The shadow pandemic

- a feminist institutional perspective on civil society’s work on gender-based violence in post COVID-19 South Africa

Author: Louise Lindfors

Supervisor: Emma Sundkvist

University College Stockholm
Acknowledgments

Sincere appreciation to all women who shared their experience and analysis to accomplish this study. And for the emotional support from family, colleagues, and friends: Alba, Valentina, Brendan, Daniel, Anna U, Anna N, Sylvia, Feroza, Dean, Pontsho, Norma, Björg, Tijana, Linde, Ulf, Maria, Göran, Susanne, Sanna, Tannaz, Emma, Caroline and Olga.
Abstract

This field study is a thematic and feminist institutionalist analysis on how the civil society and grassroots activists in Gauteng province, South Africa, has been affected and mitigated during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in their work against gender-based violence. The data consist of five semi-structured interviews with primary sources, divided in the two sub-groups of activists and formal NGO representatives.

The study presents civil society and activist viewpoints on adaptation, feminist movement building as well as shrinking space and crisis within crisis. This qualitative study is a thematic analysis linked to the theoretical framework of feminist institutionalism in the context of South Africa. The results reflect issues of representation, power balances linked to organizational status, accountability, transparency, and democracy.

Conclusion of this study is that need for adaptation and to mitigate the crisis within crisis (GBV and COVID-19 pandemic) is predominant for all stakeholders, but the viewpoints on how the pandemic affected the cooperation within the civil society sector varies between the two subgroups. The formal NGO’s viewpoint in this study is that the pandemic strengthened the cooperation within civil society and with institutions. However, the grassroots activist group’s perspective is that the pandemic created a split within the feminist movement. Shrinking democratic space is evidently affecting the grassroots activist group to a larger extent. The formal NGO group articulates an improved dialogue and cooperation with institutions and an enhanced political will to address gender-based violence.

All stakeholders that were interviewed in this study articulate that the context with new emerging crises, such as power-poverty, inflation and food shortage are challenging the possibilities to address the “shadow pandemic” of gender-based violence which is still a predominant human rights and democratic crisis in South Africa. This study contributes to the context analysis around implementation of the national strategic plan on gender-based violence and femicide and informs on challenges on feminist institutionalism in post-pandemic South Africa.
Keywords

Gender-based violence, institutional feminism, CSO (civil society organizations), grassroot activists, South Africa.

List of abbreviations

CGE – Commission for Gender Equality
CSO – Civil society organization
DOW - Department of women
DV – Domestic violence
DWCPD – Department of Women, Children and Persons with Disabilities
GBV – Gender-based violence
GBVF – Gender-based violence and femicide
IPV – Intimate partner violence
LGBTQIA+ - Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer, intersexual, asexual and other forms of sexual orientation and identification
NGO – Non-governmental organization
NGM – National Gender Machinery
NPA’s Sexual Offences and Community Affairs Unit (SOCA)
NSP (GBV) – National Strategic Plan on Gender Based Violence
NSP (GBVF) – National Strategic Plan on Gender Based Violence and Femicide
SRHR – Sexual and reproductive health and rights
SV – Sexual violence
TCC - Thuthuzela Care Centres
VAWC – Violence against women and children
VAWG – Violence against women and girls
WEGE – Women Empowerment and Gender Equality
# Table of contents

Introduction ................................................................................................................. 8  

1. Research aim and questions .................................................................................. 11  

2. Background ............................................................................................................. 12  
   2.1 Gender-based violence in South Africa ............................................................... 12  
   2.2 State/government initiatives against GBV ........................................................... 12  
   2.3 Civil society mobilization against GBV ............................................................... 14  

3. Previous research .................................................................................................... 17  
   3.1 Gender-based violence in a global context ........................................................... 17  
   3.2 Gender-based violence in South Africa ............................................................... 19  
   3.3 COVID-19 context in South Africa ...................................................................... 23  

4. Theory ...................................................................................................................... 24  

5. Method ..................................................................................................................... 29  
   5.1 Geographic scope and timeframe ......................................................................... 29  
   5.2 Participant selection ............................................................................................. 29  
   5.3 Data collection ...................................................................................................... 29  
   5.4 Thematic analysis ................................................................................................. 30  
   5.5 Ethical Considerations ......................................................................................... 31  

6. Delimitations ............................................................................................................ 33  

7. Results and analysis ................................................................................................. 35  

8. Analysis of formal NGO’s responses ...................................................................... 39
8.1 Adaptation........................................................................................................41
8.2 Formal NGO responses on feminist movement building ..........................44
8.3 Formal responses on shrinking space ....................................................45
8.4 Formal responses on crisis within crisis .............................................45

9. Analysis of informal (activists and grassroots) responses .........................46

9.1 Informal responses on adaptation .........................................................48
9.2 Informal responses on feminist movement building ..............................51
9.3 Informal NGO responses on shrinking space ......................................54
9.4 Informal responses on crisis within crisis ........................................55

10. Positive or negative sentiments in statements .........................................56

10.1 Positive sentiments...............................................................................56
10.2 Negative sentiments.............................................................................58

11. Conclusion and discussion .....................................................................61

Bibliography..................................................................................................63

Appendix 1 Statement of consent ...............................................................67
Appendix 2 Interview guide..........................................................................68
Appendix 3 Quotes from semi structured interviews formal sector .............70
Appendix 4 Quotes from semi structured interviews informal sector ..........72
Introduction

Statement of the problem

Gender-based violence in South Africa is one of the major challenges to democracy and human rights. GBV, also referred to as “the shadow pandemic”, increased during and after the COVID-19 pandemic due to lockdowns, rising unemployment rates and increased inequality for already vulnerable groups. Right before the outbreak of COVID-19, a multitude of national initiatives were taken to prevent gender-based violence. The 2018 declaration of the Presidential summit on gender-based violence and femicide opened by “Acknowledging that the epidemic of gender-based violence and femicide in South Africa is a national crisis.” The President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, therefore launched and started to implement multiple initiatives, among those two Presidential summits on gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) in 2018 and 2022. The President gave many public speeches on how to tackle GBV and multiple liaisons with civil society organizations and activists were re-established. Eventually, in cooperation with civil-society and regional actors, a national strategic plan – the NSP (GBV) - was launched in 2018 and published by 2020.

Civil society organizations (CSO’s)/non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) in South Africa, focused on addressing gender-based violence, are both the pillar of expertise and analysis as well as a supplier of the more part of the support functions for victims of GBV. NGO’s often work with both advocacy on policy level as well as functioning as service providers, and grassroot movements and activists are often the core function of reaching out

---


and supporting women and victims of GBV in rural areas and much of the research/analysis, information and campaigning is organized through various levels of civil society.

Very soon after the pandemic COVID-19 started and restrictions, including hard lockdowns, were implemented, statistics showed that levels of GBV increased rapidly. “Official reports show that within the first week of level 5 lockdown, South African Police Services (SAPS) received 2,320 complaints of gender-based violence [---] These statistics represent a 37% increase from the weekly average of South African GBV cases.”³ Civil society organizations was facing unprecedented challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, with increasing rates of GBV as well as limitations due to restrictions, limiting the possibilities to meet the need of the victims.

The research problem for this thesis is to contribute to insight on how various actors within civil society has coped and mitigated these challenges, and furthermore to investigate if the experience differs between formal and informal actors. Moreover, an institutional analysis of the data will inform on issues of governmentality, democracy, representation and inclusion.

**Purpose of the project**

The twofold purpose of this project is a case study⁴ - to give voice to stakeholders within civil society, grassroots activists as well as formal NGO representatives, and to thematically investigate how the experience and viewpoint on challenges and opportunities to address GBV during and after the pandemic COVID-19 differs between formal and informal actors in this field and consequently a feminist institutionalist analysis⁵ of the data. The study aims to link the role of civil society to the theoretical framework of feminist institutionalism by analyzing the collected data on how different actors within civil society interact and relate to


⁴ See Chapter 5 Method

⁵ See Chapter 4 Theory
the national gender machinery\(^6\) (NGM). Highlighting some different positions and experiences between formal and non-formal NGO’s aims to map out some of the issues linked to democracy: funding of civil society, mechanisms within the sector that supports or challenges the work against gender-based violence.

The results of the study aim to contribute to further research on South Africa’s civil society’s role in preventing GBV, feminist movement building and feminist institutionalism and additionally mitigation and the shrinking democratic space in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis and result will benefit an audience mainly within academia and civil society and target groups interested in issues of democracy, human rights, feminist institutionalism, state feminism, feminism, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

\(^6\) See Chapter 4 Theory
1. Research aim and questions

The aim of this study is to thematically analyze from a feminist institutionalism perspective how civil society organizations in South Africa specialized on advocacy and prevention of gender-based violence have mitigated the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including restrictions and social and economic effects. A fieldwork study is performed including interviews with several stakeholders from CSO’s as well as informal actors/activists/grassroot-level aims to gain insight on how the situation is perceived from both these levels, civil society - formal and informal sector.

Data is collected on how the responses on GBV has shifted during and after the pandemic and furthermore investigate the dynamic regarding the shrinking democratic space and feminist institutionalism linked to the limitations for organizing in this policy area during the restrictions. The focus is steered towards the different experiences and conditions for formal vs informal actors within civil society. Furthermore, the focus and analysis are devoted to finding out more on context after the pandemic. In the process of analyzing the data, a thematic approach was applied to sort and analyze the results.

- Has the conditions and premises for addressing GBV shifted in different ways depending on organizational structure within civil society?
- Has the cooperation between formal and non-formal actors been affected?
- Has the funding for addressing GBV increased or decreased?
- Will the answers differ between stakeholders, if so, how could these differences be interpreted from a feminist institutional point of view?
- Which thematic areas regarding civil society’s preconditions to address gender-based violence is referred to by the stakeholders?
- Do the experiences and viewpoints differ between formal and informal sector?
- How are the civil society responses linked to issues on human rights and democracy and what kind of result is to be found on analyzing the data through a perspective of feminist institutionalism in relation to civil society’s role and function as stakeholder in the work against GBV?
2. Background

2.1 Gender-based violence in South Africa

The issue of gender-based violence from a civil society perspective can be defined as “[---] a profound and widespread problem in South Africa, impacting on almost every aspect of life. GBV (which disproportionately affects women and girls) is systemic, and deeply entrenched in institutions, cultures, and traditions in South Africa. GBV occurs as a result of normative role expectations and unequal power relationships between genders in a society.”

South African civil society organizations focused on gender justice and women’s rights have highlighted the risks and direct consequences for the victims of GBV due to the lockdowns and other restrictions taken to prevent the spread of virus during COVID-19. The GBV situation is sometimes referred to as a “shadow pandemic” and this study aims to give voice to some of the stakeholders through semi structured interviews with both NGO-representatives as well as primary sources in the target group and activists.

South Africa is one of the countries globally with highest rates of GBV and femicides, according to statistics from 2020 a woman is killed every third hour in South Africa. NGO’s have a key role in prevention initiatives, support to victims and for the lobby- and advocacy work for policy change. Gender-based violence remains one of the massive scourges in South African society and has been addressed in many levels, from activist level to government.

2.2 State/government initiatives against GBV

South Africa has one of the most supportive constitutions for gender equality and ever since the democratization of the country in 1994 the women’s movement has been influencing state design, policy framework and legislation mainly through the CGE (Commission for Gender

---


Equality). The Thuthuzela project is a national initiative on “one-stop-facilities” organized the Sexual Offences and Community Affairs Unit (SOCA), in partnership with several departments, funded by state-funds as well as by external donors. Nationwide there are today more than fifty TCC’s established since the start of the project in 2006. The purpose of the Thuthuzela project is that South Africa should have an integrated strategy that includes prevention support on GBVF, response and support for SV and IP and GBV victims. The support offered at the TCC includes trauma-support and legal support in order to promote prosecution of perpetrators but also to address the stigmatization of victims. The project of establishing the TCC’s was planned and implemented in cooperation between the government and civil society.

