

# Towards a Gender-Based Violence Index for South Africa

An overview and  
proposed way forward  
**2024**



Commission for Gender Equality



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proposed way forward

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# Foreword by the CGE

This report highlights the issue of gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) in South Africa as one of the worst scourges facing our democracy. Despite the National Strategic Plan adopted by the country in 2020 to address GBVF, the number of reported cases continues to rise. Between April 2022 and March 2023 alone, a staggering 53,498 sexual offences were reported to the South African Police Service (SAPS), with rape accounting for 42,780 of these cases. However, the accuracy and reliability of data related to GBVF remains a critical concern.

The KPMG report released in 2014 estimated the costs of GBVF in the country to be between R28 billion and R42 billion per year, which amounts to 0.9% and 1.3% of the country's annual GDP. The impact of GBVF is thus not only socio-medical but also economic, which is detrimental to the country's prospects for further economic growth.

According to the NSP, most incidents of GBVF remain undocumented, underreported, and unaccounted for within national statistics. This is despite reliable and credible data being the bedrock for policy formulation, planning, costing, implementation, evaluation, and reviewing of programmes and policies. Reliable data is central to ensuring that resources are allocated accurately as budgets follow reliable data sets. Furthermore, sound information leads to clear roles and responsibilities for key role players and can contribute towards addressing challenges and gaps in service delivery.

Currently, the country relies on two types of data sources to comprehend the extent of GBVF, namely administrative data and household survey data. The South African Police Service (SAPS) is a critical stakeholder in sourcing administrative data, but the data collected, reported, and publicised make it difficult to extract GBVF indicators as SAPS does not reflect information on gender. It is worth noting that underreporting of cases of sexual offenses like rape continues to go undetected due to various factors, including lack of trust in the criminal justice system, fear of intimidation by the abuser, fear of not being believed, a desire to avoid the stigma associated with rape, access issues with distant police stations, a lack of information or knowledge, and other challenges.

The Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has thus embarked on a project to develop the GBV Index of South Africa. The GBV Index will be a broad measure of GBVF that provides detail on the extent and nature of GBVF at all levels of society. The GBV Index will be an easy-to-calculate index that adds value by providing valuable insights into the extent and nature of GBVF in South Africa. The CGE is issuing this report as the first in a series that will be published to reflect the different phases of the development of the Index.



# Message of support from the UNFPA

In a world where the principles of equality and respect should be paramount, the scourge of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) remains an affront to our collective humanity. UNFPA is pleased to be a collaborating partner of the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) in the development of the Gender-Based Violence Index for South Africa. Expanding efforts to address GBV, this index will influence efforts beyond South Africa to the broader region and the world. The GBV Index is a testament to our unwavering commitment to confronting GBV head-on.

This has been made possible through the support of the UK Government Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO).

As we navigate the complexities of this issue, let us remember that our actions today will shape the world of tomorrow. Together, let us strive to build a future where GBV is relegated to the annals of history—a future defined by empathy, equality, and unyielding respect for the inherent dignity of every human being.

## 1. Rationale for an Index of Gender-Based Violence


Gender-based violence (GBV) is a public health concern and a human rights violation. GBV refers to any type of harm that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their factual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Pandea et al., 2019:18). In line with the sustainable development goal to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation (SDG Target 5.2), the NSP on Gender-based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) aims to address and respond to the unacceptably high levels of gender-based violence and femicide in South Africa. The NSP coordinates a coherent and strategic policy framework in response to the crisis of gender-based violence and femicide.

In the South African context, GBV is a critical area of concern with high rates of violence recorded. South Africa recorded 2 407 cases of femicide in 2017, with 1 033 of these being intimate partner femicide (Abrahams et al., 2022). Furthermore, between April 2022 and March 2023, 53 498 sexual offences (including 42 780 rapes) were recorded nationally (South African Police Service, 2023). This fact is compounded by the high levels of attrition of rape in the criminal justice system (Loots and Dunseith, 2008:8).

GBV imposes a number of costs not only on victims, but also on society. GBV imposes direct and indirect tangible economic costs. First, direct tangible costs take the form of the actual cost of healthcare required as a consequence of GBV, as well as the criminal justice system costs associated with reporting and prosecution (Matzopoulos et al., 2023). The total out of pocket medical expenditure of GBV victims in South Africa was estimated to have cost almost R10 billion in 2021 (Davis et al., 2022). Second, GBV results in indirect tangible costs by limiting the victim's participation in society and the economy, which can negatively impact educational outcomes and the loss of household incomes and productivity. GBV also diverts significant scarce resources—including financial and human resources—towards prevention and mitigation of the effects of GBV that might otherwise have been deployed in other areas of need. Estimates by KPMG (2014: 39-40) put the minimum cost of GBV to be R28.4 bn (0.9 percent of GDP in 2012/2013 Rands) with a 20 percent prevalence rate, to R42.4 bn (1.3 percent of GDP) at a 30 percent prevalence rate when combining the cost to the victims, the government, businesses and to civil society.

This research aims to construct a broad measure of GBV in South Africa. The primary purpose of this GBV index is that it will support comprehensive monitoring and tracking of the progress in the implementation of the NSP on GBVF over time. Monitoring GBV will enable stakeholders to identify GBV trends and patterns in order to allocate resources appropriately to address GBV. The index will also assist the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) in executing its mandate of monitoring the progress in evaluating whether the NSP is impactful in achieving its objectives. Importantly, the intention is that this index will provide detail on the extent and nature of GBV at different levels





of geographic disaggregation (national, provincial, district, municipal). In the future, it should also provide detail for different demographic groups (such as age and gender). Further, the index is intended to reflect characteristics of GBV, including both criminal and non-criminal forms of GBV.

The rest of this report is structured as follows: We begin by defining GBV, specifically violence against women and girls, as well as discussing the various types/forms of GBV that exist. We then introduce the idea of a GBV index, including a general discussion about the principles and workings of good indices and explore what an ideal GBV Index for South Africa might look like. Next, the available sources of GBV data in South Africa are discussed and assessed. Given the ideal index for South Africa, together with the available data, we then set out the way forward for the construction of the GBVI for South Africa.

## 2. Defining GBV

### 2.1. Formal definitions of gender-based violence

The NSP on GBVF defines gender-based violence as “violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations associated with the gender associated with the sex assigned to a person at birth, as well as the unequal power relations between the genders, within the context of a specific society” (Republic of South Africa, 2020). A similar definition is used by InterAction (2021), which describes gender-based violence as “any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e., gender) differences between females and males”.

Although the term GBV refers to any violence perpetrated against any person based on their gender, whether male or female, it is most commonly associated with the disproportionate level of violence perpetrated against women and girls. As a result, gender-based violence and violence against women are often used interchangeably. Violence against women is defined as any act of GBV that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (United Nations, 1993). In their analysis of GBV in Gauteng, Gender Links and the Medical Research Council (2022) also reference this definition from the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Thus, violence against women is a subset of gender-based violence, alongside violence against members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and against men or boys. When defining women, the NSP on GBVF uses the term to refer to any person that defines themselves as female, including cis women, trans women and feminine-identifying genderqueer and non-binary persons.

Internationally, the Council of Europe’s Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) explores these issues in detail. It defines gender-based violence as “any type of harm that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their factual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity” (Council of Europe, 2023). It also defines the more specific term ‘gender-based violence against women’ in Article 3 as “violence ... directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately” (Council of Europe, 2023).

### 2.2. Aspects of gender-based violence

GBV can be considered from a number of perspectives, including the nature of the violence, the severity of the violence, and the occurrence or time period during which the violence takes place (Walby, 2007; ISTAT, 2007; Ramirez, 2007). These perspectives aim to capture the various aspects of GBV, the understanding of which is essential for

combatting GBV. Measures of GBV with varying levels of detail already exist within the literature, and these measures generally align with these aspects of GBV.

In considering the nature of the violence, the types or forms of violence that victims may experience based on their gender are explored. Understanding the nature of violence is crucial for assessing the diversity of harmful behaviours that can be encountered by victims. Although most studies agree on the various types of violence, they may categorise them in different ways. Walby (2007) makes note of a UN definition of GBV that identifies sub-categories as intimate partner violence, harmful traditional practices, sexual violence by non-partners, sexual harassment in the workplace, and trafficking. ISTAT (2007) and Ramirez (2007) take a broader view and identify physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and economic violence as some general forms of gender-based violence, a categorisation that is also used by the Council of Europe (2023). Machisa and Van Dorp (2012) use these four categories—slightly differently described as sexual, economic, emotional, and physical violence—in their analysis of intimate partner violence. The NSP on GBVF (Republic of South Africa, 2020) also identifies physical, economic, sexual and psychological abuse as aspects of GBV, but lists them alongside “rape, sexual harassment and trafficking of women for sex, and sexual exploitation”. Irrespective of the exact classification, these broader categories can then be sub-divided for a more detailed or more focussed analysis of GBV issues. For example, the prevalence of violence can be divided into prevalence by type of violence—say physical violence—and this can be further sub-divided by environment (home, work or school) or relationship (intimate partner, family, stranger). These sub-divisions of types of violence can give insights into the severity of violence.

The severity of GBV considers the intensity and impact of the violence on victims. Recognising the severity of violence helps in gauging the immediate and long-term harm caused to survivors. Due to the complex nature of economic and psychological violence, in some cases it may not be possible to gauge the severity of the violence as directly as with the severity of sexual or physical violence. While the physical harm stemming from acts of physical or sexual violence may constitute a spectrum of harm that might be assessed in a relatively objective manner, this may be more difficult in terms of economic and psychological violence. Relatedly, the severity of different forms of physical and sexual violence may be implied by the nature of the violence and society’s response to such types of violence (as reflected in differences in sentencing guidelines, for example). Thus, for example, assault and sexual harassment may be viewed differently to murder and rape.

However, the physical harm caused by these acts is not the only way of measuring severity. Other ways of measuring the harm caused can include medical costs to the victim, the costs of therapy and recovery following the trauma, as well as the loss of income to the victim should they not be able to work either as a part of the abuse or as a result of the abuse. These non-physical measures can also be applied to the measurement of the severity of the non-physical forms of violence (economic and psychological).

Finally, occurrence and time period respectively refer to the frequency with which an act of GBV occurs, and the period of a victim's life during which the violence took place. Understanding the occurrence and frequency of GBV is essential for assessing patterns, trends, and the persistence of violence. In terms of occurrence, GBV may be experienced as ongoing or chronic violence, episodic or sporadic violence, or single or isolated incidents. Violence can also be categorised according to when in the victim's life the violence occurred, such as during childhood, adolescence, or adulthood. Chronic or episodic violence may span multiple periods in the victim's life.

## 2.3. Categories of gender-based violence

### 2.3.1 Legislation dealing with gender-based violence

The various forms of gender-based violence are dealt with by a range of South African legislation, as well as common law. Key pieces of legislation include the Sexual Offences Act 23 of 1957; the Children's Act 38 of 2005; the Protection of Harassment Act 17 of 2011; the Maintenance Act 99 of 1998; the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act 7 of 2013; the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998; Domestic Violence Amendment Act 14 of 2021; the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007; the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 13 of 2021; and the Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Act 12 of 2021. Over time, these acts and amendments to them have aimed at strengthening efforts aimed at ending gender-based violence through a victim-centred focus, closing gaps in the legal system, and ensuring that legislation remains relevant and addresses new forms of violence as they emerge. The 2021 amendments specifically give attention to issues that have arisen around GBV, such as discouraging bystanderism and mitigating secondary victimisation.

