GBVF and children in conflict with the law in

Sekhukhune District Municipality, according to the SAPS Sekhukhune District Municipality.

Despite the legislative frameworks such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and the Domestic Violence Act 116, GBVF persist. In Sepedi culture, the proverb *fogohlela seropeng* meaning “endure in the marriage” continues to influence women to remain in abusive relationships. This suggests that socio-cultural factors, rather than laws alone, perpetuate marital abuse Malatji & Mamokhere (2024: 1060). This study explores how *fogohlela seropeng* is interpreted by married women in EMLM and how it shaped their experiences of marital abuse.

1.2 Problem statement

Sections 10 and 12 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa guarantee dignity and freedom from abuse, yet GBVF was declared a national crisis in December 2020. As a researcher, I argue that marital abuse persists not solely due to cultural norms, but through the complex intersection of economic dependency, legal implementation gaps, psychological attachment, and cultural proverbs such as *fogohlela seropeng* that are weaponised to normalise endurance. In relation to literature, I contend that while studies by Ranape (2023) and Isioma & Osaat (2023) acknowledge the role of African proverbs, they inadequately theorise how these proverbs interact with structural factors to sustain abuse among married women in rural areas. Through Cycle of violence theory, Attachment theory and Social learning theory (SLT), I interpret proverbial socialisation as one dimension of a broader architecture of entrapment that includes control and insecure attachment.

From 15 years of practice at the Department of Social Development as a social worker, I contend that studies by Isioma & Osaat (2023) and Ranape (2023) have established that Sepedi proverbs guide social behaviour and promote respect, but inadequately theorise how *fogohlela seropeng* sustains marital abuse. Therefore, due to this scholarly gap, the study seeks to address the lack of a theoretically grounded understanding of how cultural, economic and psychological factors intersect to sustain marital abuse among Sepedi speaking married women in Ward 6 of EMLM.

1.3 Aims of research and significance

This study aims to investigate how the proverb *fogohlela seropeng* promotes marital abuse against married women in Ward 6 of EMLM. Through interrogating this cultural norm, the study strive for contribution of anthropological knowledge of how cultural tools sustain gender inequality and provides insights for anthropologists, social workers and other stakeholders to develop culturally competent interventions that address normative barriers and the development of GBVF strategies that engage with cultural reinterpretation.

1.4 Research objectives

- To explore the understanding of the proverb *fogohlela seropeng* and how it enables abuse within marriages.
- To determine factors influencing endurance in an abusive marriage.
- To understand the consequences of marital abuse for the self and family structure.
- Exploring possible solutions to curb marital abuse.

1.5 Research questions

- How does the concept of *fogohlela seropeng* and other Sepedi proverbs promote abusive behaviour within marriages?
- What are the factors influencing endurance in an abusive marriage?
- What are the consequences of marital abuse for the self and family structure?
- What are the possible solutions to curb marital abuse?

1.6 Definition of key concepts

1.6.1 Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is deliberate and controlling. It often takes place in combination with other types of abuse, namely sexual, physical and financial abuse, although it can also occur on its own (Human Science Research Council 2024: 80). Operationally, for the purpose of this study, I define emotional abuse as intentional belittling, insults and public humiliation perpetrated against married women in Ward 6 of EMLM which manifest as hopelessness, low self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts (Selebano 2019: 20). As the researcher, I interpret emotional manipulation through insecure attachment theory, which prevents women from seeking help.

1.6.2 Financial abuse

This refers to the inconsiderate denial of financial resources to another party who is entitled to them, such as dependants and a spouse (Sibanda 2019:15). Operationally, for the purpose of this study, I define financial abuse as the deliberate withholding, embezzlement, or control of income by husbands in EMLM, which violates the physiological and safety needs as conceptualised in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. As the researcher, I contend that this form of abuse functions as a mechanism of entrapment that sustains dependency and undermines Section 9 of the Constitution of South Africa.

1.6.3 Fogohlela seropeng

Fogohlela seropeng is a Sepedi proverb that is translated as brush your thigh, emphasising dignity, privacy and resilient without external intervention. Operationally, for the purpose of this study, I define *fogohlela seropeng* as a cultural narrative weaponised within marriages in EMLM to silence women and enforce endurance of abuse under the guise of upholding family dignity (Montle 2020: 163). Through SLT, I argue that this proverb functions to promote toxic masculinity and observational learning, teaching women to internalise submission and mask marital abuse.

1.6.4 GBVF

It involves abuse that occurs due to gender imbalance in the relationships amongst couple which is influenced by low socio-economic position with femicide being its greatest manifestation (Research brief 2018: 7). Operationally, for the purpose of this study, I define GBVF as gendered violence perpetrated against married women in Ward 6 of EMLM, which manifests as physical, emotional, financial, and symbolic abuse justified through patriarchal norms and proverbial socialisation. I support SLT that GBVF is a learnt behaviour.

1.6.5 Marital abuse

Marital abuse entails experiencing economic, corporal, mental, psychological and symbolic exploitation within marriage, which are often perpetuated by toxic masculinity and rooted in a patriarchal system characterised by a power imbalance (Britton 2020: 13). Operationally, for the purpose of this study, I define marital abuse as the systematic weaponisation of control, financial dependency and emotional degradation in Ward 6 of EMLM. As a researcher, I contend through Attachment theory that marital abuse creates a cycle of entrapment that damages psychological wellbeing and intergenerational family structures.

1.6.6 Marriage

Marriage can be defined as an agreement between two people who are sexually involved (Kabekwa 2022: 18). Social, traditional or legal agreements that require mutual consent from both parties must be adhered to (Section 5 of the Marriage Bill of 2023). It involves the allocation of rights and responsibilities among parties, such as love, care, communication, contact, protection, compassion, conjugal rights and the execution of parental responsibilities towards the children, if any (Wimalasena 2016:166-168). Operationally, for the purpose of the study, I define marriage as a legal and cultural institution in EMLM that should guarantee dignity, equality and protection as stipulated in Section 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

1.6.7 Physical abuse

It entails any physical form of somatic attack with deliberate intent of harm as the results of punishment or power (Sibanda 2019: 11). It also include threats of beating, slamming and depriving any person of prescribed medication (Selebano 2019: 11). Operationally, for the purpose of this study, I define physical abuse as acts of bodily harm perpetrated against married women in Ward 6 of EMLM, which include assault, strangulation, and medical neglect justified through patriarchal control. As the researcher, I interpret physical abuse as a violation of Section 12 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

1.7 Geographical information

The study was conducted at Ward 6 of EMLM, which comprise three villages, namely, Phucukani, Taereng and Five Morgan. EMLM is based within Sekhukhune District Municipality at Limpopo Province in South Africa. Most residents in Ward 6 of EMLM depend on social grants, qualify for free basic services, and households can be classified as indigent (Sekhukhune District Municipality 2019:123).

The communities are located near South African Police Service (SAPS) for access of law enforcement services, Victim Empowerment Program for contingency of short-term assistance with domestic violence, Philadelphia Hospital for access to health care services, one secondary and two primary schools for access to basic education, Mathebe Tribal Authority for preservation, promotion of customs and resolving conflict at the mild stage, Moutse Magistrate Court for access to legal and judicial intervention, and DSD to access to family preservation and child protection.



Figure 1.1: Map of EMLM

Source: © *municipalities.co.za*

1.8 Research design

Qualitative methodology and design were utilised to attain detailed and comprehensive knowledge of living experiences of married women (Silverman 2024: 27). Semi-structured interviews provided a holistic understanding of participants, incorporating body language and its effects. Observations revealed diverse perceptions mirrored in Sepedi proverbs (Hatch 2023: 82). Emotional expressions, notably crying, indicated sensitivity, prompting referrals for psychosocial support. Thematic analysis was used to systematise qualitative data (Dunk-West & Saxton 2024: 79), categorising themes on the basis of oral and body language of participants (Maguire & Delahunt 2017: 3353).

1.9 Ethical factors

Ethical factors in research emphasised importance to safeguard people who participated as well as maintenance of trust. Key ethical principles included respect for autonomy, voluntary participation, and avoidance of harm, particularly for vulnerable women who experienced abuse. Informed consent was secured, with participants receiving adequate information and the option to withdraw freely. Data was safely captured without being made public, in compliance with Section 14 of the South African Constitution, which protects privacy. Anonymity was maintained by using participant numbers instead of names. Ethical clearance was obtained from University of South Africa (UNISA) to conduct the study responsibly, with reference number 4003.

1.10 Limitations of the study

Research concentrated solely in one ward of EMLM, which is composed of three villages, namely, Phucukani, Taereng and Five Morgan, to limit generalisability. The target group included women who were married, separated or divorced and over 18 years of age and who experienced marital violence because, legally, a person has the right to marry after reaching maturity, which is 18 years. Women who never entered into marriage were excluded. Furthermore, women who did not experience abuse during their marriages were also excluded.

Qualitative research method prefers going to location of participants, to explore their living conditions; in contrast, the participants were interviewed at offices of DSD in Sempupuru because of delicate nature of topic. Thoughtfulness of subject influenced participants' willingness to disclose their experience while maintaining confidentiality and not being audio recorded. Actual names of the participants were not disclosed to safeguard their privacy and dignity. Participant 1 was named P1.

Perspectives of married men were excluded, as they may dilute the focus on women's experiences of marital abuse, different power dynamics and potential silence or overshadow women's experiences. Excluding the perceptions of men assisted in

ensuring that the study focused on its target population and increased the probability of validity.

The interview guide was written in English and translated into Sepedi. The sessions were conducted using the Sepedi language for effective communication and avoidance of language barriers. The transcripts were also translated into English. Rapport was developed, first sessions and second sessions were conducted to minimise potential bias in self-reported data.

1.11 Chapters outline

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework

Chapter 2 highlights marriage institutions, Bapedi marriage; magadi or lobola; marital abuse, legislations on marital abuse, the analysis of Sepedi proverbs was conducted by taking into consideration the following factors: the importance of the proverb “*fogohlela seropeng*”, proverbs that discourage marital abuse, proverbs that discourage tolerance of marital abuse, proverbs that can encourage toxic and abusive behaviour within marriages, proverbs that encourage silence in marriage, proverbs that promote male dominance and proverbs that normalise infidelity.

Anthropological perspectives on marital abuse are composed of kinship, patriarchy and gender roles. The contributing factors of marital abuse that can be perpetuated by misinterpretation of African proverbs include culture, the indirect approval of extra marital affairs, financial dependency, family pride and substance abuse. The consequences of remaining in an abusive marriage for children include affecting the children academically, emotionally and physically.

Three theories were discussed to explore further the marital abuse faced by women. The cycle of violence comprises tension building, intermediate or acute battering, the honeymoon and chronic or severe regular patterns. Attachment theory shows that the bonding relationship between the victim and the perpetrator can prolong abuse, whereas

socialisation theory elucidates that environmental and social issues influence the behaviour of people in either a positive or negative way.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

Chapter 3 highlights the following aspects: a qualitative approach as a research methodology for this study project and its limitations; research design, interpretative as a research paradigm; study setting; study population; sampling; sample size; data collection tools, which include individual interviews, semi-structured interviews and observations; data management and analysis; ethical considerations, which include informed consent, voluntary participation, no harm, confidentiality and honesty; and ensuring rigour.

Chapter 4: Findings and discussion

Chapter 4 provide the findings from 22 semi-structured interviews with women in Ward 6 of EMLM using reflexive thematic analysis. It explores the interplay between the weaponisation of the proverb *fogohlela seropeng* and the perpetuation of marital abuse; the sociocultural, economic, and psychological factors that influence women's decisions to stay or leave; and the profound consequences of this abuse on themselves and their children.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations

Chapter 5 present summary of key findings, a discussion and conclusion, limitations of the study, avenues for future research, and actionable recommendations drawn from the conclusion.

1.12 Conclusion

This research explored the way in which misinterpretation of Sepedi proverbs, particularly *fogohlela seropeng*, enables marital abuse in South Africa. It explored cultural issues, including misinterpreted proverbs and emotional manipulation women faced, which contributes to their ability to stay in abusive relationships. It featured interviews with women over 18 years of age who are married, separated, or divorced. Ethical standards were maintained to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

The next section discusses the literature review and theoretical framework which explores Bapedi marriage practices, notably *magadi* (lobola), alongside with types of marital abuse. It discusses relevant South African legislation, while analysing Sepedi proverbs that reflect themes of marital abuse, male dominance, and infidelity and their impact on children. Additionally, it includes anthropological views on marriage and abuse, emphasising patriarchy and cultural interpretations. To better comprehend the lives of women who experienced marital abuse, three theories are presented: attachment theory, socialisation theory, and cycles of violence.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 highlights marriage institutions, Bapedi marriage; magadi or lobola; marital abuse, legislations on marital abuse, the analysis of Sepedi proverbs was conducted by taking into consideration the following factors: the importance of the proverb *fogohlela seropeng*, proverbs that discourage marital abuse, proverbs that discourage tolerance of marital abuse, proverbs that can encourage toxic and abusive behaviour within marriages, proverbs that encourage silence in marriage, proverbs that promote male dominance and proverbs that normalise infidelity.

Anthropological perspectives on marital abuse are composed of kinship, patriarchy and gender roles. The contributing factors of marital abuse that can be perpetuated by misinterpretation of African proverbs include culture, the indirect approval of extra marital affairs, financial dependency, family pride and substance abuse. The consequences of remaining in an abusive marriage for children include affecting the children academically, emotionally and physically (Harrison 2021:64).

Three theories are discussed to explore further the marital abuse faced by women. The cycle of violence comprises tension building, intermediate or acute battering, the honeymoon and chronic or severe regular patterns. Attachment theory shows that the bonding relationship between the victim and the perpetrator can prolong abuse, whereas socialisation theory elucidates that environmental and social issues influence the behaviour of people in either a positive or negative way.

2.2 Marriage institution

Any individual who reaches maturity, which is 18 years of age (Section 17 of Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended), has the right to enter into marriage voluntarily (Article 12 of the Human Rights Commission). Marriage further involves socially and traditionally accepted unification or legitimate agreements between spouses that create rights and

responsibilities among them and their children (Niehaus 2016: 43). It requires mutual consent from both parties. Customary matrimony requires negotiations and celebration. Section 26 (1) of Marriage Act no. 25 of 1961 prohibits marriage of a male person under the age of 18 years and a female person under the age of 15 years. Written permission from a minister or any officer in the public service that authorises such a marriage is an exception. The legal process of marriage goes hand in hand with Bapedi marriage.

From the researcher's perspective, the intersection of statutory law and customary practice are important in this study. Although the law emphasise voluntariness, equality and protection, customary marriage often relies on elders, family negotiations, and cultural teachings that are transmitted through the proverbs. This creates a space where cultural expectations, such as *fogohlela seropeng*, can either support or undermine the legal principles of marriage. Therefore, understanding marriage as both a legal and cultural institutions provides the foundation of exploring how proverbial discourse influence marital relations and the perpetration of GBVF in Bapedi marriage.

2.3 Bapedi marriage

Bapedi marriage practice are shaped by both endogamous and exogamous traditions, as well as gendered expectations regarding marital structure and reproduction. Endogamous marriage refers to the practice of marrying within one's clan, socio-economic status, or kinship, and is believed to strengthen family ties and alliances (Phala 2020: 76). It is commonly practised by individuals who spend their lives within the same village to reduce the number of spinsters and bachelors in the community. This is reflected in the proverb *bana ba kgwale ba bitsana ka melodi*, "the chicks of a partridge call each other with whistles" which emphasise that couples cannot hurt a person from the same community as they are related through blood (Ranape 2023: 15). However, Bansaka & Pearlman (2021: 5) caution that relative marriage is rarely practised due to risk of perpetuating hatred among families, particularly in case of abuse.

In contrast, exogamous marriage involves marrying outside one's clan or community and is entered when Bapedi individuals relocate far from home (Naich 2025: 401). Within both forms of marriages, Bapedi society permits men to enter into either monogamous or

polygamous marriages, while women are restricted to monogamy (Sefoka 2017: 22). The main purpose of marriage outside the community is to build relationships between families and to grant authority to reproduce children and participate in community related affairs (Sefoka 2017: 15). This reveals structural inequality: society and the family play important roles in marriage, yet a woman is not permitted to practice polyandry, which demonstrates the patriarchal nature of Bapedi marriage.

Culturally rituals further reinforce gender roles. During marriage in Bapedi culture, they slaughter a cow that is used to connect groom and bride family. One day before marriage, the groom's men are prepared for the *legogwa* (mat) to symbolise that the bride will provide the husband with conjugal rights in their home (Kabekwa 2016: 36-37). *Legogwa* symbolises permission for the couple to have sex. Women are encouraged to have as many children as possible to avoid being called *moopa*, meaning barren and showing that she cannot refuse husband with sex. Although society understands that lack of biological children may result from medical challenges experienced by husband or wife, the wife is the only one who receives more stigmas compared to the husband.

From the researcher's perspective, Bapedi marriages operate at the intersection of law, culture, and gender. Although the law permits any person over the age of 18 years to marry, cultural practices continue to privilege male authority, polygamy, and female fertility. These practices create a context in which proverbs such as *fogohlela seropeng* are used to regulate women's behaviour, normalise endurance, and discourage resistance to marital problems. Therefore, this study argues that understanding Bapedi marriage is essential for analysing how cultural norms and proverbs contribute to the perpetuation of GBVF.

2.4 Magadi/lobola

In Bapedi culture, magadi/lobola is central to the legitimacy and success of marriage. Traditionally, *magadi/lobola* was used to symbolise respect and to reinforce the relationship between the wife and husband's family (Msweli 2020: 1). It involved the

provision of gifts from the groom's family, primarily in the form of cattle, goats, and money, and served to acknowledge the loss of daughter to her parental family. It is also signified the husband's promise to maintain his wife and children,

Literature indicates a shift in the function of *magadi/lobola* from symbolic practice of an instrument of control. Devaney & Lazenbatt (2016: 33) argue that *magadi/lobola* is used to regard women as property. Similarly, Shope (2016: 3) contends that bridal price encourage husbands to exercise control over their wives, which forms the basis of patriarchal authority in marriage. Montle (2020: 162-163) agree with Devaney & Lazenbatt (2016: 33) and Shope (2016: 3) that *lobola* lost its original value due to commercialisation, and links this to the high prevalence of domestic violence, noting that 80% of married women experience abuse. The control and abuse within marriage is reinforced during premarital counselling conducted by elderly family members particularly the paternal aunt and maternal uncle at the bride's home where bride is encouraged to tolerate abuse and not to share their marital challenges with anyone, to avoid the exploitation of the family (Sefoka 2017: 21).

From the perspective of researcher's perspective, *magadi/lobola* creates a foundation for the normalisation of *fogohlela seropeng*. The notion that a husband "bought" his wife foster sense of ownership that justifies control, silence, and the endurance of abuse. Thus, this study argues that the commercialisation of *magadi/lobola*, combined with cultural counselling that promote tolerance, directly contributes to the perpetuation of GBVF in Bapedi marriage.

2.5 Marital abuse

Marital abuse in South Africa is a complex social problem that encompasses emotional, physical, financial and sexual abuse, all of which are driven by power and control over the victim (Britton 2020: 13). The causes of abuse are multifaceted. Britton (2013: 13) further argued that abuse is exacerbated by shifting gender roles, where government, private sector, and civil society initiatives empower women with employment and income that exceeds that of their husbands. This economic shift creates tension, as some men are not equipped to accept the capabilities of their spouses, and may resort to abuse to reassert dominance.

The dynamic of marital abuse is not limited to unemployed women. The proverb *fogohlela seropeng* influence both unemployed and employed women to remain in abusive relationships. Thus, cultural expectations of silence transcend economic status and continue to regulate women's responses to abuse. Furthermore, interventions to marital abuse are hindered by conceptual gaps. Lee & Blackwell (2019:4) highlighted lack of standardised definitions, particularly emotional and financial abuse, which make it difficult for service providers to place victims in appropriate intervention programmes. Britton (2020:58) added that the absence of standardised processes for addressing marital abuse poses serious challenges for stakeholders who attempt to intervene.

From the researcher's perspective, marital abuse in Bapedi marriages cannot be understood only as an individual violence. It is sustained by a combination of economic power struggles, cultural norms of endurance, and institutional gaps in response. Therefore, this study contends that *fogohlela seropeng* functions to normalise all four forms of abuse by discouraging disclosure and help-seeking, even as women's economic independence increases.

2.5.1 Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is a form of marital abuse that frequently occurs alongside with physical and financial abuse, it can also occur independently (Sibanda 2019: 17). It refers to purposeful humiliation or degradation of another person, including insults, threats of danger, and invasions of privacy (Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998:3). Selebano (2019: 80) explained behaviour such as constant criticism, humiliation, demeaning, and name calling as examples used to undermine women's self-esteem and make them feel unworthy.

The impact of emotional abuse is severe. Sibanda (2019: 14) noted that ongoing emotional abuse can lead to depression, other severe mental diseases, illogical thinking and longer lasting emotional damage that leave no visible marks.

From the researcher's perspective, emotional abuse is the form of abuse most reinforced by proverbs such as *fogohlela seropeng*. The expectation to endure and keeping quiet prevent women from naming insults and humiliation as abuse, and instead frames silence

as a cultural virtue. Therefore, this study argues that emotional abuse is sustained not only by perpetrators, but also by cultural discourse that discourages disclosure and help-seeking within Bapedi marriage.

2.5.2 Physical abuse

Physical abuse refers to any corporal practice carried out with deliberate intent to harm as a form of punishment or exert power over another person (Sibanda 2019: 11). It includes acts such as beating, slamming and depriving any person of prescribed medication (Rodriguez & Gonzales 2020: 1). Selebano (2019:11) further noted that it may involve deprivation of basic needs such as food, water, clothing and shelter. These acts may begin as minor incidents and escalate over time, leaving marks that are either visible or hidden.