The government took additional initiatives on policy level in 2012 when the National Council on Gender-Based Violence (NCGBV) was established with the purpose of drafting, costing, and implementing a national strategic plan (NSP) to combat GBV. In 2014 the international auditor KPMG conducted an evaluation of the SA government strategies to address violence against women and children (VAWC). The report was published after a year in embargo and its recommendations was to strengthen the government’s responsibility to address the issue in all departments and not to isolate it to a “women and children” issue. During the last few years, the president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa has signed several improved and strengthened legislation bills and amendments aiming to end gender-based violence: Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters), the Eighteen Amendment Act Bill, the Criminal and the Domestic Violence Amendment Bill. These additions to legislation emerged from the


2018 presidential summit against gender-based violence and femicide. In 2022 a follow-up Presidential summit was organized.

The major outcome of these initiatives was the *National strategic plan on gender-based violence* NSP (GBV) – a multi-sectoral strategy that was produced by the Interim Steering Committee established in April 2019 to respond to the gender-based violence and femicide crisis following the 2018 Presidential Summit on GBVF. It was prepared and written in cooperation with stakeholders from civil society and the feminist movement. The purpose is to realize a South Africa free from gender-based violence and femicide. “NSP(GBV) address all violence against women and other victims such as LGBTQI+ people and boys and men and it recognizes victims regardless of age, location, disability, sexual orientation, sexual and gender identity, nationality, and other diversities and affirms that accessing services is human rights-based and thus should be accessible for all.”

2.3 Civil society mobilization against GBV

In 2006 the One in nine campaign (OINC) was started as a mobilization from CSO to address GBV and SV after the rape trial against the at that time Deputy President Jacob Zuma. The campaign was started in support of Fezeka Kuzwayo (Khwezi) who publicly accused the former President of rape. Shortly after the South African Medical research center published a study on SV stating that an estimate of only one out of nine rape survivors reported the attack to the police. OINC still functions as an umbrella for activists and organizations to cooperate in these issues and has been followed by several campaigns and initiatives. The high levels of GBV in South Africa, including a number of femicide cases with high media attention during the last decade, has mobilized a strong public call for to significant public call to end GBVF. In 2012 the government took initiative to form the National Council on Gender-Based Violence (NCGBV), a council created for the purpose of drafting, costing, and implementing a national strategic plan (NSP) to combat GBV. But between 2012 and 2014 there were no projects or further steps taken, and the civil society in South Africa reacted with mobilization and counter

---

action: “Since its (the NCGBV) formation in 2012, it has been destabilized by political changes and lack of funding to execute its mandate, but with a lack of financial budget provision for the services needed and minimal consultation and cooperation with civil society.”\textsuperscript{15}

This lack of political will led up to the mobilization in civil society nationwide to come together in 2014 to form the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence campaign, demanding a “fully-costed, evidence-based, multi-sectoral, inclusive and comprehensive NSP to end GBV”\textsuperscript{16}. The campaign’s mandate and objectives have since broadened to holistically address and respond to GBV more broadly. The campaign was renamed in May 2016 to Stop Gender Violence: A National Campaign.\textsuperscript{17}

During the years 2014-2020 civil society organizations in South Africa has made efforts in mobilization to advocate on the urgency to get policy and sustainable funding in place to address the gender-based violence and femicide, hereafter referred to as GBVF. The campaigns, petitions and marches followed in numbers just before the pandemic struck.

Notable recent campaigns are the #totalshutdownSandton in 2018: “The protests came shortly after Stats SA revealed in June 2018 that the murder rate for women increased by 117 per cent between 2015 and 2016/17. The number of women who experienced sexual offences also jumped from 31,665 in 2015/16 to 70,813 in 2016/17, an increase of 53 per cent.”\textsuperscript{18}

In 2019 the #amInext campaign\textsuperscript{19} mobilized thousands of women in the streets and on social media following the rape and murder on the 24\textsuperscript{th} of August 2019 of nineteen-year-old student


\textsuperscript{16} ibid

\textsuperscript{17} ibid


\textsuperscript{19} Participedia article on #amInext campaign in South Africa (published Aug 24\textsuperscript{th} 2019) https://participedia.net/case/12313
year old Uyinene Mrwetyana in Cape Town. Her body was dumped in Khayelitsha. Her destiny sparked an uprising where thousands of women took to the streets to protest the violence.

The mobilization and protests were of course decreased during the pandemic, because of restrictions such as curfews and quarantine, but also due to the fact that many other more pressing issues became pressing, such as the access to medical and health-care, rising unemployment rates and food shortage. Initiatives to combat GBVF had to take new forms, one such initiative is the #WeAreDyingHere campaign/performance/film by the poetry collective Hear my voice: “WeAreDyingHere chronicles the journey of three soldiers forced to survive in a war that they did not choose. As the war against women rages around them, they attempt to find solace to process their pain under the constant threat of their enemy lurking in the shadows. #WeAreDyingHere engages directly with the violent culture of harassment, abuse, rape and femicide, it is a necessary pause, an exhale and insight into the experience of living as a woman.”

Other notable approaches to address GBV could be found in rural movements with focus on female farming. The Rural Women’s Assembly (RWA) is a self-organized network of national rural women’s movements, assemblies, grassroots movements, and networks of mixed small-scale farmers unions in southern Africa. The RWA focuses on building a feminist approach challenging corporate power, and advocating and building mechanisms to hold government and institutions accountable to supporting food sovereignty in the region and they integrate the issue of GBV in their work with female farmers, creating awareness through feminist schools, building support networks within the movement, and strengthening rural women’s independence.

20 “We are dying here” film on gender-based violence by poetry collective Hear my voice © Copyright #WeAreDyingHere, 2023  https://wearedyingherefilm.com/

21 Rural Women’s assembly – a coalition of rural women in southern Africa (homepage website) https://ruralwomensassembly.wordpress.com/
3. Previous research

3.1 Gender-based violence in a global context

There are multiple studies published about gender-based violence globally and a several on the specific context of South Africa. The global prevalence of GBV and the fact that it is prevalent in all socioeconomic levels, all cultures, and nations all over the globe, it is obvious that most theories fall short of explaining all aspects of gender-based and sexual violence. To contribute to research in this field, it is necessary to have a multidimensional approach and collect data from a variety of sectors and stakeholders.

The problem of gender-based violence is a global phenomenon and the definitions are broad and informed by the development in the feminist research and political agenda of both ideological and policy level of the issue. Different geographical areas have taken different approaches, due to development level of the countries, ideological and cultural aspects and funding of programs, such as the multilateral agenda and civil society and state actor’s focus. In the overview by Taket and Crisp *Eliminating gender-based violence* \(^22\) a presentation of a socio-ecological model with intersectionality characteristics is informing a definition of the complexity of causes and effects of GBV, at individual, interpersonal and community/society levels. The model maps out the individual as the center with added layers of the interpersonal, community, society and global context interfacing, with the parameters of ethnicity, dis/ability, gender, age, sexuality, socio-economic status and religion interluding on all levels (from individual to global). \(^23\) This book was published in 2017 and contributed to the establishment of the intersectional perspective dominating the paradigm of research and prevention programs ever since. With case studies from several countries, among those South Africa and presenting an overview of decades of research this publication was contributing to the definition of gender-based violence in this field study, where the intersectional and ontological perspective is fundamental. Chapter seven on a case study of how feminist empowerment of self-defense carried out by grassroot activists and chapter eleven on organizational gender equality work

---

\(^22\) Taket, Ann and Crisp, Beth R. *Eliminating Gender-Based Violence*, Routledge, 2017

\(^23\) ibid
elaborating on the logic of how an asset-based approach can contribute to prevention of GBV was particularly rewarding to the definition of GBV in this thesis\(^{24}\).

In the collection of articles published in *Gender-based violence* edited by Terry and Hoare\(^{25}\) the definition of GBV is scrutinized and problematized from a civil society-, development- and humanitarian-sector perspective. “The terms GBV and violence against women (VAW) are often interchanged, but they are not synonymous. The Declaration on the Elimination of violence against women (1993), defines VAW as a sub-category of GBV. ‘Any act of gender-based violence that results in [---] physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life’ [---] There are problems with the term GBV, both in itself and the way it is used by the international development community. [---] it implies that there are some types of violence that are not rooted in gendered power relations, whereas [---] all violence is, in fact, gendered.\(^{26}\)

In the research field of social sciences, there has been a shift regarding the concept of gender during the last three decades. From an essentialist perception, mainly explained by biological differences between the sexes in the late sixties, through a shift from (sex-) roles to (gender-) performance and position.\(^{27}\) Worth noticing is how this shift also supports the concept of gender-based violence, where the understanding of violence is intertwined with the concept of gender (masculinity, patriarchy and structural violence and oppression) and thus, the performance of violence is also the performance of gender. The feminist movement have also contributed to the paradigm shift on how to understand the concept of gender by adding the intersectional analysis. From the more academic western approach in the seventies, the feminist movement as well as research motivated to include other levels of injustices in the struggle for gender equality. This effort is to some extent inspired by Marxist theories, where

\(^{24}\) ibid page 98  
\(^{25}\) Terry, Geraldine and Hoare, Joanna: *Gender-Based Violence*, Oxfam, 2007  
\(^{26}\) Terry, Geraldine and Hoare, Joanna: *Gender-Based Violence*, Oxfam, 2007  
\(^{27}\) Merry, Sally Engle: *Gender Violence – A Cultural Perspective*, Wiley-Blackwell (an imprint of John Wiley Sons Ltd) West Sussex, UK, 2009
class, socio-economic standard, race ethnicity, nationality, disability, sexual orientation among other characteristics, will also feed into the concept of gender justice.

The ontological perspective is elaborated in Sally Engle Merry’s *Gender violence – a cultural perspective*. Merry concludes that even though GBV is a global phenomenon, structural violence, such as poverty, racism and migration, plays a crucial part in a country’s vulnerability of high prevalence of gender-based violence. Merry also elaborates on the importance of social movements in the global response to GBV with multiple examples and the region of Southern Africa as the example where successfully decreasing the rates of female genital cutting is illustrating the thesis. Even though Merry’s book was published in 2009 – there are many important and relevant suggestions on how to theoretically navigate the vast landscape of gender-based violence all over the world. For this study the theoretical framework will be supported by Merry’s suggestions and findings.

The definition of gender-based violence enhances many different expressions of violence, in many contexts – intimate partner violence (sometimes referred to as domestic violence), rape, sexual assault, rape in conflict, female genital mutilation/cutting, trafficking, dowry deaths and more. The theoretical framework is covering ontological, structural, cultural, and socio-economic aspects.

### 3.2 Gender-based violence in South Africa

Amanda Gouws, who is professor of political science and chair of the South African Research Initiative in Gender Politics, Stellenbosch University is one of the most notable researchers on feminism in SA, Gouws has published studies on democracy, feminist movement building and feminist institutionalism. Gouws has also made a theoretical inventory of different approaches on the context of GBV that will support and guide this analysis, with referral to Louise du Toit, a philosopher based at the same South African university, Gouws maps out four explanations of root causes to gender-based violence which are common as well as contested: past perpetrator violence, social and economic exclusion, injured masculinity or

28 Ibid page 102

patriarchal politics (reaction to women gaining rights) and lastly violence that is a condition of human existence i.e. ontological violence. And of these four, the last perspective is what makes most sense according to Gouws and she refers to three viewpoints in research that supports this, and all research is pointing towards that there is a need for multi-faceted response, where legal reform dealing with domestic violence, as well as with sexual violence, is implemented, where there are government-funded shelters for victims of domestic violence and crisis centers for victims of sexual assault. In addition to the policy and implementation of legal structure and support, what is also needed is also the integration between state and civil society, a perspective that is further elaborated in Gouws latest book on how the feminist institutional approach has its specific possibilities and challenges in the South African context, which will be the theoretical baseline for this study, see Chapter 5 Theory.  

The most recent larger study on GBV in SA is *Ending gender-based violence – justice and community in South Africa* by Hannah E. Britton. In this study Britton organizes the extensive data she collected by sorting it by four categories: place, people, police and points of contact and the result of the study maps out the challenges and possibilities linked to these diverse levels where mitigation and prevention is organized. Britton concludes that incarceration is not the answer for prevention so the feminist movement should focus more on structural response. She recognizes how South Africa, with its recent history of apartheid and current reality with inequality in injustice, both regarding gender as well as race, puts SA in a specifically vulnerable spot for ontological violence. In this recent book there is a visible connectivity and theoretical baseline for my thesis.