- The Sexual Offences Act (SOA) consolidates laws concerning unlawful intercourse and other sexual activities. Originally enacted as the Immorality Act, it was subsequently renamed and has been amended several times. Within the SOA, rape is defined as any non-consensual sexual penetration, where consent means voluntary and uncoerced agreement (s.2(3), s.1(2)). Sexual assault is non-consensual sexual violation. Moreover, the SOA expands the statutory offence of rape to include all forms of sexual penetration without consent, irrespective of gender.
- The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act (CLAA) brings together, reviews and extends laws related to sexual offences, such as rape, sexual assault, certain compelled acts, indecent exposure, statutory rape, child pornography, age of consent, sexual exploitation and grooming of vulnerable people, and trafficking. The act also established the National Register of Sexual Offenders (NRSO).

- The Children's Act sets out the different rights and responsibilities that children and parents have. The act has a very broad scope but, relevant to GBV, it (i) prohibits underage marriage and engagement (s.12(2)); (ii) sets boundaries related to virginity testing and male circumcision of children over the age of 16 years provided the child understands and consents to what is happening (s.12(4), (5) and (9)); (iii) creates the parental responsibility to contribute towards the maintenance of the child;<sup>1</sup> and (iv) provides that access to contraceptives cannot be prohibited for children over the age of 12 years (s.134).
- The Protection from Harassment Act (PHA) protects the rights of victims against harassment. Harassment causes harm or threatens to cause harm by unreasonably: (i) following or watching someone; (ii) approaching someone in a threatening way; (iii) hanging around a victim's home, work, school, or places the victim may be; (iv) unwanted communication which can be verbal or electronic, or other (s.(1(1a))). Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual attention and may be physical (such as touching or strip searching), verbal (such as sexual jokes, or sexual advancements), non-verbal (unwelcome gestures, indecent exposure, or unwelcome display of sexually explicit pictures), or take the form of a quid pro quo (United Nations, n.d. and s.(1(1a))). The Protection from Harassment Act also prescribes how protection orders can be obtained from a court. These orders are aimed at preventing the person from harassing a victim by stipulating what they can and cannot do. Furthermore, it is a criminal offence to contravene the terms of a protection order (s.(18)).
- The Domestic Violence Amendment Act 14 of 2021 aims to (i) make small changes to existing legislation and give meaning to concepts that had previously not been described by existing legislation; (ii) outline how acts of domestic violence and related matters should be dealt with; (iii) regulate protection orders; (iv) revise the terms and conditions related to certain laws; and (v) stipulate any further clauses and requirements related to these changes (Republic of South Africa, 2022). The Domestic Violence Act defines domestic violence to include: physical abuse; sexual abuse; emotional, verbal or psychological abuse; economic abuse; intimidation; harassment; sexual harassment; related person abuse; spiritual abuse; damage to property; elder abuse; coercive behaviour; controlling behaviour; exposing a child to domestic violence; entry without consent into a complainant's permanent/temporary residence or workplace/place of study (where the parties do not share the same residence/workplace/place of study); of "any other behaviour of an intimidating, threatening, abusive, degrading, offensive or humiliating nature towards the complainant, where such conduct harms, or inspires the reasonable belief that harm may be caused to the complainant" (s.1(1)). The Domestic Violence Amendment Act also makes provisions related to protection orders (s.(4), s.(5), s.(6), s.(8), s.(10)) in response to domestic violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Maintenance is also governed by the Maintenance Act (Act 99 of 1998).

The amendments to the Domestic Violence Act and the Criminal Law Amendment Act entail an expansion of the National Register of Sex Offenders (NRSO). The NRSO now includes any person who has been convicted of a sexual offence (s.(14)). Previously, the NRSO only included sexual offenders who were found guilty of sexual offences against children and mentally disabled persons. A sex offender's particulars must remain on the NRSO for 20 years before they can be removed.

The inclusion in the Domestic Violence Amendment Act of spiritual abuse, elder abuse, coercive behaviour and controlling behaviours effectively expands the definition of domestic violence. Spiritual abuse encompasses (i) preventing a person from practising their religion; (ii) using one's faith to justify other types of abuse (such as physical abuse, psychological abuse, financial abuse, and sexual abuse); (iii) compelling someone to act against their spiritual or religious obligations, (iv) ridiculing someone because of their level of religiosity, or (v) ridiculing someone because of their understanding of religious practices and beliefs (s.2(1)). Spiritual abuse can therefore be manifested as other forms of violence.

Both coercive and controlling behaviour are forms of psychological abuse that may or may not have physical violence element. Even if no physical violence is present, the threatening nature forms a pattern of behaviour by the preparator has an influence on the victim. This type of abuse can for instance lead to various forms of economic abuse such as controlling spending patterns or whether someone may go to school or work.

The DVAA also addresses new forms of violence that have arisen through the spread of new technologies. Specifically, if an act of domestic violence is perpetrated through electronic communication or social media, then the courts can direct services providers to provide information to the courts (s.9(5B)). This amendment supports the Cybercrimes Act 19 of 2020, which criminalises malicious communications such as inciting or threatening violence and disclosing intimate images.

Human trafficking—the trade of people for forced labour (forced slavery), sexual exploitation, or commercial sex acts—as a form of GBV is addressed by the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act 7 of 2013, which establishes the offences related to trafficking in persons (in line with South Africa's obligations regarding international agreements) and provides protections for the victims of trafficking.

### **2.3.2 Forms of gender-based violence**

Table 1 provides a categorisation of various types or forms of GBV as described in the literature and is based on four broad categories GBV, namely physical, sexual, psychological (or emotional), and economic violence. These provide broad general categories within which sub-categories or specific types of violence can be classified based on the various definitions in the literature.

**Table 1. Forms of gender-based violence**

General Category	Sub-Category	Example
Sexual	Sexual assault - Rape	Rape
		Compelled rape
		Statutory rape
	Sexual assault - Other	Non-consensual physical contact
	Sexual harassment	Non-physical, unwanted sexual conduct (e.g. indecent exposure, peeping Tom, taking clandestine photos, demands for sexual favours)
	Trafficking	Sexual slavery
Physical	Trafficking	Servitude/slavery
	Assault	Assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm
		Common assault
	Murder	
Deprivation of liberty	Physically limiting movement or actions	
Psychological (Emotional)	Coercion	
	Defamation	
	Verbal insult	
	Harassment	
Economic	Property damage	Malicious damage to property
	Restricting access to/ control of resources	Restricting access to financial resources
		Restricting access to education
		Restricting labour market participation
Not complying with economic responsibilities	Not paying maintenance to support children	

Notes: Asterisks denote common law offences (South African Police Service, 2024). SOA: Sexual Offences Act; PHA: Protection from Harassment Act; DVA: Domestic Violence Act.

Sexual violence is any sexual act committed against the will of another person, either when the person does not give consent or when consent cannot be given because the person is a child, has a mental disability, or is severely intoxicated as a result of alcohol or drugs (UN Women, 2023). Sexual violence includes rape, other sexual assault, sexual harassment, and trafficking. Sexual assault occurs when an individual physically violates the victim in a sexual manner and without their consent. Rape is a form of sexual assault that occurs when an individual is forced to have sexual intercourse without their consent. In South Africa, compelled rape is when an individual is forced to rape the victim by a third party, and statutory rape occurs when there is any sexual contact between an adult and somebody under the age of 16 years, regardless of consent (Republic of South Africa, 2007). Sexual harassment is unwanted sexual behaviour

that makes someone feel upset, scared, offended or humiliated, or is meant to make them feel that way (Rape Crisis, 2023). This includes unwanted advances or demands for sexual favours, inappropriate comments, or indecent exposure. Trafficking occurs when an individual is tricked or forced to leave their home and transported elsewhere in order to be exploited. This can fall under both sexual or physical violence depending on whether the victim is forced into physical servitude or sexual slavery.

Physical violence incorporates assault, trafficking, deprivation of liberty, or murder. Physical assault occurs when an individual causes physical harm to the victim and can range from minor to serious assault depending on the severity of the abuse. Murder is the most extreme form of physical violence and occurs when the victim is killed by the perpetrator. Deprivation of liberty refers to instances where the victim is under constant supervision and physical control.

Whereas sexual and physical violence consist of criminal acts, psychological and economic violence are more complex. Psychological or emotional violence is intentional conduct that causes psychological harm to an individual. Psychological violence typically involves causing fear by intimidation or threatening harm, whereas emotional violence includes undermining a person's sense of self-worth through constant criticism or verbal abuse, or not letting a partner see friends and family (UN Women, 2023). These forms of violence include acts that could be considered criminal, but evidence that these acts have occurred may be harder to identify from outside of the abusive situation or relationship.

Economic violence occurs when the perpetrator makes (or attempts to make) the victim financially dependent by maintaining control over financial and other resources. This is done through withholding access to financial resources or limiting control of one's own money, property damage, forbidding attendance at school or employment, or not complying with economic responsibilities (EIGE, 2023).

It is also important to note that forms of gender-based violence are evolving with technological developments. Technologically-facilitated GBV is a reconfiguration of these various forms of GBV and is defined by the UNFPA (2021) as an act of violence that is partially or fully committed, assisted, aggravated or amplified by the use of information and communication technologies or digital media against a person on the basis of their gender. Examples of these acts include online harassment and cyberstalking, online sexual harassment, and taking, sharing or threatening to share sexually explicit images without an individual's consent (revenge porn and sextortion).

GBV can be committed by strangers, intimate partners, family, friends or colleagues, and can also occur in a wide range of environments, such as at home, school or work. Disaggregating the broad categories of violence by who the perpetrator was or which environment the violence occurred in allows us a more detailed analyse of the violence and, potentially, the identification of patterns of violence to target



from a policy perspective. Table 2 presents a breakdown of typical forms of violence based on who the perpetrator is or in which environment the violence takes place. Thus, if any form of violence is performed by somebody in the victim's domestic circle, it can further be identified as domestic violence. Similarly, when the perpetrator is the victim's intimate partner, violence that occurs would be classified as intimate partner violence regardless of which form of violence is taking place or where it is taking place. Because family, friends or intimate partners are closer to the victim, they also are more likely to use psychological or economic violence. It is typically not as common for strangers to commit psychological or economic violence against victims, although this is becoming more common with the growth of technologically-facilitated GBV.

**Table 2. Typical sub-types of violence depending on perpetrator and/or environment**

Environment / Perpetrator	Sexual	Physical	Psychological (Emotional)	Economic
Stranger	Sexual assault Sexual harassment	Assault Murder	Coercion Defamation Verbal insult Harassment	-
School (friend, fellow student, teacher)	Sexual assault Sexual harassment	Assault	Coercion Defamation Verbal insult Harassment	-
Place of work (colleague, employer)	Sexual harassment		Coercion Defamation Verbal insult Harassment	-
Domestic circle or Family	Domestic Violence (This is a general name for any of the forms of violence if the perpetrator is the victim's family member(s) or in their domestic circle)			
Intimate Partner	Intimate Partner Violence (This is a sub-form of domestic violence and the general name for any of the forms of violence if the perpetrator is the victim's intimate partner)			

When identifying perpetrators, the literature (like the SDG targets) typically divides GBV into intimate partner and non-intimate partner violence. Intimate partner and family member violence is the leading cause of homicidal death of women globally (United Nations, 2018:3). Globally, approximately 50 000 women are killed per year by their current and former partners, fathers, brothers, mothers, sisters and other family members because of their role and status as women (United Nations, 2018:55). South Africa has a high rate of gender-based violence against women, where men are more often the perpetrators and women and children the victims (Dartnall and Jewkes, 2013:3), and the country's rate of femicide is five times the global average (Boonzaier, 2020; Gouws, 2022).