From the researcher's perspective, physical abuse is often justified and concealed through cultural expectations of endurance. In Bapedi marriages, the proverb *fogohlela seropeng* is used to instruct women to tolerate pain and bodily harm in silence in order to preserve the marriage and family name. Thus, physical abuse is sustained not only by the perpetrator's use of force, but also by cultural pressure that discourages victims from seeking medical help or reporting abuse.

2.5.3 Financial abuse

Financial abuse is defined as the deliberate denial of financial resources to which another party is legally entitled (Sibanda 2019: 15). It manifests through control over a wife's allowance, demanding money back, depositing money into her account and denying her access, or preventing her from seeking employment with higher wages than her husband (National Strategic Plan 2020–2030: 9). The Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence (2019: 28) added that perpetrators may damage a wife's credit by forcing her to take loans on their behalf. Dunton (2022: 2), similarly argued that financial abuse has long-term psychological and financial implications, as victims become preoccupied with debt and dependence.

From the researcher's perspective, financial abuse intersects directly with *fogohlela seropeng*. Economic dependence is used to trap women in abusive marriages, and the proverb reinforces this by teaching that a woman should endure hardships and not disclose financial control to her family or authorities. Therefore, this study contends that financial abuse is a tool of power that relies on both economic control and cultural silence to keep women in abusive marriages.

2.5.4 Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse entails any action that aims to harm a person's genital organs, anus or mouth by insertion of a penis or any object under duress or force (Ozor 2022: 12). It also includes non-consensual intercourse, even within marriage. Sibanda (2019: 12) noted married women find it hard to report sexual assault perpetrated by their husband due to fear of being judged, marginalised or informed that they must not refuse their partner their conjugal rights, even if they do not feel comfortable.

From the researcher's perspective, sexual abuse in Bapedi marriages is directly sustained by the proverb *fogohlela seropeng*. The cultural expectation that a wife must not deny her husband sex frames marital rape as a duty rather than violation. This discourage disclosure and positions silence as loyalty. Therefore, this study argues that sexual abuse persist because cultural norms override legal rights to bodily autonomy and consent within marriage.

2.5.5 Symbolic abuse

Symbolic abuse entail the use of symbols, images, immaterial ideals, intangible things or symbolic characters to abuse the person (Lee & Blackwell 2019: 65). It also involve infidelities committed by men (Ziyahlo 2023: 70). Werthmann (2023: 35-37) indicated that most women who live in rural areas and never migrate to urban areas where there is access to information have experienced marital abuse. Symbolic abuse indicate that perpetrators can abuse the victims without using physical force or assault. Society perceives that when abuse does not involve beating, any kind of physical abuse is not regarded as severe and does not need intervention (Limpopo Department of Transport and Community Safety 2024: 26).

From the researcher's perspective, proverbs are a primary tool of symbolic abuse in Bapedi culture. *Fogohlela seropeng* functions as a symbolic instrument that normalises suffering, enforces silence, and delegitimises women's pain. Thus, this study contends that symbolic abuse is central to the perpetuation of GBVF, as it provides the ideological justification for all other forms of abuse.

2.6 Legislation on marital abuse

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the Domestic Violence Act (DVA), Trio Amendments Acts and the National Strategic Plan (NSP) on GBVF of 2020 – 2030 are key legislations that protect victims of marital abuse.

2.6.1 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa provides the supreme legal framework for addressing GBVF in the country. It established the rights of women and places an obligation on the state to protect them from violence, including marital abuse. Sections 10 and 12 of the Bill of Rights are central to this protection. Section 10 guarantees the right to dignity, while Section 12 guarantees freedom and security, which includes the right to be free from all forms of violence from either public or private sources, not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. These provisions directly challenge cultural practices that normalize marital abuse such as *fogohlela seropeng*, by affirming that no person may be harmed in the name of culture or marriage.

South Africa's obligations are further strengthened by international law. Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women in marriages and family relations. This includes ensuring equal rights regarding marriage, property, decisions children, and guaranteeing treatment with dignity and equality (CEDAW 1979).

From the researcher's perspective, South African Constitution appears to be main tool in prohibiting marital abuse and promoting gender equality, the persistence of *fogohlela seropeng* suggests a disjuncture between law and cultural practice. The law provides protection while cultural norms continue to endure abuse, indicating that legislation alone is insufficient without social transformation.

2.6.2 Domestic Violence Act number 116 of 1998

The DVA provides legal mechanisms for victims to seek safety (UNFPA 2022: 7). It aims to defend married women from physical, psychological and economic abuse from their husbands (Fakunmoju & Rasool 2018: 11). Applying protection order is one of such mechanisms, as it is a court order that prohibits the abuser from continuing abusive behaviour and can require the perpetrator to vacate the shared residence (Selebano 2019: 22). In terms of Section 7(1)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f) of the DVA, a Presiding officer may issue orders that forbid further abuse, prohibit contact, prevent entry into the shared home, place of employment, or educational institution, and restrain the perpetrator from enlisting others to commit abuse. Section 17 (1)(a) further stipulates that contravention of a protection order may result in imprisonment or a fine, underscoring the seriousness of the offence. The protection order takes full legal effect once served and acknowledged by the offender in terms of Section (6) (7) (a) of the DVA.

The effectiveness of protection orders is contingent on victim participation and institutional support. Section 6(a)(b) of the DVA provides that a court may revoke a temporary protection order if the applicant fails to appear without reasonable cause. Furthermore, Regulation 30(1) acknowledges that victims may withdraw or vary orders due to feelings of sympathy, manipulation or reconciliation attempts by perpetrators. Similarly, Limpopo Department of Transport and Community Safety (2024:28) also noted that some women experience post-traumatic stress and mental health challenges following the withdrawal of protection orders.

From the researcher's perspective, this reveals a critical tension. While the DVA offers legal protection to challenge fogohlela seropeng, cultural and emotional pressures often compel women to withdraw cases or fail to attend court. Thus, the law assumes agency and safety that many women do not have in practice. This suggests that without psychosocial support of social workers and community education to address victim-blaming and guilt, the DVA alone cannot disrupt the cycle of marital abuse.

2.6.3 Trio-Amendments Acts

In response to the escalation of GBVF, the President of the Republic of South Africa signed three GBV laws aimed at curbing the pandemic of marital abuse on 28 January 2022 which are: the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amended Act, Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Act and the Domestic Violence Amendment Act to strengthen the justice system of the country (Nortjie & Hull 2024: 297). Collectively referred as Trio-Amendment Act, these laws were enacted to strengthen the criminal justice system's response to marital abuse and other forms of GBVF.

The Domestic Violence Amendment Act expand the definition of domestic violence to include victims who are engaged or in customary marriages, and introduce the provisions for online applications for protection orders. This provision is significant as it provides an alternative for victims who are not ready to disclose abuse verbally due to stigma or fear. The Criminal and Related Matters Law Amendment Act further strengthens accountability that the National Register for Sex Offenders (NRSO) include not only sex offenders against children, but also those who commit offences against persons with mental disabilities. Similarly, Child Protection Register (CPR) prohibits listed perpetrators from working with vulnerable groups including children, elderly, persons with disabilities and women.

From the researcher's perspective, the TRIO-Amendment Acts represent a legislative effort to address structural barriers that prevent victims from seeking help through enabling online applications and broadening protection. This law attempts to reduce influence of fogohlela seropeng by making help more accessible and less public. However, the effectiveness of these amendments depend on awareness and implementation at community level. Without education and support, cultural pressure to endure abuse may still override legal protections, limiting the impact of these reforms on married women's lived experiences.

2.6.4 National Strategic Plan on GBVF of 2020-2030

Republic of South Africa has joined a global campaign aimed at reducing the incidence of marital abuse by 2030 (Jones 2021:37). According to the President of the Republic of South Africa, the aim is to create social and economic opportunities and enhance country which is free from GBVF. The country has developed NSP from 2020-2030 with the goal of eliminating all types of GBVF, including marital abuse.

2.6.4 Pillars of the National Strategic Plan to limit marital abuse

2.6.4.1 *Pillar 1: Accountability, coordination, leadership*

The first pillar promotes responsibility, transparency and guidance. All citizens must be accountable for their actions. The institutions that render core services of the GBVF must be accountable for their actions, and no victim should be discriminated against or blamed for the abuse that she experienced (National Strategic Plan 2020: 19). For this study, women who experienced abuse within their marriage must not be blamed for actions of the perpetrator, not being regarded as the source of abuse or being labelled as the failure to preserve the healthy actions of the man. The next pillar discusses the prevention and rebuilding of the social cohesion system, which must be implemented to assist the victims of marital abuse.

2.6.4.2 *Pillar 2: Prevention and rebuilding social cohesion*

Awareness creation is necessary, such as challenging the issue of negative masculinity and engaging in necessary dialogues with community members. Challenging the culture of abuse, where it is regarded as a normative technique to solve differences, needs to be addressed at the prevention level (National Strategic Plan 2020: 46-47). It is necessary to transform society from considering men as family providers who can refuse the wife to be employed, which promotes gender inequality and marital abuse, to being interdependent as a way of empowerment programme.

2.6.4.3 *Pillar 3: Justice, safety and protection*

When marital abuse is not prevented as per pillar 2, it is necessary for victims of the GBVF to have the ability to access competent and thoughtful criminal justice that is speedy, available, and reactive. Pillar 3 promotes strengthening capacity within the justice system to address liberty. The construction of Thuthuzela care centres (in which multiple sectors are placed in one facility, such as forensic medical practitioners, investigating officers, social workers, psychologists and the National Prosecuting Authority), which are accessible to victims of marital abuse, is needed to prevent secondary victimisation (National Strategic Plan 2020: 48). Although there is a Thuthuzela Care Centre in ELML, which is based at Groblersdal, many people in rural villages find it difficult to access.

2.6.4.4 *Pillar 4: Response, care, support and healing*

Pillar 4 mandates victim-centred services, including intensive counselling by social workers, registered counsellors and psychologists (National Strategic Plan 2020: 49-50). The aim is to move survivors from victimhood to survivorship through coordinated multidisciplinary support.

From the researcher's perspective, the NSP provides a robust framework that aligns with constitutional and legislative commitments. However, the findings in Chapter 4 suggest a gap between policy and practice. While the NSP calls for non-blame, prevention, accessible justice, and healing, participants reported experiences of blame, silence, and lack of coordinated support. This disjuncture highlights that legislation alone cannot dismantle fogohlela seropeng without effective implementation and community transformation.

2.6.4.5 *Pillar 5: Economic power*

Pillar 5 of the NSP recognizes economic independence as a key strategy to enable women to leave abusive relationships. The pillar encourages women to pursue careers in male dominated fields such as engineering and construction, and to establish their own enterprises using indigenous expertise to create economic opportunities (National

Strategic Plan 2020: 51). Through promoting financial autonomy instead of reliance on government or spousal support, the NSP acknowledge that economic dependency traps women in abusive relationships.

From the researcher's perspective, this pillar directly addresses of the barriers identified in this study which is the inability to leave due to financial need. If healthy economic practices are not realised within marriage, women who are financially independent and able to meet their basic needs are more likely to exit toxic relationship. Thus, Pillar 5 provides a structural response to *fogohlela seropeng* by giving women the material means to choose safety over endurance.

2.6.4.6 Pillar 6: Research and information management

Pillar 6 emphasises the importance of expanding the GBVF knowledge base from the perspective of victims and stakeholders at operational level. The NSP mandates that information must be gathered within a planned timeframe to inform policies and resources aimed at curbing marital abuse and GBVF by 2030 (National Strategic Plan 2020: 53-54). This pillar also recognises existing gaps in response to marital abuse, prevention strategies, and monitoring and evaluation. Confidentiality and anonymity of victims must be guarded in accordance with POPI Act.

From the researcher's perspective, this pillar justifies the relevance of the current study by documenting the lived experiences of married women regarding *fogohlela seropeng*. This research contributes to the knowledge base that Pillar 6 seek to strengthen. The findings on family responses, institutional response, and cultural normalisation provide data that can inform prevention strategies and policy implementation.

2.7 Analysis of Sepedi proverbs

2.7.1 Importance of proverb *fogohlela seropeng*

African proverbs teach individuals how to act in a way that is socially acceptable (Kamwendo 2019: 10). Sepedi proverbs are important because they use metaphors to convey ideas that can be understood in a variety of ways, which are used to advice about

risky circumstances (Ranape 2023:1 & 30). In Bapedi culture, proverbs serve as moral and social instruments for regulating behaviour and resolving conflict without external intervention. Malatji & Phokwane (2023: 1302) argue that Sepedi proverbs instil mutual respect and are used to solve family and community disputes without involving law enforcement agencies. Within this framework, marriage is treated as a private institution where challenges are managed internally through cultural teachings. Central to this teaching, there are the proverbs *fogohlela seropeng* and *lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi*, a woman's grave is at her marital home. According to Malatji & Phokwane (2023: 1302), these proverbs are instruments used to teach persistence and endurance in marriage. Their original intent was to maintain family dignity by discouraging public disclosure of domestic challenges. Thus, silence was framed not as oppression, but as a virtue that protected the reputation of both family and the marriage.

From the researcher's perspective, while the proverbs were initially intended to promote stability and cohesion, their contemporary application has shifted. In the context of GBVF, *fogohlela seropeng* is weaponised to justify the suppression of women's voices and to normalise concealment of abuse. Therefore, this study contends that the importance of the proverb lies in its dual function: historically as a tool for maintaining family dignity, and currently as a mechanism that can perpetuate GBVF by discouraging help-seeking behaviour.

2.7.2 Proverbs that discourage marital abuse

Cultural proverbs play a protective role in marriages by promoting care, respect, and accountability between spouses. *Mosadi ke galase o a hlekwa*, communicates that women require careful treatment and protection within marriages. This proverb together with *maitshwaro a mabotse a lota seriti sa motho* instil into respect, dignity and integrity in the marriage, thus discourage violence and negligence (Namanyana 2024: 9-10).

From a researcher's perspective, these proverbs function as indigenous mechanisms for discouraging marital abuse. They instruct men to practice transparency, responsibility and accountability and they position abuse as contrary to cultural values of respect and

integrity. Thus, while other proverbs may weaponise GBVF, these counter-narratives affirm that Sepedi proverbs also provide linguistic resources for promoting non-violent and equitable marriages.

2.7.3 Proverbs that discourage tolerance of marital abuse

Not all Sepedi proverbs promote endurance in abusive marriages. Some proverbs function as cultural mechanisms that discourage women from tolerating marital abuse and encourage them to seek safety and dignity. Mapadimeng (2018: 8) observed that *kgaka boela maropeng moraka ga o na ditshehlo*, “the guinea fowl return to the kraal where there are no thorns”, advise women not to remain in harmful marriages. The message is that a person should not persevere in a place of pain when alternative peace exists.

The idea of exit as an option is further reinforced by the proverb *gabo motho ke moo a robalago boroko*, “a person’s home is where they sleep peacefully”, which suggests that women who are unhappy or unsafe may return to their parental homes to find peace (Mapadimeng 2018:8). Ranape (2023:30) agreed with Mapadimeng (2018:8) that *hlogo ye meetse e lotwa ke mong* encourage women experiencing marital abuse to take action of leaving relationship for their own safety, since they do not have the power to fight their husbands directly.

From the researcher’s perspectives, these proverbs present a counter-discourse to *fogohlela seropeng*. While other proverbs weaponise silence and endurance as discussed in 2.7.4 to 2.7.7, these proverbs legitimize women’s right to leave toxic marriages. They reflect an indigenous recognition that dignity, safety, and well-being should not be sacrificed for the sake of marriage. Thus, this study argues that Sepedi culture contain dual messages: some proverbs sustain GBV, while others provide cultural justification for rejecting and escaping it.

2.7.4 Proverbs that can encourage abusive behaviour within marriages

The proverb *fogohlela seropeng* instruct women to tolerate any hardships in the marriage and refrain from disclosing it (Msuya 2017: 4). By discouraging women from reporting marital abuse to authorities and law enforcement, protect the perpetrators and prioritise

family reputation over the safety and dignity of the women. This culture of silence is further reinforced by proverbs that demand humility and self-effacement from wives. For example, *phukubje ya tshela moedi e duta mosela*, metaphorically meaning that married women living with husbands or in-laws must always humble themselves, as it is not their immediate family enable oppression or discourage sharing of their ideas (Letsoalo & Kgasago 2025: 3). *Lefotwana leo e sego la gago o le hloba le gaela*, figuratively meaning that when a person is living with non-biological family requires bad treatment, normalise marital challenges and suffering as inevitable, rather than being addressed (Ranape 2023: 192).

From the researcher's perspective, the above mentioned proverbs collectively function to legitimise abusive behaviour. They shift responsibility away from the perpetrator and place burden of endurance on women. By framing silence, humility, and suffering as cultural virtues, such proverbs discourage help-seeking and enable the continued perpetration of GBVF within Sepedi marriages. Thus, *fogohlela seropeng* and related proverbs do not merely describe marital abuse, but actively produce it by silencing victims and shielding abuse from scrutiny.

2.7.5 Proverbs that encourage silence in marriage

The proverb *fogohlela seropeng* “endure and keep quite in marriage” is widely interpreted as a cultural directive that encourage women to remain in abusive marriages (Sefoka 2017: 40). This interpretation promotes silence and submission, which directly contradicts with Sections 10 and 12 of the Constitution of the country that protect dignity and freedom from abuse. Although Sections 30 and 31 of the same Act recognise cultural practices, they prohibit customs that endanger life, suggesting a tension between Constitutional rights and traditional proverbial use.

Culture of silence is reinforced through other Sepedi proverbs and social expectations. The proverb *lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi*, “a woman's grave is at her marital home”, is used to pressure women to persevere and tolerate abuse rather than returning to their parental homes (Selebano 2019; 35). Women who endure are then portrayed as genuine wives who can withstand complications, even when they experience psychosocial distress. This performance of happiness is further sustained by concerns for social status.

Aziz et al. (2020:3) argue that traditional recognition incentivises wives to tolerate marital abuse in order to preserve their standing in the community.

From the researcher's perspective, *fogohlela seropeng* functions as a mechanism for weaponising GBVF by normalising silence. It does not simply advise endurance; it delegitimise women's voices and shield perpetrators from accountability. Therefore, while the Constitution of the country guarantees protection; proverbial interpretations continue to undermine women's rights by framing silence as a virtue. This highlights the need to interrogate how cultural language sustains GBVF within Sepedi marriages.

2.7.6 Proverbs that promote male dominance

Male dominance in marriage is culturally legitimized and maintained through proverbs, social norms, and power hierarchies. In Sepedi culture, marital abuse is often framed as legitimate form of discipline rather than a violation, and it is further treated as a private matter to be resolved within the couple (Ziyahlo 2023: 28). This privatisation of abuse limits external intervention and external intervention and reinforces male authority in the home. Two Sepedi proverbs central to this discourse are *monna ga a fetolwe ke hlogo ya lapa*, "a man cannot be questioned at home" and *fogohlela seropeng* "endure and keep quiet in marriage". According to Ranape (2023:3), *fogohlela seropeng* is used to socialise women into silence, obedience, and submission, particularly on the basis that the husband provides for the family. Consequently, a man's abusive behaviour is normalised and rendered unquestionable.

Scholars further link this dominance to structural power imbalances. Selebano (2019: 13 & 39) contends that men use abuse to regulate women's development and preserve dominance, often through abusive acts, while cultural taboos ensure that women's reports of abuse are ignored. From the researcher's perspective, these proverbs and cultural norms function as mechanisms to weaponising GBVF. They do not merely reflect male dominance; they actively produce and sustain it by silencing women and legitimising abuse. Thus, *fogohlela seropeng* emerges not only as a proverb but as an ideological tool that sustain gender inequality within Sepedi marriages.

2.7.7 Proverbs that normalise infidelity

Male infidelity is culturally normalised in many African societies, including Sepedi communities, through the belief that men are naturally polygamous and cannot be satisfied by one partner. Limpopo Department of Transport and Community Safety (2024: 26) reported that men are culturally labelled as “bulls” that require multiple partners. Sefoka (2017: 23) agreed, that African men have a tendency to have more than one sexual partner, and that this behaviour is accepted rather than being condemned. Childress, Shrestha, Kenesarieva, Urbaeva & Schrage (2024: 1211) supported Limpopo Department of Transport and Community Safety (2024: 26) and Sefoka (2017: 23) that public support for male infidelity exists across societies regardless of religion or political affiliation, suggesting that it is a widespread cultural practice rather than an isolated phenomenon.

In Sepedi culture, normalisation of infidelity is reinforced through proverbs. The proverbs *monna ke phoka o lala a e wa boshego*, “a man is like dew that falls wherever it wants at night” and *monna ke selepe re a adimishana*, “a man is an axe that is we borrow from each other” are used to justify infidelity and adultery for men (Britton 2020:78). These proverbs imply that even when a man is legally or traditionally married, he is entitled to conjugal rights with extramarital partners and that such behaviour should be tolerated by the wife.

From the researcher’s perspective, proverbs that normalise infidelity function as another mechanism for weaponising GBVF. They shift accountability away from men and place the burden of tolerance on women, who are expected to endure both abuse and infidelity in silence as discussed in 2.7.4 and 2.7.5. Thus, *fogohlela seropeng* and proverbs that justify infidelity work together to sustain male dominance and to legitimise multiple forms of marital abuse. This highlights how cultural language is used to protect men’s behaviour while silencing women’s right to safety, fidelity and dignity.

Summary: The contested role of Sepedi proverbs in marital relations

The literature reviewed in the above section demonstrates that Sepedi proverbs play a dual role in shaping marital relations and responses to GBVF. On the other hand, proverbs such as *fogohlela seropeng* and *lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi* have historically been used to promote persistence, family dignity, and the internal resolution of marital abuse without external interventions (Malatji & Phokwane 2023: 1302). These proverbs positioned silence and endurance as cultural virtues that protected the reputation of the marriage and family.