Britton has, together with fellow researchers, set out to map out the role of civil society for the support and implementation of women’s rights after 1994 in South Africa in a study of civil society’s role in the democratic implementation in SA and: “[---] explores these spaces where women are actively reconstituting society by engendering democracy in ways that are central to assuring the long-term transformation of South Africa. In this collection, we situate civil society organizations as our central lens in analyzing gender progress in the context of”

30 ibid

31 Britton, Hannah E: *Ending gender-based violence*, University of Illinois press, 2020
South Africa’s ongoing process of social change and democratization.” 32 Britton and colleagues uncover of South Africa’s somewhat ambiguous position towards women’s rights where women are strengthening their presence in local, provincial, and national institutions has inspired legislation aimed at advancing women’s rights and opportunity. Yet, at the same time, South Africa has one of the highest rates globally of sexual assault, rape, and intimate partner violence and femicide. Britton examines the reasons gendered violence persists in relationship to social inequalities even after women assume political power. Venturing into South African communities, Britton invites service providers, religious and traditional leaders, police officers, and medical professionals to address gender-based violence in their own words. Britton finds the recent turn toward carceral solutions—with a focus on arrests and prosecutions—fails to address the complexities of the problem and looks at how changing specific community dynamics can defuse interpersonal violence. She also examines how place and space affect the implementation of policy and suggests practical ways policymakers can support street level workers such as social worker and civils society representatives and care workers.

Hannah Britton’s 2006 study Organising Against Gender Violence in South Africa 33 which was based on interviews with stakeholder (representatives and staff) from a wide range of NGOs that has been working on combatting, and preventing, GBV has also informed the backdrop to this thesis. The publication elaborates on the complicated relationship between the civil society actors (NGOs) and the state institutions. The awareness on the crucial role that civil society has in both policy push on GBV, implementation actor and instrumental key role to up-hold prevention programs, shelter facilities and support programs for victims, is evident in Britton’s previous research. This research point towards how the theoretical framework of feminist institutionalism could be a fruitful perspective for the specific context of gender-based violence, civil societies and the government’s role in South Africa.


In Amanda Gouws 2006 article on the “State of the National Gender Machinery” in *State of the nation* Gouws conceptualize one of the structural dilemmas that prevent the GBV movements full participation in how and what policies are prioritized by framing it in the term “localized temporal movements”. This pattern can be enlarged to also enhance the dilemma in the full implementation of women’s rights at national/state level, see more in Chapter 5 Theory.

Chapter 11 from the main guide of the theory of this study – *Feminist institutionalism in South Africa* is a contribution by Simamkele Dlakavu on the dynamic for civil society actors in the making of the NSP (GBV) and it reflects on the impact of the GBV activists and movements in the informing and contribution to the process of producing NSP (GBV). Dlakavu draws upon references from all the major initiatives and protests including the One in Nine Campaign, #RUReferencelist, #EndRapeCulture and #Totalshutdownmovement (also referred to as #totalshutdownsandton. Dlakavu “considers the activist legacies of the democratic feminist and women’s movement. [...] seek to make visible women as actors in the battlespace against GBV and femicide in which they have extracted the state’s response towards curbing the pandemic.”

Dlakavu concludes that due to the localized temporal feminist movements tend to be erased from policy making and from academic recognition and the constant flow of activists being either recruited to institutions, and thus potentially compromised in their activism, in combination with the reoccurring shifts in government bodies (institutions) creates tension and scatters the feminist movement. This, in combination with the fact that several activists who have been vocal in the mobilization against SV and femicide and GBV also have been


37 See Chapter 4 Theory
attacked, silenced, or killed if one of the features that severely challenges the movements potential to be recognized and to have impact in legislation and policymaking.

3.3 COVID -19 context in South Africa
The COVID -19 pandemic affected all levels of society and hit especially hard on civil society in South Africa, where much service providing and infrastructure is organized through CSO and the decision on hard national lockdown implementation both limited citizens access to crucial social services and support systems, as well as limited people, families, to leave their homes. This immediately had negative impact on the already negative trend in statistics on GBV, including femicide, child abuse and killings\(^{38}\). The situation around GBVF and VAWC is referred to as a ‘crisis within crisis’ and often called the twin pandemic to COVID-19 as well as shadow pandemic and invisible pandemic. In Lamb’s and Fourie’s book and research on how COVID -19 has affected life in SA: The South African response to Covid 19 - the early years - the “crisis within crisis” perspective is elaborated and shares the already alarming statistics on GBV the first three weeks of the lockdown where “over 120 000 women called the South African National helpline for GBV (Udo, 2020). Femicides, rapes, and domestic violence have in recent years reached extraordinarily high levels in South Africa, but the lockdown and the COVID-19 crisis also intensified these brutal crimes, especially against poor and working-class black women in the townships”\(^{39}\)

The vulnerable groups in society, such as women and children and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged and/or black communities are even more vulnerable to “crisis within crisis” effects, thus the pandemic itself and the aftermath/consequences of COVID -19 added many more challenges and burdens to women and children. In this study the connection between context of pandemic and the new reality presenting itself to this already exposed target group adding up to the vulnerability in terms of gender-based violence is presented.

\(^{38}\) Adebayo, B, newsarticle CNN (published June 19th 2020) “South Africa has the continent’s highest Covid-19 cases. Now it has another pandemic on its hands” CNN. South Africa has another pandemic on its hands: gender violence | CNN

Latest research of the gender dynamic of the effects of COVID-19 in African context is discussed in the collection of articles in *Gendered perspectives on Covid-19 recovery in Africa: towards sustainable development* ⁴⁰ Including political, social, and socio-economic links and effects between the power dynamic of gender and COVID-19 this book is informing on how gender is an important factor when measuring effects and designing prevention and setting indicators on how to deliver results to the SDG by 2030 and countering the backlash caused by the pandemic. Even though the book centers around the SDG number 5, gender equality and women’s empowerment it is also informing on context and mapping out specific precondition for the African continent in terms of effects of the pandemic in relation to the implementation of women’s rights as well as the effects of the restrictions and measures of mitigation during the pandemic, that hit more severely on vulnerable target groups such as women and children. It also touches upon the fact that women as group are on the one hand more victimized due to limited freedom and limited resources, but at the same time women are agents of protection and care in most countries in Africa, where much of the health care services are conducted through women organized in civil society. In South Africa much of the medical care during the pandemic was organized through the system of care workers who were an important stakeholder to reach out to marginalized groups and households, but also vulnerable to the political decisions on restrictions.

4. Theory

In the field of feminist institutionalism, two major theoretical hypotheses have been researched over the last three decades: one area of the discourse mainly centered around the state capacity, i.e., to what extent can women influence the state’s policy and decision-making? And the second branch of research is focused on “state – women’s organisations relations – the extent to which there is a conductive relationship for women’s organisations to

influence policy processes in the state.”⁴¹ In this field of research an exclusion of developing countries means that there are major gaps in the discourse on state feminism and on institutional feminism for South Africa, some important contributions from an African continent perspective, however, is to be found in Amina Mama’s study on state feminism in Nigeria from 1995⁴² where the postcolonial perspective informs the historical lens of the liberation in SA and elaborates why a decolonization as such does not necessarily lead to gender equality, and recognizes that the postcolonial state is a challenge but also a given in the project of gender activism⁴³.

Shireen Hassim is one of the leading South African voices in this field of research who has extensive publications on the relationships between women’s movements – activists and the state and has written many articles and books on how the gender machinery, the NGM in South Africa was elaborated by a “troika” of stakeholders: feminist activists, feminist scholars and women’s organizations.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Hassim has contributed to the problematization of the representation issue versus the gendered mechanisms in the state bodies with her concept of the “dual representation”⁴⁵ – where women in the case of representing women as a group but also actually being women themselves and therefore faced with some of the exclusion and marginalization that comes from the patriarchal structure of the hierarchies of the state.⁴⁶ This dynamic is informing some of the result in this study, where viewpoints on how the power

---


⁴² Mama, Amina: ”Feminism or Femocracy? State feminism and Democratization in Nigeria” *Africa development/Afrique et Development* 20 (1) 1995 pages 37-58

⁴³ Mama, Amina: ”Feminism or Femocracy? State feminism and Democratization in Nigeria” *Africa development/Afrique et Development* 20 (1) 1995 pages 37-58


⁴⁵ Hassim, Shireen “The dual politics of representation: women and electoral politics in South Africa” *Politikon* 26 (2) page 201-212, 1999

dynamic between civil society (and within civil society) informs sentiments and analysis of feminism in relation to the state.

To briefly recap the history of the National Machinery for Women (later National Gender Machinery) in South Africa it was one part of the negotiation process toward democracy.\footnote{Hassim, Shireen: “The gender pact and democratic consolidation: institutionalizing gender equality in the Soth African state” Feminist studies 29 (3) page 505-528, 2003} “[--] gender interests were incorporated and institutionalised as a gender pact. This “gender pact” included lengthy discussions among women activists, non-governmental organisations and academic institutions that could contribute different types of expertise (such as legal expertise).”\footnote{Gouws, Amanda: Feminist institutionalism in South Africa - designing for gender equality (edited by Amanda Gouws), Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022} Today, the NGM entails a large number of entities, on governmental, parliamentary, independent bodies/authorities and civil society level. One of the major challenges of impact for policy on GBV is that the NGM has over ten state level institutions, of which some are malfunctioning (due to lack of political will, constant restructuring, and the dynamic of democracy/election process) that are supposed to interact with civil society multitude of entities, such a NGO’s, women’s organizations, women’s legal organizations, religious bodies, local government interests, movements, non-formal actors etc.\footnote{Gouws, Amanda: Feminist institutionalism in South Africa - designing for gender equality (edited by Amanda Gouws), Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022 page 19}

In Feminist institutionalism in South Africa several perspectives on the feminist potential and limits and failures are mapped out in eleven contributions covering several aspects of feminist analysis, policy, activism and explaining the outline of the NGM as well as the history and management of the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE). To further elaborate on one of the key questions: “Can gender equality be designed?” the researchers contributes firsthand experience from the journey of implementation of South Africa’s implementation of the women’s and later gender issues regulated in the constitution and the efforts to “design” gender equality by forming state bodies, such as the CGE. The case of South Africa is of certain interest in this paradigm, since the constitution is very strong in regard to human rights and gender equality, but the nation has an immense history of inequality, violations of human rights and injustices linked to apartheid, segregation, poverty, inequality and abuse. It is also
an extra layer of complexity linked to that SA is such a young democracy and some of the methods and patterns in forming new institutions and implementing democracy is failing due to the copying of previous attitudes and habits.

Gouws 2016 article on women’s activism around gender-based violence – recognition, redistribution and representation\textsuperscript{50} explains some of the structural features from the perspective of Nancy Fraser’s theory of recognition and redistribution.\textsuperscript{51} Gouws shows that there is a tendency of temporal connections between movements and representatives of the state (often female MP’s) leaving a gap when the movement become demobilized, and this can happen through defunding, lack of political will and by the paradox that activists might be recruited to institutional positions and thereby shift their platform and loose some of their independence and courage to question the state/power.

The baseline theory for this study, is the lens of feminist institutionalism. The theoretical perspective was elaborated during the thematic analysis – since findings and results pointed towards observations on feminist movement building in connection with the specific context of the gender machinery in South Africa including gendered power dynamics interplaying at institutional level as well as within civil society per se and affecting the dynamic between these two levels (CSO’s and state).