Although a wide range of intimate partner and domestic violence is understood to be typically perpetrated against women and girls, it is important not to exclude or ignore the violence and discrimination targeted towards LGBTQI+ individuals. In some instances, it may be even less likely for these individuals to report violence or seek help due to the fear of stigmatisation and discrimination. This fear can also form the basis of psychological violence, as a perpetrator might threaten 'outing' the victim.

Furthermore, violence against openly LGBTQIA+ individuals, such as homophobic and transphobic violence, constitutes a form of gender-based violence because they are driven by a desire to punish individuals whose appearance or behaviour appears to challenge gender stereotypes (UN OHCHR, 2015:7). Violence based on these motivations tends to be characterised by high levels of cruelty (IACHR, 2014:3). Furthermore, in addition to typical physical and sexual violence, homosexual individuals also specifically suffer homophobic rape. This is a form of sexual violence aimed at conditioning - or in the view of the perpetrator, 'fixing' - an individual's preferences. This is a particularly widespread problem targeted at lesbian women in South Africa (Graaff, 2021). Furthermore, trans women experience high rates of violence as well as dealing with the issue of likely being misgendered in police and other reports of the violence, since administrative systems are not set up to efficiently account for different gender identities.

With regards to violence targeted towards men due to their gender, it becomes harder to identify gender-based violence against men and differentiate it from everyday violence. Due to the societal expectations of men and masculinity, it can be argued that violence perpetrated both by and against men is often gendered (Graaff, 2021). This can often take the form of violence used to prove one's masculinity, or alternatively to attack men that do not conform to gender norms within a patriarchal society. Furthermore, some forms of violence are already known to affect men more. For example, although the largest share of detected trafficking victims are women, men and boys form a larger share of the victims of trafficking for the purposes of servitude/physical slavery (UNODC, 2016).

### 3. Using Indices to Measure Multidimensional Concepts

#### 3.1. Approaches to Measuring Multidimensional Concepts

There are essentially two ways in which to systematically measure a multidimensional concept such as gender-based violence. The first approach is to use a system or set of individual indicators that each measure specific aspects of the concept, and to use movements in these individual indicators to assess changes in the broader multidimensional concept. The key challenge with respect to a system of indicators is that, although it is easy to interpret changes for a single indicator, it is considerably more difficult to formulate a clear picture of overall trends based on a set of different indicators that might be behaving differently over time, with the result that two observers faced with identical data might arrive at different conclusions. Systems of indicators are also not easily communicated in a succinct way to stakeholders, policymakers or the general public.

The second approach—and the approach used here—is to aggregate the individual indicators into a single composite measure or index; changes in this composite measure would then summarise the changes observed in the individual indicators. An index-based approach is not without its own challenges, although it is typically easily communicated to and understood by different audiences. Aggregate indices are a compilation of individual indicators into a single index based on an underlying model and are designed to measure multidimensional concepts that cannot be captured by a single indicator (Nardo et al., 2005:13). A key advantage of such indices is that they allow one to summarise a lot of different information in a single metric. While the process of constructing these indices is relatively straightforward, there are several decisions that need to be made in the construction of the index. These will be discussed in more detail below.

In the process of constructing an index such as a GBV index, a number of key decisions must be made. These include the identification of the primary dimensions of gender-based violence that will be reflected in the index, the choice of appropriate variables or indicators to measure a particular dimension of gender-based violence, and the approach to aggregating often widely disparate indicators into a single index so that it has a clear and unambiguous interpretation.

#### 3.2. The benefits and drawbacks of composite indicators

Composite indicators have both advantages and disadvantages, as described by Nardo et al. (2008: 13-14). The main advantages of composite indicators are that they:

- can summarise complex multidimensional realities;
- are easier to interpret than a battery of many separate indicators;

- facilitate communication with general public and promote accountability;
- are useful in placing issues on the policy agenda;
- help to construct or underpin narratives for audiences both with and without specific expertise in the area of study;
- enable users to compare complex dimensions effectively; and
- can be used to assess developments over time and for evaluating country performance.

In contrast, disadvantages of composite indicators include the possibility that:

- they can send misleading information or policy messages if poorly constructed;
- they invite conclusions that are overly simplistic;
- the selection and weighting of dimensions may increase the difficulty of identifying proper remedial action, if the construction process is not transparent;
- the selection weights could be the subject of political dispute; and
- they may lead to inappropriate policies in instances where aspects that are difficult to measure are ignored.

### **3.3. Steps in constructing a composite measure**

In constructing a composite measure, Nardo et al (2008) and Mazziotta and Pareto (2012) identify key steps that ought to be followed. Some of these are summarised briefly below.

#### **3.3.1 Theoretical framework**

In this step, the phenomenon to be measured is defined (in terms of its sub-components, selecting individual indicators and weights that reflect their importance and the dimensions of the overall composite). The definition serves as the starting point in constructing a composite indicator, and should give a clear sense of what is being measured by the composite indicator. Ideally this is based on what is desirable to measure and not which indicators are available. A theoretical framework provides a basis for the selection and combination of variables into a meaningful composite indicator under a fitness-for-purpose principle.

Multi-dimensional concepts can be divided into several sub-groups. The sub-groups need not be statistically independent and existing linkages should be described theoretically or empirically.

In the current context, the theoretical framework clarifies how GBV is defined and understood and provides a classification structure for different types of GBV. It is also within this process of crystallising the theoretical framework that the component variables for inclusion in the composite measure are selected. Selection criteria guide whether an indicator should or should not be included in the composite index and should ensure that the nature of the indicators included in the index are aligned with the nature of the phenomenon that the index is intended to measure. Specifically, indicators may measure inputs, outputs or processes, and which of these indicators are included would be determined by whether the index aims to measure an input, an output, or a process. In the context of a GBV Index, for example, the intention is to measure outputs—the level of gender-based violence within South Africa—and, therefore, only output indicators (e.g. the number of incidents of a particular type of violence) should be included. Indicators such as spending on GBV prevention programmes, for example, should not be included as these indicators are input indicators. The set of selection criteria also informs data selection.

### 3.3.2 Data selection

The ability of a composite indicator to measure a particular phenomenon is strongly influenced by the quality of the underlying variables. Indicators should be chosen for their analytical soundness, measurability, timeliness, accessibility, coverage and relevance to the underlying concept being measured, as well as the relationships of indicators to each other. A lack of relevant data may limit the ability to construct a sound composite indicator. In instances where data is scarce, the use of proxy variables may be required. The assessment (through correlation and sensitivity analysis) of indicators across these characteristics enables an assessment and summary of the quality of the available indicators, as well as their individual strengths and weaknesses.

### 3.3.3 Imputation

An important challenge in compiling a composite index from a set of underlying variables relates to missing data. Imputation of missing data may therefore be required to complete the dataset, although it may not always be possible to impute missing data.

Approaches for handling missing data vary and are influenced by the nature of 'missingness'. For example, data may be missing completely at random (where missing values do not depend on the variable of interest), missing at random (where missing values are unrelated to the variable of interest, but are related to other variables in the data), or not missing at random. For data missing completely at random, no imputation is necessary because the data that remains is considered a random sample of the full data set. However, other missing patterns would require specific approaches that aim to reduce the impact of missing values on the dataset, while also minimising unwanted statistical impacts.

### 3.3.4 Normalisation

A key practical challenge implicit in the construction of composite measures is that a wide range of variables measuring very different things must be aggregated. One can imagine, for example, that a particular composite measure might require the aggregation of variables expressed in absolute numbers, in currency terms, in per capita terms, or as proportions, where such variables would ordinarily not be added to or subtracted from each other. The aggregation of these variables requires that the data be normalised in some way so that each variable is expressed in a comparable. Normalisation ensures that data are of the same units and enables aggregation of data. Without normalising the data, indices can become biased towards variables with high ranges. It is necessary that normalisation respects both the theoretical framework and the underlying data properties.

Another motivation for normalisation is that some indicators may be positively correlated with the phenomenon to be measured (positive polarity), whereas others may be negatively correlated with it (negative polarity) (Mazziotta et al., 2017:166). To construct a sensible index, all individual indicators must have positive polarity so that an increase in the normalised indicators corresponds to an increase in the composite index. It is therefore necessary to 'invert' the sign of indicators with negative polarity to achieve this. For instance, increased numbers of assaults (which has a positive polarity) implies higher index. However, increased labour market participation (which has a negative polarity) should imply a lower index - therefore labour market participation would be inverted. The main methods to invert an indicator are (a) linear transformation, which is a complement with respect to the maximum value; and (b) non-linear transformation, which is the reciprocal of the value but requires that all values are greater than 0. The advantages of linear transformations are that they are simple to implement and used with ranking, standardisation and re-scaling.

It is necessary to consider boundedness and outliers before proceeding with normalisation techniques. First, the ability to use a normalisation technique may be influenced by whether the indicator is bounded or unbounded. Bounded indicators range between fixed values, while unbounded indicators have no predetermined upper or lower limits. The relevance of boundedness to normalisation is discussed below. Second, if and how these normalisation methods are affected by outliers should be considered, as outliers may distort later calculations of the indicator. Outliers are points that differ significantly from other observations and therefore may disproportionately skew results. Box plots and scatter plots are two simple graphical techniques which can be used to detect outliers. Some methods of normalising data as identified by Nardo et al. (2005) and Mazziotta et al (2017) are as follows:

- i. *Ranking*: Ranking refers to a transformation in which numerical or ordinal values are replaced by their rank when the data are sorted. Ranked data is data that has been compared to other data. Different sub-strategies are used in instances where

data is tied: standard competition ranking (tied data points get the same rank), ordinal ranking (tied data values get a unique rank), and fractional ranking (tied data get an average rank). The main advantages of ranking transformations are, first, that they are suitable for indicators with positive, negative and zero values; second, that they are suitable for both bounded and unbounded indicators; third, that they have no implicit weighting; and fourth, they are not affected by outliers. However, ranking transformations entail a loss of information and assume equal intervals between consecutive values. Thus, for example, gaps in the actual values between consecutively ranked values may be large or small, but this qualitative difference is invisible in the ranked data. Further, aggregation by a mathematical function is questionable for ordinal data.