Other proverbs such as *kgaka boela maropeng moraka ga o na ditshehlo* and *hlogo ye meetse e lotwa ke mong* discourage the tolerance of marital abuse by legitimising women's right to leave toxic relationships and seek safety in their parental homes (Mapadimeng 2018: 18 and Ranape 2023: 30). This reveals that Sepedi culture does not present single narrative on marriage.

The dominant discourse in contemporary practice appears to favour proverbs that normalise silence and submission. Scholars argue that proverbs including *fogohlela seropeng*, *phukubje ya tshela moedi e duta mosela* and *mepipi ka moka e a na* are used to socialise women into obedience, to conceal abuse, and to protect perpetrators from accountability (Msuya 2017:4; Selebano 2019: 35 and Sefoka 2017: 40). This privatization of abuse directly contradicts the Constitution of the country that guarantees dignity and freedom from abuse.

From the researcher's perspective, the above contradiction highlights that *fogohlela seropeng* has been weaponised as an ideological tool. Although its original purpose may have been to maintain family cohesion, it is now used to sustain gender inequality and to silence victims of GBVF. Therefore, this study argues that for GBVF to be effectively addressed there is a need to interrogate and reframe proverbial discourse.

2.8 Anthropological perspectives on marital abuse

2.8.1 Kinship

People in the Bapedi clan can marry through biological kinship, which is rarely practised (Ntsoane & Manthwa 2022:10). Men are allowed to marry their cousins for the purpose of strengthening the family and assume that the couple cannot fight as they are related biologically (Bamford 2019: 295--296). Ntsoane & Manthwa (2022: 10-11) further clarified that if a wife does not have the ability to fall pregnant due to unforeseen medical conditions, the family requests that her younger sister have sex with the husband with the purpose of conceiving a child. This woman is called "*tlhatswadirope*". The child will belong to the wife and husband. Bamford (2019: 623) regards biological kinship marriage as fundamentally male-controlled and forced.

Social kinship is practised where men can marry a woman outside their clan. Married woman in Bapedi culture, either with biological or social kinship, becomes a member of clan, and union is a communal matter by means of *mosadi wa kgoro ya ga*, and *ngwana kgomo tša rena* acknowledges the contribution of family members to her *magadi* cattle, granting her honour and respect (Phala 2020: 77). After wedding, the woman is asked to temporarily reside at the groom's house with groom's family in Sepedi tradition, known as *go dula bogadi* or *go kotisa*, as they prepare to move into their own home (Niehaus 2016: 47). Nevertheless, a married couple only lives in the husband's parents' hamlet until his younger brother is married, at which point they are supposed to establish their own home. The wife is instructed on how the in-laws live and act in accordance with the customs and expectations of that new family. The wife is viewed as a disobedient daughter-in-law when she struggles to adapt.

From the researcher's perspective, these kinship practises illustrate how marriages in Bapedi culture are not solely a union between two individuals, but social contract between families. The expectation for women to adapt, bear children, and maintain harmony creates structural vulnerability to marital abuse. The practice of *go dula bogadi* and labelling confronting women as disobedient reinforces *fogohlela seropeng*, as women are pressured to endure mistreatment to preserve family honour and avoid shame. Thus, anthropological perspective reveal that marital abuse is sustained not only by individual perpetrators but by kinship systems that prioritise collective interest over women's safety and autonomy.

2.8.2 Patriarchy

Patriarchal norms in South Africa perpetuate gender inequality, where men have more authority and women have less influence (Devaney & Lazenbatt 2016: 17). A patriarchal social structure is one in which men predominate in terms of moral power, socioeconomic status, and ownership of property (National Strategic Plan 2020: 12). A patriarchal system is one in which men dominate families, communities, society, or the government (Keller 2017: 6). Sepedi culture perpetuates patriarchal system, where the desires of men continually receive precedence (Ranape 2023: 3). The husband is considered to be *hlogo ya lapa*, which means that all of his choices are irrevocable and definitive (Ziyahlo 2023: 64). Names such as social identity, discipline, material necessities, dispute resolution, enclosing and defending boundaries, and representation to the outside world are all things he does for his children (Niehaus 2016: 46). Very few families allow their men to help out around the house. They fear that neighbours would accuse the wife of bewitching the husband. Most cases of marital abuse remain unreported due to power, culture and financial dependency on perpetrators (Selebano 2019: 35).

The patriarchal payment of *lobola/magadi* wealth in society reinforces male control over women's sexuality, enslaving them and reinforcing male ownership and control over females (Selebano 2019: 15). South Africa struggles to balance its patriarchal society with the legacy of the apartheid-era restriction of women from leadership positions among indigenous tribes with its inclusive constitution, which has led to GBVF (Mbandlwa 2024: 4737).

From the researcher's perspective, patriarchy provides the cultural foundation for *foghlela seropeng*. The designation of men as *hlogo ya lapa*, combined with economic dependency created through *magadi* and fear of social stigma, place women in position where enduring abuse is framed as preserving the family. Thus, patriarchal norms not only enable marital abuse but also legitimise silence and endurance as expected female behaviour.

2.8.3 Gender roles

Gender roles in Bapedi culture assign women the responsibility of maintaining family stability and reputation, regardless of circumstances Ziyahlo (2023: 71). The wife is positioned as the primary protector of the primary protector of the family, a role that requires her to conceal abuse and refrain from disclosing her husband's extra-marital affairs. This expectations places women in precarious position where they are held accountable for their husband's behaviour while simultaneously being denied the right to seek help. Beyond managing marital issues, women are also expected to oversee all domestic and child-rearing responsibilities. Sefoka (2017: 20) noted that women are responsible for ensuring that children attend the school regularly, participate in school meetings, complete homework, maintain personal hygiene, and that the household has adequate food and clean clothing. These roles reinforce the notion that good wife is one who prioritise family duties and preserve the image of a harmonious home.

From the researcher's perspective, these prescribed gender roles directly sustain fogohlela seropeng by positioning women as guardians of family honour who must not expose marital problems, culture silences victims and normalise endurance of abuse. The expectation of manage both domestic responsibilities, and the consequences of the husband's actions means that women bears the burden of maintaining the marriage, even in abusive context. Thus, gender roles function as a social mechanism that pressures women to endure marital abuse in order to protect family reputation rather than their own safety.

2.9 Contributing factors of marital abuse, which can be perpetuated by misinterpretation of African proverbs

Marital abuse in African societies is often perpetuated through misinterpretation of Sepedi proverbs, leading to a culture of shame and criminality. In South Africa, extra-marital affairs and financial dependency on perpetrators exacerbate the issue. Family pride and substance abuse also contribute to marital abuse among married women.

2.9.1 Culture

There is a culture of abuse and criminality in which society regards marital abuse as a way of resolving domestic challenges (Enaifoghe et al. 2021: 130). This practice is

suppressing legal determinations in the public and private sectors to curb marital abuse, indicating the need to redirect attention from legal intervention to cultural mediation (Ngwepe et al. 2024: 63). This cites that women are blamed for being victims or perceived as reckless rather than holding perpetrators accountable. This victim-blaming often leads to further perpetuation of the culture of silence.

In contrast to the fact that marital abuse is perpetuated by culture, Britton (2020:14) argued that abuse is not cultural or part of tradition. Britton further noted that there are no African norms that encourage abuse during marriage and that Africans love marriage to avoid having sex with any person. Furthermore, in South Africa, perpetrators abuse women using culture as a scapegoat rather than taking accountability for their actions. Ranape (2023: 6) agreed with Britton that culture is flexible and fluid and that norms and beliefs can be amended because of transformation over time. Ranape further reported that proverbs, idioms and traditions promote humanity and resilience and must be preserved and promoted. Britton and Ranape discourage resistance to change and enhance flexibility.

2.9.2 Indirect approval of extra-marital affairs

Extra-marital affairs seem to be a major contributing factor to marital abuse, which is perpetuated by husbands and is believed to be a common reason for either separation or divorce among couples (Selebano 2019: 56-63). A married man in Sepedi culture is allowed to commit adultery and can marry more than one wife if he can maintain it financially (Sefoka 2017: 23). Extra-marital affairs are also encouraged by the following Sepedi proverb: *monna ke phoka o lala a e wa boshego and monna ke selepe re a adimishana*. This means that even when having an affair poses serious hazards such as short-term and long-term psychosomatic disorders, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, delusion, and hallucinations (Limpopo Department of Transport and Community Safety 2024: 27-28). Wife may also feel not attractive enough or question her worth. The following sub-topic explores how financial dependency on perpetrators enables abused married women to persevere in their marriage.

2.9.3 Financial dependency

South Africa's rising unemployment rate disproportionately impacts wives, particularly in areas with limited resources (National Strategic Plan 2020-2030: 28). Everyone is affected by marital abuse, but poor populations are more likely to experience GBVF due to unemployment, financial hardships, and extreme poverty, which can lead to men using violence to control women, particularly in developing and Sub-Saharan nations (Ziyahlo 2023: 3). Being dependent on their husbands for survival and child maintenance makes it harder for unemployed spouses to leave marriage (Lee & Blackwell 2019: 114). Other households instruct their wives not to work, as their husbands can support them financially.

Victims of marital abuse fear facing difficulties in providing for their children and themselves due to financial strains such as debt and loss of income, as well as low income that does not cover the family's basic needs (Limpopo Department of Transport and Community Safety 2024: 26-27). Although society assumes that working-class women cannot experience marital abuse due to financial independence, they also experience it (Limpopo Department of Transport and Community Safety 2024: 26-27). The following subsection discusses family pride as a contributing factor for women to remain in toxic marriages.

2.9.4 Family pride

To maintain their family status, most women keep quiet about abuse they endure in their marriages because they do not want their neighbours to know (Selebano 2019: 17). Culturally, wives should persevere in abusive relationships since leaving marriage is perceived as disrespect to the family, which is influenced by *magadi or lobola*. They feel that it is taboo to return home. They also have a fear of being called “*powabogadi*”, meaning a return soldier. Women’s families feel that they have failed to discipline their daughters. They promised to stick with their partners during thin and thick times, be sympathetic, be concerned, and forgive and keep the families together during a wedding ceremony (Selebano 2019: 84).

2.9.5 Substance abuse

South Africa has been reported to be among the other countries with high rates of alcohol consumption internationally, resulting in loss of employment, interpersonal violence, domestic violence and other social ills (National Strategic Plan 2020: 30). In Sepedi tradition, there is a proverb that says *mabele mpolaye, ge ke bolaile ke wena nka thaba*. Simply meaning, it is better for the man to be hurt by traditional beer or alcohol than to be offended by the wife or intimate partner. This implies that they acknowledge that overuse of alcohol can have negative outcomes in the family, such as a lack of food, and a person can say words that he may regret at a later stage. The proverb *seo se koshago monna swikiri, se kosha mosadi wa gagwe letswai* entails that most times in villages, what makes men happy has a negative impact on women or makes women sad. However, this does not ignore the fact that women also abuse alcohol or other substances, which can also lead to negative outcomes in their families.

Culture, indirect approval of extra-marital affairs, financial dependency on perpetrators, family pride and substance abuse seem to be contributing factors to GBVF among married women. However, culture also instils dignity and respect among the community and its members. Engaging in extra-marital affairs can lead to behaviour from the past generation, but the individual can decide to be faithful and break the cycle of infidelity. The literature shows that family pride encourages women to remain in toxic marriages due to fear of stigmatisation, but families can also decide to put life first by accepting their daughters returning from toxic marriages. The following subsection discusses the consequences of remaining in a toxic marriage.

2.10 Consequences of remaining in marital abuse for children

Any child possesses an entitlement to home or parental care and safeguards against exploitation, mistreatment, torture or humiliation (Kukhianidze & Kitoshvili 2025: 70). Children are responsible for attending school; treating their peers and teachers with respect; respecting culture, language, and gender; and considering the support and guidance provided by their parents and guardians (Department of Social Development 2019: 71). When children experience challenges from school, their peers and community

members they need comfort from their family; however, they find it difficult to vent their problems to their parents because of the abuse experienced by their parents. Family is a crucial institution that gives its members a feeling of identity and belonging, which serves as a foundation of comfort, affection, guidance, assurance, and shielding (Department of Social Development 2021: 1). Nonetheless, children are exposed to harmful mental circumstances when they observe abuse, as it can lead to long-term trauma (Selebano 2019: 84).

Children exposed to emotional, physical or sexual abuse of their mothers or caregivers which is perpetuated by father, continue to have serious social problems (Harrison 2021: 64). As a result, they may learn to manipulate others to have their needs met, signalling the beginning of an antisocial personality, as they learnt from the way in which their father treated their mothers, whereas others may always blame themselves within the play environment when mistakes occur (Srikandi 2020: 340). Eventually, children may believe that love and intimate relationships are not something that they can rely on after observing from their parents (Selebano 2019:33). Continuous and constant parental battle has damaging effects on children, such as financial complications, particularly if the perpetrator is a breadwinner, which leads to a high level of stress that contributes to depression (Limpopo Department of Transport and Community Safety 2024: 26-27).

2.11 Theoretical framework

This study adopted integrated theoretical framework using Cycle of violence, Attachment theory and Social Learning Theory rather than single theory because marital abuse is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Three theories complement each other by addressing different levels of analysis. Cycle of Violence Theory explains the pattern of abuse over time such as reasons for staying in abusive marriage and escalation of abuse which address objective of determining factors influencing endurance in an abusive marriage. Attachment theory explains emotional bond that keeps women in abusive relationship despite which also address objective of determining factors influencing endurance in an abusive marriage. Social Learning Theory explains how abusive behaviour and proverbs interpretations are acquired and normalized in Sepedi families which address objective

of exploring the understanding of the proverb *fogohlela seropeng* and how it enables abuse within marriages.

Although these theories are rooted in psychology, they are anthropologically interpret how Sepedi proverbs function as cultural tools that teach, reinforce, and perpetuate gender roles and violence through attachment and social learning. Together they provide holistic anthropological understanding of marital abuse linked to GBVF.

2.11.1 Cycle of violence

Cycle of Violence Theory, which was developed by Lenore Walker in 1979 through her clinical work with battered women in the United States, was used to understand how Sepedi proverbs influence endurance in marital relationships. Walker developed this theory to challenge victim-blaming narratives and provided a framework for understanding entrapment in abusive relationships, which consists of four stages of abuse. The four stages of abuse consist of tension building, intermediate battering, honeymoon and chronic, which are explained in detail in the following section.

2.11.1.1 Stage 1: Tension building

At the tension-building stage, the perpetrator may become moody and irritable, and gathers background information, including the family history of the victim. The abuser assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the victim and family. He ensures that he isolates the victim from family by accusing them of associating with socially deviant people and witchcraft. The couple spend much of their time with each other at this stage. There is a slow growth of conflicts presented, such as name calling, belittling and deliberate hurting (Selebano 2019: 9), whereas physical acts include shivering, being aggressive, hitting with a flat hand or hitting with a thin stick with the shoulder down or level, or shoving her against a wall by her hand (Koepping 2021:14). Financial abuse acts include reducing monthly contributions at home, such as the amount of basic needs (Sibanda 2019: 16). At this stage, married women can terminate their relationship with the assistance of family members and friends (Koepping 2021: 13).

2.11.1.2 Stage 2: Intermediate or acute battering

During stage 2, the perpetrator does not want the wife to spend much of her time with family or friends. If the victim has registered with a tertiary institution for capacity building, she is requested to deregister. Psychological manipulation takes place at this stage, whereby the perpetrator can beat the victim and then apologise with gifts and promise not to repeat the abuse, but the abuse continues. The tension continues to deteriorate, and perpetrators display aggressive behaviour towards victims (Selebano 2019: 11). Husband reminds wife that he used much money to pay lobola and marry her to manipulate her so that she could not report the case to family or friends. Compared with stage 1, the financial contribution in stage 2 of abuse decreases. Married women find it difficult to report abuse and start to normalise it (Selebano 2019: 35). Few married women who manage to report abuse terminate marriage with empowerment from government or civil society organisations and apply for protection orders after termination (Sangeetha, Mohan, Nawaz & Hariharasudan 2022: 5).

2.11.1.3 Stage 3: Honeymoon

Stage three may involve the use of a length of wood, a knife, an axe, a gun or strangling, or even killing, and when she undergoes medical consultation, she makes justifications about the cause of the injury (Koepping 2021:14). The intensity of abuse is usually severe, and most married women in this stage are economically and socially dependent on their husbands (Sangeetha et al. 2022: 5). The abusive behaviour in this stage remains unreported, with the motive of *fogohlela seropeng* and the fear of being judged or blamed to provoke the perpetrator. The perpetrator realised that his wife plays an important role in the family, which gives him a sense of loss, and he becomes remorseful (Sangeetha et al., 2022: 5). Although he feels remorseful at this stage, abusive behaviour continues.

2.11.1.4 Stage 4: Chronic or severe with a regular pattern

The period of abuse tends to escalate with the power of marital violence growing over the years. Many perpetrators face substance abuse challenges, and the injuries for victims include sprains, fractures, forced anal and genital sex, the use of weapons, and broken bones (Human Science Research Council 2024: 66). At this stage, married woman has adjusted and agreed to live with the abuse and tries by all means to protect the actions

of husband even when they are affecting themselves and immediate family members. If they are not asked about abuse, they prefer not to tell anyone (Enaifoghe et al. 2021: 143). Other married women wish to leave the relationship but fear that their husbands can cause more harm (Sangeetha et al. 2022: 6).

Stage 4, abuse becomes chronic and occurs regularly, with the possibility of contracting HIV (Enaifoghe et al. 2021: 144). Perpetrators in stage 4 use cultural language, including Sepedi proverbs, to apologise, promise change and convince women to stay. Proverbs which are likely to be used are: *ga go mohlopi woo o sa nego, mepipi ka moka e a na*, which emphasise that all people in marriage face marital challenges and *fogohlela seropeng*.

2.11.2 Attachment theory

Attachment theory was originally developed by John Bowlby in 1969 and expanded by Mary Ainsworth in 1978 to explain the emotional bond between infant and caregiver. Ainsworth applied it to understand how early attachment patterns affect adult relationships. This shows that couple starts to bond before marriage, which happens when they are still dating. It is composed of attachment styles that consist of secure attachment that fosters safety, trust, and positive interactions and insecure-avoidant attachment that leads to frustration, criticism, and defensiveness.

2.11.2.1 Secure attachment

Secure attachment is characterised by feelings of safety, trust and security in marriage. This is the stage where couples have low anxiety and avoidance (Solokova & Bakolova 2023: 3). It fosters safety and trust (Okonkwo 2024: 38). Couples that are securely bonded are more likely to have pleasant interactions and communicate well. This is a stage where couples experience challenges and solve them without engaging in abusive behaviour or psychological manipulations.

2.11.2.2 Insecure-avoidant attachment

People who are insecurely attached often become more frustrated. They criticise too much out of a fear of being abandoned and a refusal to accept truth. To keep others away

from themselves, an avoidant who is insecurely attached may criticise (Okonkwo 2024: 38). For those with a dismissive-avoidant attachment style, this can involve treating one's partner with contempt to prevent feelings of rejection. When one believes that the relationship is in danger, insecure-avoidant attachment might result in being overprotective. When overwhelmed, avoidant attached people may stonewall as a way to withdraw emotionally. Behaviours that result in unfavourable interaction patterns that are thought to be detrimental to the stability of marriages can be influenced by this insecure attachment style.

Insecure-resistant and disorganised attachment

People who are not honest are likely to be thoughtful, insecure, and unwilling to show their emotional state to others (Bates 2016:62). They reflect on previous experiences that may affect them positively or negatively (Bates 2016:62). Owing in part to the effectiveness of their strategies for retaining control and power, abusive males frequently exhibit skewed thought patterns and are resistant to treatment (Solokova & Bakolova 2023: 5). People who are attached to their abusers tend to believe that they cannot live without their intimate partners. Insecure-resistant attachment is linked to stages 3 (honeymoon) and 4 (chronic or severe with a regular pattern) of marital abuse, whereby the perpetrator realises that abuse is wrong, does not want to lose their wife and apologies but experiences resistance to stop abusive behaviour.

2.11.3 Social learning theory

SLT was used to analyse marital abuse. SLT is influenced by microsystems, mesosystems, macrosystems, learning, childhood trauma, discipline, and intergenerational transitions. Abuse is often perpetuated by influential figures, such as politicians and celebrities, who contribute to the issue. Internal aggression and marital abuse are common issues in children raised by single mothers due to parental rejection. These children often inherit abusive behaviour from their parents or close role models, leading to an intergenerational sequence of abuse.

2.11.3.1 Background

SLT was employed to elaborate on marital violence towards women. It was developed by Albert Bandura in 1977, who suggested that environmental and social issues influence the behaviour of people in either positive or negative ways through interactions (Ranape 2023: 46). This theory can be viewed as a mutual process between the environment and people, as they absorb knowledge from past events, integrate it, and create meaning that shapes their perspective (Makongoza 2024: 36). Socialisation reveals that abuse is a social act that can be influenced by cultural, psychological and political factors where an authoritative person shows power over victims by controlling, disempowering or injuring victims perpetuated by aggression (Britton 2020: 13). SLT is influenced by the following factors: microsystems, the mesosystem, the macro system, learning, childhood trauma, discipline and intergenerational transition.

2.11.3.2 Microsystems

SLT is influenced by microsystems related to marital abuse, which include personal history, trauma, substance abuse, relationship insecurities, personal history, and individual circumstances (Devaney & Lazenbatt 2016: 33-35). Microsystems are influenced by family background, which is dominated by the patriarchal system and negative masculinity, whereby a girl child is expected to perform all domestic house chores, whereas a male child is projected to be a leader and not participate in any household activities. A girl child is expected to return home before sunset, whereas a male child may return home after midnight. The male child internalises control and negative masculinity, which can likely continue during marriage.