The concept of feminist institutionalism, as referred to in this study, derives from Krook and Mackay’s definition in \textit{Gender, politics and institutions}\textsuperscript{52} and further elaborated and discussed in \textit{Feminist institutionalism in South Africa} edited by Gouws et al in 2021.\textsuperscript{53} The discourse enhances the relationship between state feminism and the civil society and women’s

\textsuperscript{50} Gouws, Amanda: “Women’s activism around gender based violence: recognition, redistribution and representation”, Review of African Political Economy 43 (149): 400-15

\textsuperscript{51} Fraser, Nancy: “Feminism, capitalism and the cunning of history” New left review 56:97-117, 2009

\textsuperscript{52} Krook, ML and Mackay, F: \textit{Gender, politics and institutions}, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2015

\textsuperscript{53} Gouws, Amanda: \textit{Feminist institutionalism in South Africa - designing for gender equality} (edited by Amanda Gouws), Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022
and feminist movements’ possibility to partake in policy change and derives from new institutionalism focused on explaining practices and norms that forms the institutions based on power dynamics derived from Foucault’s concept of power.54

The definition of feminism in this study is also a, to some extent, conflicted area in a post-colonial context, where the concept of feminism is sometimes perceived as linked to imperialistic, western academic influence and power. Thus, postcolonial feminism from an intersectional point of view will be informing the theoretical baseline of this study. The postcolonial perspective derives from Foucault’s55 definition of power and resistance and the intersectional perspective is contributing to keep the many levels of identity markers that will interplay in dimensions of political influence and democratic participation and representation, that is race, sex, gender, sexual orientation and identity, class, location (urban/rural), ability and disabilities.

In the analysis of the data concepts of feminist institutionalism will be applied mainly focusing on the state – women’s organizations relations and to highlight various experiences on the conductive relationship56 for organizations and activists/movements to influence policy processes in the state. Furthermore, an analysis of problem representation57 will be highlighted where the concept of the dual representation58 including the concepts of

54 Krook, ML and Mackay, F: Gender, politics and institutions, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2015


57 Ibid. page 229

inclusionary\textsuperscript{59} and transformational strategies\textsuperscript{60} will be applied to the thematic results. Some findings on the voice-to-representation-to accountability will also be applied to the analysis.\textsuperscript{61}

5. Method

5.1 Geographic scope and timeframe
The location for this study was set in Gauteng province, in the surroundings of Johannesburg city and outskirts. It was selected for this project based on the high rates and prevalence of reported GBV and because of the many CSO and activists that operate in this area. Gauteng province is the smallest in South Africa and at the same time the one with highest density of population, which makes the area extra exposed to the vulnerability linked to lock downs and travel bans and other restrictions during the pandemic. The timeframe for the field study was spring 2023.

5.2 Participant selection
The interviewees were selected by purposeful selection, but some field visits to sites such as shelters, and activist hubs were accumulated through snowball effects when interviewees suggested these.

5.3 Data collection
The interviews were conducted live on site and recorded on a mobile device or over secure Zoom and encrypted WhatsApp voice calls (no video). Additional interviews (two) were conducted via email after the field visit. The interview guide (see Appendix 1) was the baseline


\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{61} Goetz, Anne Marie: Governing Women - Women’s Political Effectiveness in Contexts of Democratization and Governance Reform, Routledge, London, 2013
for the interviews and in some cases follow-up questions and free text/speech comments were also included in the data collection even if they were collected in between sessions for instance in showing around at the site. Fieldnotes were taken during the visits. The equipment used for conducting and recording the interviews were personal computer and cell phone (Iphone). The average duration of the interviews was approximately 45 minutes. The interviews have been conducted in the focal points mentioned above, including field visits to shelters, activist-hubs, NGO programs and offices. Part of the interviews has been conducted live, recorded, transcribed and coded and some has been digital, via Zoom-interviews and Whatsapp calls, and some has been done via emails. Observations and data include meetings, conversations, longer and shorter visits to facilities, group encounters, chats, photos and film clips. For safety reasons all material is completely anonymized, and no interviewees will appear with their names or any other personal and/or identifiable markers. All interviewees has been given the mandate to be removed from the final version of the thesis.

5.4 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a method to sort and code qualitative data that enables an analysis to identify thematic patterns. This method is not per default associated with a specified theoretical perspective\textsuperscript{62} but for this project the researcher found it beneficial to link the method to the theoretical framework on state feminism and feminist movement building as elaborated in chapter 4 Theory. The interviews were first transcribed manually by the researcher and then proofread against the recording once more for accuracy. Thereafter the interviews were analyzed in accordance with the six-step analysis-method as presented in Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide by Maguire and Delahunt\textsuperscript{63}.

Step one: First step is reading through the entire material to get to know the material and get a first impression and a starting point for the interpretation and deeper analysis. Looking out for trends and patters, such as the overall impression of the interviewee’s messages and output.


\textsuperscript{63} Maguire, Moira and Delahunt, Brid: Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide, 2017
Step two: The interviews were manually coded by using NVIVO14 software for coding qualitative research. A word cloud was created for the entire material (all interviewees’ responses combined) as well as separated word cloud for the formal NGO responses vs the informal “activist” responses. The process of coding refers to mapping the thematic occurrence and to enable the process of sorting the results.

Step three: The codes were then compared, and the thematic analysis could start, in this process some reoccurring patterns and viewpoints could be organized under thematic headings and at this point the theoretical framework on how feminist movement building and the idea of state feminism in the specific context of South Africa was also taken into consideration. This method has per se no specific theoretical frame but for this specific project where both civil society and GBVF are core issues, the theoretical approach in the thematic analysis was relevant. The researcher made connections and interpreted some codes as linked to specific thematic relevance in this theory, such as participation, inclusion, cooperation, feminist movement building and funding.

Step four: The thematic analysis and patterns were reviewed to find overarching themes and to find possibilities to merge and/or break out sub-themes and categories. For instance, the thematic findings on democracy could also be connected to the category “shrinking space”. In total five themes and seven categories were mapped out.

Step five: The thematic findings were reviewed, and an outline and mapping of the themes and the categories was conducted.

Step six: Inductive thematic analysis was applied to the findings, and these were interpreted and mapped out in the chapter on results. Further analysis on positive or negative sentiments was coded.

5.5 Ethical Considerations

Multiple considerations were made in planning the design and method of the project and careful measures taken to make sure that the field-study could live up to the highest ethical

64 Bryman A. Social Research Methods, Third Edition. Liber AB; 2008
requirements. Efforts were made to recruit participants in an unbiased manner. In initial contacts the message on that all participation in this study is voluntary and that the interviewee at any point up until submission of the thesis has the full right to withdraw.

All interviewees were informed in text and oral on the context and condition for participating and were asked to sign an “Informed consent from” (see Appendix 1). The informed consent forms were the only identifying information which was captured and will be destroyed after the results of the study have been published and disseminated to the participants. The consent forms are stored separately from the interview recordings and transcriptions to secure anonymity.

A total of six interviews were completed, though only five are included in the final thesis since one of the interviewee’s decided to withdraw their response during the round of approval to participate in the published version. The reason for this is complex, the interviewee was uncomfortable with their quotes and did not have the time to revise them and one sensitive issue in the final results of the study is that it points towards challenges on the trust within the feminist movement and thus the participation can cause negative sentiments. The researcher acknowledged the possibility that the interviews could trigger uncomfortable emotions or memories for the participants and was prepared to provide for external support if this would happen. No such incidents occurred during the course of the field study.

Personal Information Act (POPIA) and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) are followed in the storage of personal data in this project.

All interviewees are fully anonymized, initially assigned with participant letters (A, B, C, L and N) and later named with alias/fictive names such as “Activist-Anna” and “Grassroot-Breda” etc. As both the audio files and the interview transcriptions were digital, these files were kept in password protected folders and were anonymized to a point where they cannot be un-anonymized in. All material, audio-files and recordings and transcripts will be destroyed after one year.

**Methodological adjustment during the field-study**

To cover current responses from civil society on gender-based violence, the methodological approach for the research project is a field study with visits at focal points for GBVF, such as shelters and organizations and interviews with both qualitative and quantitative questions. Data has been collected through semi-structured interviews with stakeholders representing civil
society, divided in “formal” NGO representatives and “informal” grassroot/activist representatives. The sampling strategy was snowball adaptive – where sampling evolves based on insights during the process and responsive to the information that will be shared during the interviews.65

The reason behind the division in two categories of formal and informal interviewees emerged during the interview process, it became clear that the answers shifted depending on whether the respondent was associated with an NGO structure or not. Much of the civil society responses to GBVF in terms of offering shelter, care, trauma-healing and housing is organized in more informal structure, whereas the more part of the programs offered, such as support-groups, training, counseling and therapy is organized through NGO’s and/or in co-operation with municipalities, state or multilateral institutions. As covered in Hannah Britton’s book Ending gender-based violence,66 many other points of contact are of course equally crucial for a victim of GBVF: the police, hospitals, GBV focal points at local level (municipalities and regional).

6. Delimitations

There are several delimitations to this study linked to the method of semi-structured interviews, that is qualitative approach; the study will not accumulate quantitative data and/or statistic conclusions. The method with a few semi-structured longer interviews will inform also on theoretical level, which means that the theory will be guided and supported by the process. Thus, there is also a limitation as to presenting and testing a hypothesis from the start and to expect the study to support or undermine that hypothesis. Furthermore, the theoretical

65 Aurini, Janice D. and Heath, Melanie and Howells, Stephanie: The how to of qualitative research, 2nd ed. London: Sage, 2022 p 80

66 Britton, Hannah E: Ending gender-based violence, University of Illinois press, 2020
limitations are obvious. The theoretical framework, as mentioned in 1.3, are divided in many levels, the state feminist theory itself differs between the western liberal ideological viewpoint and the African feminism, with its respective branches and standpoints\(^7\). The referral to intersectional feminism is a strive rather that a theoretical fixed viewpoint, since many factors linked to representation, inclusion and diversity is often neglected even though the intention and ambition, and policy, is in place. A shelter, for example, will most likely have the intention to work intersectional and thus acknowledge and address diversity, for example by making sure the housing is accessible also for a person with a disability. However, less visible issues of representation, such as sexual orientation or language barriers for example, might be overlooked even though the full intension is striving to include everyone.

Methodological limitations range over many aspects such as limited data and samples, limited scope, including limitations linked to how networking and applying both purposeful and the snow-ball method entails the risk of adding on like-minded interviewees. Within the field of civil society organizations addressing GBV in South Africa, there are of course power-dynamic within that cannot be fully uncovered or fairly considered when conducting a limited field-study such as this. Some data that is presented as truth to one respondent, might be viewed from another perspective and/or contradicted if the scope would be broader. The delimitations to experiences within the LGBTQI+ communities became obvious from the start of the field study. It is a challenge to find organizations that are fully intersectional in practice, even if the more part is so in strategy and policy. The limited scope regarding the formal NGO’s is linked to that the study is conducted from an urban perspective since the more part of the interviewees were situated in urban/peri urban areas. There are also, as will be discussed in the analysis ahead, limitations to reach informal sectors/representatives due to the energy crises and daily load-shedding, which limits the access for digital meetings in the rural areas.

Another obvious limitation when addressing issues around civil society’s role in regard to democracy, transparency, equity and accountability and participation is the general shrinking space and the CSO’s fear of losing funds. In some of the answers there were a general positive analysis on how the sector had improved the cooperation between organizations

during the pandemic, whilst other sources gave witness on the opposite. In these cases, there is a necessity to understand that some of the data will be colored by external expectations and/or fear of losing funds, even though the method ensured anonymity. Another possible limitation linked to these inconsistencies are possible self-censorship, a re-occurring phenomena in times of shrinking democratic space, and very difficult to mitigate.

Another important limitation to be aware of is the difficulties in building trust and mutual understanding because of limited time during the interviews. A limitation is that the researcher’s ethnicity/skincolor/race is white/caucasian and the majority of the interviewees are black/African, since this might influence the power dynamic and the trust, it might also limit the researcher’s possibility to de-code and sort some of the material and to be able to grasp possible follow-up questions during the interviews, due to lack of insight and lack of lived experience.

Another mitigated risk regarding the identity of the researcher is that fact that the researcher also has a leadership position within civil society in Sweden, as Secretary general for the Swedish solidarity organization Afrikagrupperna, with close contacts, co-operation and network within civil society in South Africa. Since this position might create a bias and a potential problematic power dynamic in the research the decision was taken to only use a private g-mail address for the project, to only contact stakeholders, interviewees that were not affiliated to Afrikagrupperna and to make a clear announcement in every contact that the research was conducted by the researcher in her private capacity and not funded, supported or connected to the work of Afrikagrupperna in any way.