- ii. *Standardisation (z-scores)*: The process of standardisation entails converting data to a standard score with a mean of zero and standard deviation of one, ensuring that the data is on the same scale. Advantages of standardisation include its ability to handle indicators with positive, negative, and zero values, and a lack of implicit weighting since indicators have equal variances. On the negative side, standardisation is not suitable for bounded indicators and can produce negative values. Further, outliers (extreme valued observations) have a greater effect on the composite indicator.
- iii. *Min-max normalising*: Min-max normalisation remaps data onto the same range. This is done by subtracting the minimum value and dividing by the range of the indicator values. For data with negative polarity, the complement of the min-max value with respect to 1 is calculated. The min and max values are known as goalposts, and these can be set by experts. This normalisation technique is applicable to indicators with positive, negative, and zero values, and results in low implicit weighting. However, this technique is not suitable for unbounded indicators. Other disadvantages of this approach include the fact that the mean reference is often lost, and that data with little variation can lead to increased contributions to the composite indicator than other normalising techniques, i.e. this technique is sensitive to outliers.
- iv. *Distance to a reference*: This measures the relative position of a given indicator vis-à-vis a reference point. This method calculates the percentage ratio between original values. A reference point could for instance be a target to be reached within a given time frame. The main advantages of this technique are that it is suitable for both bounded and unbounded indicators and, for indicators with positive polarity, it saves the coefficient of variation. The main disadvantages are that it is not applicable to indicators with negative values, zeroes are only accepted for indicators with positive polarity, it has high implicit weighting, and the technique is sensitive to outliers.
- v. *Categorical scaling*: In this approach, a score for each indicator is assigned. For example, the data for a particular variable may be categorised “as one, two or three stars, or ... as ‘fully achieved’, ‘partly achieved’ or ‘not achieved’” (Nardo

et al. 2005). Scores may be based on the percentiles of the distribution of the indicator across the sample. The main disadvantage of categorical scaling is that it excludes information, especially with regards to the variance.

- vi. *Indicators above or below the mean*: This transformation makes use of an arbitrarily defined threshold level where values around the mean receive 0, whereas those above or below a certain threshold relative to the mean receive 1 and -1 respectively. The main advantage of this transformation is that it is simple to perform and not influenced by outliers. However, the threshold level is essentially arbitrary and the approach yields an indicator that no longer incorporates absolute level information.
- vii. *Percentage of annual differences over consecutive years*: This approach transforms the underlying data, calculating the percentage growth with respect to the previous year, instead of reflecting the absolute level. The transformed indicator is dimensionless, i.e. it has no units, and is thus a number not associated with a physical dimension (such as time or cases per 100 000 people). The disadvantage of this method is that it requires indicators to be available for a number of periods.

### 3.3.5 Weighting and aggregation

In the process of combining the chosen indicators into an index, these indicators are weighted and aggregated along the lines of the underlying theoretical framework and data properties. Weights may be explicitly determined or stipulated, but it is important to note that normalisation techniques introduce implicit weights. The weights are implicit in that they are not directly defined; instead, the weights are given indirectly through the normalisation technique. For instance, when using min-max normalising, the scale acts as implicit weights, variables with minimum and maximum values that are further apart implies a higher implicit weighting because the range of the indicator is larger than that of the other indicators. Conversely, if the minimum and maximum are less far apart, then it implies a lower implicit weighting. Implicit weights can distort an index.

Irrespective of the way in which they are determined, “weights are essentially value judgements” (Nardo et al., 2005: 21) and, as a result, there is rarely a single ‘correct’ weighting for an index. From a practical perspective, weights are used to raise or lower the importance of individual indicators relative to each other within the overall composite measure. Each indicator in the index is assigned a particular weight, with the sum total of the weights adding to one (or 100 percent); when calculating the index value, each indicator value is then multiplied by the weight before being added together, the total sum across all the indicators equalling the index value.

The choice of weights in an index essentially determines the specific patterns of relative importance for the various indicators. In the context of a GBV index, different choices of weights might, for example, be used to attach greater weight to more



harmful forms of GBV and a smaller weight to less harmful forms. Alternatively, weights may be used to amplify indicators derived from higher quality data and to downplay those based on poor quality data. Weighting schemes can have a significant effect on the overall composite indicator because they reward (punish) components that are viewed to be more (less) influential (Nardo, et al 2005:21). As an alternative to the researcher making direct decisions on the weights of each indicator, data-driven techniques (such as principal components analysis) can be employed to identify the underlying relationships within a particular dataset and to translate these relationships into unique weights for each indicator.

Different weighting schemes imply different results; therefore, to prevent subjectivity, Booysen (2002) suggests no explicit weighting should be the norm and the burden of proof should fall on differential weighting. However, as will be discussed below, despite the phrasing, this still implies a clear and specific weighting structure.

Equal weights for all indicators included in an index accord no single indicator more importance within the index than any other indicator. This is very useful in contexts where there is no robust evidence that would support unequal weighting. Even where there is both a good argument to be made and evidence to support the argument that one indicator is more important than another, such evidence may not provide a basis to quantify how much more important that indicator is (and, therefore, what the relative weights for the two indicators should be). Equal weights may also be beneficial in terms of ease of understanding for general audiences.

It should be noted that an equal weighting approach may effectively yield unequal weights, depending on the overall structure of the index. This arises specifically for indices that have a multi-tier structure, including dimensions and indicators, where each dimension does not have the same number of indicators within it. For example, take an index with two dimensions of equal weight (equal to 0.5 or 50 percent each) and which weights the indicators within each dimension equally. If each dimension has four indicators in it, each of the eight indicators will have a weight of 12.5 percent (or one-eighth). If the same index had three indicators in the first dimension and five in the second, the indicators within the first dimension will each have an overall weight within the index of one-sixth (16.67 percent) and those within the second dimension will each have a weight of one-tenth (10 percent). To achieve equal weighting across all eight indicators, the weights of the dimensions would need to be altered (three-eighths for the first dimension, five-eighths for the second).

To ensure true equal weighting, indicators should preferably be uncorrelated with each other. Including highly correlated indicators may effectively result in double counting within the index: high correlation may imply the two indicators are essentially measuring the same aspect of the broader phenomenon, meaning that this aspect receives double the weight of other aspects included in the index. One way of avoiding this is to test for statistical correlation and to carefully consider whether highly correlated

indicators are measuring the same or different aspects of the phenomenon measured by the index.

Weights can be used to improve the credibility of an index by weighting indicators from higher quality data sources more highly than those from poor quality sources. Higher weights could therefore be assigned to statistically reliable data with broad coverage (Kaufmann et al., 2011:230). A potential drawback of this approach is that it is likely to be biased towards variables and data that are available and it would therefore not contribute towards a more comprehensive data environment. At a practical level, weights that reflect statistical quality would require regular and ongoing standardised assessments of data quality across the full range of data sources that would provide clear and unambiguous guidance on how to adjust weights. This would significantly increase the level of effort required to update the index over time. Further, as data quality changes over time, this would result in the weights shifting over time, making comparisons over time more difficult. Indeed, even without any change in the value of an indicator, the index would change in response to a change in the evaluation of the quality of a single dataset.

As noted above, weights can be determined on the basis of an assessment of the relative importance of different indicators included within the index. A key challenge here is to translate this assessment of importance into actual weights and to do so in a way that is objective and not subject to dispute. Assessments of relative importance may also be open to manipulation or abuse, whereby weights are used with ulterior motives to downplay or de-emphasise particular types of gender-based violence and thereby achieve a particular result from the index.

Depending on the specific context, there may be many different ways to assess relative importance. In the context of the GBV index, certain forms of GBV may be deemed more harmful than others and may therefore merit a higher weight. Where applicable, weights might be based on, for example, minimum sentences or recommended sentences within the criminal justice system. Alternatively, weights might feasibly be based on average sentences handed down or average sentences served, for example. However, as noted above, not all forms of GBV are criminal offences and weights for these indicators would thus require an alternative approach. Further, this type of weighting approach may lead to interpretations that construct a clear hierarchy of acts of gender-based violence—or, worse, that establish an 'exchange rate' of acts of gender-based violence—based on the weights attached to them in the GBV index.

In terms of aggregation, indicators can be combined through either linear or geometric aggregation methods. In both aggregation methods, "weights express trade-offs between indicators" with weakness in one area able to be offset by strength in another (Nardo et al., 2005: 22). This represents a departure from the understanding of weights as specifying relative importance. Linear aggregation schemes reward improvement (or penalise deterioration) in a particular indicator equally, irrespective of the absolute

level of that indicator; in contrast, geometric aggregation schemes would more strongly reward improvements in indicators with lower absolute scores. Relatedly, geometric aggregation schemes would require much better performance in one indicator to compensate for poor performance in other indicators when compared with linear aggregation methods. Alternative aggregation methods are available for contexts where trade-offs between indicators is not allowed, although they may be more demanding computationally.

### **3.3.6 Uncertainty and sensitivity analysis**

Uncertainty and sensitivity analysis is undertaken to assess the robustness of the composite indicator. This serves to validate the composite indicator. There are a number of decisions and selective judgements in developing a composite indicator. These decisions include, but are not limited to, the selection of individual indicators, the treatment of missing values, the choice of aggregation model, the weights of indicators (Nardo et al, 2008:117). Together, the decisions shape the message communicated by the indicator.

Sensitivity analysis is the study of how the variation in the output can be apportioned, qualitatively or quantitatively, to different sources of variation in the assumptions, and of how the given composite indicator depends on the information fed to it (Nardo et al, 2008:117). Sensitivity analysis helps identify how responsive the composite indicator is to sub-indicators.

Similarly, uncertainty analysis aims to quantify the variability of the output that is due to the variability of the input (Saisana et al., 2005:308). This is done through simulations on the various equations that constitute the underlying model. In essence, this done by re-estimating the composite indicator, excluding dimensions, one at a time, and measuring the difference of the reduced indicator on the original composite indicator. A scatter plot of the differences can be used to track which indicator affects the output the most when excluded. In doing uncertainty analysis it is necessary to reweight the dimensions so that the other factors are scaled to unity.

## **3.4. Final considerations for composite indicators**

### **3.4.1 Data concerns**

Irrespective of the quality of the underlying methodology used in their construction, the quality of composite measures such as the proposed GBV index is determined by the quality of the underlying data. An important aspect of data quality in the context of the GBV index relates to underreporting. It is widely recognised that the incidence and prevalence of GBV is significantly underreported in South Africa, in both administrative and survey data. Underreporting is a key challenge for the analysis of GBV and in assessing the absolute levels of GBV.

In the context of the index, there is little that can be done in the short term to address the challenge of underreporting and the index will be impacted (e.g. the index value may be lower than might otherwise have been the case). In this sense, the resulting GBV index may provide a lower-bound estimate of the true value of the index. What is key, however, is that we have a good understanding of patterns of underreporting and how these might be changing over time for different groups and for different indicators. This provides important context for assessing trends in the value of the index over time and changes in rankings for different subpopulations within the overall index. Critically, it must be recognised that improvements in reporting over time will manifest as deteriorations in the underlying indicators. For example, an indicator such as rapes per 100,000 women may increase (deteriorate) if underreporting falls from 50 percent to 25 percent. Understanding the nature of underreporting will ensure that improvements in reporting are not misinterpreted as a worsening of GBV levels.

### **3.4.2 Practical and cost effective**

The practicality and cost effectiveness of the index also influences the accuracy and precision of the index. An index is impractical if it requires measurement of difficult to attain information. For instance, needing to analyse police evidence, and incorporating this information into the index is not pragmatic. Moreover, it may not be practical to update the index in real time as stakeholders may not be able to effectively use and respond to such frequent (and potentially volatile) updates to the index. A GBV index that requires a dedicated regular specialised national survey would be costly to construct and update on an ongoing basis and may therefore also not be practical. A good index is therefore dependent on baseline data availability—drawing on data that is already being collected or that requires relatively little additional cost and effort to collect—which in turn means it is cost effective.