2.11.3.3 Mesosystems

Mesosystems include learning behaviour from family, friends, neighbours, community members and church members, who normalise GBVF through relationship insecurities, power relations, dependency, unnecessary competitions and peer associations (Devaney & Lazenbatt 2016: 39). Perpetrators of marital abuse experienced challenges during their childhood, such as not praising them when they accomplished positive responsibilities, being taught that failure reflects individual weakness and that they were often blamed for household problems (Bates 2016: 147). SLT suggests that characteristics of abusive

behaviour that a person inherits from the family of origin are not only practised with peers but also with their future family, which can indirectly promote the intergenerational transition of abuse. Mesosystems can also occur when the perpetrator is experiencing workplace bullying and tends to relieve toxic workplace pressure with aggression towards the wife or children at home. Others may receive influence from colleagues, who always inform them that they are not regarded as man enough if they are not assaulting or insulting the wife.

2.11.3.4 Macro systems

Macro systems are associated with inheriting behaviour learned from national politicians, famous people from businesses and the entertainment industry (Britton 2020:1-3). For example, when a famous person in South Africa won a case of GBVF legally without imprisonment or fines or receives lenient punishment, perpetrators within the community regard it as the key to continue abusing other people, especially women. Briton (2020 1-3) provided a symbolic example associated with social learning regarding the GBVF in cases of former President of the Republic of South Africa, where he raped the lady and acknowledged it that he had sex with her without a condom and was found not guilty. Briton further explored case of a former athlete who murdered her girlfriend and received fewer sentences. Britton also showed that this can serve as a motivating learning behaviour for perpetrators as they regard them as role models.

2.11.3.5 Learning

No person was born with abusive behaviour but learned from people within the family and external environment (Selebano 2019: 12). Albert Bandura reported that people learn less when provided with verbal information but remember more through observation and actions from significant others and their role models (Firmansyanh & Saepuloh 2022: 304). Social learning theory is associated with the learning style of diverges whereby they learn best through noticing and brainstorming (Bates 2016:123).

2.11.3.6 Childhood trauma

Children who are raised by their single mothers for different reasons, such as parental rejection, leave their mothers to marry another wife and become step-father to those children, experience a sense of motivation and internal aggression (Lee & Blackwell 2019: 127). Tough family background motivated them to work hard academically with the purpose of improving their family circumstances. After completing their studies and obtaining employment, they ensure that they assist their siblings with education and provide the entire family with basic needs. During the stage of commitment to relationships, they ensure that they marry to avoid having the same characters as the father does. They ensure that they provide children and wife with basic needs. The ignored challenges, i.e., father rejection re-emerge unexpectedly during the marriage when they experience minor challenges. He may assault wife with the purpose of assaulting father but on the body of wife or child.

2.11.3.7 Modelling

Albert Bandura highlighted importance of social interaction with others to understand human behaviour (Firmansyanh & Saepuloh 2022: 303-304). Perpetrators inherited abusive behaviour from their parents or any person who was close role model to them (Devaney & Lazenbatt 2016: 39). According to Bandura' SLT in human beings, abusive behaviours are learned through observing the people who defend themselves with resentment when they are provoked (Lee & Blackwell 2019: 175). Perpetrators witnessed abuse from their fathers when they were abusing their mothers or uncles when brutally treating their wives. This vitalises the intergenerational sequence of abuse because their children can also inherit marital violence and might find it difficult to move from IPV in the future (Devaney & Lazenbatt 2016: 39). Marital abuse behaviour is learned during childhood and then replicated throughout adulthood (Firmansyanh & Saepuloh 2022: 304).

2.11.3.8 Discipline

SLT showed that boys who witnessed their fathers abusing their mothers as a way of discipline have more chances of abusing their wives in future (Devaney & Lazenbatt 2016: 39). Perpetrators and victims of marital abuse may have experienced severe corporal

punishment from their previous or childhood schools and may have regarded physical abuse as a better way to discipline the wife or husband to avoid the recurrence of mistakes (Britton 2020: 95). This type of social learning shows that learner makes efforts to pay attention during the basic education process, retains information about corporal punishment, reproduces it through implementing it within the marriage and serves as a motivation to instil discipline and forced respect (Firmansyanh & Saepuloh 2022: 304). Physical punishment may cause abusive behaviour toward the person who is being punished and significant others (Devaney & Lazenbatt 2016: 47).

2.12 Conclusion

Marital abuse in African countries, particularly South Africa, is often justified by cultural norms rather than traditional practices. In South Africa, perpetrators use culture as a scapegoat, causing abuse of women. However, cultural flexibility and fluidity can lead to changes in norms and traditions, promoting humanity and resilience. Resistance to change is discouraged from enhancing flexibility.

The stages of marital abuse have been explored, but couples might not follow the sequence of the cycle of violence, as explained above. SLT revealed that abusive behaviour is learned from microsystems, mesosystems and macro systems. This finding further revealed that children who experienced childhood trauma might suffer mentally in the future or abuse their future intimate partners. Abuse starts internally, which means that even if another person can commit a crime when the mind is not ready, planned abuse cannot be implemented.

The following chapter present a qualitative research methodology, highlighting its limitations and interpretative paradigm. It outlines crucial elements such as the study setting, population, sampling, sample size, data collection tool, data management, analysis, and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights the following aspects: a qualitative approach as a research methodology for this study project and its limitations; research design, interpretative as a research paradigm; study setting; study population; sampling; sample size; data collection tools, which include individual interviews, semi-structured interviews and observations; data management and analysis; ethical considerations, which include informed consent, voluntary participation, no harm, confidentiality and honesty; and ensuring rigour.

3.2 Research Methodology

Methodology is a collection of thorough methodological principles and practices that offer a route for research that include taking into account the interaction between people, ideas and concepts (Olmos-Vega, Stalmeijer & Kahlke 2023: 241). It also highlights the steps that need to be followed for data collection, analysis and interpretation (Creswell & Creswell 2018: 3). The following subsection introduces a qualitative approach as a chosen methodology in this study, its strengths and limitations.

3.2.1 Qualitative approach

The qualitative approach requires interviews to be conducted at the place where participants are residing or placed (Silverman 2024:26). In contrast, I interviewed the participants at the office of the DSD in light of the sensitivity of the topic, which is “Fogohlela seropeng: Exploring the Sepedi proverbs and women’s abuse within marriages in Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality, Limpopo Province”. DSD authorised me to interview the participants at their offices, guaranteeing that the husbands of the participants did not overhear their challenges or experiences within marriages.

The qualitative approach allowed direct interaction with individuals (Gill 2020: 77). This approach is characterised by the ability to probe extensively beyond the complicated nature of life experiences and events, providing thorough knowledge that aims to emphasise the perspectives of the participants (Dunk-West & Saxton 2024: 51). The participants were able to explore the positive and negative impacts of Sepedi proverbs. Most participants reported that Sepedi proverbs assist in maintaining the dignity and integrity of the family and discourage divorce, particularly in the case of *fogohlela seropeng*, *sepipimpi se pipa molomo* and *lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi*. Conversely, other participants also indicated that proverbs pressured them to remain in marriages due to fear of family stigmatisation and damage to their reputations. This approach assisted them in seeking redress and accountability for what happened to them (Collins & Durlington 2024: 127). Participants reflected on how they see the past today within the limits of their current cultural knowledge (Schoepfle 2022: 4-5).

3.2.2 Research design

A qualitative design explored the experiences of participants; their problem-solving skills and what they need to change (Silverman 2024: 27). It produced comprehensive results regarding thoughts, feelings, challenges and ideas (Guyotte & Wolgemuth 2021:128). A key component of this research understands how people dealt with marital abuse and how they made meaning of their daily lives (Hatch 2023: 8).

The title of the study focused on women who had experienced marital abuse and those who had left their marriages after experiencing it. The following objectives were accomplished by using a qualitative approach: to explore the understanding of the proverb *fogohlela seropeng* and how it enables abuse within marriages; to determine factors influencing endurance in an abusive marriage; to understand the consequences of marital abuse for the self and family structure; and to explore possible solutions to curb marital abuse.

3.2.3 Research paradigm

The interpretive paradigm allowed the researcher to focus holistically on participants by seeking to understand their subjective meanings, beliefs and cultural context rather than testing variables. It was utilised to understand the living circumstances of married women who were abused in their marriages, observing their non-verbal communication cues without judging them (Dunk-West & Saxton 2024: 52). Body language, facial expressions and emotions were observed when I was interviewing the participants and listened without interference when they were exploring their challenges within their marriage and interpretation of Sepedi proverbs (Brinkmann 2022: 7).

The interpretive paradigm allowed me to focus on the participants holistically, as they do not live in isolation (Gunbayi & Sorm 2018: 63). This included interviewing them about how their experiences affect them individually, in their family structure and ecologically. Tolerating marital abuse affected their children and siblings, which impacted them negatively (Gunbayi & Sorm 2018: 64). Beliefs, language, behaviours, and issues such as power, resistance, and dominance have been explored in this study as a holistic approach.

3.3 Study setting

I was introduced to the study setting by the Ward Councillor and the Tribal authorities during GBVF awareness campaigns that were conducted at Ward 6 of the EMLM, which includes the communities of Phucukani, Taereng, and Five Morgan and is the site of the research project. Although the Ward Councillor and Tribal authority provided permission to interview the participants from their villages, they were not given the names and data collection tool for the security of the participants. The participants spoke the Sepedi language. They were interviewed at the office of the DSD to avoid earshot of their husbands. I established a space where participants could freely communicate their feelings of worry, pain, anger, discomfort, and disappointment (Fine & Torre 2021: 36).

3.4 Population

A population entails the people whom a researcher intends to study and from whom characteristics are collected, from which a carefully selected sample is drawn (Creswell & Creswell 2018: 150). It also includes employment status, marital status, age, gender, academic level and cultural beliefs of the people in Ward 6 of EMLM (Kortmuta & Germaine 2019: 76). The DSD also granted authorisation to access prospective participants when they were consulting the office, as curbing marital abuse is also their responsibility. The target group consisted of women who were abused in their marriages and were either civilly or traditionally wedded. Women who had never married were excluded from the study. People who fell within the sex range of men were also excluded. The interviews were conducted in the Sepedi language and translated into English. An interpreter was not used because of my understanding and fluency in the Sepedi language.

3.5 Purposive and snowball sampling

Given that abuse is often hidden, participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Initial participants were identified through the caseload of the DSD, comprising women who had voluntarily reported marital abuse and consented to research participation. The Head of Department of the Limpopo DSD granted permission to access the files on the strict condition of maintaining confidentiality regarding the names and personal details of the participants. These participants then referred other women in

similar situations, ensuring trust and access to this concealed phenomenon. Access was negotiated by building rapport over the period of two weeks, explaining confidentiality and the benefits of participating in the research project. The researcher, being a social worker, maintained professional rapport to assure participants that disclosure was purely voluntary and would not affect their services.

Participants who voluntarily and consciously agreed to contribute their experiences and knowledge regarding the study were selected through purposive and snowball sampling (Iker et al. 2017: 2). Participants who shared common characteristics, i.e., women who experienced abuse in marriage, were selected (Makwana et al. 2023: 766). Despite their shared traits, the participants' views varied, as they experienced marital abuse in diverse ways and had different perceptions (Flick 2022:281). I purposefully selected the women who reside in Ward 6 of EMLM, who experienced abuse in their marriages. Participants who agreed to participate and satisfied the inclusion requirement, which was experience of marital abuse and consented to participate, were requested to sign a consent form and scheduled appointment for interview.

3.6 Sample size

Qualitative design requires a small sample size to allow the researcher to categorise and analyse themes (Shaheen, Pradhan & Ranajee 2019: 35). A small number was used to represent the entire population of EMLM to increase credibility of the results (Shaheen et al. 2019: 35). The initial target group included 24 married, separated, widowed or divorced women from Phucukani, Five Morgan and Taereng from 18-65 years of age who experienced marital violence. Due to saturation, I interviewed 3 widows, 18 married women, and 3 separated women (10 from Phucukani, 5 from Taereng and 7 from Five Morgan) between 32 and 63 years of age. Five participants are pensioners, 9 are unemployed, and 8 are employed. Seven of the participants had tertiary qualifications, 9

had secondary education, and 6 had primary education. The following subtopic explores the data collection tools used to obtain the perspectives of the participants.

3.7 Data collection methods

Data collection started by recruiting participants and negotiating the terms of their engagement (Cyr & Goodman 2024: 127). The methods listed below were employed to gather information:

3.7.1 Individual face to face interviews

Individual personal interviews were conducted to gather the opinions of the participants (Durdella 2019: 219) about the interpretation of Sepedi proverbs in marital abuse and to explore the possible contributing factors thereof. I engaged with the participants directly to gather data via verbal plus non-verbal cues to deeply explore the topic (Zouhairi 2018: 1). I started by preparing the sessions through the development of rapport with the participants. I informed the participants about the purpose of the study, which was: to explore the understanding of the proverb *fogohlela seropeng* and how it enables abuse within marriages; to determine factors influencing endurance in an abusive marriage; to understand the consequences of marital abuse for the self and family structure; and to explore possible solutions to curb marital abuse. DSD is located 15 kilometres from residences of the participants. To address transport challenges, participants used public transport and private vehicles to reach the venue. The researcher reimbursed participants for transport cost after each interview session to ensure that financial constraints did not hinder participation.

Face-to-face interviews allowed me to observe the body gestures of the participants, which included their ability or inability to maintain eye contact and their sitting preferences. I conducted the interviews at DSD's office to ensure their safety and privacy due to the critical nature of the subject.

3.7.2 Semi-structured interviews and observation

Interviewing guidelines were developed to direct the interaction process, but they were followed partially. Questions that are open-ended were facilitated through interviews that were partially structured to explore the challenges of participants with the aim of creating awareness and finding possible solutions to GBVF, which is faced by married women (Silverman 2019: 403). Flexibility was used to make follow-up questions determined by the answers of participants, as everyone had a different set of experiences and perspectives. This approach made it possible to understand why married women keep themselves in unhealthy relationships.

Semi-structured interviews enabled concentration on the participants holistically. This include interviewing them about their experiences, body language, the way in which the experiences of marital abuse affected their significant others and their ecosystem. Through learning from the experiences and coping strategies of the participants, I realised that they have intense and deep knowledge, skills and expertise related to their own challenges (Orozco 2022: 85). They have the power to change or adjust to their living circumstances (Jackson & Mazzei 2023: 56).

Audio recordings were used to capture the interviews; however, 18 participants requested that their interviews not be recorded, and I respected their requests. The impact and severity of marital violence were evaluated on the basis of the participants' emotional expression and vocal intonation. Semi-structured interviews allowed recognition of the strengths of the participants (CohenMiller 2024: 132).

Observation was used when I took notes on the behaviour and activities of the participants. This allowed further consideration of the lives of the participants, which opened the discovery of negative and positive understandings of Sepedi proverbs (Hatch 2023: 82). Understanding emotional aspects such as crying, tone of voice and body language provided in-depth information to the participants (Yorgure 2018: 55). Owing to sensitivity to the topic, three participants cried excessively during the first session, whereby I provided them with referrals to consult social work offices for further psychosocial support services and therapy. I interviewed them after they attended two sessions with a social worker.

3.8 Data analysis method

The relevance of statements was discovered after the verbatim transcripts were read multiple times. Themes were used to analyse the information that the participants expressed through their body language and words (Dunk-West & Saxton 2024: 79). The process of classifying themes was used (Maguire and Delahunt 2017:3353) to provide a highly flexible approach (Nowell et al.2017: 2). Themes and sub-themes were framed, classified and reunited into one whole document (Cardano 2020: 122).Nowell et al. (2017: 2) used a six-step thematic analysis approach to analyse data as follows:

Step 1: I read the transcript several times, which included verbal and non-verbal communications (Selebano 2019: 43). The body language of the participants and their tone of voice, eye contact and sitting posture were analysed.

Step 2: I analysed the individuality of each participant (Selebano 2019: 43). The uniqueness of their interpretations of Sepedi proverbs and their experiences of marital abuse were taken into consideration.

Step 3: The themes with common meanings are grouped together (Dunk-West & Saxton 2024: 78-79).

Step 4: To ascertain whether one or more themes were prevalent, the complete themes were analysed (Creswell & Creswell 2018: 194).

Step 5: Identified the data aspect. Every theme was noted, along with areas of interest and complexity (Nowell et al. 2017: 10).

Step 6: Second interviews were conducted after the participants were presented with the results of the data (Creswell & Creswell 2018: 196).

Step 7: I worked with the first interview and recorded the second one's themes and synopsis (Selebano 2019: 43). The themes have been changed.

3.9 Ensuring rigour

3.9.1 Credibility

Establishing validity of the findings required conducting the study in accordance with values of thoughtful, intentional exercise as a means of obtaining further assurance that the researcher had accurately recorded the data (Bryman 2016:302). The qualitative approach has more validity, as the results of the study was based on the experiences of the participants. This allowed the participants the opportunity to construct their own meaning of the world and how they coped with abuse within their marriages (Creswell & Creswell 2018: 3). I provided the participants with an overview of the results to guarantee that their data were accurately recorded to prevent repetition. Furthermore, the supervisor audited the results to promote legitimacy and reliability. As the researcher, I laid aside my own frame of reference to avoid being biased.

3.9.2 Comfirmability

The reliability of the study was ensured through a more in-depth exploration of the same themes that continued to occur (Kortmuta & Germanine 2019: 53). According to Sekgale (2017: 13), compliance requires impartiality, which is the absence of research bias. To prevent repetition, I ensured rigour by conducting follow-up interviews with the participants to ensure that the information they had provided had not been altered. During the study's validation, I remained impartial. It provides future scholars with assumptions of decisions, findings, conclusions and recommendations (Nowell et al. 2017: 3).

3.9.3 Transferability

Transferability which impacted by how effectively results extrapolated to a broader population, was improved by carrying out the research until saturation was reached (Sekgale 2017: 13). It was not feasible to gather information from every woman within EMLM who had been abused in her marriage. Twenty-two women from Elias Ward 6 of EMLM served as representatives for those who were not interviewed despite having varying relationship histories because of financial and time limitations.

3.9.4 Dependability

Dependability is the capacity to replicate a study using the same methodology and participants in the same setting, with the expectation that the results would remain constant (Sekgale 2017: 12–13). A thorough explanation of the data collection process was provided to participants. The study was prepared and carried out according to qualitative research design. The researcher transmitted the obtained data to the supervisor to confirm that the quality of the data was accurately recorded and captured during transcription.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations entail that I guarded against putting the lives of the participants and the university in danger. It assisted me in building trust with the participants (Bloomberg 2023: 116). Ethics entail what researchers must do or not do when undertaking the study process (Silverman 2024: 106). To avoid re-victimisation of the participants, the following ethics were taken into consideration: respect, voluntary participation, no harm to the participants, informed consent, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, deception and ethical clearance.

3.10.1 Respect

The participants' willingness to participate under strict confidentiality was respected. During the interviewing process, a safe place was created, and conducted in the office to protect the dignity and information of the participants (Bloomberg 2023: 136). Rapport was developed to create a warm environment and trusting relationship.

3.10.2 Voluntary participation

The participants participated voluntarily, and they did not receive financial remuneration (Selebano 2019: 45). The purpose and benefits of the study were clearly explained to the participants. Voluntary withdrawal was emphasised; however, no one withdrew from participation.

3.10.3 No harm

Somatic and psychological harm were avoided by the researcher (Bloomberg 2023:135). Other participants who experienced flashbacks or trauma during the interviews were referred to registered social workers for intensive counselling to mitigate the risk of future reoccurrence of post-traumatic experiences. I did not interview the participants near their spouses to avoid endangering their lives. The interviews were conducted at DSD to protect the participants from their spouses.

3.10.4 Informed consent

Participants were given adequate information regarding the purpose of the research and potential benefits, and they agreed through declaration by signing consent forms (Bloomberg 2023:135). The notebook was also used to record verbal and non-verbal communications using the observation method (Dunk-West & Saxton 2024:79).

3.10.5 Privacy

Privacy is a constitutional right in South Africa. A mobile phone with a secured password was used to record four participants who allowed audio recording. The information of the participants was not publicised on social media or other places that were not recognised in terms of Section 5(f) of the POPIA of 2013.

3.10.6 Data management

Data will be stored in the cloud of the UNISA for a period of 15 years. Sensitive information such as names, identity numbers, and residential addresses was removed before storage (Salmona, Kaczynski & Lieber 2024: 79).

3.10.7 Anonymity and confidentiality

I did not show names of the participants in the research project (Hwang & Kang 2022:2). All the names and addresses were removed and replaced with numbers, and participant number one was named P1 (Bloomberg 2023: 308). Consent forms and data collected were accessed by me and the supervisor only.

3.10.8 Deception

I safeguarded against dishonesty. I identified myself as a researcher and provided participants with the full information, purpose and aim of the study (Silverman 2024: 108). Although I am employed as a registered social worker, during the study process, I was engaged as a researcher or student to avoid conflict of interest and dual relationships with the participants. Resources of DSD, such as laptops, steel cabinets, note pads and papers, were not used to record data to avoid leaking information from the participants. Only infrastructure that is office was used.

The participants were treated as individuals with unique living circumstances who need respect (Sekgale 2017: 14). Interview transcripts were reviewed to ensure verbatim correctness and accuracy (Salmona *et al.* 2024:71).

3.10.9 Ethical clearance

The research study was conducted after receiving approval from UNISA, with reference number 4003. Ethical clearance minimised harms and maximised the benefits of the study (Hanekom 2018:1). The DSD provided office space.

3.11 Limitations of the study

Qualitative methodology often emphasises fieldwork in natural settings; in contrast, the participants were interviewed at the offices of DSD to avoid ear-dropping from their husbands. Four participants allowed audio recording, whereas 18 participants felt uncomfortable but consented to written recording under the strict confidentiality of their personal information. The participants' real names were not disclosed to safeguard their privacy, with Participant 1 referred to as P1.