7. Results and analysis

In the thematic analysis of the data, consideration has been taken to whether the interviewee is affiliated to formal or non-formal entities. Coding of keywords, patterns in responses and re-occurring viewpoints will be outlined to harvest results of this study and presented in chapters on formal and non-formal responses.
There were four key thematic areas that emerged from the data collection with several categories linking to each theme: adaptation (shift to digital solutions/methods, increased or decreased funding) shrinking space (participation, exclusion, democracy, relation to the state/government, urban/rural context) feminist movement building (co-operation, communication, mobilization, competition, trust) and crisis within crisis (pandemic and GBV plus poverty, energy poverty, digital exclusion, inflation). In this chapter on results the analysis of the thematic findings will be mapped out, elaborated and statistically accounted for.

The data analysis of the interviews is processed through the coding program NVIVO14, where the thematic analysis and manual coding is made by the researcher. There were in total six interviews completed and additional field-notes, email information and field observations. The researcher was also invited to take photos on several occasions, these photos will not be displayed, but is used as side-material for the researcher’s recollection and sorting of material.

The first part (Chapter 8) will outline overall answers from representatives in the formal NGO sector. In this study formal is referring to organizations registered as NPO or NPC or trust with funding, staff, offices and in some cases members, in other cases funding from foreign donors and/or through multi- or bi-lateral programs. The analysis is focused on the answers in the interviews and also on observations made on visits to offices and in the field. The analysis will be accounted for by thematic findings and analyzed through a perspective of feminist institutionalism.

The second part (Chapter 9) will develop some analysis on the data collected from the informal sector and categorize the answers pointing towards results in the guiding areas as defined in Chapter 2 (Research aim and question). The questions in the interview guideline centers around how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the organizations and activists and furthermore how these stakeholders mitigated and shifted the responses to address gender-based violence during and after the pandemic. The interviewees were invited to share on if, how and why they changed their way of working – and were also invited to share other reflections on their experience of the shift. The data collected points toward some patterns within all the responses, all the interviewees answered that the found that the GBV increased during the pandemic. All interviewees also stated that they shifted their responses due to the pandemic, some with referral to hygiene and mitigation on spreading/contracting the virus.
and others to shifts in funding and methods linked to navigating the reality during the pandemic.

The method for collecting data has been observations through visits to offices and shelters, oral and written (via email) interviews, the material consists of six interviews with some fixed yes/no answers regarding statistical and financial observations and experiences followed by three longer open questions where the interviewees are invited to share in freely in text or oral – to elaborate on the answers linked to how the responses from civil society has changed during and after the pandemic and if there are any reflections on other ripple effects in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The interviewees have been anonymized and are referred to with fictive names. Observations from field visits are accounted for to the most objective and accurate way as possible but will of course not be completely free from bias (see Chapter 6 Delimitations)

Questions were divided in some multiple choice and followed up by some free text/reflections. For those interviews that were conducted via physical meetings, there were more free sharing and more sharing of thoughts and experiences, which both added value to the data/material but at the same time presented some challenges in how to fit into the analysis.

Below is a word cloud generated from all the interviewees’ answers to get an overview on what was covered in the interviews, what words were used most frequent in all answers.
During the research, it became apparent that the viewpoint and perspective differed related to the interviewees’ organizational status. The starting point for the research was to analyze “civil society responses” – but during the process it became relevant to make the distinction between the formal and informal actors. The data was eventually sorted in relation to the interviewees’ organizational status, half of the material are formal NGO affiliations (staff members in formal CSO’s) and half are activists and grassroot/movement affiliated.

In the NVIVO14 program there is an option to code the affections/attitudes in the answers with a “positive” or “negative” code. This step was added on to the thematic analysis, to get a more statistical measure on the findings regarding different attitudes in the two groups of respondents.

In the accounting of percentages on themes in the below sections, it is worth to mention that the levels also relate to the size of the data – i.e. how long/how many sentences and words that are marked with the code in question. Moreover, the percentage levels are to be used for orientation of the qualitative data, not for accurate quantitative statistics.
8. Analysis of formal NGO’s responses

The most evident theme that formal sector mentioned was that of adaptation. All the interviewees answered that the level of cases of GBV increased during the pandemic and also that they needed to work in new ways during the pandemic because of restrictions and other reasons, such as funding. Most formal NGO’s in this interview stated that the level of funding was increased, and that the cooperation within the sector improved.

The formal NGO interviewee’s witness on high level of participation and cooperation and said that both cooperation with funders, institutions, corporate sector and well as government including several departments, have improved during and after the pandemic.

There was a high level of trust in the implementation of the National Strategic Plan on GBV in this group and some of the interviewees share information on successful steps in implementation on local and regional level. The NSP (GBV) is a welcomed and useful platform for the formal NGO sector.

This group of interviewees centered around the issues of adaption, state support and cooperation the most.68

Analyzing these results through a feminist institutionalist perspective, the pattern of “recognition and redistribution”69 could inform of the viewpoint articulated by the interviewees in this group. Even though they formally represent CSO’s they perceive their accountability also from a back-donor liaison, which in this case is the state. The replies reflect that the formal NGO’s, even though this is anonymized material, express and accounts for how flexible and solution-oriented they themselves, and the organizations that they represent, have been during the challenge of the pandemic and also to reflect their respective the organizations’ mitigation and thereby the accountability of NGO’s in times of crises.

68 See Appendix 3

The affirmative responses of how the funding increased and the dialogue with funders improved in times of multiple crisis informs this target group's conductive relationship with the state. The transformational pattern recalled by the target group is both an expression of the willingness to shift and adapt, what is often referred to as “build back better” in sectorial terms, but could also be interpreted as an example of mechanisms of power, where the state (funder in this case) determine the policy focus for civil society which could be experienced as a silencing and/or imposed self-censorship in hindsight.

(FIGURE 2: Table of percentage levels from data in target group/interviewees “Formal NGO” coded in NVIVO14, sorted by thematic findings by the researcher)

---


8.1 Adaptation

A reoccurring response in all the interviews was that the work within civil society has gone through several stages of adaptation and adaption to new realities during the pandemic COVID-19 as well as after. All interviewees answered that they made changes in their work to mitigate restrictions, to limit risks for staff and volunteers to be infected by the corona virus as well as protecting the target groups. Many aspects of the adaption were risen on a diverse scale of negative and positive outcomes, short term and long-term perspective, immediate effects, and side effects.

In the formal NGO responses, there were six (6) references coded as relating to adaption of different means, covering 36,77 percent of the total material. Most of the references were related to COVID-19 restrictions, new methods, and hygiene mitigation. Some references also linked to increased funding and improved cooperation with other stakeholders, such as other NGO’s and the state. This was also one of the thematic areas where of the results varied the most between formal and non-formal actors, regarding whether the adaption was a positive or a negative process. In the formal NGO responses most referral to adaptive practice was exemplified with positive changes, such as successful hygiene measures, increased cooperation within the sector and with funders.

New methods

The new methods described by the formal group consisted of smaller changes in work modes as well as bigger changes in purpose and methods as well as a change of primary target-groups. The answer on new methods that stood out the most was an organization, a shelter facility mainly focused on HIV positive target group, that changed their method drastically during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the increased need for accommodating victims of GBV.

“We have mainly been working with shelter and programs for children and/or families infected with HIV and this has been our core operation. During the pandemic we saw both need and financial opportunity to shift to also including victims of GBV”

72 See Appendix 3
In this example of adaption, the change of operation entailed a shift on focus and target-group, informed by financial support. The interviewee did not suggest that this was perceived as a so-called donor driven decision, the narrative and wording was positive and highlighted the agency and constructivism for the organization in question. In terms of feminist institutionalism this perspective is an example of, in Foucault’s term “the conduct of conduct” guides the position of “people” individuals or groups in accordance with their position in an institution or their position in relation to an institution. 

“[ --- ] we realized that the need for shelter from gender-based violence increased during the pandemic and for this reason we decided to also accommodate women and families suffering from GBV.”

**Digital solutions**

The formal NGO interviewees mentioned that methods of work have become more digital, referring to Zoom and Teams other social platforms. The main findings on digital solutions in the formal group was referring to the organizations’ internal work, that meetings are now more frequently organized digital, and that staff could more extensively work from home. Digital solutions was also referred to in aspects of mitigating the spread of the virus.

**Hygiene mitigation**

“To limit the possibility of being infected, an alternate schedule was drawn, that is, two staff were scheduled to be at the office at a time. This was to ensure that both staff members and clients were protected from contracting COVID 19 in large numbers”

The above quote is typical for how the formal NGO responded on what changes they did during the pandemic, an affirmative response on how the organizations mitigated the pandemic and found ways to maneuver the medical risks involved.

---


74 See Appendix 3

75 See Appendix 3
Increased levels of cooperation

The formal NGO interviewees pointed out that the new reality and challenges linked to consequences of the pandemic also created a stronger incitement for cooperation and dialogue among stakeholders.

“It should be noted that most organizations were slowed down as a result of COVID 19. The above situation led to organizations in the GBVF sector starting to work closely rather than continue to work in silos.”76

The cooperation with institutions and state-level was referred to as improved and increased, the reasons mentioned touched upon the possibilities presented by launch and implementation of the NSP (GBV) as well as political will and improved cooperation structure and strengthened coherence:

“The six pillars alluded to in the National Strategic Plan namely Accountability, coordination and leadership; Prevention and rebuilding social cohesion; Justice, safety and protection; response, care, support and healing; economic empowerment and research and information management are being explored.”77

Furthermore, reference was made to improved cooperation and a more flexible support from institutions due to increased funding: “[---] the reason for our shift was linked to an increased need but also to the fact that it was possible to receive additional funding for accommodating victims of GBV since the launch of the NSP.”78

The formal interviewees responses on how the cooperation with the entities of the state is mirroring the theoretical perspective of the mechanisms in feminist institutionalism in South Africa in several ways. Since there is an acknowledged tension between the feminist

76 See Appendix 3
77 See Appendix 3
78 See Appendix 3
movements independence and the feminist institutions dependency of the state\textsuperscript{79} this tension will accordingly inflict on the relationship between the formal (often state funded) organizations of civil society and create an unconscious bias. This bias manifest itself in different ways, such as self-censorship or the unproportionate focus on specific policy areas which per default downplay other areas of concern. This pattern is theoretically elaborated by Bacchi and Rönnblom referred to as the \textit{What’s the problem represented to be} mechanisms in the field of feminist institutionalism and reflects the power levels of the fact that those who are (have the power/authority of) defining the problem are also setting the agenda for the solutions to the problem(s).\textsuperscript{80}

\section*{8.2 Formal NGO responses on feminist movement building}

In the responses from formal NGO’s interviewees there was only one (1) reference coded to feminist movement building covering a percentage of 4.07 of the entire data. Moreover, the quote was a reflection on current premises linked to the effect of mobilization during the years leading up to the draft of the NSP, so more of a contextual statement rather than a reference to the importance of feminist movement building in the current work and praxis.

\begin{quote}
“Since the mobilization during 2014-2018 the issue of femicide and GBV has got also more attention from international CSO’s and trusts, and funding is devoted to address that.”\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

From a feminist institutional perspective, the results inform on the conductive relationship\textsuperscript{82} of the perceived identity/platform of which an organization/representative perceive themselves at. The reference in question is a comment on mobilization and movement building leading up to a point of success (the launch of the NSP (GBV) that has already been

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{79} Gouws, Amanda: \textit{Feminist institutionalism in South Africa - designing for gender equality} (edited by Amanda Gouws), Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022 p 69
\item \textsuperscript{80} Bacchi, Carol and Rönnblom, M “Feminist discursive institutionalism – a poststructural alternative” Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research 22 (3) 170-186, 2014
\item \textsuperscript{81} See Appendix 4
\item \textsuperscript{82} Gouws, Amanda: \textit{Feminist institutionalism in South Africa - designing for gender equality} (edited by Amanda Gouws), Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022 p 69
\end{itemize}
established. No reference was made to how the current status of movement building is perceived, to be compared with a high level of indicators on this issue in the informal group\(^83\).