The considerations of practicality and cost effectiveness also inform the future development of the index, by helping highlight areas where relatively large gains can be made in terms of the quality of the index with relatively low cost. This may be particularly relevant in the context of administrative data, where small tweaks to data collection processes or to the items collected may significantly improve the ability of the index to measure GBV.

### **3.4.3 Resource intensity**

The human resources and skills required to construct and interpret an index should not be too burdensome. The index should be straight-forward to measure and interpret, rather than overly complicated. This requirement has important methodological implications for the construction of the index, and particularly the approach to weighting.

#### 3.4.4 Well-documented

Using the same data and methodology should lead to the same results. For this reason, indices should be well documented in terms of rationale, methodology, and analysis. Decisions relating to the construction of the index in terms of both the data used and methodology therefore need to be clearly described. Under analytical scrutiny these decisions should be robust with the results not overly sensitive to marginal changes. In other words, small adjustments should not substantially change the results and conclusions.

Being well documented supports computational replicability because it means that there is no space for alternative results. Replicability is a way to build confidence in the scientific merit of results because if the result from one study is consistent with another study it is more likely to represent a reliable claim to knowledge (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019:71). This further means that stakeholders will better be able to understand the full context of how to interpret the results and thus avoid misinterpretation and misleading policy messages.

## 4. GBV Data in South Africa

### 4.1. GBV Data Sources in South Africa

In terms of the data sources used for studying GBV, the literature makes mention of two main sources, namely administrative data, and individual or household survey data. We look at each of these in turn.

#### 4.1.1 Administrative data

The first key source of data on GBV is administrative data. Perhaps the most well-known administrative data source is police data on crime, but useful data could, in principle, be drawn from government departments including the Ministries of Health, Social Development, and Education, and public institutions such as the National Prosecuting Authority. These data usually have standardised reporting procedures, which can ensure a level of consistency that can be helpful for tracking trends and changes in reported GBV over time. These data are also typically readily available and are already being collected as part of law enforcement and administrative processes, which would reduce the data collection costs. Administrative data is also continuously collected, unlike surveys that collect data much more infrequently. Given the nature of administrative data, these kinds of datasets are particularly useful in assessing the incidence of gender-based violence and, apart from rare cases, would not be able to accurately address issues of prevalence.

However, a significant drawback of crime and administrative data is the underreporting of GBV cases to authorities, which can lead to an inaccurate representation of the true extent of GBV. This underreporting can be due to a number of reasons such as fear, stigma, or lack of trust in the legal system. Jewkes and Abrahams (2002) use an analogy of an iceberg of sexual coercion where they characterise the GBV reporting levels. The iceberg analogy illustrates how what is reported represents only a small fraction of cases, with most of the problem remaining unreported. Specifically, when a sexual assault occurs the default action is to not share this information with anyone, i.e., it is not disclosed due to shame and/or the nature of associated stigmas and blame. Of those GBV cases reported to the police, many do not lead to justice: many victims withdraw cases; within the police there are issues at some stations around victim-friendly rooms; there is a skills shortage in using rape kits; the process of analysing DNA is often prolonged; and there are high rates of acquittals in GBV cases (Masson, 2022). Vetten et al. (2008:8) illustrate the attrition of rape cases through the criminal justice system: 50.5 percent of cases result in arrests, 42.8 percent of perpetrators were charged in court; trials commenced in 17.3 percent of cases; conviction for any crime happened in 6.2 percent of cases; only 4.1 percent of cases reported as rape resulted in convictions for rape.

Furthermore, administrative and crime data may not capture all dimensions of GBV due to standardised procedures and recording. The standardised way in which this data is recorded may limit the level of detail being captured when these data are being collected. In other words, key pieces of information from the perspective of understanding gender-based violence may not be available in administrative datasets simply because of choices made when designing data collection process that did not have GBV as a priority. Currently, however, while individual administrative data sources might be internally consistent in terms of definitions and procedures, this is not the case across data sources, making comparisons of data across different data sources difficult. It must be noted that, for the vast majority of administrative data sources including crime statistics, the measurement of gender-based violence is not the core mandate or objective and therefore the design and content of these databases may not be optimal from the perspective of constructing a GBV index.

Administrative data from health facilities can provide information that may help in the construction of a GBV index. The Department of Health (DoH) gathers data at the local municipality level from various organisational units, such as clinics, hospitals and pharmacies (DoH, n.d). The information is then combined to produce a number of health-related indicators and 'data elements'. Within the DoH database, indicators appear to be rates and other figures that require a calculation, while data elements are counts that represent the number of observations of health-related occurrences. According to the DoH database website, the database contains information such as 'sexual assault case HIV negative issued with post-exposure prophylaxis', 'sexual assault case seen at health facility', assault case and gunshots. However, when searching for indicators or data elements regarding topics like 'rape' or 'abuse', these cannot be found. Furthermore, although information regarding the contents of the database is available online, access to the actual database needs to be granted.

Information from the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (DoJ) may also provide some information on GBV-related cases in South Africa. The DoJ collects information about sexual offences cases managed by regional courts in South Africa (DoJ & CD, 2022). However, it is important to note that these figures represent the number of cases that make it to the courts, rather than the number of victims or perpetrators. The DoJ Annual Report of the Implementation of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act also includes a section discussing cases allegedly perpetrated against LGBTQIA+ persons. However, the DoJ data is not systematically published in detail online. However, the DoJ statistics on cases may be accessible via the National Department of Public Prosecution or the national Operations Centre.

In South Africa, crime data from the South African Police Service represent a valuable source of data for exploring gender-based violence within the broader context of overall crime trends. The data includes a range of categories of crimes, such as contact crimes and sexual offenses. From such data, incidence measures can be estimated and trends in GBV identified. Subcategories within these categories of crimes, such as

rape, sexual assault, and attempted sexual offenses, can potentially provide a more nuanced understanding of different forms of GBV taking place in South Africa. These can be used to identify specific areas of concern and develop targeted interventions. The data also includes information on 'Crimes Detected as a Result of Police Action', and this includes the sub-category 'Sexual offences detected as a result of police action'. This may provide insights to the effectiveness of law enforcement in addressing GBV.

The crime data can relatively easily be aligned to the sexual and physical forms of violence identified in the earlier discussion of types of GBV. The data includes information on rape, other sexual assault, sexual harassment, common assault, assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm, and murder. It also captures information on kidnappings taking place, which may be partially aligned with trafficking. The data is also broken down by time period and geographic region (police station), which allows the measurement of changes in GBV indicators over time and across geography. The crime statistics are published for each quarter of the year, which allows for a longitudinal analysis of changes over time, while the spatial detail available can help policymakers by informing localised prevention and support efforts.<sup>2</sup>

While the crime statistics are published quarterly on the SAPS website, the ultimate usefulness of this data source is dependent on whether information on the genders of victims and perpetrators can be obtained. The publicly accessible version of the data only reports the frequency of each type of crime and does not include information on the gender of the victim or any information about perpetrators. However, presentations of the quarterly crime stats by the SAPS include the discussion of a sample of the data, which does include details about the victim, the perpetrator, the environment and the reason for crimes taking place. Thus, it is possible to estimate certain GBV indicators from the crime statistics if access to this more detailed data was granted.

#### 4.1.2 Survey data

Survey data may provide a more comprehensive picture than administrative data by allowing researchers to ask specific questions and gather information that may be more suitable for use in defined measures or indicators of GBV. Survey questions can be tailored to explore different dimensions and contexts of GBV, allowing for a more nuanced analysis. Thus, surveys may be able to capture a broader range of GBV experiences, including incidents that go unreported to authorities. Where administrative data is most useful in the context of the incidence of GBV, survey data is well-suited to collect data relating to the prevalence of GBV.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that areas covered by police stations do not necessarily conform to the geographical boundaries of other administrative units (such as local municipalities) and that victims may not necessarily report crimes at police stations within the local area where they are resident. Both of these issues need to be considered in the calculation of the GBV index, with the crime statistics data requiring realignment to better match municipal boundaries.



The chief drawback of survey data lies in the costs associated with running surveys: conducting surveys can be expensive and time-consuming, involving the recruitment of enumerators, complex logistics surrounding data collection, and the cleaning and analysis of responses. Given these challenges, surveys may not be conducted frequently or, indeed, regularly. The problem of infrequent data collection necessitates reliance on ageing data, which can be compounded by delays in the post-collection processing of data. Thus, if a survey is conducted every five years, one may need to rely on data as old as seven or eight years while waiting for the new data to become available. The regularity of data collection may be linked with the issue of frequency, but irregular data collection may create uncertainty in terms of when updated data will become available. Indeed, where surveys are scheduled to run on a regular schedule (e.g. annually or every five years), they may fall victim to a lack of momentum, financial constraints, or competing interests. Together, these challenges make the tracking of measures or indicators over time difficult. Even where multiple surveys exist, differences in how questions were asked and in definitions used may make it difficult to use the surveys interchangeably to update specific indicators.

In the context of the proposed GBV index, a key challenge around survey data is linked to the ability to disaggregate the indicators derived from the data. Surveys are carefully designed to ensure representation of the target population so that the picture that emerges from the sampled households or individuals is representative of the situation for the target population. For example, Statistics South Africa's *General Household Survey* for 2022 was constructed so that the responses from the 19 400 or so households, home to just over 66 000 individuals, can be considered to represent the answers for South Africa's total population of over 61 million people. The need for a sample is driven by the cost associated with surveys, but this comes at a cost in terms of the extent to which one can disaggregate the data. Thus, Statistics South Africa's household surveys are designed to be nationally representative, and are deemed to be representative at the provincial level. However, as one moves to smaller geographical areas, the surveys lose their representivity, meaning that detailed geographical analysis becomes impossible (or, at least, highly exposed to error).

In the context of the GBV index, Statistics South Africa regularly publishes the Victims of Crime Report, which is based on the Governance, Public Safety and Justice Survey (GPSJS), previously the Victims of Crime Survey. The GPSJS is a household-based survey, with the objective of collecting information on perceptions about citizen interaction and community cohesion, trust in government and public institutions, government's performance and effectiveness, experiences of corruption, and household and individual perceptions and experiences of crime (Statistics South Africa, 2023). The Victims of Crime report itself focuses on the perceptions and experience of crime portion of the survey, while the full GPSJS dataset can be downloaded from Statistics South Africa's website.

The report examines overall crime in South Africa, and is not specifically focused on GBV or sexual violence. The typical types of crime analysed in the report are housebreaking, home robbery, motor vehicle theft, deliberate damage of dwelling, murder, assault and sexual offences. Psychological violence has also been included in the latest report. The analyses of the trends in these crimes also usually include demographic information about the overall incidents and the victims. However, the survey results suffer a small sample issue with respect to information regarding sexual offences. In this case, the demographic disaggregation is not possible.

The Victims of Crime Report does include a section on perceptions of gender-based violence and safety, but lacks more specific questions and information on experiences of gender-based violence. This could be problematic, since violence against women is a large problem and specific focus for many policies in South Africa. This lack of inclusion of a gender-based violence information limits the suitability of the Governance, Public Safety and Justice Survey for the proposed GBV index.