The study focused only on one ward of the EMLM, which is composed of three villages, namely Phucukani, Taereng and Five Morgan, which limits generalisability and prevents it from representing the entire population of the municipality. The target group included women who were married, separated or divorced and over 18 years of age and who

experienced marital abuse because, legally, a person has the right to marry after reaching maturity, which is 18 years. Women who never entered into marriage were excluded. Furthermore, women who did not experience abuse during their marriages were also excluded.

Perspectives of married men were excluded, as they may dilute the focus on women's experiences of marital abuse, different power dynamics and potential silence or overshadow women's experiences. Excluding the perceptions of men assisted in ensuring that the study focused on its target population and increased the probability of validity.

3.12 Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of Sepedi proverbs on marriages in EMLM, with a focus on married women who have experienced marital abuse. The research design aims to understand the reasons behind these abusive relationships, the emotional and psychological manipulation employed by abusers, and the ways in which certain African proverbs can promote abusive behaviour in marriages. Research took place at EMLM, with 22 married, separated, widowed, or divorced women aged 35-65 years. The interpretive paradigm was used to understand the living experiences of married women who experienced abuse within their marriages, including their beliefs, language, behaviours, and issues such as power, resistance, and dominance. The validity of the study was ensured through rigour, whereas the reliability was confirmed through follow-up interviews.

The following chapter present findings from 22 semi-structured interviews with women in EMLM, which were analysed through reflexive thematic analysis. It delved into how the proverb *fogohlela seropeng* is weaponised and its connection to marital abuse, highlighting the socio-cultural, economic and psychosocial factors influencing women's choices to remain in or depart from abusive situations, as well as the significant impacts on them and their children.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the findings from 22 semi-structured interviews with women in Ward 6 of EMLM using reflexive thematic analysis. It explores the interplay between the proverb *fogohlela seropeng* and the perpetuation of marital abuse; the sociocultural, economic, and psychological factors that influence women's decisions to stay or leave; and the profound consequences of this abuse on themselves and their children.

4.1.1 Purpose of research and biographical information of participants

This study aims to investigate how the proverb *fogohlela seropeng* promotes marital abuse against married women in Ward 6 of EMLM. Data were obtained from three villages of Ward 6 of the EMLM, namely, Phucukani, Five Morgan and Taereng, through semi-structured interviews. The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, and the emotions and non-verbal communication cues of the participants were observed. Themes were formulated and presented in relation to the participants' experiences regarding marital abuse. The objectives of this research are as follows:

- To explore the understanding of the *proverb fogohlela seropeng* and how it enables abuse within marriages.
- To determine factors influencing endurance in an abusive marriage.
- To understand the consequences of marital abuse for the self and family structure.
- To explore possible solutions to curb marital abuse.

The target group included women who were married, separated or divorced and over 18 years of age and who experienced marital violence. Three widows, 18 married women, and 3 separated women (10 from Phucukani, 5 from Taereng and 7 from Five Morgan) between 32 and 63 years of age were interviewed. Five participants were pensioners, 9 were unemployed, and 8 were employed. Seven of the participants had tertiary qualifications, 9 had secondary education, and 6 had primary education. A qualitative approach was utilised to collect the data. A semi-structured technique with minimum

preparation was employed. The participants were interviewed individually at the offices of the DSD at Sempupuru due to the sensitivity of the topic. The real names of the participants were not disclosed to protect their privacy and dignity. Participant 1 was named P1.

Biographical information

Participant	Village	Age	Marital status	Duration of marriage	Academic status	Occupation	Type of abuse
P 1	Taereng	60	Widow	10 years	Grade 8	Pensioner	Physical Emotional
P2	Taereng	51	Married	29 years	Grade 11	Unemployed	Financial Emotional
P3	Five Morgan	41	Married	5 years	Grade 11	Unemployed	Physical Emotional
P4	Taereng	43	Married	15 years	Grade 9	Unemployed	Emotional
P5	Five Morgan	45	Married	17 years	Post graduate	Government official	Physical Emotional Financial Sexual
P6	Phucukani	58	Widow	13 years	Post graduate	Government official	Financial Emotional
P7	Phucukani	38	Married	14 years	Post graduate	Government official	Financial Emotional

P8	Phucukani	43	Separated	12 years	Grade 11	Cashier	Physical Financial Emotional
P9	Phucukani	32	Married	6 years	Post graduate	Government official	Emotional
P10	Five Morgan	39	Married	12 years	Post graduate	Government official	Emotional Financial
P11	Phucukani	58	Separated	30 years	Grade 5	Unemployed	Physical Financial Emotional
P12	Five Morgan	63	Married	30 years	Grade 7	Pensioner	Financial Emotional
P13	Phucukani	59	Widow	28 years	Grade 7	Unemployed	Financial Emotional
P14	Phucukani	60	Married	29 years	Grade 7	Pensioner	Financial Emotional
P15	Taereng	35	Married	4 years	Grade 10	Unemployed	Physical Financial
P16	Five Morgan	62	Married	29 years	Grade 5	Pensioner	Financial Emotional
P17	Phucukani	55	Married	27 years	Grade 8	Unemployed	Financial

							Emotional
P18	Phucukani	42	Separated	15 years	Diploma	Government official	Financial Emotional
P19	Phucukani	57	Married	35 years	Grade 11	Unemployed	Financial Physical Emotional Sexual
P20	Five Morgan	59	Married	37 years	Grade 11	Unemployed	Financial Emotional Physical
P21	Taereng	39	Married	4 years	Postgraduate	Government official	Financial Emotional
P22	Five Morgan	60	Married	37 years	Grade 7	Pensioner	Physical Financial Emotional

4.2 Marriage and culture in EMLM

Legal marriage is defined as a voluntary union between individuals of maturity age (18 years), recognised by South African law, customary law, or religious systems, creating rights and responsibilities for spouses and children (Section 1 of the Civil Union Act number 17 of 2006). All the participants willingly entered into marriage without any force or element of duress. Marriage is the union of two individuals, particularly men and women, who may have children together or out of wedlock (Phala 2020: 56). All the participants reached the age of maturity, as they were over the age of 18 years, ranging from 32-60 years. The youngest one has been in marriage for a period of five years, whereas the oldest one is in marriage for a period of 37 years.

Bapedi clan practices exogamy, marrying outside one's clan or tribe, in contrast to endogamy, which favours marriage within caste or kin groups (Bansaka & Pearlman 2021: 52). All the participants entered into exogamy as they married non-relatives and were outside their communities. Bapedi men can enter into monogamous or polygamous marriages, often with the aim of building family relationships and producing offspring (Sefoka 2017: 15-17). All the participants entered into monogamous civil marriages. They are living with their children. They further explained that their husbands paid lobola in full and followed all their cultural requirements.

In the Bapedi clan, culture is highly valued and passed down from generation to generation. It encourages the wife to surrender to her husband and the husband to lead the family, following a proverb, *monna ke hlogo ya lapa* (man is the head of the family). It also helps family members comprehend their responsibilities and tasks in the home. P12 clarifies this by demonstrating how culture encourages perseverance and hard work, which is reinforced by the proverb *kodumela moepathutse ga go lehumo leo le tswago kgauswi*, which teaches about perseverance and diligence (get into a deep hole since there is no wealth without dedication). Lee & Blackwell (2019: 36) indicated that culture has the ability to shape the environment by promoting positive behaviour.

4.3 Awareness and typologies of marital abuse

Marital abuse includes physical, sexual, emotional, financial, economic, stalking, harassment, and other forms of oppressive or abusive behaviour (Selebano 2019: 54). Emotional and psychological abuse can involve humiliating a spouse in public. Each of the 22 participants was conscious of experiences of marital abuse. Additionally, they demonstrated their understanding of four categories of abuse: financial, emotional, physical, and sexual. *When a person beats you is physical abuse, denies you money to purchase basic household needs is financial abuse, while when is insulting you is emotional abuse (P1)..... I know financial and emotional abuse because I am experiencing them currently (P2). Abuse in marriage is when the husband is having extra-marital affairs and not contributing financially towards the basic needs of the household. This is emotional and psychological abuse because you can end up being depressed and having low self-esteem like me (P4). When he is calling me with private parts (P19).* The abuse is exacerbated when a husband has extramarital encounters while neglecting to provide for the family. Low self-esteem and depression can result from such events.

The following subsection highlights the types of marital abuse experienced by the participants.

4.3.1 Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse regularly occurs in conjunction with other forms of abuse, or can happen alone (Devaney & Lazenbatt 2016: 14-15). It refers to purposeful humiliation or degradation of another person, including insults, threats of danger, and invasions of privacy (Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998:3). Constant criticism, humiliation, demeaning, and name calling are examples of abusive behaviour that are purposefully employed to undermine women's self-esteem and make them feel unworthy (Selebano 2019: 80). Thirteen participants reported that they experienced emotional abuse in different ways. *He informs me that he made me favour marrying me. He insults me with private parts daily (P1). When I confront him, he insults me (P4). He is shouting at me and children when return from bottle store every weekends (P14& P15) He call me with names like bitch etc. He is always aggressive and angry without the reason (P16).*

He treat me like a trash (P9). He was always accusing me of cheating while I was very faithful to me even when he was not faithful (P17). He is insulting me. We are no longer sharing the bed (P21). This marriage is dragging me emotionally (P14). Ongoing emotional abuse is unbearable, which can lead to depression, other severe mental diseases, illogical thinking or can escalate to longer-lasting emotional damage (Sibanda 2019: 14). Devaney & Lazenbatt (2016: 14-15) agreed with participants that emotional abuse is difficult to measure and can cause harmful mental damage. Emotional abuse may lead to physical abuse by affecting the body through psychosomatic illnesses, where pain occurs in areas such as the abdomen, legs, head, and stomach without a medical diagnosis. Untreated depression and emotional abuse can result in psychosomatic disorders, including metabolic indicators, headaches, burning mouth disorders, and low-grade chronic inflammation, as highlighted by Nisar & Srivastava (2018: 12-14).

4.3.2 Physical abuse

Physical abuse includes any physical form of somatic assault with deliberate intent of harm or as a sort of punishment or power (Sibanda 2019: 11). It also includes threats of beating, slamming and depriving any person of prescribed medications (Devaney & Lazenbatt 2016: 12). Seven participants reported experiences of physical abuse. *The husband was beating me. He started with one slap, abusing continued until he was using dangerous weapons such as an axe and others to beat me and in front of the children (P1). I experienced physical abuse because my husband was always assaulting me with my children or sometimes assaulting me in front of the children..... and was beating me excessively with dangerous weapons (P3). The abuse continued whereby I had lot of bruises, he strangled me. All kinds of physical abuse I experienced them (P5). Beating me excessively with dangerous weapons (P8 and P 11). Husband is beating me with dangerous weapon at night without valid reason (P15). After beating me he demand sex (P19).* This finding demonstrates a cycle of violence, where physical abuse began with the wife being reprimanded solely with hands and progressed to the use of hazardous materials such as an axe. Given that women lack the physical strength to exact revenge, this indicates that their husbands knew that they had control over them. Physical injury, including bruising and injuries, results from the extent of abuse. Physical abuse also

affects the emotional well-being of participants, resulting in living with fear of excessive abuse that can lead to death.

4.3.3 Financial abuse

Financial abuse entails prohibiting a person from obtaining valuable resources such as education or using money in an inappropriate manner (Sibanda 2019: 15). *He takes the household money to give the girls and impress his friends with alcohol (P5). The husband was not providing the children with the basic needs as he is the one who is employed (P10).* The participants received less money that was insufficient to meet their fundamental needs and experienced a lack of involvement in the family's income or wage (Devaney & Lazenbatt 2016: 15). Sixteen participants (P8, P9, P10, P12, P13, P16, P17, P18 & P19) reported that their husbands use their finances, which are supposed to benefit the family and provide the children with basic needs by providing to extra-marital partners with money. *He will use the money on his girlfriends.....He takes the household money to give to the girls and impress his friends with alcohol (P5). He was having extra-marital affairs and was providing those intimate partners with finances while we were suffering to get the basic needs (P8, P9, P10, P12, P13, P16, 17, 18 & P19). He was using his finances on extra-marital partners and demanded mine when his salary is finished (P18). The husband was not providing the children with the basic needs as he is the one who is employed (P2 & P10). The husband is using his salary to buy alcohol while we do not have the basic needs, he inform me that he is the one who is working. He is indebted due to alcohol and those debts are not beneficial of us (P15). The husband is using his salary to buy alcohol while we do not have the basic needs, he inform me that he is the one who is working (P14). He returned home after finishing all the money (P20). He is using his little salary to those extra-marital affairs (P21). He is not contributing financially at home at all (P22).* The study revealed that the husbands are misusing their salary for extra-marital affairs, indulging in alcohol and leaving the household without basic needs. The money intended for the family is given to his partners, while additional finances are demanded when his income is exhausted. Financial irresponsibility resulted in debts that benefit no one in the household.

4.3.4 Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves acts that cause damage openly or indirectly to another person's genital organs, anus, or mouth through force or duress, including penetration with a penis or object, as well as sexual acts committed under deception or while the victim is sleeping or unconscious (Hortle, Hyslop, Langridge & Brockman 2024: 8). He always comes home intoxicated when he has money. *After beating me, he demands sex* (P19). This means that since she is compelled to be intimate without permission, having sex in marriage is no longer seen as a pleasure but rather as a duty. This finding demonstrates the prevalence of marital rape among married women, which is difficult to report to law enforcement and can lead to sexual challenges such as damage to certain sexual organs and unplanned pregnancy (Aphane & Mofokeng 2018: 190). Sexual abuse encompasses physical and emotional abuse where victims feel humiliated and experience painful sexual intercourse due to force and elements of assault. This finding reveals the role of premarital counselling, which the role played by the introduction of *legogwa* on the day of the wedding to provide instruction on having sex even when feeling uncomfortable.

4.4 Weaponisation of proverbs: A dual-edged cultural sword

African proverbs teach individuals how to act in a way that is socially acceptable (Kamwendo 2019: 10). Sepedi proverbs are essential in building a responsible society through the use of metaphors to convey ideas that can be understood in a variety of ways, which are used to advise about risky circumstances (Ranape 2023:1 & 30). While Ranape and Kamwendo argue that proverbs promote respect, the researcher disagrees that they should be applied uniformly during marital abuse sessions; elders or people in the session must understand that the complexities and experiences of abuse differ in severity.

4.4.1 Traditional intent versus weapon interpretation

Sepedi proverbs instil respect towards each other and are used to solve conflicts among family members and society without involving law enforcement offices (Malatji & Phokwane 2023: 1302). The proverbs *fogohlela seropeng* coupled with *lebitla la mosadi*

ke bogadi (woman's grave is at in-laws) are used as instruments teaching persistence in marriage life. Those proverbs were initially used to maintain family dignity by not revealing domestic challenges to any person. African proverbs shape the positive behaviour of people (Kamwendo 2019: 10). The importance of *fogohlela seropeng* was confirmed by 11 participants, who reported that it encouraged perseverance in a positive manner, such as keeping family matters private to maintain confidentiality and privacy (P1, P5, P7, P14, P16, P18 & P19). *It instil respect in the society and marriage (P14 & P19). To maintain dignity in the home and to secure family information..... To persevere in the marriage (P5)... ..to keep the family issues private (P1, P9 & P 13). It prevent people from gossiping about your problems (P1).... confidentiality and privacy (P7)..... Women must not reveal any hardships in the marriage (P18). The outsiders will think that you are happy couple (P2, P8, P16 & P17). The proverb fogohlela seropeng means a woman must not disclose any good things or bad things to the outsiders, especially the neighbours and the friends (P12 & P13).* This means that married women pretend to be happy in the eyes of the public.

The barriers to cultural beliefs and values that silence women also abuse played an essential role in influencing women's decisions (Selebano 2019: 93). *Fogohlela seropeng* is interpreted as women enduring abuse without reporting it to family or friends, ultimately discouraging them from leaving marriage. This view enabled husbands to exploit their wives. The participants reflected on personal circumstances that prevent them from returning home, emphasising the oppressive nature of such expectations in the context of marriage (P3, P4, P11, P15 & P18). *The husband abuse wife with the intention that the wife will not disclose any abuse to the family or friends. In our community, when the man is abusing the woman, they blame the woman for provoking the husband and that she did not receive proper counselling from her parental home. On my side, I called a family meeting for his infidelities but both families sided with him. That thing damaged me mentally (P7).It encourages women to tolerate difficulties and hardships in the marriage. It enable the husbands to take advantage of wife for example, in my marriage, the husband was shouting me and children excessively, assaulting me and the children (P8). It encourages women to tolerate difficulties and hardships in the marriage: my husband had a lot of extramarital affairs with women within my village (P13). Fogohlela seropeng*

*means when the husband is abusing you in any way, you must not report him to the family or friends, and you must not leave the marriage (P15). It encourages women to tolerate difficulties and hardships in the marriage. It enables the husbands to take advantage of wife for example, in my marriage, the husband was shouting at the children and me excessively, assaulting the children and me. He knew very well that I would not return home because my family is poverty-stricken..... The woman is always blamed for the faults of the husband (P17). They are oppressive towards women; they are not protecting them. Especially hlogo ye meetse e lotwa ke mong, which means you must always be humble even when someone provokes or abuses you (P18). This entails that although the perpetrator is interpreting the proverb *fogohlela seropeng* to influence abusive behaviour, it is also linked with identification of vulnerability. The invocation of *fogohlela seropeng* and *lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi* by family members transforms cultural preservation into a mechanism of social control that overrides both the victim's safety and the state's legal protections.*

The following subsection discusses the proverbs that play a role in encouraging silence and toxic submission within marriages.

4.4.2 Proverbs that encourage silence and submission

There are various proverbs that society expects people to abide by in marital silence. *Sepipimpi sepipa molomo. ...entailing deep secrets that are not supposed to be disclosed encourage silence even when experiencing hardships within marriage (P11).* In a metaphorical sense, this proverb indicates that there are deeply personal things that no one should know, such as being abused by a husband, wife or husband with a child who is conceived with an extra-partner (illegitimate child). *Mepipi ka moka e a na point out that every household within the community is facing significant difficulties...If someone leaves marriage due to difficulties or abuse, their future circumstances are likely to be worse than they are presently (P20).* These findings reveal how *sepipimpi se pipa molomo* combined with *mepipi ka moka e a n)* and *mosadi o swara thipa ka bogaleng* (woman holds a knife on the sharp side of the blade) encourages silence and helps community members preserve their dignity because they are unable to understand the difficulties that are faced

by victims. A married woman can be regarded as a failure to be *mosadi wa go swara thipa ka bogaleng* if she returns to her parental home due to marital abuse. Ranape (2023: 26) described these proverbs as the promotion of silence and the degradation of women's ability and advancement of female subordination. *Monna ke khudu ga a tlaletswe leshata meaning you are not supposed to reprimand your husband* (P5), further emphasise elevation of silence in the marriage even when experiencing abuse. The researcher contends that these findings prove that the power of the proverbs does not lie in their intrinsic meaning but in their strategic deployment by perpetrators to exploit specific vulnerabilities and enforce silence.

Proverbs that normalise infidelity and male privilege

Infidelity occurs in all family types and is not just a problem in nuclear families (Davis 2022: 5). In contemporary and ancient society, having extramarital encounters is a regular occurrence and have significant contribution of marital abuse (Ngwasheng & Mbedzi 2024: 123), which is believed to be a common reason for either separation or divorce among couples (Selebano 2019: 56-63). *Monna ke thaka o a naba is encouraging my husband to disrespect me, as he is not faithful and is having affairs with the person I know. When I confront him, he says I must remember that a man is dew which falls at night* (P5). P4 also articulated that her husband is committing extra-marital affairs, which are perpetuated by the following proverbs: *monna ke phoka o lala a e wa boshego* (a man is a dew, he drops during the night), *monna ke selepe o lala a adimilwe* (a man is an axe, he is borrowed during the night), and she must understand her role as a woman, which is to *fogohlela seropeng. I assume that my husband feels man enough when engaged into extra marital affairs because he is dating different women, and when I confront him, he said I must accept that he cannot have sex with one partner* (P4).

A married man in Sepedi is allowed to have extra-marital affairs and can marry more than one wife provided that he can maintain the first wife financially, but the wife is not allowed to marry more than one person (Sefoka 2017: 23). Data revealed that women are conscious of marital affairs but that they chose to remain in marriage because *monna ke thaka o a naba* (P14, P18 & 19). The societal view posits that if women divorced over these issues, it would lead to the disintegration of families.

Extra-marital affairs pose serious hazards such as short-term and long-term psychosomatic disorders, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, delusion, and hallucinations (Limpopo Department of Transport and Community Safety 2024: 27-28). This is proven by P12 and P13, who felt powerless in questioning their husband's financial support for extra-marital affairs partners, which endangers their health, including the risk of contracting HIV. P7 and P14 were admitted to the hospital for the treatment of depression associated with marital abuse, whereas medical personnel complained about an increase in blood pressure in P21. Although extra-marital affairs enable husbands to receive pleasure from the extra-partners, it affects the integrity and dignity of the immediate family, particularly their wives, where they question their beauty and their capabilities as women. The study revealed that women understand the consequences of being with a husband who is engaging in extramarital affairs, such as the danger of acquiring HIV and other infections and a decrease in self-confidence.

4.4.3 Counter-narratives: Proverbs that discourage abuse and encourage help seeking

There are proverbs that promote healthy marriages, such as *mosadi ke galase o a hlekwa*, figuratively meaning that the woman is fragile, such as glass, which can be broken or damaged if not handled correctly. *Mosadi ke galase o a hlekwa meaning the woman must be taken care by the husband* (P7). This figurative proverb emphasises proper care and maintenance with transparency, responsibility and accountability. Department of Social Development (2021: v) describes stable family units as positive mutual relationships that do not involve any kind of abuse. White Paper on Families further noted that when a husband treats his wife and the children with respect, the family members find it easier to interact with each other, the community and society well without being threatened by the success of other people. *Maitshwaro a mabotse a lota seriti sa motho indicates that people respect a person with dignity and integrity* (P4). *Mosadi ke galase o a hlekwa* combined with *maitshwaro a mabotse a lota seriti sa motho* enforce effective communication, emotional support, respect, trust, flexibility and resilience.