### 8.3 Formal responses on shrinking space

Regarding shrinking democratic space, a major discrepancy between formal and informal sector is observed where only one (1) reference to this was coded in the data from formal interviewees where as many as twelve (12) were observed in the informal data.

“The space was definitively shrinking during the pandemic, and the trust has not come back after.”\(^84\)

The comment on shrinking space in the formal NGO responses was very hands on relating to the fact that this is a new reality and referring to the context more than actual practical challenges and experienced restrictions for the interviewee themselves. Even though this comment on shrinking space is very straight forward and clear, the perception of how shrinking space would limit the possibilities for civil society to work is not clearly stated in these interviews.

### 8.4 Formal responses on crisis within crisis

The formal NGO representatives interviewed in this study are acknowledging the fact that there is currently a context where multiple crises are interplaying and affecting the work on how to counter gender-based violence and the possibilities to work with prevention as well as support for victims. The interviewees mentioned both the increasing vulnerability of the target group, linked to multiple crises context, as well as how the dynamic of crisis within crisis both hinders the possibility to reach out to the target group as well as limits the potential for target group to be amenable to programs and or other initiatives to prevent GBV.

---

\(^{83}\) See Chapter 9  
\(^{84}\) See Appendix 3
“In times such as these, with high unemployment rates, inflation, energy crises, the women and children pay the highest price.”

The causes and effects linked to theory of underlying factors that trigger GBV such as poverty, segregation, unemployment and/or limited socio-economic standard of living etc are all factors that mounts up to the situation during and after the pandemic, as referred to by one of the interviewees as the “perfect storm for GBV.”

9. Analysis of informal (activists and grassroots) responses

The second respondent group for this study are informal representatives, in this case referred to as activists and grassroots that has less formatted structure - these individuals, groups, focal points and hubs might refer to themselves as collectives, movements, activists or grassroots. In comparison to the formal CSO’s these entities are generally less funded by government funds and/or international development cooperation or for example multilateral bodies such as the UN or bilateral funding via foreign embassies. Nota bene that there are exceptions to the standard, and it is impossible to outline the exact factors that are valid for the three interviewees in this study, both because of diversity reasons where funding and cooperation is fluctuating over time, but also for the sake of keeping full anonymity. In this study, the interviewees have different functions, some are activists linked to a movement, others are care workers with a role as operative in a shelter, a perspective from the target group of GBV victims is also included in these interviews since one activist was also living in a shelter after domestic violence experience.

The core result was that informal actors centered around the issue on feminist movement building. They focused most on the shifting premises around the feminist mobilization on GBV and some were very pessimistic in their analysis of how the pandemic and the aftermath

85 See Appendix 3
86 See Appendix 3
of political initiatives around the implementation on NSP (GBV) had turned out. The interviewees also formulated concern on how activists had been recruited during the pandemic to positions within institutions, thereby coopting the feminist movement.

The viewpoints from informal interviewees are informing a feminist institutionalist perspective in terms of state feminism issues (who is recruited and why?), the governing dynamic (“conduct of the conduct”) and through the dynamic referred to in the concept of “voice-to-representation-to accountability”\(^{87}\) where Hassim and Goetz suggests the accountability of the state (in SA) fails to implement the feminist agenda due to “lack of access, presence and influence”\(^{88}\) and connects these inabilities to the nature of civil society the political system and its bureaucracies (institutions).

One of the most outstanding quotes on this split, or division, in civil society was: “the pandemic has divided us, we don’t speak the same language anymore.”\(^{89}\) This is one of the comments that pinpointed this sentiment of split within the movement and symptom of shrinking democratic space. Examples on how feminist activists has been recruited/appointed to positions within the institutions was also symptomatic on how the national gender machinery\(^{90}\) in South Africa is perceived as an obstacle to realizing true feminist development and change.

In terms of the problem of dual representation this was clearly affecting the viewpoint from the informal interviewees, many references were made on how they simultaneously navigated the needs from the target group (victims of gender based violence/often women) and the demands from funders and expectations/needs from formal NGO:s. An obvious frustration was expressed on how to, at the same time meet these different needs, that is perform the dual representation, as well as advocating for the institutional shifts needed. This of course also


\(^{89}\) See Appendix 4

speaks to the governmentality of entities in civil society that is the underlying relationship between the people/individuals/staff/members/activists that constitutes the governance/body and its relationship to the state institutions\textsuperscript{91}.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{informal_responses_data_coding.png}
\caption{Diagram of informal responses data coding with percentage coverage for various categories.}
\end{figure}

(FIGURE 2: Table of percentage levels from data in target group/interviewees “Informal activists/grassroots” coded in NVIVO14, sorted by thematic findings by the researcher)

\section{9.1 Informal responses on adaptation}
In the informal civils society interviewees’ responses, there were eight (8) references coded as referral to adaptation of different means, but only covering 18.02 percent of the total material. Even though it was referred to more frequent than in the interviews with the formal NGO’s it

did not cover more than about a fifth of the total data, the explanation to this is mainly that the interviewees devoted more space in their answers to other issues than adaption.

Most of the references were related to how they had mitigated during COVID-19 restrictions and the new methods to mobilize and reach the target group. Several referrals were also made to hygiene mitigation. Additional comments on adaption in the context of negative consequences, such as organizations forced to close was made in this group, which stands out in comparison to the formal group.

Another major difference between the answers on adaption in the informal group compared to the formal group is that the examples shared were more focused on practicalities, whereas the formal centered more on policy-level. Furthermore, the informal answers more often added an ideological perspective on the balance between humanitarian needs and their role in that context.

Cooperation

“At first our activities needed to change due to the restrictions, we could not keep the shelter facility open anymore and we started cooperating with a larger formal NGO nearby and referred victims in need of shelter to them.”

This comment is representative for the informal responses on cooperation, that they needed to reach out and find support from bigger organizations. None of the answers refer to this cooperation as a positive development, rather a necessity caused by hygiene mitigation or by restrictions or change in funding.

New methods

Most of the answers on new methods in the data from informal interviewees refer to innovation and the exploration of new ways of reaching out, but also of how they needed to address many challenges at the same time. Several answers refer to how they as activists and focal points for development in this new reality also needed to do humanitarian work. Some reflects on the

__________________________

92 See Appendix 4
challenge in balancing needs in the target-group and how to stay realistic in expectations on what the grassroot/activists could contribute.

A comment on addressing the food-shortage and simultaneously as promoting food-sovereignty and agency is: “We also promoted the establishment household gardens, community soup kitchens etc”. Many of the practical solutions, mitigation to counter the challenges of the pandemic, from the activist perspectives, is along the line of trying to address several setbacks by a holistic approach. And reoccurring comments on how this could be difficult due to the design of the funding and the core values/vision of the movement, such as: “At first, we thought it was too welfarist but we had no choice because children had no access to feeding schemes at school and there was a sharp rise in retrenchments and employment.”

**Hygiene mitigation**

“We had to change – we could not organize physical meetings, we could not travel or do field work. Our member organisations had no access to water, sanitisers, soap and all that was expected if they were to remain healthy and free from the pandemic.”

**Digital solutions**

The answers on how the work has shifted to digital solutions covered both opportunities and limitations. All interviewees mentioned that much of the work needed to be done online, and some highlighted the opportunities such as:

”We developed new ways of communication by getting rural women to use smart phones and computers for meetings (zoom etc)”

93 See Appendix 4
94 See Appendix 4
95 See Appendix 4
96 See Appendix 4
In this example a push towards a shift that will also benefit the target group in a long-term perspective is mentioned. But the opposite was also addressed, where the activists found need/opportunity to shift to digital solutions but at the same time was faced with limitation, such as unfit funding: “We get funding for food packages, but not for purchasing data or office supply.” In a feminist institutionalism perspective this result also points to the issue of governmentality where the interrelation between activists/grassroots are one step further away from the resources, financial as well as policy wise, which will limit their ability to influence and inform on how the funding should be design to meet the needs of the target group. This position is a result of a dilemma within the voice-to-representation-to accountability area where an agent/actor within the field of the policy area (GBV in this case) lack the means and the point of contact to the political and or financial power/institution. And this was also reflected in the quote on access and power linked in the programs against GBV formulated by informal sector as: “The rules and expectations from funders do not apply to grassroot activist movements - how can I present an auditor’s statement when I don’t have any funds? We get funding for food packages, but not for purchasing data or office supply.”

9.2 Informal responses on feminist movement building

In the responses from informal civils society actors, such as grassroot activists and movements interviewees there was twelve (12) references coded to feminist movement building covering 29.35 percent of the data. The more part of these statements communicated a split, division within the sector and most comments were around the tension between formal and non-formal actors created by shrinking democratic space and competition on funding. Remarks on the vulnerability of the activists and experiences on how individuals faced the double burden of advocating for rights whilst as the same time becoming victims themselves reoccurred in two cases. The interviewees also shared experiences of how psychosocial factors and mental health risks challenged the work and the cooperation in the feminist

97 See Appendix 4


99 See Appendix 4
movement.

In terms of challenges on the *dual representation*\(^{100}\) of activists the data presents an additional layer to that phenomena where the interviewees mention not only the balance of “being women (and) representing women” but also highlights marginalization consequences due to them as both “activists” and “victims” facing the twofold pressure of advocating for the cause (lobbying against GBV) as well as struggling to cope with the increased GBV also affecting themselves: “We still advocate against gender-based violence but the movement is scattered and many activists get worn down by long term stress and abuse.” [---] “It took a while for me to realize that I was now in the “victim” position, it was hard for me to accept. It was also hard for my fellow activists, they said, “but you are so strong”.”\(^{101}\) The dynamic of dual representation was also evident in terms of power levels and transparency between formal and informal organizations: “When an activist becomes a victim, it is hard to get accepted in a shelter cause people get scarred that the activist will call out on injustices within that organizations.”\(^{102}\)

The interviewees in the informal group elaborated more on power dynamic influencing the sector and the ontological aspect of abuse, where it is proved that intimate partner violence often creates a spiral of more violence and that this also affects the women within the movement\(^{103}\). “There is also a negative dynamic w abused women bullies each other, the spiral of oppression is very difficult to stop and many women who has suffered abuse becomes also perpetrators, this is something we don’t talk about. There is often abuse in shelter. People die from stress.”\(^{104}\)

When activists were referring to feminist institutionalism, in terms of how the feminist movement is interlinked/connected to the gender machinery in South Africa, the interviewees

---


\(^{101}\) See Appendix 4

\(^{102}\) See Appendix 4

\(^{103}\) Taket, Ann and Crisp, Beth R. *Eliminating Gender-Based Violence*, Routledge, 2017, page 98

\(^{104}\) See Appendix 4
mainly focused on how this was a hinder for the movement building: “The #totalshutdownSandton was a turning point that resulted in 2018 activists were recruited to positions within government and the message was: ” … but we are doing something” The analysis was that recruitment of activists for positions within the gender machinery was a strategy to silence the resistance and the demands from civil society to walk the talk and to better understand the needs of the rights bearers and thus offer a more functional funding.

Another important aspect covered by informal interviewees was the power dynamic within the GBV sector, where a pattern of formal NGO are often more focused on policy (lobbying and advocacy work) and the informal actors are often responsible for the more practical/on the ground activities, such as running shelters and reaching out to rural women, a target group that could be difficult to reach for the larger organizations mainly based in the urban areas and larger cities. “Most programs for women, with workshops for skills, are organized by smaller organizations. But not all of the bigger had the capacity or presence in the field, the rural areas were left behind. They take results from us and report as their own. So, the trust was damaged.”

“The biggest change after pandemic is that there is less co-operation between bigger and smaller organizations, less trust and more competition.” One of the most apparent results in this study is that the perception on effects of the pandemic on the feminist movement are diametral between formal and informal sector. “The language of civil society has changed. We don’t speak as one anymore. The pandemic has divided us.”