The South Africa Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) includes sections on women empowerment and domestic violence, which is useful for identifying issues and patterns related to violence against women. The survey reports on the overall population and health statistics of South Africa, providing estimates related to fertility levels and preferences, marriage, sexual activity, contraception, breastfeeding practices, nutrition, maternal and child health and mortality, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and adult health issues (NDoH, Statistics South Africa, SAMRC, ICF, 2018). The section on women empowerment includes questions related to in-union employment and earnings, control over earnings between men and women, ownership of assets, participation in decision-making in the relationship, attitudes towards wife-beating and the negotiation of sexual relations. In addition, the section on domestic violence covers topics such as lifetime physical, sexual and emotional intimate partner violence, age at first experience of sexual violence by any partner, physical, sexual and emotional violence towards women by their partner in the past 12 months, controlling behaviours by the most recent partner, injuries to women as a result of IPV, and violence by women against their partners. However, the DHS is conducted infrequently, with the most recent survey having been conducted in 2016.

The National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) is a panel survey implemented by SALDRU at 2- or 3-year intervals between 2008 and 2017 (SALDRU, n.d.). The survey questionnaire covers topics, such as household members' incomes, expenditures, assets, access to services, education, health, and well-being. However, due to the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the NIDS surveys were followed up by the National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM) (Datafirst, 2021). This survey was specifically aimed at investigating the socioeconomic impacts of the national lockdown during the State of Disaster that had been declared in response to the pandemic, and five waves of the survey were completed during 2020

and 2021. The questionnaire covered the same topics as NIDS but included questions and responses that related to Covid-19 and the lockdown measures. Although these surveys have been conducted frequently, the NIDS and NIDS-CRAM do not include specific questions regarding GBV. Furthermore, it is also not representative at more detailed levels of geographical disaggregation. Thus, a more detailed geographical analysis will not be possible.

An initiative that started in 2021 and is currently underway is the National GBV Prevalence Study being conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). The study has been commissioned to generate useful data and evidence specific to GBV at all levels in South Africa, and the questionnaire modules cover psychological, economic, physical and sexual forms of IPV, as well as non-partner sexual violence, physical, sexual and emotional child abuse, ukuthwala, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and trafficking, social norms and gender equality, reproductive coercion and women's perceptions of community attitudes towards gender relations and IPV. As this survey will be aimed specifically at GBV, the responses and data collected is most suitable for studying GBV in South Africa, compared to the other currently available surveys. The survey will collect data on the forms, extent and nature of GBV victimisation and perpetration using a nationally representative sample, as well as GBV perpetrated against women with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ persons (Republic of South Africa, 2021). Although the data for this survey has not yet been released, it is likely to be useful for the purposes of the GBV index.

Much like with administrative and crime statistics, underreporting can still be problematic for reporting of sexual coercion and assault in survey responses. Jewkes and Abrahams (2002) argue that only a subset of GBV not reported to the police is reported in anonymised surveys. Underreporting has repercussions for the accuracy and credibility of statistics. This is because it leads statistics to be seen as being more of an indicator of the pattern of GBV in SA as opposed to being considered definitive (Meyiwa et al., 2017:8607). This is an important consideration for how an indicator or index using this data is interpreted. The challenge of underreporting is a significant challenge in this area, but it is not something that can be directly addressed within a GBV index. Where patterns of underreporting are stable over time, the GBV index should be able to track the underlying trends in GBV relatively accurately. However, where underreporting changes over time, this will no longer be true and, as a result, care should be taken in interpreting changes in the index. Indeed, where interventions that encourage reporting are successful, GBV as measured by the index may appear to worsen even where there is no change in the incidence of GBV.

### 4.1.3 Other Data

The United States Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons publishes a Trafficking in Persons Report for a number of countries, including South Africa, which it lists as a tier 2 country on its watch list. The tier 2 ranking is given to governments

that have not completely met the United States' Trafficking Victims Protection Act's (TVPA) minimum standards but are making significant efforts to comply with the TVPA standards. This annual report includes details about prosecution, protection efforts and prevention of trafficking in South Africa. It identifies the number of ongoing and new trafficking cases/prosecutions for the year, including the number of suspects and some details about the victims and convictions. It also provides the number of cases related to sex trafficking and labour trafficking. Due to the lack of information about trafficking in the SAPS crime stats, this is a useful source for obtaining the relevant information on the number of trafficking cases.

## 4.2. Data Access

Given the above information regarding data sources, we can begin to compile a list of sources that can be potentially used to capture information on the different types and dimensions of GBV. Table 3 provides a list of potential data sources for each of the different forms of violence, given the above discussion regarding what is known to be available. Where no sub-category is specified, these are data sources for more general information, for example, overall sexual or psychological violence. Furthermore, this table only captures data sources that are currently accessible, thus it currently excludes the national GBV study as a potential source.

**Table 3: Potential data sources for index**

Category	Sub-category	Potential Data Source
Sexual		Governance, Public Safety and Justice Survey (Victims of Crime Report) – household/individual sexual offences in the past 12 months
		Demographic and Health Survey – Sexual violence by any partner
		Demographic and Health Survey – Negotiating sexual relations
	Sexual assault - Rape	SAPS Crime Statistics – Sexual Offences – Rape
	Sexual assault - Other	SAPS Crime Statistics – Sexual Offences – Sexual assault
	Sexual harassment	
	Trafficking – Sexual Slavery	Trafficking in Persons Report - Detected cases of trafficking of persons for sexual slavery <sup>1</sup>

Category	Sub-category	Potential Data Source
Physical		Demographic and Health Survey – Physical violence by any partner
	Assault	SAPS Crime Statistics – Attempted murder  SAPS Crime Statistics – Assault with the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm  SAPS Crime Statistics – Common assault  Victims of Crime Report – household/individual assault offences in the past 12 months  Demographic and Health Survey – Attitudes towards wife-beating
	Murder	SAPS Crime Statistics – Murder  Victims of Crime Report – Household experience of murder in the past 12 months
	Deprivation of liberty	Demographic and Health Survey – controlling behaviours of most recent partner
	Trafficking - Servitude	Trafficking in Persons Report - Detected cases of trafficking of persons for servitude
Psychological		Victims of Crime Report – Psychological violence in the past 12 months  Demographic and Health Survey – Emotional violence by any partner
	Coercion	
	Defamation	
	Verbal insult	
	Harassment	
Economic	Property damage	Victims of Crime Report – Deliberate damaging of dwelling in the past 12 months
	Restricting access to education, the labour market, or control over financial decisions	Demographic and Health Survey – women's employment and earnings  Demographic and Health Survey – women's control over earnings  Demographic and Health Survey – women's ownership of assets
	Not complying with economic responsibilities	Maintenance Court

## 5. The Proposed GBV Index

### 5.1. Considerations for this GBV index

The starting point for the design of this gender-based violence index must be its purpose and the associated practical and technical implications. As has been alluded to above, the index must allow for the measurement of the extent of GBV in South Africa on an on-going basis into the future, providing useful evidence for policymaking at all three levels of government. The results should be easily accessible by relevant stakeholders, civil society, and the general public, and should be able to be used for advocacy and for further research.

These objectives suggest the following key considerations for the GBV index:

- *Ease of calculation:* The index should be constructed in such a way as to be easy to calculate and update on an ongoing basis. This means that the included indicators should not require complex calculations and, further, that the structure and weighting scheme of the index itself is not 'data-driven' and does not change substantively over time. The aim here would be that the index can be calculated automatically by inputting updated data into a spreadsheet and that, where changes to the structure of the index are required, these are relatively easily implemented.
- *Available at different levels of geographical disaggregation:* In order for the proposed index to be useful for policymaking in South Africa, the index will need to be constructed at different levels of geographical disaggregation. Specifically, the index should be available at national, provincial, and district and local municipality level given that policymaking and interventions with respect to GBV happen at each of these levels. Naturally, the index should be consistent across these different levels of geographies.
- *Available for different sub-groups:* A nuanced understanding of GBV will require that the index is able to reflect the varying experiences of key demographic groups within South Africa. Key amongst these would be gender and age, although there may be others.
- *A focus on incidence:* The most common and straightforward measure of GBV is the overall prevalence of GBV (Walby, 2007; ISTAT, 2007). This is a single measure that captures any form of violence against women occurring within a woman's lifetime. This indicator is typically then separated into sub-indicators that give more detail about the various aspects of GBV. For example, sub-indicators that measure each major unique form of violence against women (nature of violence), or prevalence sub-divided by timing of occurrences, such as in childhood or during adulthood. However, for the index to be policy relevant and responsive to changing circumstances, the indicators included in the index should be sensitive to emerging trends. From this perspective, the proposed GBV index should prefer indicators of

incidence over those of prevalence: while these two types of measures are closely linked to each other, the former tracks exposure to GBV events over the recent past, while the latter includes all events over an individual's lifetime. This is not to say that prevalence of GBV is not a concern; instead, this preference of indicators of incidence recognises the inertia that characterises prevalence indicators and which makes it difficult to identify successes and failures in dealing with GBV over the short and medium term.

- *Easy to understand and communicate:* In order for the GBV index to be useful, it must be easily communicated and understood. This requirement has implications for the way the index is structured and calculated, as well as for the types of indicators that are included. In support of this requirement, the construction of the index must be clearly and transparently documented, with this documentation made freely available.
- *Updated regularly:* In order for the GBV index to be useful to policymakers, it will need to be updated and published regularly. Well-known examples of multidimensional indices such as the Human Development Index, published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2023), are typically published annually. We would argue that the GBV index should be updated at least annually if it is to be directly useful for policymaking. In this context, it is worth noting that the GBV index will be drawing on data sources with widely varying frequencies of publication: crime statistics are published by the South African Police Service (SAPS) on a quarterly basis, while national household surveys covering GBV issues may be conducted only every few years or may not be conducted on a regular schedule.
- *Published in a user-friendly format:* In support of the aim to ensure that the data is accessible to a broad range of stakeholders, including civil society and the general public, it is critical to ensure that the data is published online in a user-friendly format. If possible, it would be worth exploring online tools that would allow users to extract either all the data or subsets of the data, and to either graph or map the data.

## 5.2. Possible Indicators

Given the above discussions regarding data access and considerations for the index, we can begin to gather a number of indicators from these sources that may be potentially used to capture information on the different types and dimensions of GBV. Table 3 provides a list of examples of these potential indicators to be used, together with each data source. The data source and its type (either administrative or survey data) are important to note for the construction of the index. Where no sub-category is specified, these indicators offer more general information, for example, overall sexual or psychological violence.

The four main sources used to identify potential indicators are the SAPS crime data; the Victims of Crime report and the underlying Governance, Public Safety and Justice Survey; the Demographic and Health Survey; and the US Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons report solely focused on human trafficking. Currently, not enough information regarding the national GBV survey is available; should access to the questionnaire or data become possible, additional indicators can be added.

Other administrative sources may provide information for constructing additional indicators. However, access to these data sources will need to be granted before the indicators can be identified for possible inclusion in the index. Possible sources discussed during the workshop in February 2024 include data from the Department of Justice, Department of Higher Education and Training, Department of Basic Education, and the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities. If possible, further exploration of the available Department of Health data could also prove useful.