Ranape (2023) emphasised that although there are certain proverbs that oppress women, there are others which aim to preserve family and discourage silence over abuse.

Ngwana yoo a sa llego o hwela tharing means that women or any person must not bottle the issues to avoid psychological problems, even when it is less likely to be practised (P3 & P8). Matjila (2025:49) agrees with Ranape and participants that *ngwana yoo a sa llego o hwela tharing*, which figuratively means that a baby who fails to cry can die in the cot encourage seeking assistance from families, friends and relevant stakeholders. Lee & Blackwell (2019: 74-76) support the above scholars and participants that this proverb encourages interpersonal relationships, self-care, sharing of ideas, compassion, and constructive criticism. It promotes talking about marriage difficulties to receive emotional support and empowerment from significant people. It also helps people facing difficulties feel less alone because there is a chance that people might offer tentative answers. The proverb can enable the DSD to render support groups for women who experienced marital abuse.

4.4.4 Proverbs that promote substance abuse

Married women are experiencing marital abuse when their husbands are intoxicated by substances (Limpopo Department of Transport and Community Safety 2024: 18). Marital abuse is significantly linked to excessive alcohol consumption (Selebano 2019: 79). *Mabele mpolaye ge ke bolaya ke wena nka thaba* translated to sorghum kill me if I am killed by you, I will be happy. Simply meaning, it is better for the man to be hurt by traditional beer or any alcohol than to be offended by the wife, intimate partner or any person. *Husband is shouting me and children excessively especially when he is drunk, assaulting me and the children* (P15). *He return being intoxicated with the substances always insults me when he return home* (P17). *He returns home when he is intoxicated with alcohol.....He shout at me from 10:00 pm until 6 am* (P22). The participants described experiences of emotional and physical abuse from their husbands and sexual assault without use of condoms during the consumption of alcohol by the husband. After consuming alcohol or any other substance, some people act aggressively, either physically or vocally, which causes considerable noise and subsequent excessive drinking (Kulak, Heavey, Marsack & Leornard 2025: 41).

Proverb *seo se koshago monna swikiri, se kosha mosadi wa gagwe letswai* metaphorically means what makes man happy makes women sad. Parental substance

use and unstable and unsupportive family dynamics are detrimental to family members and the well-being of children (Mogoale 2021: 7). *Due to their inability to cope with my husband's ongoing marital abuse, my two children are presently incarcerated. They turned to substance misuse as a way to cope with their family's circumstances. In an attempt to quit taking Cocaine, the other one went to a rehabilitation centre, but he relapsed. They are incarcerated for house robbery within the community. The third one passed away due to depression (P19).* This finding reveals that children learn maladaptive coping mechanisms as they struggle with guilt, shame, anxiety or depression.

4.5. The architecture of entrapment: Factors influencing the decision to stay

Married women in abusive situations often endure their marriages due to socio-cultural norms, which are heavily shaped by religious beliefs and the stigma of marital failure, labelled *powabogadi* (return soldier from marriage). Community pressures, financial dependency, and unemployment exacerbate their challenges, as traditional male dominance increases conflict. Psychological factors, including the need for a father figure for their children and insecure attachment patterns, alongside societal shame, further complicate their ability to leave these relationships.

4.5.1 Socio-cultural shackles

Married women are encouraged to endure it by cultural, social, and family norms that state they should not return to their parents' house. *I have a portfolio in the church, so that thing again will show that I did not lead by example for the future generation. Again, as a Pedi woman, you cannot cook the food at weddings and funerals when you are divorced. You cannot accompany the newlyweds to the in-laws if you return soldier (P2).* Phala (2021: 62) support the participants that most abused women stay in their marriages because of their religious and cultural origins, their desire to protect their husbands and keep the family together, or their fear of not being trusted by churchgoers. *Fear of being labelled in the community that I was unable to treat the husband well and that I made my husband to abuse me. I'm afraid to be called "powabogadi" and disappointing the parents (P3). Legally, people might stigmatise you when involving the legal institutions and label*

you as a failure (P9). Fear of being labelled in the community that I was unable to treat the husband well and that I made my husband abuse me (P14). The participants highlighted that they feared leaving marriage because divorced women are subject to severe societal stigmas, which affects how they participate in community gatherings such as weddings and funerals. These women face the challenge of being classified as *powabogadi*, which involves being stigmatised for perceived marital failure.

Women are blamed as victims or perceived as reckless rather than perpetrators being held accountable. Many abused women stay in their marriages because of their religious and cultural origins, their desire to protect their husbands and keep their family together, or their fear of not being trusted by churchgoers (Phala 2021: 62). *I suspect my marriage is suffering due to culture because my mother informed me to foghlela seropeng (P1). There is a cultural norm that in order to be man enough, you must be engaged in extra-marital affairs, and women must always submit to their husbands (P5 & P9). Cultural interventions always protect the men (P9). These findings are supported by Rai & Pallavi (2025:49) that culturally married women are supposed to prioritise their partner's pleasure first, accept toxic and manipulative behaviour, be forgiving and faithful, and provide an example for their children and community members (Rai & Pallavi 2025: 49). My family said mepipi ka moka e a na and I have to be mosadi wa go swara thipa ka bogaleng (P20).* These findings demonstrate how *mepipi ka moka e ana* and *foghlela seropeng* are utilised to discourage disclosure and help-seeking.

Family members find it difficult to encourage the wife to return to the parental home because they believe that lobola connects the ancestors of two families, so they are afraid to disconnect the bond (Phala 2020: 66). *My uncle said the family of the husband paid full lobola and performed all cultural issues, so he cannot allow return soldier P72. My aunts informed me to remain in the marriage because lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi and to foghlela seropeng because all the married women endure marital abuse. If women divorced their husbands due to extramarital affairs and abuse, no homes would have the family (P7).* Culturally wives should persevere in the abusive relationship because they will disrespect the family by leaving the marriage because they are brought through bridal price or lobola (Mathebula 2021: 35). The researcher supports the participants and Phala and Mathebula that family pride from significant others which is accompanied by stigma

challenge the decision of abused married women to stay or leave, they regard *magadi/lobola* as a symbol of owning wife.

4.5.2 Economic chains

Financial dependency on husbands keeps unemployed wives in abusive relationships, as many feel financially pressured and controlled. Although some women work, traditional male dominance enhances marital conflict. Husbands often mismanage their wives' earnings, leading to increased financial strain, reduced self-care, and adverse health effects.

4.5.2. Financial dependency

Being dependent on their husbands for survival and child maintenance makes it harder for unemployed spouses to leave their partners (Centre for the study of violence and reconciliation 2016: 12). *I rely on him financially, so I find it difficult to leave the relationship* (P10). *My children will suffer with basic needs because I know if we can separate, he will not provide for the children at all* (P3). This finding indicates that the participant is not aware of the process of applying for spousal and child maintenance at the nearest magistrate court.

The victims are able to tolerate abuse because they fear difficulties in providing for their children and themselves due to financial strains like debts and loss of income, as well as low income that does not cover the family's basic needs (Limpopo Department of Transport and Community Safety 2024: 26-27). *We are also depending on him financially even when he supports us partially financially* (P4). *..... I cannot leave due to financial dependence on husband* (P8). *I cannot leave the marriage because I'm unemployed* (P14, 15 & 17) *and I don't have any capital to start building the house* (P17). *We are depending on his pension grant* (P19). This finding reveals that married women who lack financial independence fear that they are unable to afford a different place to live and feel stuck in their relationship. The researcher further emphasises that the power imbalance resulting from their inability to support themselves financially reinforces control by the husband.

4.5.3 Psychosocial bonds

Psychosocial factors significantly influence women's choices to stay in abusive relationships. The desire for a father figure for their children can compel women to tolerate such situations, as father absence may negatively affect children's self-esteem and behaviour. Additionally, insecure-resistant attachment patterns lead to internalised blame and a fear of isolation, further hindering their ability to leave. Factors such as age and societal shame also contribute to their predicament, creating a conflict between securing stability for their children and the inherent dangers of the relationship.

4.5.3.1 Number of children

To be legitimate, children need to be conceived by their parents (male and female) within marriage (Phala 2020: 65). Married women have a fear of raising the children alone, so they would rather remain in the abusive relationship (Ahiaku & Ajani 2022: 171). The participants had children from previous relationships. They find it difficult to leave marriage because they do not want to conceive children further with different fathers. *I have 3, two from the previous relationship (P1). He further bragged that I'm having three children and the pregnant one, meaning no one will need a burden woman (P3). Firstborn is not his biological child (P4 & 16).....3, but all of them are born out of wedlock. Having a child before marriage enabled me to stay in the abusive marriage because I was tired of having children with different fathers (P6).....First and second born are not his biological children (P8).....The father of first born never executed the parental responsibilities towards her. I had to drop out of the school to take care of my toddler (P11)....One from the previous relationship and other with the husband (P14).* Children play a vital role in hindering married women from leaving the relationships (Mathebula 2021: x). The researcher supports the participants and scholars that the number of children is perceived as a burden when starting a new life, which pressurises them to endure the marriage.

4.5.3.2 Fear of lacking a father figure

Father is a vital disciplinary figure, role model, and influencer of social growth and competitive spirit. At the same time, fatherlessness is considered significantly detrimental, potentially causing poor developmental outcomes in children whose maternal care alone cannot fully compensate beyond financial support (Ahiaku & Ajani 2022: 174). *I do not want my children to be raised by the person who is not their father (P21). Firstborn is not his biological child..... My mother just said I have to tolerate and I have the children with him so the children are not supposed to be raised by the single parent (P12). His mother said if I divorce, the child will lack a father figure (P7).* The researcher agrees that availability and presence of both parents ensure family stability, supervision and discipline but not used as a weapon to abuse children. Freeks & De Jager (2023: 2) also support these findings that many detrimental effects on children, including psychological torment, bullying, low self-esteem, and poor academic performance, are associated with father absence, which is linked to higher rates of child abuse and neglect, behavioural issues, and poverty perpetuation, which causes mental and financial distress.

4.5.3.3 Social learning

SLT detected key factors which are modelling, childhood trauma, and the transmission of intergenerational behaviour, suggesting that children in abusive settings may replicate similar behaviours (Makongoza 2024: 36). SLT asserts that past experiences shape individual perspectives, influenced by cultural and psychological factors affecting abuse dynamics.

Learning through observation

Bandura's SLT provides a framework for understanding how abusive behaviour is normalised and reproduced across generations, complementing the analysis of how cultural proverbs are weaponised (Ranape 2023: 46). P8's account of being the other woman before becoming a wife illustrates the cyclical nature of learned behaviour, where infidelity is modelled and then replicated. *My husband was cheating his first wife with me, I met him while he was married, and I was also married to a certain man, he is currently cheating with different women and conceived three children out of wedlock (P8).* Marital

abuse behaviour is learned during childhood and then replicated throughout adulthood (Firmansyanh & Saepuloh 2022: 304). This finding demonstrates that husband has habit of engaging into extra-marital relationships, which is why he does not see any problems in committing to infidelity again.

Childhood trauma

Perpetrators of marital abuse have experienced challenges during their childhood, such as not being praised when they accomplish positive responsibilities, being taught that failure reflects individual weakness, and being often blamed for household challenges (Bates 2016: 147). *My aunt was a return soldier, and my uncle is divorced as he was consuming alcohol excessively and abusing his wife. I want to break the culture of marital curse in my family. I will tolerate. I cannot return to parental home.... My husband is bewitched, and I will ensure that he gets spiritual healing, which can assist him to stop beating me* (P5). This finding demonstrates that P5 experienced her aunt's abusive divorce from her husband and her uncle's divorce from his wife due to his substance abuse and neglect of family needs. She expressed a desire to end the generational curse of divorce in her maternal family, acknowledging the abuse in marriages while feeling that the absence of healthy marriages brings a curse upon the family. This finding revealed that observing significant others suffering in their marriages enables her to be urged to break the cycle of marital separation or divorce. It further indicates that married women are struggling with the desire to correct the mistakes of their significant others, which she does not have control over the past living experiences of family members. Albert Bandura's SLT explained that a person's behaviour, even as an adult or an older person, reflects their family of origin and upbringing. He additionally encouraged individuals to abstain from illegal activity and poor behaviour since children learn more through observation (Sewela 2023: 9-10).

Modelling

Albert Bandura emphasised the value of social connection in comprehending human behaviour (Firmansyanh & Saepuloh 2022: 303-304). The participants disclosed that their parents did not endure marital abuse and that they grew up in a stable household. They

considered their parents to be positive role models (P6 & P9). Since they learned the value of marriage and parenting from both parents, they find it difficult to leave violent marriages (P6 & P9). According to P10, a healthy marriage is characterised by open communication, a lack of secrets, financial transparency, a sense of accountability, no extramarital affairs, impartial child discipline, and setting a good example. *Pinyana ge e re ping e bone e kgolo means that the child's actions are a reflection of their parents' or adults' actions, whether they are favourable or negative* (P9). P10 fears being the first member of the family to return to the parental house in this married situation. *My parents were role models of good parenting. Because they spent lot of time together, so I had a fear of disappointing them, they also had challenges in their marriage but they considered separation or divorce* (P10). This finding indicates that participants fear being the first generation to end a marriage, as they feel a responsibility to maintain a happy marriage.

4.6 Social ecology of marital abuse: Decision, support, and institutional response

4.6.1 Disclosure and family responses

4.6.1.1 Empathy and support

The findings revealed that disclosure of marital abuse to family and friends was a significant act of courage for participants, undertaken with the purpose of seeking intervention and support (Selebano 2019: 65). Disclosure resulted in responses characterised by empathy, sympathy, and compassion, which affirmed participants' worth and prioritised their safety and healing. Five participants reported disclosing abuse to significant others including children, parents and siblings. Participants described receiving messages of hope, protection, and encouragement to leave abusive marriage. *My friends and children are source of support and encouraged me to return from parental home. They showed me the importance of healthy life and that the husband will kill me one day if I continue staying with him* (P1 & P3). *The family said it is better to return home alive than returning being a cop. They even informed me that they have a fear of my safety and children as the abuse does not stop but persist* (P5). *My siblings encouraged me to move out of the toxic relationship because they do not want to see me dead because of the behaviour of my husband* (P18). *My parents told me to leave the marriage*

because I still have space in my parental home. My father also promised to give me capital to start new stand. They informed me that it is better to come home alive than dead. His family support his abusive behaviour (P21).

These findings are consistent with Dermott & Fowler (2020: 2), who argue that support from significant others demonstrates willingness to accompany victims on their journey of healing. They also align with Fisher & Harrison (2018: 39) who highlighted that close familial ties, underpinned by the African Philosophy of Ubuntu which is “we are, therefore I am” emphasise collective responsibility and care during difficult times.

From the researcher’s perspective which is informed by SLT, the empathy and support received by the participants from parents, siblings and children directly contradicts the expectations of fogohlela seropeng. While the proverb demands silence and endurance, family members in this study redefined loyalty as protecting life over preserving marriage. Thus, this finding demonstrates that strong family support system can serve as a protective factor that enable women to challenge cultural norms of silence and safeguard both their own and children’s wellness.

4.6.1.2 Lack of compassion

The findings indicate that the participants who disclosed abuse to extended family members and in-laws often encountered a lack of empathy and understanding regarding the effects of marital abuse (Davies 2022: 5). Unlike immediate family, extended family tended to minimise the abuse and emphasised endurance over safety. Seven participants, P2, P4, P7, P11, P15, P18 & P20, reported negative responses from in-laws and extended family. Participants described being told to tolerate abuse as a normal part of marriage. *I informed his sisters and brothers and they responded that their brother did not marry me to give me money P18. They further indicated that there are lot of people who are abused and they tolerate and protect husband P7. On 2011 I informed my aunt, his aunt, his mother and responded that my family did not provide me with intensive pre-counselling during marriage (P4). My mother in law said lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi and to fogohlela seropeng because all the married women they endure marital abuse (P18).....my mother in law said most women encounter abuse and extra marital affairs*

and tolerate them.....she further said I have to appreciate the fact that he is providing us with the little basic needs such as 50 kg of maize meal (P2). Uncle informed me that it is the duty of woman to tolerate the abuse because lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi and that the girlfriends will want him because I take good care of him (P11). His family said I must endure abuse to preserve marriage (P20). This finding supports Davies (2022:5), who asserts that extended family members often lack comprehension of the impact of marital abuse. It also demonstrates the normalisation of abuse within marital relationships, where the preservation of the institution of marriage is prioritised over wellbeing of women.

From the perspective of researcher, and drawing on Cycle of violence theory and the concept Symbolic abuse, proverbs such as *lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi* and *fogohlela seropeng* function as cultural tools used by extended family to enforce silence and compliance. These proverbs communicate that a woman's duty is to endure, regardless of abuse, and that leaving would lead to the collapse of family structures. Thus, this finding reveals how symbolic abuse through proverbs perpetuates marital abuse by legitimising it and discouraging help-seeking. It underscores systematic issues where women's safety is sacrificed to maintain family and cultural expectations.

4.6.1.3 Guilt trapping

The findings show that participants experienced guilt trapping as a form of pressure to remain in abusive marriages. Participants reported being blamed for bringing shame to the family and were requested to tolerate abuse for the sake of children's and family reputation (Childress et al. 2024: 1208). Three participants described being told that leaving would harm their children and that they were responsible for keeping family together. *His biological mother said I must tolerate the abusive marriage because a child will grow without father who might affect her academically (P7). Children need father figure, it is going to be difficult to raise them alone (P12 & P13).* This finding reveals that women are positioned as the protectors of the family, even when the husband mistreats them or their children. It further implies that if married women decide to leave the marriage, they risk being blamed for the absence of a father figure. This corresponds

with Ziyahlo (2023: 17), who noted that married women are placed in precarious position where they are held accountable for their husbands' behaviour.

From the researcher's perspective informed by SLT, guilt trapping functions as a mechanism of control that reinforces fogohlela seropeng. Cultural expectations shift accountability from the perpetrator to the victim, demanding that women endure abuse to prevent family shame and to fulfil the role of "keeping the home". The researcher agrees with participants that those who encourage tolerance do not understand the impact of abuse on women and children. Thus, guilt trapping demonstrates how women are forced to choose between their own safety and societal expectations of motherhood and marriage.

4.6.2 Institutional responses

Seeking assistance is an indication of a transformational journey that helps manage pain (Turpin 2024: 42). The participants acknowledged that the government and civil society organisations are implementing programmes for creating awareness on GBVF. *The government is trying by all the means to educate us about domestic violence but at the end the decision is us (P 10, 11, 12). We do have information, the decision depend on us victims regarding weather we leave or stay. To be honest staying in that relationship is putting the lives of us women and the children in danger (P13).* The participants acknowledged awareness of marital abuse and consulted different role players, such as social workers, pastors, psychologists, clinical nurses and law-enforcement practitioners, who helped them understand that they were not responsible for the abuser's behaviour (Davies 2022: 43).

In contrast, some institutional responses reinforced culture of silence. Participants reported that social workers prioritised family preservation over safety of victim. *Social worker advised us about importance of family and family preservation looking into the consideration that as parents we are role models even when abuse was severe (P11). The social workers reprimanded him but he just stopped abusing me emotionally for the three months and relapsed (P16).* This finding align with Sibanda (2019:66), who argued that secondary victimisation occurs due to official's lack of training in providing

psychosocial services to victims of marital abuse. It also supports Davies (2022: xxi), who asserts that women who experience marital abuse need justice, intensive counselling, safety, and protection.

From the researcher's perspective, institutional responses are contradictory. While government campaigns challenge *fogohlela seropeng* by discouraging disclosure, some frontline practitioners reproduce it by emphasising family unity. Thus, institutions can either be a source of liberation or source of secondary abuse, depending on whether they prioritise the victim's safety or preservation of marriage.

4.7 Consequences of abuse

4.7.1 Impacts on the self

Psychological scars from verbal abuse severely affect self-esteem and identity, leading to trauma-related problems such as memory impairment and emotional exhaustion. This form of abuse is associated with an increased risk of depression and mental health disorders, as well as heightened vulnerability to HIV through coerced sexual activities. Additionally, marital abuse causes public humiliation and emotional strain, impacting not only victims but also their families, particularly children, who may face long-term trauma and academic disruptions. This situation underscores the urgent need for awareness and intervention strategies for those impacted.

4.7.1.1 Psychological scars

Verbal abuse leaves deep psychological scars that are irreparable even when the victim can attempt to forgive the perpetrator (Turpin 2024: 5). *He used to tell me that no man will propose to me or love me if I can leave him because I did not completed the grade 12 and I'm unemployed. He further bragged that I'm having three children and the pregnant one meaning no one will need a burden woman. He also expressed to me that I can only get employed at community programmes which is hired through political activity (P3). P3 experienced stress due to humiliation resulted from his unemployment status and lack of Grade 12 education, but he claimed that he made me favour with marriage. He informed*

me that he made me favour for marrying me. He insults me with private parts daily, which made me feel not important in life (P22). P22 experienced insults by referencing her with private parts, which diminished her sense of self-confidence. These results show that they are subjected to symbolic abuse, which lowers their self-esteem, as they are perceived as burdens due to the number of children they have. Symbolic harm, in which perpetrators use spoken words, images, and symbols to attack the victim, is associated with certain psychological injuries. When a word is used to hurt someone, it is never forgotten

4.7.1.2 Trauma and depression

Trauma associated with marital abuse can affect memory functioning, concentration challenges and sleep disorders (Lee & Blackwell 2019: 30). *This marriage is affecting me psychologically...I always get angry when I treat the patients (P15). This abuse is affecting my work performance. I forget things easily, I take my anger to the children, and sometimes I lose focus at work. I'm tired of crying (P5).* Marital abuse led to anger and frustration, which negatively affected the psychological state of the participants, resulting in anger during patient care and impacting work performance. Marital abuse can lead to bodily harm, trauma, low self-esteem, aggressive actions, and sexual issues (Sibande 2019: 16). The trauma can also enable women to question their worth and self-esteem.