106 See Appendix 4

107 See Appendix 4

108 See Appendix 4

109 See Appendix 4
9.3 Informal NGO responses on shrinking space

About twenty percent of the answers from informal interviewees were coded with referral to shrinking space. Many of the answers focus was on direct consequences in terms of funding and of survival of the organizations: “My reflection is that many organizations has been forced to shut down during and following the pandemic.”\footnote{110}

“The NSP (GBV) was launched after many years of mobilizing, but its implementation is a failure.”\footnote{111} This result reflects the feminist institutional analysis on the temporal, localized agenda\footnote{112} that often tend to impact the implementation of successful policy achievements and success. In this case the viewpoint from the informal sector is that the policy achievement was a result of an inclusionary and transformational process, but resulted in a failed implementation, partly because of the restrictions of the pandemic, but also because of lack of political will: “The #totalshutdownSandton was a turning point that resulted in 2018 activists were recruited to positions within government and the message was: "but we are doing something”

The temporal and localized agenda was also informing the statements on which organizations that had to transform and why: “But not all of the bigger had the capacity or presence in the field, the rural areas were left behind.” This pattern in terms of feminist institutionalism speaks to the fact that organizations on all levels adapted to the new COVID -19 reality, but in terms of inclusion this shift created unequal opportunities between the different target groups: “And the bigger organizations needed “results” since they were not present here, they came to visit and take pictures and result harvesting. They take results from us and report as their own. So, the trust was damaged.”\footnote{114}

\footnote{110} See Appendix 4
\footnote{111} See Appendix 4
\footnote{113} Hassim, Shireen: “The gender pact and democratic consolidation: institutionalizing gender equality in the South African state” Feminist studies 29 (3) page 505-528, 2003
\footnote{114} See Appendix 4
9.4 Informal responses on crisis within crisis

In the group of informal actors’ interview/data, a coverage of about 17.89 percent of the answers reflected on the “crisis within crisis” situation in one way or another. The informal actors had an impression that many organizations had to shut down and that activists were worn out and challenged by other challenges such as unemployment, abuse and shortage of social security and food. My answers also reflected the feeling of being in a never-ending spiral of negative side effects and someone even said that the pandemic never ended. “At this specific time, post pandemic, but with other major challenges such as power cuts and energy crisis there are a need for women that are victims of GBV to be able to self-sustain, women need skills in order to cope and take care of their children after being “saved” from their provider, the abusive husband.”

“My reflection is that many organizations has been forced to shut down during and following the pandemic. Activists are exhausted and tired and emotional stress and diagnosis of mental illness is very common.

“Energy and water crisis affects the situation now, load shedding affects people.” [---]“We also promoted the establishment household gardens, community soup kitchens etc. At first, we thought it was too welfarist but we had no choice because children had no access to feeding schemes at school and there was a sharp rise in retrenchments and employment.”

In terms of voice-to-representation-to accountability\textsuperscript{115} the informal group express a lack of responsiveness from the institutions and a limited understanding of the shifted needs including limited understanding of how institutions need to enable the representation in times of “crisis within crisis” when the grassroot perspective is need in order to take informed decisions on policy and funding of programs.

\textsuperscript{115} Goetz, Anne Marie: Governing Women - Women’s Political Effectiveness in Contexts of Democratization and Governance Reform, Routledge, London, 2013
10. Positive or negative sentiments in statements

10.1 Positive sentiments

(FIGURE 4: Table of percentage levels from data in all interviews coded in NVIVO14, categorized as “positive” by the researcher)

Formal group

In the formal responses a percentage of 38.27 were coded as positive in their statements, whereas in the informal data only 4.57 percent was coded as positive.
A notable pattern in the formal groups answers is that the interviewees tend to refer to challenges as *at the same time* presenting new possibilities. Many of the responses centers around increased funding and improved cooperation within the sector, which could be interpreted as a contributing factor to their mindset of seeing possibilities. The data from formal interviewees points toward a civil society with an overall constructive and positive viewpoint presenting a context analysis that entails both awareness of a multiple crisis reality, but also shows on energy and determines to address these challenges.

“These collaborative efforts led to sharing of resources and holding each other accountable for services rendered to victims of GBVF. A referral chart to alleviate challenges relating to secondary victimization of clients at various delivery points was designed. Partnering with relevant government departments viz. Community Safety, Social Development, Health, Justice and Constitutional Development specifically Public Prosecution and Department of Education was also found to be important in addressing GBVF related challenges experienced.”

The formal group had several positive examples on how cooperation had increased and how this was also resulting in more solid funding:

“The cooperation with funders improved during COVID 19 as corporate sector through their Corporate Social Investment programs, pumped funds to assist organizations working in the GBVF sector.”

“This was also informed by the political will – GBVF referred to by the President of South Africa as second pandemic (the Solidarity Fund)”

**Informal group**

In the informal group only one statement was coded as positive, even though this must be balanced with the fact that many statements that were coded as negative could also be interpreted as positive in regard to what theory of change we apply to the analysis. In this study, however, main focus is on how the perception and viewpoints on mitigation during the COVID-19 pandemic was experienced so with that lens, the informal sector was not very positive/optimistic in their answers.
10.2 Negative sentiments

![Negative Coding by Item](image)

(FIGURE 5: Table of percentage levels from data in all interviews coded in NVIVO14, categorized as “negative” by the researcher)

**Formal group**

The formal NGO interviewees had four statements that were coded with a negative sentiment, covering only twelve (12) percent of the data, they centered around structural analysis and the mitigation around the pandemic: “It should be noted that most organizations were slowed down as a result of COVID 19.” [---] “The problem of GBV is multi-faceted and SA has a history of violence and oppression, and it is like this spiral of patriarchal violence that is very difficult to stop.” \(^{116}\)

---

\(^{116}\) See Appendix 3
An analysis of this very low prevalence of negative statements is that many of the NGO representatives was answering this interview and partaking in the study in their professional capacity, as a researcher at least this was the impression, and this can affect the interviewees ambition to answer in a constructive and “positive” way possibly linked to the ambition to see opportunities rather than threats and also in a way of acting professional. The last quote below was related to the context for civil society currently, when South Africa is tormented by load-shedding (electricity ransoming/cuts) and inflation and food shortages and unemployment, that negatively impact all lines of work, hereby referred to as the perfect storm:

“It is the perfect storm for gender-based violence.”

**Informal group**

In the informal group about seventy-four (74) of the total material was coded as negative sentiments, as many as twenty-four (24) references. During the research, it became obvious that the framing and mindset differed between the two sub-groups and the analysis of sentiments was a truly informing step in the research to get a quantification of this qualitative perception. During the interviews a lot of sentiment and emotion was shared in the informal group. Besides the reflections on adaption of programs and activities and funding an cooperation, much added information more relating to existential matters was touched upon. Some interviewees shared on their own situation, personal trauma, emotional distress and anxiety. These interviewees also made a connection between these feelings and sentiments and the actual feminist movement, sharing reflection on how people/women feel also immediately affects the ability and motivation in the movement: “Activists are exhausted and tired and emotional stress and diagnosis of mental illness is very common.”

One interviewee also shared a personal insight in how these dimensions within the struggle to address GBV are also intimately intertwined with the fact that the more part of the activists also has personal trauma and/or own experience of GBV which could both be a challenge and a possibility. This interviewee highlighted the fact that the shift of roles and perspective can be very difficult to accept, being both an activist and a victim: “During the pandemic the father of

---

117 See Appendix 3

118 See Appendix 3
my two children and husband for 18 years lost his job and became more and more bitter and abusive. It took a while for me to realize that I was no in the “victim” position, it was hard for me to accept. It was also hard for my fellow activists, they said, “but you are so strong”. I stayed too long in this abusive relationship; the abuse was mainly emotional and verbal and therefore more difficult to acknowledge.”

An additional dynamic mentioned by this same activist was that it also creates an uncertainty and fear among fellow activists and fellow victims in a shelter, when a profiled activist, known for her strong sense of calling out on injustices, is seeking support and housing among other victims: “When an activist becomes a victim, it is hard to get accepted in a shelter cause people get scarred that the activist will call out on injustices within that organizations.”

After a follow up question on this dynamic the interviewee added further context:

“There is also a negative dynamic w abused women bullies each other, the spiral of oppression is very difficult to stop and many women who has suffered abuse becomes perpetrators, this is something we don’t talk about. There is often abuse in shelter. People die from stress.”

Negative sentiments were also captured around the political hi-jacking of the movement, or as referred to earlier, the recruitment of activists for political positions also has a backlashing effect on the movement. Many activists within the GBV movement, who were visible during the mobilization up until 2018 where later recruited, either by government or by larger organizations. This caused tension within the sector as these former activists now got power, high salaries and are in some ways seen as betrayers. One of the interviewees said: “And it becomes a tension between the bigger and the informal organizations. We saw many smaller organizations being forced to shut down under the pandemic.”

\[119\] See Appendix 3


\[121\] See Appendix 4
11. Conclusion and discussion

Has the cooperation between formal and non-formal actors been affected? For all the interviewees the viewpoint was that the cooperation had been affected, the formal group mainly referred to it as an improved cooperation, but the informal interviewees had many examples of how the feminist movement has been scattered during and after COVID-19 and that the trust within the sector is still damaged. The thematic areas most covered by both groups were adaptation, feminist movement building, crisis within crisis and shrinking space.

The conclusion of the feminist institutional analysis to the data regarding the co-operation within civil society is highlighting issues on dual representation, for the informal group where more levels of representation was expressed: the challenge of being a “woman” plus an “activist” plus a “victim”. This finding informs the need of an intersectional approach, in civil society and between the CSO’s. A reoccurring pattern where the problem representation was articulated clearly showed that the informal group experienced a larger extent of exclusion during the COVID-19 pandemic and after. The informal group elaborated on challenges, such as lacking funds or receiving funds that was not fitting the needs. Whereas more part of formal actors had the viewpoint that cooperation within civil society had improved during this phase, both due to necessity and to meet the needs of both target groups and funders. The result of the data is an example of the split in how civil society responses has shifted during and after the pandemic where most formal actors stated that there has been an increased and improved co-operation within the sector and that new inter-sectorial alliances have emerged. However, most activist/grassroot interviewees answered that the co-operation had declined, some even to the extent of calling it a division within civil society.

Main differences were noticed in the analysis of sentiment, where the formal sector mainly expressed positive sentiments whereas the informal interviewees mainly centered around the challenges, struggle and hardship that had emerged during and after the pandemic. Thematically the main differences were found regarding feminist movement building and shrinking space, where the informal group centered around the analysis on what effects the pandemic and its

consequences has had for the movement building per se and for the cooperation and communication within the sector. Whereas formal sector highlighted the adaptation, increased dialogue and cooperation with both entities within the sector as well as funders and state actors and institutions. The analysis maps out several institutional feminism findings on the (power-) dynamic between state – women’s organizations relations and various experiences on the conductive relationship\(^{123}\) for organizations and activists/movements to influence policy agenda but also the extent to where organizations perceived their potential to receive suitable funding. The conductive relationship varied between informal and formal sector, where it was perceived as a challenge in the informal group and an opportunity in the formal group.

In terms of how the civil society responses linked to issues on human rights and democracy interplayed, this study presents the twofold result of the thematic analysis from a feminist institutionalism perspective where the various perceptions of feminist movement building, recruitment of activists to institutional positions from informal sector was mainly viewed as a negative effect but, on the other hand the formal sector highlighted the positive effects of the strengthened bonds between state and CSO informed by political will and funding. The formal group shared how transformational strategies\(^{124}\) has informed their shift and mitigation during the pandemic.

In this limited study the conclusion is that there are major differences in how the post-pandemic reality regarding to address GBV in South Africa is unfolding in civil society, depending on the organizational status and structure. The key result of this study is that there are major differences within civil society on how the pandemic effects has hit and the feminist movements will need time and resources to build back after this setback to be able to analyze potential, needs and level-up already set indicators for programs on GBV in South Africa.

Suggested further research in this field would be a larger quantitative analysis of the effects from a feminist institutional perspective to promote an implementation of the NSP (GBV) and to ensure that policy and programming, including funding, fits the purpose and need as


\(^{124}\) Ibid.
defined by civil society. Further research on the consequences of the pandemic in terms of the shadow pandemic – GBV in South Africa – is recommended.