**Table 4. Examples of indicators that could be used in the Index**

Category	Sub-category	Indicator	Source			Smallest Geographical Disaggregation	Maximum Frequency	
			Survey	Admin	Other			
			Detail					
Sexual	General	Number of sexual offences (incidents) in the past 12 months per 100,000 people	X			GPSJS	Provincial	Annual
		Share of women who have experienced any sexual violence (committed by any partner) in the past 12 months (%)	X			DHS	Provincial	Irregular
	Sexual assault - Rape	Cases per 100,000 women	X			Crime Statistics	Municipal	Quarterly
		Cases involving members of LGBTQIA+ community per 100,000 people	X			Crime Statistics	Municipal	Quarterly
	Sexual assault - Other	Share of cases perpetrated by intimate partners (%)	X			Crime Statistics	Municipal	Quarterly
		Cases per 100,000 women	X			Crime Statistics	Municipal	Quarterly
		Cases involving members of LGBTQIA+ community per 100,000 people	X			Crime Statistics	Municipal	Quarterly
		Share of sexual assault cases perpetrated by intimate partners (%)	X			Crime Statistics	Municipal	Quarterly
	Sexual harassment							

Category	Sub-category	Indicator	Source			Smallest Geographical Disaggregation	Maximum Frequency
			Survey	Admin	Other		
					Detail		
	Trafficking - Sexual	Detected cases of trafficking of persons for sexual slavery per 100,000 people			X	National	Annual
Physical	General	Share of women who have experienced any physical violence (committed by any partner) in the past 12 months (%)	X			Provincial	Irregular
	Assault	Cases per 100,000 women		X		Municipal	Quarterly
		Cases involving members of LGBTQIA+ community per 100,000 people		X		Municipal	Quarterly
		Share of cases perpetrated by intimate partners (%)		X		Municipal	Quarterly
		Number of assault offences (incidents) in the past 12 months per 100,000 people	X			Provincial	Annual
	Murder	Cases per 100,000 women		X		Municipal	Quarterly
		Cases involving members of LGBTQIA+ community per 100,000 people		X		Municipal	Quarterly
		Share of cases perpetrated by intimate partners (%)		X		Municipal	Quarterly

Category	Sub-category	Indicator	Source			Smallest Geographical Disaggregation	Maximum Frequency
			Survey	Admin	Other		
					Detail		
		Number of murders (incidents) in the past 12 months per 100,000 people	X			Provincial	Annual
	Deprivation of liberty	Share of women whose current partner (if currently partnered) or most recent partner (if formerly partnered) demonstrates at least one of the following controlling behaviours: is jealous or angry if she talks to other men, frequently accuses her of being unfaithful, does not permit her to meet her female friends, tries to limit her contact with her family, and insists on knowing where she is at all times (%)	X			Provincial	Irregular
	Trafficking - Servitude	Detected cases of trafficking of persons for servitude per 100,000 people		X		National	Annual
	Psychological	Share of women who have experienced any emotional violence (committed by any partner) in the past 12 months (%)	X			Provincial	Irregular
		Number of incidents of psychological violence in the past 12 months per 100,000 people	X			Provincial	Annual

Category	Sub-category	Indicator	Source			Smallest Geographical Disaggregation	Maximum Frequency	
			Survey	Admin	Other			
			Detail					
Economic	Property damage	Number of incidents of deliberate damaging of dwelling in the past 12 months per 100,000 households	X			GPSJS	Provincial	Annual
	Restricting access to education or the labour market or control over financial decisions	Share of women without control over earnings (participate in decisions alone or jointly with their spouse about how their own earnings will be used.)	X			DHS	Provincial	Irregular

Where indicators based on administrative data are to be expressed relative to the population, use should be made of official population estimates from Statistics South Africa.

### 5.3. Proposed Structure

Mazziotta and Pareto (2017:71-74) propose a useful guide for choosing an appropriate method to combine individual indicators into an index, noting that the main factors to consider are the type of indicators, the type of aggregation, the type of comparisons, and the type of weights.

**Type of indicators:** The issue of the type of indicators refers to whether or not a low score on one indicator can be compensated for by a high score on another indicator. Where such compensation is allowed, indicators are considered substitutable or compensatory. For example, a composite measure of job quality may allow for substitutability between the proportion of workers with written contracts and the proportion of workers with permanent contracts; however, it might not permit substitutability between the proportion of workers with written contracts and the proportion of workers exposed to hazardous work environments. Where substitutability is allowed, additive approaches to aggregation can be followed. For example, one might combine substitutable indicators by taking the arithmetic mean of the values. In contrast, non-linear methods such as geometric means or other more complex methods are used to allow for non-substitutability or partial substitutability.

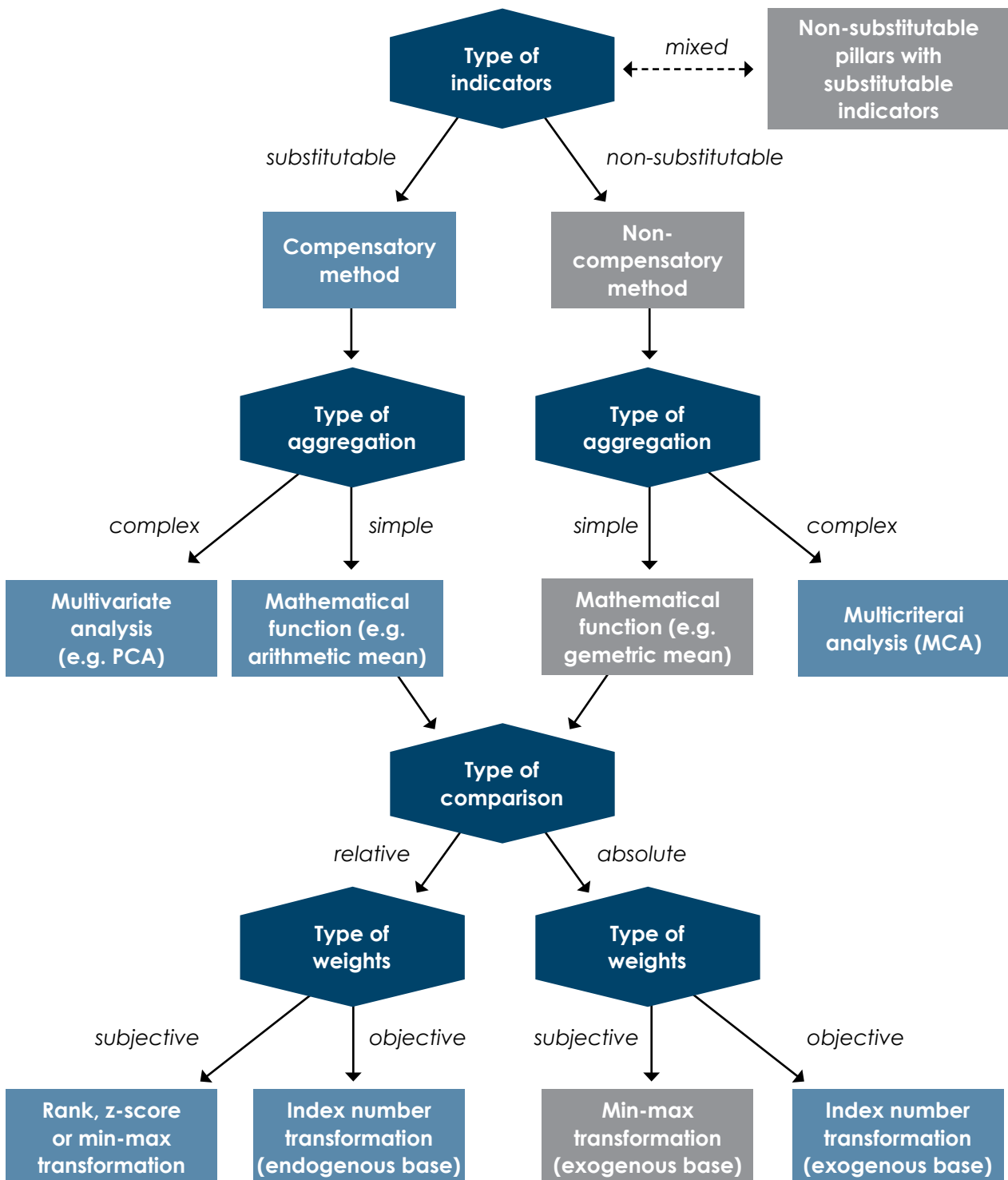
**Type of aggregation:** The decision around the type of aggregation boils down to whether the method is simple or complex. Simple aggregation methods are those that can be described through an easily understandable mathematical function (e.g. addition) and are particularly useful where non-specialists or the general public are the primary users of the index. In contrast, complex aggregation methods rely on multivariate approaches and complex models (e.g. principal components analysis) that may be more challenging to communicate to non-specialist audiences.

**Types of comparisons:** Comparisons of index values across space and time may be either absolute or relative. All normalisation methods allow for space comparisons, whereas time comparisons of units may be difficult to make or interpret (Mazziotta et al 2017:183). Certain normalisation methods, such as ranking or standardisation, preclude absolute comparisons as the methods use the mean and variance of the indicators at the time of reference. In order to make absolute comparisons, normalisation methods such as rescaling or indicisation need to rely on reference values that are external to the data itself.

**Types of weights:** Weights, which establish a hierarchy of relative importance, may be either subjective or objective. Subjective weights may be adopted implicitly by assigning the same weight to all the components, or explicitly through reference to a group of experts. Objective weights can be applied implicitly by choosing a normalisation method that assigns a weight proportional to variability of the indicator, or explicitly by multivariate statistical methods (Mazziotta et al, 2017:184). Put differently, subjective weights are assigned, whereas objective weights are calculated.

These choices can be illustrated through a flowchart developed by Mazziotta and Pareto (2013). This flowchart is presented in Figure 1. The decision path for the proposed GBV index is highlighted.

**Figure 1. Flowchart for choosing appropriate method**



Source: Adapted from Mazziotta and Pareto (2013).

Given the considerations for the GBV index discussed in section 5.1 and the flowchart in Figure 1, the proposed structure for the index is as follows.

The intention of the index is to measure the level of gender-based violence in South Africa. Thus, since the index aims to measure an output, all indicators included within the index must be indicators of outputs.

The proposed index follows a mixed approach of non-substitutable pillars with substitutable indicators. Specifically, in line with the literature the proposed index will have four pillars or domains, measuring sexual violence, physical violence, psychological violence, and economic violence. Each pillar will then have a number of indicators that will be substitutable. At the level of the pillars, then, the method is a non-compensatory method, although a compensatory method is followed at the level of the indicators.

In line with our preference for usability and transparency, a simple aggregation approach is proposed. This entails the use of a clear mathematical function. The index will be calculated using a geometric mean of the scores for each pillar, while each pillar's score will be calculated using an arithmetic mean of the individual indicator scores.

The intention is that the index allow for absolute scores, allowing us to compare scores in absolute terms over time and space.

Finally, equal weights will be applied across all indicators within each pillar, and each pillar will be weighted equally. Since equal weights are subjective weights, the method available to us for transforming the indicators is a min-max transformation with an exogenous base (i.e., a min-max transformation that is independent of the distribution).