Depression and an elevated risk of various mental health problems are linked to marital abuse (Turpin 2024: 33). *I spent three weeks admitted to hospital, treated for depression (P1). Last year I was admitted to hospital to treat depression. I find it difficult to sleep; I forget easy (P2). I'm tired of being diagnosed with depression and high blood pressure every time I consult at the clinic (P16). I started to blame myself by regarding myself as a failure (P7).*

4.7.1.3 Physical effects

HIV transmission is more likely to occur among women who have experienced abuse, as they frequently do not consent to sexual activity with their husbands, and others consent to sex under duress (Selebano 2019: 20). Five participants contracted HIV due to unfaithful partners. Extra-marital sexual relationships are the main factor in HIV transmission, as the wife believes that committing to marriage instills the trust of having

sex with one person only (Izudi & Kadengye 2022: 3). *This marriage infected me with HIV (P17 &18). The marriage affected me physically because I have a chronic illness (HIV) and am currently adhering to treatment (P19). He infected me with HIV (P20). I'm currently HIV positive because of him, with the motive of "monna ke thaka o a naba", highlighting that man is a bean which is spreading (P22). This marriage affected me physically because my high blood pressure sometimes becomes unstable because of stress (P21). I'm tired of being diagnosed with depression and high blood pressure every time I consult at the clinic (P16).* Ifekoya (2017:17) agree with the concerns of participants that lack of using condoms and extramarital affairs puts faithful partners at risk of contracting HIV (Ifekoya 2017: 17). Sefoka (2017: 23) and Limpopo Department of Transport and Community Safety 2024, validated the concerns of participants over infection by HIV that African men have tendency of having more than one sexual partner which is influenced by Sepedi proverbs, *monna ke thaka o a naba, monna ke phoka o lala a e wa boshego and monna ke selepe re a adimishana* support infidelity and adultery for men.

4.7.1.4 Social effects

The participants revealed loss of dignity and confidence within their community following their husbands' relocations to live with extramarital partners, resulting in feelings of humiliation. *I lost dignity in the community, especially by relocating to stay with the girlfriend....One day my husband kissed the girlfriend in front of me (P12). The husband relocated to stay with the extra-marital partner I lost respect in the community because the extra-partner is staying within the community (P22). This marriage ruined my dignity (P4). I'm so strained emotionally. At least currently I'm employed; I can be able to provide for myself and the children. She sighed. You cannot believe that I found that he is having extramarital affairs with a subordinate, so I posted the picture of that girlfriend to the colleagues. I feel lost dignity (P10).* Marital abuse led to public humiliation or embarrassment, which decreased the reputation of the participants (Rai & Pallavi 2025: 52).

Male children who witnessed marital violence tend to resolve their challenges with peers through violence. Conversely, girls find it difficult to report bullying to the adult support system. Children exposed to the emotional, physical or sexual abuse of their mothers or caregivers by their intimate partners continue to have serious social problems (Lehmann & Spence in Roberts & White 2007: 181). They are at high risk of developing forms of violent behaviour (Walker 2017:117). *My child is bullying other learners (P14) and anger issued (P 8) my son has beaten him (P16). My child cried when he saw the behaviour of her father. My two children are currently in prison because they found it difficult to handle the domestic violence which their father was doing to me. They turned to substance abuse to ignore their family situation. The other one went to a rehabilitation Centre with the purpose of stopping using Cocaine, but he relapsed. They were arrested for house robbery (P18).* Continuous and constant parental conflict has damaging effects on children, such as financial complications, especially if the perpetrator is a breadwinner, which leads to a high level of stress that contributes to depression. The children who stay in a household affected by domestic violence find it difficult to heal psychologically, as they are learning to adjust to a crime scene.

4.7.2 Intergenerational Impact: Effects on children

The psychosocial impact of marital abuse on children is profound, undermining their sense of belonging and safety. Experiencing such abuse leads to long-term trauma, emotional difficulties, and behaviour problems, with children often feeling hopeful for change while also struggling with anger.

4.7.2.1 Psychosocial impact

The family is an important structure that provides members with a sense of belonging and uniqueness and acts as a source of relaxation, warmth, encouragement, protection and safety (Niehaus 2016: 42). It is an important structure that shapes the values and behaviour of family members through direct or indirect influences from the actions of parents (Fisher & Harrison 2018:193). *The children said they love both of us, but they are tired of seeing me unhappy (P16). My firstborn child, who is 10 years have the hope that one day my father can change his behaviour and become a responsible parent. He has*

an urge of responsible parent who can treat her mother in an acceptable way (P9). However, children find themselves vulnerable to violence or witness it, which can cause long-term trauma. This data revealed that abuse was often conducted in front of the children.

The impact of marital abuse on children is profound, as they struggle to heal psychologically while adapting to a crime scene atmosphere. They often face challenges in enjoying childhood, feeling lonely and overly cautious, which can lead to poor impulse control and emotional expression (Mazikana 2023). *My children associate me with the lion because of the abuse which I tolerated (P3). My child informed me that it is better to lose the father than the mother (P7).* This finding suggests that the children recognise the abuse that their mother endures and feel that they can survive without their father, highlighting the emotional gap created by the absence of a positive father figure despite sharing the same residence.

4.7.2.2 Academic impact

The children who witnessed the abuse from their parents display the following signs calling the teacher with names, making noise, disruptive talking, distracting other learners, bunking the lessons, clowning or making unnecessary jokes, lack of participation in academic matters, intimidation and laughing at others, interfering with learning activities, being late or leaving the class early and tardiness (Sewela 2023: 25-26). *My child is bullying other learners (P4). The lastborn is bullying the children at school. His academic progress also dropped, especially when his father decided to stay with the side-chick (P17). My firstborn is the one who is affected He is bullying the children in the school (P21).* Selebano (2019: 33) supported this finding that marital abuse experienced by parents causes serious social and psychological harm, which is undeniable. As a researcher, I take the position that marital abuse does not affect only the children living with the victim and perpetrator, but also the children at school as they become concerned about seeing their peers with feelings of aggression, retaliation and interference with

learning activities. This emphasises that the influence of *fogohlela seropeng* affects family and society.

4.8 Navigating the crossroads: Decisions to leave or remain

4.8.1 Decisions to leave marriage

Leaving an abusive marriage is more complicated when families and cultural matters are involved than when a couple has simply registered their marriage at the Department of Home Affairs without involving family and community members (Phala 2020: 63). Five participants decided to leave the marriage for different reasons. *I decided to leave the marriage because I felt that he would kill me one day because he was beating me for nothing. I also informed myself that this person failed four marriages, which means he is not ready to change (P1). I took a tough decision to leave the marriage. Two weeks later, he assaulted my first born who is studying at college and informed her to leave the yard. He instructed the two children which are not his biological children to leave the house (P3).* This means that the participant was obliged to choose between marriage and the children. *I was tired of fogohlela seropeng, I was really tired so I left the marriage (P6).* Repeating the word exhaustion of *fogohlela seropeng* showed the motive to leave marriage. The researcher observed the feeling of determination of P6. *I decided to separate with him. Now I have full one year without him. ...To be honest I'm psychologically and physically relieved from the violence (P8). I was further up and I thought this person will end up killing me, so I left marriage (P18). As I communicate with you now I'm going to fetch my belongings to my parental home. I thought the immediate family members will judge me but they welcomed me with good hands. They appreciated the fact that I returned alive. However is going to be difficult to start new life (P14). I'm in the process of leaving the marriage. I bought the residential stand and I'm in the process of building two rooms. I informed him. I think after three months I will leave to my home if things will work according to my plans. I'm tired of being diagnosed with depression and high blood every time when I consult at clinic (P16).* From the researcher's perspective these findings revealed resilience and expertise of the participants through recognition of family as support system of moving from abusive marriage.

4.8.1.1 Rediscovery

Rediscovery assisted the participants in realising that their life and health are paramount. The participants decided to prioritise their well-being and leave the marriage due to its detrimental impact on health, including exacerbated depression and high blood pressure. *I'm tired of being diagnosed with depression and high blood pressure every time I consult at the clinic* (P16). Personal safety concerns stemming from past physical abuse and the partner's failed marriages also contributed to the decision of leaving marriage. I decided to leave the marriage because I felt that he would kill me one day because he was beating me for nothing... *I also informed myself that this person failed four marriages, which means he is not ready to change* (P1). This finding aligns with the Department of Social Development (2021: 1), which showed that the decision to leave marriage rests upon the individual, which is reinforced by different circumstances. The researcher supports the participants and the Department of Social Development (2021) that people are experts in their own lives; they realise their challenges and have solutions from their internal perceptions. They also recognise the future challenges upon their decisions.

4.8.1.2 Cumulative effect

The participants left the marriage, as they realised that they do not have the power to change the behaviour of the perpetrators where abusive escalated without any sign of remorse. *I took a tough decision to leave the marriage. Two weeks later, he assaulted my firstborn, who is studying at college and told her to leave the yard. He instructed the two children, who are not his biological children, to leave the house* (P3). *I was tired of being beaten without any reason, so my life was in danger* (P18). *Every time he returned from the tavern around 02:00 am, he beat me and shout for the children, so I realised that this person cannot change as long as I share same residence with him* (P22). P1 and P8 experienced a great deal of physical and psychological relief from abuse after escaping marriage. Department of Social Development (2021: 30) recognised that leaving a toxic environment is the next step in the healing process after the realisation of marital abuse. According to Lee & Blackwell (2019: 19), personal change has the ability to bring an end to abuse, find coping mechanisms to address previous marital abuse, and empower other

victims. The researcher supports the Department of Social Development (2021) and Lee & Blackwell (2019) that personal change can end abuse. I interpret the quote as evidence of Walker's Cycle of Violence Stage 4 and 5 where tension becomes intolerable. The delay of moving out of abusive marriage can be influenced by the proverb *fogohlela seropeng*.

4.8.2 Reinforced reasons for staying

4.8.2.1 Insecure-resistant attachment

The participants showed that they remain in the marriage because of insecure-resistant attachment. People who are not honest are likely to be thoughtful, insecure, and unwilling to show their emotional state to others (Bates 2016:62). Women who remain in abusive marriages put their own and children's lives in danger, but they are afraid to leave and feel alone because they may lose friends, family, or money, which they developed during marriage.. *I think I have the challenge of starting afresh with new partner (P21). I won't leave the marriage due to my age. I never had the thought of leaving the family. In Sepedi culture you will be tortured for being return soldier (P13).* Attachment enabled the victim to imagine the world without the husband or intimate partner as useless as a result of denial for facing reality (Fisher & Harrison 2018:6). This finding shows that insecure-resistant attachment compounded by *fogohlela seropeng* with enhances denial for facing reality.

4.8.2.2 Unemployment status

Inability to pay for basic necessities for themselves and her children enabled unemployed married women to stay in their relationships (Rai & Pallavi 2025: 54). Most married women tolerate abuse due to fear of difficulties in providing for their children and themselves due to financial strains like debts, as well as low income that does not cover the family's basic needs (Limpopo Department of Transport and Community Safety 2024: 26-27). Seventeen participants reported feeling unable to leave their marriages due to unemployment and a lack of resources. *I rely on him financially (P2 & P10). I'm unemployed, having three children and currently pregnant meaning I cannot leave (P3). We are depending on him financially even when he just provide with little money (P4).*

.....financial dependence on husband (P8). I am unemployed and fully depending on him financially (P14 & 15). I cannot leave the marriage because I'm unemployed and I don't have any capital to start building the house (P17). We are depending on his pension (P19). Researcher supports the above scholars and participants that although there is a desire to end abusive marriage, many feel practically trapped due to reliance on their husbands for basic necessities.

Although most participants showed that they remained in marriage due to financial dependency on perpetrators, there are seven participants who decided to remain in the marriage even when they are employed and have the ability to pay the household bills and contribute towards the maintenance of the children. *I am a government official, while he is unemployed and he stole my card to provide money to his girlfriends... I cannot return to parental home. I don't have good relationship with my mother and she will laugh and label me as a return soldier (P5). I am government official and I'm earning more salary as compared to him... He is using his little salary to those extra-marital affairs.... He further informed psychologist that cheating boosts his confidence because I'm earning more than him (P21). I am government official with 31 years of experience. My husband was not employed at all, I'm the one who provide with basic needs at home, I bought vehicle but I'm not driving it. After getting my monthly salary he has habit of giving girlfriends my salary (P6).* Increased economic activity and independence among women may be perceived as a threat by less affluent men, potentially resulting in the misuse of female influence within marital relationships, this dynamic is observable when an unemployed husband's diminished household power is associated with his wife's employment, stemming from traditional cultural expectations of men as primary providers (Mathebula 2021: 42). These findings reveal that the proverb *fogohlela seropeng* or enduring abusive marriage does not affect women who are unemployed only.

4.8.2.3 Lack of father figure

One of the participants disclosed that she experienced an absence father, in contrast to P9, who stated that both parents were present in her life so that they did not want their children to feel a gap due to the lack of fathers. Many detrimental effects on children,

including psychological distress, bullying, low self-esteem, and poor academic performance, are associated with father absence, which is linked to higher rates of child abuse and neglect, behavioural issues, and poverty perpetuation because of a lack of financial assistance, which causes mental and financial distress (Freeks & De Jager 2023: 2). *I decided to continue staying in the relationship because I grew without the father so I don't want my children to experience father gap* (P5). P5 reached the decision to stay married to shield the children from the father gap that she went through. For the sake of the children, P9 felt compelled to put up with her partner's toxic conduct since it would be difficult to introduce them to another man. Insufficient financial support perpetuates poverty, prompting some women to remain in unhealthy relationships to prevent a father gap for their children.

4.9 Participant-derived solutions and recommendations

4.9.1 Leaving the marriage

Despite the decision to stay in an abusive marriage, all the participants recommended leaving the relationship upon identification of red flags as a sustainable solution. *Leave the marriage as soon as possible and take education seriously* (P1, 2, 14)... *Move out of the relationship as soon as you identify the symptoms of abuse because the abuse cannot be reduced, but instead it is escalating* (P6). *Leave the marriage as soon as possible before doing too much damage and the violence becomes chronic* (P7). These findings illustrate that the participants have an understanding of the cycle of violence that marital abuse starts with tension building, escalates to intermediate battering, proceeds to a habit of apologising after abusing the victim, which leads to a chronic stage with a pattern of normal recurrence (Selebano 2019: 11-16). The researcher is of the opinion that the participants understand the patterns used by their perpetrators and understand that the possibilities of positive behaviour modifications are rare.

4.9.2 Demand for accountability

People demanded that the perpetrator take responsibility for marital abuse. *Men need to understand that women also experience pain from abuse..... (P12). Husbands must be punished for abusing women (P22). I wish people who attend family meetings of marital abuse can understand the pain of women and reprimand men (P7).* P7 wishes that family meetings would shift from reprimanding women to holding men accountable. The researcher interprets these statements as participants rejecting the cultural normalisation of abuse embedded in fogohlela seropeng and instead invoking constitutional rights to dignity and freedom as outlined in Sections 10 and 12 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

Through the lens of SLT, this demand of accountability reflects a shift from private, family-mediated conflict resolution to state-mediated justice. From my position as a DSD practitioner, I observed that DVA and Criminal Law Amendment (TRIO Act) operationalize this demand through protection orders and NRSO registration, which participants such as P22 implicitly support in their call for punishment. However, I contend that legislation alone is insufficient if community structures such as family meetings continue to avoid confronting male perpetrators. Thus, participants' recommendations highlight a gap between legal accountability and social accountability.

Participants identified the need for targeted strategies to engage men in GBVF prevention. *The SAPS officials and other government departments are informing us about domestic violence, but the problem is that men do not attend those important meetings (P12 & P13). Social workers and other government officials must start to help the abusers, which can assist in discouraging negative masculinity (P2). DoJCD must strengthen their awareness among men to discuss with them the long-term disadvantages of abusing women, such as having a criminal record, which can affect their possibility of getting employment (P1). I think the government is trying by all means to educate us about domestic violence, but in the end the decision is ours (P8).* The researcher interprets these recommendations as evidence that participants view men not only as perpetrators but as potential agents of change if reached through culturally relevant interventions, as suggested by Morna et al., (2019: 69). Through the lens of masculinity and patriarchy, I argue that the problem is not a lack of information, but hegemonic masculinity that frames

GBVF meetings as women's issues and therefore stigmatise male attendance. From my position as a DSD practitioner, I contend that current awareness campaigns fail because they do not address men's fear of losing status or employment, which P10 correctly identifies as a deterrent. I therefore argue that effective intervention must move beyond informing men to transforming masculine norms through male associates, workplace programmes, and community dialogues that reframe accountability as strength, not weakness. Reaching men can assist to respond to Pillar two of NSP, which is encouraging dialogue that can provide an understanding of their frustrations and possible solutions to curb marital abuse (National Strategic Plan 2020).

4.10 Conclusion

The findings of this study unequivocally demonstrate that Sepedi proverb *fogohlela seropeng*, far from being a benign cultural artefact, is a potent instrument weaponised within marriages in EMLM to rationalise and perpetuate abuse. This weaponisation operates within a complex ecosystem of patriarchal interpretation, economic dependency, and systemic failure. Women's entrapment is not a result of ignorance but rather a calculated outcome of this cultural coercion, compounded by financial precocity and inadequate institutional support. The profound psychological and intergenerational impacts detailed here underscore the urgent need for interventions that move beyond legalistic approaches to directly challenge and reinterpret these weaponised cultural narratives.

The following chapter key findings, discussions, conclusions, limitations of the study, potential future research avenues, and actionable recommendations derived from the conclusions.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of key findings, a discussion and conclusion, limitations of the study, avenues for future research, and actionable recommendations drawn from the conclusion.

5.2 Summary of key findings

5.2.1 Interpretation and weaponisation of Sepedi proverbs

Evidence indicates that abusers and families do not misinterpret the proverbs; rather, they invoke a specific, patriarchal interpretation to justify control. As the researcher, I contend that *fogohlela seropeng* is not merely misunderstood but actively weaponised within marital relationships to enforce silence and normalise abuse. In dialogue with the literature, this finding supports Ranape (2023), who noted that proverbs can promote both respect and oppression at the same time. I support Ranape that, in most times can

promote oppression during family meetings. Thus, the findings extend existing literature by showing weaponisation is intentional, not accidental.

5.2.2 Awareness and typologies of abuse

The findings demonstrated clear awareness of four types of marital abuse, which are physical, emotional, financial and sexual. However, the researcher interprets that awareness does not translate into action due to stigma, financial dependence and trauma bonding. Through the lens of the Cycle of Violence theory, I argue that the struggle to confront reality reflects stage 1, which is tension building, where women minimise abuse to survive. In relation to literature, this confirms Morna et al (2019) that women understand GBVF typologies, but I contend that Morna overlooks the role of extra-marital affairs and financial neglect as emotional abuse. The study further shows that extra-marital affairs and failure to provide, as reported by participants, violate Sections 10 and 12 of the Constitution, extending legal literature by linking constitutional rights to lived experiences of psychological harm and low self-esteem.

5.2.3 Factors influencing decisions to stay or leave

5.2.3.1 *Motive of leaving marriage*

Decision to leave an abusive marriage is more complex when family and cultural factors are involved. The study demonstrated that some women left due to fear for their lives, and the perpetrator's history of failed marriages and continued physical assault. Through the lens of SLT, I argue that the decision to leave is also shaped by observation and modelling. I contend that women who left due to family compassion learned that exit was possible by observing supportive models, which Bandura termed vicarious reinforcement (Firmansyanh & Saepuloh 2022). Conversely, I interpret continued assault as enactive learning, where direct experience taught women that continuing predicts more harm. Thus my findings extend Bandura by showing that in EMLM, leaving is not only an individual decision but learnt behaviour which is influenced by both negative models of perpetrators and positive models of supportive family.

5.2.3.2 *Financial dependency*

The study confirms that unemployed married women experience distress in leaving abusive relationships due to financial dependence and societal expectations against women's employment. Women tolerate abuse out of fear of financial instability, which compromises their ability to support themselves and children. As a researcher, I argue that financial dependency functions as structural entrapment, not just individual choice. Through the lens of gender roles, woman is also thought to be responsible for ensuring that the children frequently attend school, show up to meetings, keep an eye on their progress, and help with homework which is promoting power dynamics (Sefoka 2017: 20). In dialogue with the literature, this finding supports Sibanda (2019: 15) and Dunton (2022: 2) that financial abuse might lead to temporary or longstanding implications for psychological well-being since it cause people to concentrate over debts, but I extend their work by showing how *fogohlela seropeng* validate financial dependence as a cultural duty rather than structural inequality. From a legislative perspective, I interpret this as a violation of Sections 9 and 27 of the Constitution of South Africa on equality and access to social security, because social expectations prevent women from exercising economic rights. From the perspective of a DSD practitioner, I observed that women have challenges applying for child and spousal maintenance when the husband is not providing them with the basic needs.

5.2.3.3 Children

The outcomes revealed that women remain in abusive marriages due to childcare maintenance, fear of being a single parent or raising children with a non-biological father, and challenges of starting afresh. Women tolerate difficult marital situations to prevent children from experiencing psychological distress and behavioural issues associated with the absence of a father. Through attachment theory, I argue that mothers' decisions reflect anxious attachment to children's wellbeing over their own safety. Through the lens of SLT, I contend that children also learn to normalise violence by observing maternal tolerance, which might perpetuate the Cycle of violence. Ahiaku & Ajani (2022: 171), Attachment theory, and SLT support the findings that married women have a fear of raising the children alone, so they would rather remain in an abusive relationship. Legally, I argue that this violates Section 28 of the Constitution of South Africa on children's right

to protection from harm because exposure to domestic violence constitute to harm in terms of Section 150 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended. As a practitioner of DSD, I contend that child protection services must shift from removing children to supporting mothers economically to achieve financial autonomy and reduce children's exposure to violence.