**Bibliography**

**Books:**

Aurini, Janice D. and Heath, Melanie and Howells, Stephanie: *The how to of qualitative research*, 2nd ed. London: Sage, 2022


Castleberry A, Nolen A. *Thematic analysis of qualitative research data: Is it as easy as it sounds?* Curr Pharm Teach Learn, 2018


Krook, ML and Mackay, F: *Gender, politics and institutions*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2015


Merry, Sally Engle: *Gender Violence – A Cultural Perspective*, Wiley-Blackwell (an imprint of John Wiley Sons Ltd) West Sussex, UK 2009

Merry, Sally Engle: *Human rights and gender violence: Translating international law into local justice*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2006

Stetson, D and Mazur, A: *Comparative state feminism*, Thousand oaks, Sage, 1995

Taket, Ann and Crisp, Beth R. *Eliminating Gender-Based Violence*, Routledge, 2017

Terry, Geraldine and Hoare, Joanna: *Gender-Based Violence*, Oxfam, 2007

**Scientific articles:**

Bacchi, Carol and Rönnblom, M “Feminist discursive institutionalism – a poststructural alternative” Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research 22 (3) 170-186, 2014


Fraser, Nancy: “Feminism, capitalism and the cunning of history” New left review 56:97-117, 2009


Hassim, Shireen “The dual politics of representation: women and electoral politics in South Africa” *Politikon* 26 (2) page 201-212, 1999


Mama, Amina: ”Feminism or Femocracy? State feminism and Democratization in Nigeria” *Africa development/Afrique et Development* 20 (1) 1995 pages 37-58

DOI:10.1080/10130950.2012.714674, 2012


**Web sites, news articles and other media**

Adebayo, B, newsarticle CNN (published June 19th 2020) “South Africa has the continent’s highest Covid-19 cases. Now it has another pandemic on its hands” CNN. [South Africa has another pandemic on its hands: gender violence | CNN](https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/19/africa/south-africa-covid-violence/index.html)


Rural Women’s assembly – a coalition of rural women in southern Africa (homepage website) https://ruralwomensassembly.wordpress.com/ (accessed 20230401)


“We are dying here” film on gender-based violence by poetry collective Hear my voice © Copyright #WeAreDyingHere, 2023  https://wearedyingherefilm.com/ (accessed 20230401)

Reports, declarations, evaluations and booklets:


Participedia article on #amInext campaign in South Africa (published Aug 24th 2019) https://participedia.net/case/12313 (accessed 20230401)


Appendix 1 Statement of consent

The researcher, Louise Lindfors, has described to me the condition and purpose of this interview. The researcher has explained what is going to be done, the risks, the benefits involved and pointed out my rights regarding this study.

I, the interviewee, understand that the decision to participate in this interview is on a fully voluntary basis and that no benefits or negative effects should be expected. The aim of the research is to publish a master’s thesis. None of my personal data will be shared and all quotes will be anonymized. I am aware that I can withdraw at any time before the thesis is published.

I understand that by signing this form, I voluntarily agree to participate.

Name:……………………………….

Signature of participant ………………………

Date (DD/MM/YY)……………………………

Name of Witness……………………………..

Signature of Witness………………………….

Name of interviewer………………………….

Signature of Interviewer ………………………
Appendix 2 Interview guide

1. I represent the following category/categories:

A = Activist/grassroot/selforganised
B = Representative of informal NGO/movement
C = Representative of NGO
D = Representative of Bi/multilateral organization

2. In our work we noticed the following during the pandemic:

A Less cases of gender-based violence
B The same level of cases of GBV as before
C More cases of GBV than before
D More cases of GBV including more severe and increase of femicide

3. During the pandemic the resources/funding and other support for addressing GBV:

A Was decreased
B Was unchanged
C Was increased
D Any other reflection (free text) such as - did the cooperation with funders improve during the pandemic? Did the funding change (from earmarked to core support or the other way around)? Was the awareness from government visible in you line of work? Could the implementation of the GBV national action plan be made as planned?
4. Did you/your organization change the way you work (add free text and explain why or how)?

A No it was not needed (free text: please explain why)

B Yes, we had to change because of restrictions (free text, please explain how)

C Yes, we had to change because of resources (free text, please explain how)

D yes, we shifted responses but for other reasons than mentioned above (please explain why and how)

5. If not addressed in the previous answer, please also share something on how you perceive the democratic space in the shadow of the pandemic, how will civil society be able to rise/build back better now? Has the co-operation between formal and non-formal actors improved or not? Has the cooperation between state actors and civil society improved or not?
Appendix 3 Quotes from semi structured interviews formal sector

**Interviewee N NGO Nina:** “It should be noted that most organizations were slowed down as a result of COVID 19. The above situation led to organizations in the GBVF sector starting to work closely rather than continue to work in silos. These collaborative efforts led to sharing of resources and holding each other accountable for services rendered to victims of GBVF. A referral chart to alleviate challenges relating to secondary victimization of clients at various delivery points was designed. Partnering with relevant government departments viz. Community Safety, Social Development, Health, Justice and Constitutional Development specifically Public Prosecution and Department of Education was also found to be important in addressing GBVF related challenges experienced.”

**Interviewee N NGO Nina:** “The cooperation with funders improved during COVID 19 as corporate sector through their Corporate Social Investment programs, pumped funds to assist organizations working in the GBVF sector. This was also informed by the political will – GBVF referred to by the President of South Africa as second pandemic (the Solidarity Fund)”

**Interviewee N NGO Nina:** “To limit the possibility of being infected, an alternate schedule was drawn, that is, two staff were scheduled to be at the office at a time. This was to ensure that both staff members and clients were protected from contracting COVID 19 in large numbers.”

**Interviewee N NGO Nina:** “The strategy implemented in the community serviced (Alexandra) is in line with the National Strategic Plan on GBVF as adopted by the Office of the President, currently being rolled out in various provinces, regions etc.

**Interviewee N NGO Nina:** “The six pillars alluded to in the National Strategic Plan namely Accountability, coordination and leadership; Prevention and rebuilding social cohesion; Justice, safety and protection; response, care, support and healing; economic empowerment and research and information management are being explored.”
Interviewee L, Shelter-manager Linda: “The problem of GBV is multi-facetted and SA has a history of violence and oppression, and it is like this spiral of patriarchal violence that is very difficult to stop. We as civil society need to have an instrumental approach and realize that any person, activist, woman, can only do as much! It is also worth mentioning that the power dynamic of the state in SA is sometimes jeopardizing the trust of the people, one example is that one of the first restrictions taken by the government was to ransom the alcohol and tobacco during the pandemic. This is such an abuse of power in my opinion and what did they expect as for consequences when people (men!) lost their jobs, got stuck in their homes and on top of that was deprived of a cigarette or a beer? The bootlegging created a sense of criminal behavior as many people were stashing up these goods and sold in the streets. The space was definitively shrinking during the pandemic, and the trust has not come back after. In times such as these, with high unemployment rates, inflation, energy crises, the women and children pay the highest price. Always. It is the perfect storm for gender-based violence.”

Interviewee L, Shelter-manager Linda: “I run a shelter since many decades back, where children suffering from HIV infection can live, either if they become orphans or with their parents (typically the mother). We realized that the need for shelter from gender-based violence increased during the pandemic and for this reason we decided to also accommodate women and families suffering from GBV. We have mainly been working with shelter and programs for children and/or families infected with HIV and this has been our core operation. During the pandemic we saw both need and financial opportunity to shift to also including victims of GBV.”

Interviewee L, Shelter-manager Linda: “As mentioned above the reason for our shift was linked to an increased need but also to the fact that it was possible to receive additional funding for accommodating victims of GBV since the launch of the NSP. Since the mobilization during 2014-2018 the issue of femicide and GBV has got more attention from international CSO’s and trusts, and funding is devoted to address that.”
Appendix 4 Quotes from semi structured interviews informal sector

Interviewee A Activist Anna: My reflection is that many organizations has been forced to shut down during and following the pandemic. Activists are exhausted and tired and emotional stress and diagnosis of mental illness is very common. We still advocate against gender-based violence but the movement is scattered and many activists get worn down by long term stress and abuse. Many organizations have shut down during the pandemic.

Interviewee A Activist Anna: Energy and water crisis affects the situation now, load shedding affects people. Energy poverty is deepening the inequality.

Interviewee A Activist Anna: I used to work for an organization and was a strong advocate for women’s rights. During the pandemic the father of my two children and husband since 18 years back lost his job and became more and more bitter and abusive. It took a while for me to realize that I was no in the “victim” position, it was hard for me to accept. It was also hard for my fellow activists, they said, “but you are so strong”. I stayed too long in this abusive relationship; the abuse was mainly emotional and verbal and therefore more difficult to acknowledge.

When an activist becomes a victim, it is hard to get accepted in a shelter cause people get scarred that the activist will call out on injustices within that organizations. There is also a negative dynamic w abused women bullies each other, the spiral of oppression is very difficult to stop and many women who has suffered abuse becomes also perpetrators, this is something we don’t talk about. There is often abuse in shelter. People die from stress.

Interviewee A Activist Anna:

(Comments noted during a tour/walk around the premises of a shelter/training centre for victims of GBV)

Inequality is increasing.

Pandemic is not decreasing.

Exit plan from shelters are missing.
Social workers who are not trained to cope with victims of violence.

**Interviewee B “Grassroot Brenda”**

The NSP (GBV) was launched after many years of mobilizing, but its implementation is a failure. Everything is in that document, but it is not presented in a manner that every woman can understand. The need would be to localize the NSP, translate to local languages and produce popular shorter versions. All this is on hold after the pandemic.

**Interviewee B “Grassroot Brenda”** At this specific time, post pandemic, but with other major challenges such as power cuts and energy crisis there are a need for women that are victims of GBV to be able to self-sustain, women need skills in order to cope and take care of their children after being “saved” from their provider, the abusive husband.

**Interviewee B “Grassroot Brenda”** Many activists that were visible during the mobilization up until 2018 where later recruited, either by government or by larger organizations. This caused tension within the sector as these former activists now got power, high salaries and are in some ways seen as betrayers. The #totalshutdownSandton was a turning point that resulted in 2018 activists were recruited to positions within government and the message was: ”but we are doing something”

**Interviewee B “Grassroot Brenda”** The rules and expectations from funders do not apply to grassroot activist movements - how can I present an auditor’s statement when I don’t have any funds (to pay an auditor f e)? We get funding for food packages, but not for purchasing data or office supply.

**Interviewee B “Grassroot Brenda”** At first our activities needed to change due to the restrictions, we could not keep the shelter facility open anymore and we started cooperating with a larger formal NGO nearby and referred victims in need of shelter to them.

**Interviewee B “Grassroot Brenda”** The problem we see is that many shelters lack programs and training opportunity for the women staying there. The women would need to learn new things, have workshops on CV and how to apply for jobs. But they get stuck. There is no exit-strategy at the shelters. Most programs for women, with workshops for skills, are organized by smaller organizations. And it becomes a tension between the bigger and the informal
organizations. We saw many smaller organizations being forced to shut down under the pandemic. This made funders provide even more for the bigger ones. But not all of the bigger had the capacity or presence in the field, the rural areas were left behind. We got funding for providing food to the women but not for purchasing data for wifi or for office supply. And the bigger organizations needed “results” since they were not present here, they came to visit and take pictures and result harvesting. They take results from us and report as their own. So, the trust was damaged. The biggest change after pandemic is that there is less co-operation between bigger and smaller organizations, less trust and more competition. **The language of civil society has changed. We don’t speak as one anymore. The pandemic has divided us.**

**Interviewee C Grassroot Cindy:** “There were changes in funding- several donors were very sympathetic and support “poverty reduction, household hunger and unemployment”. There was a greater inward-looking stance from some donors. We struggled to get the Basic Income Grant as well as the Social Relief of Distress Grant implemented.

We had to change – we could not organize physical meetings, we could not travel or do field work. Our member organisations had no access to water, sanitisers, soap and all that was expected if they were to remain healthy and free from the pandemic. We developed new ways of communication by getting rural women to use smart phones and computers for meetings (zoom etc). We tried to get whistles in the villages to report rape and violence. We also promoted the establishment household gardens, community soup kitchens etc. At first, we thought it was too welfarist but we had no choice because children had no access to feeding schemes at school and there was a sharp rise in retrenchments and employment.”