Three additional issues require specific attention here in terms of the construction of the index: first is the issue of differences in spatial units used across different sources; second is the issue of differences in timing and frequency of data sources and the related indicators; and third is the issue of ensuring comparability of indicators across geographical units of different population sizes.

Absent significant coordination and collaboration, institutions collecting data relevant to gender-based violence are likely to collect the data in a format that makes sense to them but that may not necessarily make sense to others. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this variance in data collection and publication relates to the spatial or geographical units used. Sometimes these units may not even have a clear geographic delineation. Thus, for example, the South African Police Service collects and publishes data at the level of police stations; the Department of Health collects data at the level of healthcare facilities; and the Department of Justice may collect data according

to magisterial district. This is a key challenge in ensuring that datasets are able to speak to each other and that indicators can be calculated for sensible detailed geographies that make sense from a policy perspective. Each dataset will present its own challenges in terms of calculating indicators for a common geographical area, with local municipal boundaries being the ideal disaggregation for the GBV index. These will likely need to be addressed through the use of geographical information systems (GIS) techniques.

A second issue is that of the different timing and frequency of the different data sources and their associated indicators. This becomes particularly challenging where data is incorporated from data sources that are infrequently or irregularly collected, such as household- or individual-level surveys. The option of choosing the 'lowest common denominator' in terms of frequency may see the index updated too infrequently for it to fulfil its monitoring function. Instead, it is proposed that the index be structured to accommodate differential updating of components. Depending on the available data, this might entail either splitting the overall index into a component that is updateable quarterly, and another component that is updateable annually; or where some components are updated annually and others less frequently. Alternatively, the index could allow for its components to be updated as and when the data becomes available, with older data being 'carried forward' within the index while waiting for more recent data. Our sense is that the former is likely to be preferable, noting that more frequent updating of the index raises the requirements in terms of capacity and resources.

Third, in order to ensure comparability across space, it is clear that indicators will need to be expressed relative to the population within the relevant geographical area. In other words, indicators will need to be expressed as a number per 100 000 people, rather than as absolute numbers.

Finally, although GBV is defined to extend beyond women to include violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals, the extent to which this violence is visible within the various datasets is likely to be limited. This suggests that this aspect of GBV will not be fully reflected within the index without significant improvements to data collection processes.



## 6. Looking Forward

### 6.1. Moving towards a gender-based violence index

It is clear that much work lies ahead in order to develop and construct an index of gender-based violence for South Africa, particularly one that enables the on-going measurement of the level of GBV in the country, that provides useful evidence for policymaking across the three tiers of government, that is easily accessible by relevant stakeholders and the general public, and that is useful for advocacy and further research.

This was highlighted through the discussions that took place during the roundtable with stakeholders from government, academia, and civil society in early February 2024, hosted by the Commission for Gender Equality, the UNFPA, and the Development Policy Research Unit. This roundtable aimed to launch the idea of the GBV index and to initiate a conversation between stakeholders on the nature and availability of existing data, and on the challenges and opportunities involved in working with different kinds of GBV-related data.

The discussions raised a number of key points for the work ahead.

First, there was general enthusiasm and support for the idea of the GBV index and the systematic and regular measurement of gender-based violence in its various forms in South Africa. Critically, measurement was recognised as being central to the ability of society to better understand and design interventions to address the problem of gender-based violence.

Second, there was broad recognition that the type of measure envisaged would, to a large extent, be reliant on regularly-available, high quality administrative data. At the same time, it was recognised that the data in this space remains fragmented and siloed, and that systematic publication of this data remains rare. Further, where relevant data is published regularly, it is rarely published in a format that speaks directly and clearly to the issue of gender-based violence. It was, however, recognised that administrative data would not be able to provide a holistic view of gender-based violence since its ability to speak to psychological, emotional and economic violence is currently limited.

Third, there was an encouraging degree of openness amongst participants in the public sector to discuss modalities of data access that would support the construction of the GBV index. Thus, participants were not averse to the idea of future engagements aimed at understanding the type of data their institutions collect and potentially at accessing such data, as well as for the possibility of making small adjustments to data collection to make the data more useful for measuring gender-based violence.

Fourth, there is a large variety of data sources that exist in both the public and the private sectors that have the potential to contribute to our understanding of gender-based violence. While not all of these may be suitable for incorporation in the GBV index, they may still be useful in broadening and deepening our understanding of the extent and nature of GBV in South Africa.

Finally, participants recognised that the development of the GBV index would not be a quick process, but would instead require a longer-term collaborative process that would allow for a period of ongoing refinement of the index as more data is made available.

Partly in response to these points, but also reflecting on the various other discussions that took place during the course of this research, we offer the following suggestions.

First, the paucity of administrative data collection systems that have GBV as either a primary or ancillary focus has implications for the data that is eventually collected and, as a result, for the type of composite measure that can be constructed. One significant data gap is the ability to discern gender-based violence beyond more narrowly-defined violence against women or violence against women and children. The intention is for this index to be a gender-based violence index: it should be able to measure violence against women, against children, and against members of the LGBTQIA+ community. However, reliance on administrative data means that—at least initially—the early versions of this index are likely to be able to only measure violence against women and girls. Over time, as data collection processes are adapted to be more closely aligned to the objective of measuring gender-based violence, the index may effectively become a measure of violence against women and children and, eventually, gender-based violence. The objective of measuring gender-based violence, broadly defined, must guide and drive future development of the index.

Second, in response to the fragmentation of data in this space and as a function of the variety of datasets that seem to already exist, the development of the GBV index would be supported by a parallel process of collating, cataloguing and bringing together as many of these datasets together in some kind of centralised repository where they can ideally be accessed for purposes of policymaking and research. This process would obviously also need to be shaped and informed by considerations around privacy and security, recognising also that the exact considerations might vary across datasets. Modalities of access may vary for different datasets and may range from, for example, unrestricted downloading of data all the way through to secure access. A key aspect of the cataloguing of the data would relate to documentation around data collection processes, data fields, and other similar metadata.

## **6.2. A proposed workplan**

As has been noted, significant work is required to construct a GBV index for South Africa in a way that reflects the key objectives and considerations for the index. This

process requires a number of different activities, including both explicitly outward-facing activities such as advocacy and engagements around data as well as more internal activities for the CGE that clearly establish a roadmap and parameters for the development of the index. Based on discussions with the CGE and the UNFPA, a set of key activities or next steps were identified and these are outlined below.

## **Outward-facing activities**

### **1. Alignment**

The need for alignment of the proposed GBV index to other existing structures and frameworks in the GBV space is critical to the success of the index, particularly in relation to its relevance within the space. Alignment with the NSP on GBVF is key and requires engagement with the Department for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, as custodians of the plan.

### **2. High-level advocacy**

It is recognised that buy-in to the process of constructing the GBV index is critical in ensuring that the resulting index fulfils its objectives and is able to provide a broad measure of the level of GBV in South Africa over time. This will require high level engagements between the CGE and stakeholders in the GBV space around the value of the proposed index for policymaking, monitoring and analysis of GBV in South Africa. Further, where relevant, these engagements need to include discussions around issues of data access, with the initial objective here being a mapping of existing data.

### **3. Mapping of GBV data sources**

A data mapping exercise is required to ensure that all existing data sources that might be able to speak to GBV in South Africa are mapped. This would include both administrative data and survey data, as well as potential administrative-type data sources that are located outside of government. This exercise would be a standalone research effort that would, amongst others, document the process of data collection, from data collection to data capturing and data cleaning; and describe the data fields collected and stored. This would require looking at forms and other data collection instruments, as well as speaking to the data holders and expert data users. This data mapping exercise would yield two key outputs: the identification of possible indicators for inclusion in the index, and the identification of data sources that could be included in a public online data hub.

### **4. Establishment of a GBV data hub**

One of the key challenges around GBV data is the extent of fragmentation and the lack of data in the public domain. Flowing from the data mapping exercise, an

online data hub that provides access to relevant GBV data for public use would help contribute to addressing this data gap. The intention is that data identified through the data mapping process could be made available through this central hub to policymakers, academics and civil society for use, either directly or by linking to these datasets. This would require the agreement of the data owners and would need to be published in such a way as to address any concerns around privacy and anonymity. While the data hub may start off with a relatively limited number of datasets, it is hoped that it might develop into a comprehensive source of data for issues related to gender-based violence.

## 5. Advocacy and engagement

Given the longer-term nature of the process of establishing a GBV index for South Africa, it is clear that the CGE and its partners would need to engage with stakeholders and the general public on an ongoing basis to build awareness and ensure continued enthusiasm for this initiative. This would entail engagements with government partners and stakeholders, with academia, with civil society organisations, with the private sector, and with the general public.

### Other activities

First, in order for the GBV index to be constructed, it would be appropriate for the CGE to develop a clear definition of gender-based violence, violence against women, and other related concepts. This is essential to ensure alignment between the Commission's own official conceptualisation of gender-based violence and what the index measures. Without staking out a clear definition, the risk is that the definition used for the GBV index will come to be viewed as the Commission's definition.

Second, based on what we know about the available, particularly administrative, data sources on GBV issues, an index constructed in the short- to medium-term is likely to end up as an index of violence against women and girls. This is due to the dearth of data fields in these data sources that would be able to ensure that constructed indicators are able to speak to the broader concept of gender-based violence. It is clear that the primary objective of this index is to measure gender-based violence; however, the Commission will need to assess—based on the constraints in the data environment—whether the first iteration of the index is as one of violence against women and girls, and that subsequent iterations of the index incrementally expand the scope of the index to fully encompass gender-based violence. The benefit of such an approach is its incremental view, particularly in terms of addressing data gaps, which allows the index to be published sooner rather than having to make all required changes to data collection across a wide range of data sources before it is first published. However, it is critical that such an approach is accompanied by a clear roadmap of the development of the index, ensuring that stakeholders understand how the scope of the index is to be broadened over time.

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## 8. Appendix: SDG Targets

### 8.1. SDG Goal 5: Targets and Indicators

SDG Target	Related indicators
5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere	5.1.1 Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex
5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation	5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age  5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence
5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation	5.3.1 Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18  5.3.2 Proportion of girls and women aged 15-49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, by age
5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate	5.4.1 Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location
5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life	5.5.1 Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments  5.5.2 Proportion of women in managerial positions

SDG Target	Related indicators
<p>5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences</p>	<p>5.6.1 Proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care</p> <p>5.6.2 Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education</p>
<p>5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources, in accordance with national laws</p>	<p>5.a.1 (a) Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure</p> <p>5.a.2 Proportion of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control</p>
<p>5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women</p>	<p>5.b.1 Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex</p>
<p>5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels</p>	<p>5.c.1 Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment</p>

Source: [https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5#targets\\_and\\_indicators](https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5#targets_and_indicators)

## 8.2. Additional SDG targets and Goals:

SDG Target	Related Indicator
8.7 Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms	8.7.1 Proportion and number of children aged 5-17 years engaged in child labour, by sex and age
10.7 Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies	10.7.3 Number of people who died or disappeared in the process of migration towards an international destination
16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	16.1.1 Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age  16.1.2 Conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause  16.1.3 Proportion of population subjected to (a) physical violence, (b) psychological violence and (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months  16.1.4 Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live after dark
16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children	16.2.2 Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age group and form of exploitation





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