5.2.4 Multifaceted impacts of abuse (on self and children)

This study documented a pervasive pattern of multifaceted abuse, encompassing financial control, physical violence, and psychological degradation. Verbal abuse left deep psychological scars that are irreparable, with symbolic harm through spoken words and images associated with depression, mental illness and diminished well-being. Marital abuse further led to public humiliation, financial pressure and chronic illness.

As the researcher, I interpret these impacts as evidence that abuse operates simultaneously on the body, psyche, and social status of women, extending beyond physical harm. Through trauma theory, I contend that verbal abuse creates "soul wounds" because words function as symbolic violence that is internalised and never forgotten as noted by Turpin (2024:5). Through linking Bandura's SLT, I argue that children exposed to beatings and financial abuse learn violence as a normative problem solving method, which explains why male children resort to bullying and females report bullying while internalising distress. This is further supported by the Sepedi proverb *pinyana ge e re ping, e bone e kgolo*, figuratively meaning that a child takes after the actions of immediate family or an adult person. Through Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, I interpret the multifaceted impacts as a systematic collapse of women's and children's needs structure. I contend that financial control and withholding resources directly attack physiological and safety needs, leaving women unable to secure food or economic security for themselves and children. In dialogue with literature, this study supports Izudi & Kadenge (2023:3) linking marital abuse to HIV or chronic illness through chronic stress, but I extend their work by showing that extramarital affairs also function as psychological abuse that destabilises existing health conditions. From the perspective of a DSD practitioner, I observe that children's expressed desire for parental separation, as found in this study,

reflects that the proverb *fogohlela seropeng* and the myth of 'staying for children' protect them.

5.3 Discussion and conclusion

5.3.1 Weaponisation of culture

African proverbs, particularly Sepedi proverbs, exert a complex influence on married women's behaviour, functioning both as cultural resources for respect and as mechanisms for conflict resolution outside legal intervention. However, as the researcher, I argue that proverbs such as *fogohlela seropeng* and *lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi* are not cultural wisdom, but are actively weaponised to enforce endurance of marital abuse and concealment of hardships. From the lens of masculinity, I contend that proverbs like *monna ga a fetolwe ke hlogo ya lapa* and *monna ke phoka o lala a e wa boshego* reproduce patriarchal authority by normalising male dominance and extramarital affairs. Through Bandura's SLT, I interpret women's endurance of abuse as a learned behaviour, where observation of elders and community role models teaches adherence to oppressive proverbs as a coping strategy, supporting Firmansyanh & Saepuloh (2022: 304). This outcome supports Selebano (2019: 12) that external factors are oppressive, but I extend Ranape (2023:66) by demonstrating that weaponisation is intentional and strategic within marital power dynamics, not merely an unintended consequence of cultural beliefs.

From a legislative perspective, I interpret this weaponisation as a direct violation of Sections 9 and 10 of the Constitution of South Africa, which guarantee equality, human dignity and freedom from violence. I further argue that the cultural jurisdiction of male authority contradicts DVA, which recognises psychological and economic abuse. Therefore, as the researcher, I conclude that while proverbs can foster respect, their selective patriarchal interpretation constitutes symbolic violence that undermines constitutional rights. This study thus contributes to scholarship by showing that cultural transformation must accompany legal reform to dismantle the weaponisation of tradition in EMLM.

5.3.2 The architecture of entrapment

The study revealed that financial dependency is a significant reason why married women stay in abusive relationships, often compounded by societal attitudes towards divorce. Unemployed women, in particular, fear financial instability that could endanger their ability to support themselves and their children. As a researcher, I argue that unemployment among women does not merely create economic vulnerability, but functions as systematic disempowerment that endangers their capacity to support themselves and their children. Through Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, I interpret fear of financial instability as a violation of physiological and safety needs, which traps women at the base of the hierarchy and prevents self-actualisation. I argue that insecure-avoidant attachment to support family, as noted by Okonkwo (2024:38), promotes exit decisions. In relation to the Cycle of Violence theory, I posit that stages 3 and 4 explain why victims recognise abuse yet deploy defence mechanisms to remain, because entrapment is both psychological and material. Therefore, as the researcher, I conclude that entrapment is architecturally designed through the intersection of economic deprivation, cultural stigma and psychological attachment, requiring DSD interventions that address material needs before therapeutic ones. This study extends Enaifoghe et al. (2021: 144) by framing entrapment as structural rather than solely individual choice.

5.3.3 Systemic failures

The study revealed that participants acknowledged the efforts of government and civil society to increase their awareness of marital abuse. As a researcher, I argue that systemic failures persist because interventions ignore how Sepedi proverbs socialise the endurance of abuse at the community level. Through Bandura's SLT, I contend that proverbs such as fogohlela seropeng, mosadi ke tshwene o lewa mabogo and lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi are observational models, teaching women to endure abuse and suppress reporting. I argue that repeated exposures to these proverbs through family and religious discourse normalises abuse, which explains why victims seek professional help yet relapse when returning to unsupportive microsystems. Through Attachment theory, I interpret women's reluctance to trust protection orders and court proceedings as anxious attachment to marriage, reinforced by fear of social rejection as a "return soldier". I posit

that insecure attachment to community and family networks prevents victims from internalising the message that they are not responsible for the actions of the perpetrators.

In dialogue with the literature, this outcome is supported by Sewela (2023: 5), who notes that government efforts to curb marital abuse exist, but I extend that cultural influence is not merely “undermined” but are active learning mechanisms that reproduce endurance of abuse. From a legislative perspective, I interpret reliance on proverbs to suppress reporting as a violation of Section 12 (1) (c) of the Constitution of South Africa and Section 4 of the Domestic Violence Act, which mandates public education to change social attitudes. Therefore, as the researcher, I conclude that systematic failure stems from the state’s failure to counter proverbial socialisation with culturally responsive education.

5.3.4 Consequences of marital abuse for oneself and significant others

The study documented a pervasive pattern of multifaceted abuse, encompassing financial control, physical violence, and psychological degradation. As the researcher, I argue that marital abuse in EMLM operates as multifaceted violence that dismantles women’s and children’s psychological, physical and financial wellbeing simultaneously. Through Attachment theory, I posit that physical abuse witnessed by children creates an insecure-disorganised attachment pattern, which explains intergenerational transmission of abuse as children model aggression or internalise helplessness. From my position as a DSD practitioner, I observed that deliberate physical assault in front of children constitutes dual victimisation, which violates Section 28 of the Constitution of South Africa.

5.3.5 Possible solutions to curb marital abuse

The study revealed the importance of leaving an abusive marriage when red flags are detected, as abuse tends to escalate. As the researcher, I contend that leaving early, seeking education and securing employment are necessary but insufficient without addressing structural barriers identified in this study. In dialogue with Mathebula (2021:47), I support the need for self-awareness, but extend Mathebula by arguing that self-awareness must be paired with economic empowerment and attachment-based counselling to counteract learned helplessness from prolonged abuse. From a legislative

perspective, I interpret Sections 10 and 12 together with Section 2 of the Domestic Violence Act as requiring proactive education of men and accountable policing by SAPS. I therefore conclude that current awareness campaigns focused on women fail because they neglect a perpetrator-focused approach.

5.4 Overall conclusion

This study concludes that the endurance of marital abuse in EMLM is fundamentally a process of cultural weaponisation, where misunderstanding of *fogohlela seropeng* functions as masculinity that silence women and compels endurance. Through synthesis of SLT, Attachment theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, I argue that the effects of marital abuse extend beyond individual victim fracture to family systems, children's development and community wellbeing. This study therefore contributes to scholarship by demonstrating that cultural beliefs do not merely influence decisions, but architecturally design entrapment through economic, psychological, and legal dimensions. I conclude that dismantling marital abuse require integrated DSD interventions such as reframing Sepedi proverbs and delivering multi-level support that restores physiological safety, esteem, and secure attachment before expecting exit or healing.

5.5 Limitations of the study

5.5.1 Methodological constraints

Qualitative methodology often emphasises fieldwork in natural settings; in contrast, the participants were interviewed at the offices of DSD because of the sensitivity of the topic to avoid eavesdropping from their husbands. The sensitivity of the topic influenced the participants' willingness to disclose their experience while maintaining confidentiality. Four participants allowed audio recording, whereas 18 participants felt uncomfortable but consented to written recording under the strict confidentiality of their personal information. The participants' real names were not disclosed to safeguard their privacy, with Participant 1 referred to as P1.

5.5.2 Scope and generalizability

The study focused only on one ward of EMLM, which is composed of three villages, namely, Phucukani, Taereng and Five Morgan, to limit generalizability to represent the entire population of the municipality. The target group included women who were married, separated or divorced and over 18 years of age and who experienced marital abuse because, legally, a person has the right to marry after reaching maturity, which is 18 years. Women who never entered into marriage were excluded. Furthermore, women who did not experience abuse during their marriages were also excluded.

Perspectives of married men were excluded, as they may dilute the focus on women's experiences of marital abuse, different power dynamics and potential silence or overshadow women's experiences. Excluding the perceptions of men assisted in ensuring that the study focused on its target population and increased the probability of validity.

5.5.3 Researcher positionality & ethics

The interview guide was written in English and translated into Sepedi. The sessions were conducted using the Sepedi language for effective communication and avoidance of language barriers. The transcripts were also translated into English. Rapport was developed, and first sessions and second sessions were conducted to minimise the potential bias in self-reports.

5.6 Avenues for future research

The literature on interpretations, misinterpretations and re-interpretations of Sepedi proverbs that promote silence, negative masculinity and infidelity, such as *fogohlela seropeng*, *lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi*, *monna ke thaka o a naba*, *monna ke phoka o lala a e wa boshego* and *monna ke tshwene o ja ka matsogo a mabedi*, is also needed in urban areas. This research can assist in obtaining different views and recommendations that can assist in developing different coping strategies.

Research that focuses on male perspectives to discuss how certain cultural proverbs perpetuate domestic abuse and infidelity in Sepedi society is needed. Proverbs such as *monna ga a fetolwe ke hlogo ya lapa*, which indicate a man's unchallengeable status,

allowing him to emotionally abuse his wife without reproach, need to be deliberated further to assist with positive reinterpretation. This cultural background, which fosters an environment in which marital abuse and infidelity are normalised, needs to be investigated to understand the feelings of victims.

5.7 Recommendations

The following recommendations were derived from the summary and conclusion of the study.

Recommendation area	Key action	Responsible stakeholder	Expected outcome
Cultural and normative shifting	Facilitating normative shifting from negative patriarchal thinking to positive masculinity	-DSD -Traditional authorities -Local government	Increased community reporting of shifts in men's attitudes towards conflict resolution, as measured in follow-up focused groups.
Development and implementation of community-led workshops and radio dramas, in partnership with traditional leaders, that offer re-interpretations of proverbs such as <i>foghlela seropeng</i> , <i>monna ke phoka o lala a e wa boshego</i> and <i>lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi</i> to emphasise mutual respect and safety over silent suffering. Detrimental cultural norms need to be reformed, given that cultural beliefs are dynamic social			

constructs, not immutable laws (Phala 2020:2). Cultural practices and social conventions which are detrimental to the wellbeing of people must be interrogated (Morna et al. 2019: 55). Proverbs and cultures which challenge toxic masculinity need to be encouraged.			
Decentralisation of psychosocial support services.	Intensive counselling.	-Social workers -Registered counsellors -Psychologist	20% increase in service intake in Ward 6 within 12 months of mobile unit deployment, which can promote self-reliance and decreased self-blame.
Victims of marital abuse are required to undergo intensive counselling, which must be rendered by professionals registered with the relevant statutory body, such as a registered counsellor, psychologist and social worker, which can help them cope with and heal from the traumatic incident (National Strategic Plan 2020: 48). DSD should fund and deploy mobile counselling units staffed by trauma-informed social workers to rural wards like Ward 6 in EMLM to improve access to psychological support. This service needs to be decentralised, which can allow the victims to access it without using costly transport. This can assist to avoid secondary trauma and develop a plan to deal with future reoccurrence of the trauma. The victims need to be assured that it is not their fault for experiencing marital abuse and must not be held accountable for the actions of the perpetrator (Rai & Pallavi 2025: 54).			
Legal, justice, and protection system strengthening.	Enforce contribution of financial maintain.	DoJCD.	Reduction in direct financial dependency.

Victims of marital abuse need to have access to an efficient and sensitive justice system that is quick, accessible, and responsive and gender inclusive (National Strategic Plan 2020–2030). The DJCD needs to create awareness regarding spousal and child maintenance. Perpetrators or spouses who use the family finances inappropriately need to be reported to the Magistrate's Court, where the Presiding officer can enforce maintenance and garnish the employer's payments. Married women need to be educated that the employed perpetrator can contribute towards the financial maintenance even in the process of separation or divorce.

Enhancing protection.	Report the cases of child exploitation which result from marital abuse.	-DSD -SAPS	Reduced number of child exploitation cases.
This study revealed that children in abusive marriages experience direct and indirect abuse, as the parents are beaten and shouted at in front of them. This entails that the children are living in an environment that is harmful to their mental health, which categorise them as in need of care and protection as stipulated in Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended. Section 110 of the highlighted legislation instructs any person who suspects child abuse to report it to SAPS or the DSD for further intervention. Although the study documented acknowledgement of the role played by DSD and SAPS regarding awareness creation, they must strengthen their awareness programmes through partnering with other relevant stakeholders such as DJCD and traditional leaders and civil society organisations for further information.			
Economic empowerment.	Creating of job opportunities and business empowerment.	-Government -Private sector, -Civil society organisations.	-Financial independence -Ability to provide themselves and children with the basic needs.

The study indicated financial reliance as the main reason for remaining in an abusive marriage. According to Section 2 of the Employment Equity Act Number 55 of 1998, government, private sector, civil society organisations, and business empowerment programmes must prioritise providing employment and commercial opportunities to vulnerable groups, such as individuals who have experienced GBVF and people with disabilities, if they meet the inclusion criteria. This attribute may assist in addressing Pillar 5 of the NSP of 2020, which is economic empowerment.

Accountability	Engaging men and boys	-DSD -Traditional leader -Anthropologist	-Increased accountability. -Reduced stigma. -Prevention of marital abuse. -Support for victims and perpetrators.
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DSD, in partnership with traditional leaders and civil society, should design and fund targeted outreach programmes for men, held in community spaces like *kgoro* or sports fields, to discuss positive masculinity and the harm of weaponising cultural proverbs. To deliver culturally relevant rights-based and democratic services, it is necessary to increase the capacity building of male members of society with relation to GBVF (Morna *et al.* 2019: 69). This can help the offenders realise that their spouses must also be guaranteed their right to dignity and to be free from torture in any way. Women who experienced abuse within the marriage must not be blamed for the actions of the perpetrator, not be regarded as the source of abuse or be labelled as a failure to preserve the healthy actions of the man (Pillar 1 of National Strategic Plan 2020). The participants demonstrated that awareness campaigns are focusing on women and neglecting males, which can help to foster accountability.

5.8 Concluding remarks

This study concludes that the proverb *fogohlela seropeng* was originally intended to preserve family dignity by protecting family secrets. It further illustrates how cultural narratives, such as *fogohlela seropeng* alongside other proverbs, are exploited to promote silence and perpetuate abuse in marriages. On-going marital abuse is seen not as a legal failure but as an outcome of these damaging cultural interpretations that maintain patriarchal dominance. The study calls for men's accountability in marital abuse and challenges existing gender roles and stereotypes to foster healthier family dynamics. Although advancements have been made in women's employment, there remains a need for men to adapt to peaceful coexistence with women, whom they often perceive as threats. The need for equitable access to academic and employment opportunities is emphasised to address marital abuse.

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Appendix A: Ethics approval certificate



College of Human Sciences_CREC

Date: 13/05/2025

Dear: Mrs Mpho Mmatalane Aphane

Decision: Ethics Approval from 13 May 2025 to 12 May 2026

NHREC Registration # : (Rec-240816-052)

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Supervisor: Mr Paseka Pharumele epharups@unisa.ac.za

Fogohlela seropeng: Exploring the misinterpretations of Sepedi proverbs and how this enables abuse within marriages in Elias Motsoaledi Municipality.

Qualification: Masters of Anthropology

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the College of Human Sciences_CREC for the above-mentioned research study. Ethics approval is granted for one year.

The **medium-risk application** was **reviewed** by the College of Human Sciences_CREC on **13 May 2025** in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College of Human Sciences_CREC.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

Appendix B: Informed consent

Name of student: Mpho Mmatalane Aphane

Supervisor : Mr SP Pharumele

Qualification : Masters of Arts in Anthropology (University of South Africa)

Name of participant:

Date of interview:.....

Title: Fogohlela seropeng: Exploring the misinterpretations of Sepedi proverbs and how this enables abuse within marriages in Elias Motsoaledi Municipality.

I,.....(Name of participant), confirm that the person asking my consent for participation informed me about the nature, procedure, potential benefit and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have sufficient opportunity to ask questions and I am prepaid to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

I am aware that the findings will be processed into research report but my participation will be kept confidential.

I agree to the verbal or written recording.

I have received a signed copy of the informed content.

Name and surname (Participant).....

Signature.....Date.....

Name and surname (Researcher).....

Signature.....Date.....

Appendix C: Request to participate in the study

Research title: Fogohlela seropeng: Exploring the Sepedi proverbs and women's abuse within marriages in Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality, Limpopo Province.

Researcher: Mpho Mmatalane Aphane

Ethics clearance reference number: 4003

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is **Mpho Mmatalane Aphane** and I am doing research with supervisor **Mr Paseka Pharumele** who is lecture in the Department Anthropology and Archaeology towards a Degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: **Fogohlela seropeng: Exploring the Sepedi proverbs and women's abuse within marriages in Elias Motswaledi Local Municipality, Limpopo Province**. Purpose of the study is to understand why married women continue to stay in abusive marriage. I will interview individually which is minimising the risks of breach of confidentiality. The study will involve semi-structured interviews. Interviews will be recorded through audio taping. Your name, identity number and address will not appear in the study. Duration of the interview will be approximately 60 minutes.

Participation is voluntary and that there is no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation. You will not receive any monetary value for participating. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form.

The research study can give closure to some participants as they will have a platform to talk about their marital challenges. Outcomes can enable them to have way forward about marital abuse.

The potential participants may feel discomfort as they give account on their marital challenges. The arrangements also have been made with local social worker and psychologist to refer the participants who may be in need of counselling services.

If supervisor has access to the information, your name and identity will not appear. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

Data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. Privacy will be protected in any publication of the information [e.g. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report].

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a minimum period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet. For future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Hard copies will be shredded and/or electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme.

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact **Mpho Mmatalane Aphane** telephonically on **0762781278** or email address on **41373847@mylife.ac.za**. The findings can be accessible on November 2026.

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact my supervisor **Mr Paseka Pharumele** telephonically on 0124293372 or through email on **epharups@unisa.ac.za** or

Aphane Mpho

Signature: M M Aphane

Appendix D: Data collection tool

Semi-structured interview guide

Introduction

Title: Fogohlela seropeng: Exploring the Sepedi proverbs and women's abuse within marriages in Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality, Limpopo Province

1. Biographical information

1.1. How old are you?

1.2 Where are you residing?

1.3 How long are you or were you in marriage?

1.4 What is your marital status? (Married, separated or divorced).

1.5 Type of marriage? (Civil marriage, customary marriage (monogamous marriage or polygamous marriage).

1.6 Do you have child/children?

1.7 If yes how many?

1.8 Did you attended the school?

If yes until which level? Primary (grade R-7), Secondary (grade 8-12), FET, Diploma, Degree or Post graduate diploma/degree?

1.9 What is your occupation or employment status?

2 Questions regarding Sepedi proverbs

2.1 How does culture play role in the marriage?

2.2 How do you understand the proverb *fogohlela seropeng*?

2.3 What are the positive factors and negative impact regarding of proverb *fogohlela seropeng* and other Sepedi proverbs?

2.4 What are African proverbs that are influencing people in the marriage and their meaning?

3. Marital abuse

3.1 How do you understand marital abuse?

3.2 When did you realise that you are experiencing marital abuse?

3.3 According to you, what can be perpetuating this abuse?

4. Disclosure

4.1 Have you disclosed marital abuse to others?

4.2. If yes, to whom and what was their response?

4.3. Did you report the matter to social workers, counsellors, SAPS, psychologists, Moshate and/or magistrate court?

4.4 If yes, what was their intervention?

5. Consequences

5.1 How did this relationship affect people close to you (Children, friends or neighbours)?

5.2 What effects did the marriage have on you (emotionally, psychologically, financially or physically)?

6. Legal intervention versus cultural intervention

6.1. Do you know any legal interventions which should protect you?

6.2. If yes, which interventions are you familiar with?

6.3. Do you know any cultural interventions which should protect you?

6.4 How do they protect?

6.5 What are the challenges and barriers of legal and cultural interventions?

7. Possible solutions

7.1 What are possible solutions that can assist the victims to liberate themselves from marital abuse?

7.2 What are suggested interventions that the stakeholders (government, civil society etc.) can do to decrease marital abuse?

Thank for participating in the study.

Appendix E: Language and technical editing certificate



Mzansi
Writers

CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

THIS IS PRESENTED TO

Mpho Mmatalane Aphone

10-07-2026

DATE

EDITOR'S
SIGNATURE

This certificate serves to confirm that your Dissertation has been professionally edited and proofread by editors at Allquill Solutions International (trading as Mzansi Writers). The editing process focused exclusively on language accuracy, grammar, spelling, and clarity. No changes were made to the content, meaning, interpretation, or scholarly arguments of the manuscript.

Appendix F: Similarity report

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29662 Words

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170867 Characters

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