



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Persistent Inequality: Understanding the Challenges Faced by Women in South Africa despite the Annual Celebration of Women's Day

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: May 27, 2024	In South Africa, Women's Month is celebrated in August, with National Women's Day observed on August 9th to honour the 1956 march of approximately 20,000 women to the Union Buildings in Pretoria. This historic protest, organised by the Federation of South African Women (FSAW), was a response to the apartheid-era pass laws that enforced racial segregation and controlled the movement of Black South Africans. The women's non-violent demonstration, which included standing in silence for 30 minutes, symbolised their unity and resistance against oppressive policies. Despite the end of apartheid in 1994 and the annual celebration of Women's Day since 1995, women in South Africa continue to face significant challenges, including domestic violence, workplace discrimination, unequal pay, and limited educational opportunities for girls. The persistence of these issues raises questions about the effectiveness and authenticity of Women's Day celebrations. The article used feminist theory to emphasise the importance of intersectional approaches that consider the compounded effects of race, class, and other social identities on women's experiences. Through qualitative content analysis, the study revealed that South Africa still struggles with high rates of gender-based violence (GBV), exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and significant economic disparities between men and women, particularly in rural areas. Although South Africa has progressive legal frameworks to protect women's rights, the study found that inadequate implementation continues to leave many women vulnerable to violence, discrimination, and insufficient access to justice and support services.
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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps, it is prudent to foreground this article by mentioning that 68 years have passed since the historic protest march in 1956 on August 9th, which was led by Black South African women against, yet another heinous act committed by the former apartheid state. The history of women in South Africa is characterised by their oppression at the hands of patriarchy, a dominance structure that has existed there from pre-colonial times (Batisai, 2018; Orton, 2018; Mudaly, 2020). This served as the catchphrase for 20,000 South African women who were protesting the hate laws that the apartheid government had imposed, forcing black women to carry passes in public places (Batisai, 2018; Sisulu, 2006). Giving a clear event, Sisulu (2006: 73) ascertained that:

On that extraordinary day, 20 000 women from all over South Africa watched their chosen representatives Lilian Ngoyi, Rahima Moosa, Helen Joseph and Sophie Williams deposit thousands of petitions to the Minister of Native Affairs at the Union Building, the seat of the apartheid government. For a full thirty minutes, 20 000 women stood in silence in the forecourt of the building, before addressing the then South African prime minister J. G. Strijdom in song: "Strijdom, you have tampered with the women, you have struck a rock!" They then dispersed with quiet dignity, conscious that they had made history. The image of the event was burned into the consciousness of millions of women and men.

This revealed the strength and resilience of women and their contribution to society and country. This view was supported by Hiralal (2017: 233) who affirmed that globally, *women have been at the forefront of nationalist movements*. Women's firm and solid determination in spite of all their adversities have not only advanced the cause of gender equality but have also played a pivotal role in shaping the nation's social, economic, and political landscape (Hiralal, 2017; Mudaly, 2020)

It is inevitable that several scholars have extensively engaged with the role and challenges faced by women in globally and South Africa is not exempted (Batisai, 2018; Hiralal, 2017; Hlatshwayo, Mashaba, Mathuloe & Yende, 2022; Mudaly, 2020). For instance, Hiralal (2017: 233) wrote that nationalistic fervour unavoidably rose in Latin America, Asia, and Africa as a result of colonialism and the enslavement of men and women. Women were at the frontline of the movement to challenge gender norms and create new venues for their political activism in both South Africa and India. This was supported by Batisai (2018) who stated that in South Africa, the history of women is a history of severe oppression brought about by patriarchy, a dominance structure that has existed in the country since pre-colonial times. While Mudaly (2020) mentioned that black women experienced the triple oppression of racism, sexism, and classism that has defined the history of the nation under apartheid. In their study, Hlatshwayo et.al (2022) revealed that being a woman in South Africa is not a barrier to achieve successful leadership, especially in higher education. It is essential to note that even though these studies have been conducted in different contexts but they still provide a context upon which the challenges faced by women in South Africa despite the annual celebration of Women's day can be understood.

As part of women's month in South Africa, National Women's Day offers a chance to honour the generations of women whose battles set the groundwork for the advancements accomplished to date in women's emancipation and gender equality. In spite of this yearly event, women in South Africa still confront a great deal of serious obstacles, such as economic inequality, violence against them based on their gender, and restricted access to healthcare and education (Hlatshwayo et.al 2022).

While existing literature provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by women in South Africa, several gaps remain (Batisai, 2018; Hiralal, 2017; Hlatshwayo et.al 2022; Mudaly, 2020). There is a need for more comprehensive data on the intersectional impacts of race, class, and geography on women's experiences. Additionally, there is limited research on the effectiveness of current policies and programmes aimed at addressing gender inequality. These gaps highlight the need for further research to inform effective interventions and policy-making.

This article was motivated by the importance of presenting a comprehensive picture of the continued struggles that South African women confront in spite of Women's Day being observed annually. This article attempts to contribute to the creation of knowledgeable and practical ways to support women's rights and empowerment by identifying gaps in the available literature and examining the present situation of gender inequality. Therefore, the following questions were developed to provide a clear picture on the challenges faced by women in South Africa:

- a) What are the key challenges faced by women in South Africa despite the annual celebration of Women's Day?

- b) What gaps exist in the current literature regarding the systemic and structural factors contributing to gender inequality in South Africa?
- c) How effective are the current policies and programs aimed at addressing gender inequality and supporting women's rights in South Africa?
- d) In what ways do intersectional factors such as race, class, and geography influence the experiences and challenges of women in South Africa?
- e) What strategies can be developed to better support the empowerment and advancement of women in South Africa?

These questions were not only essential in understanding challenges faced by women in South Africa but also to provide some remedies that can alleviate the present situation.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist theory, which emphasises the significance of comprehending and resolving gender inequities, was employed by the researchers in this paper. Scholars such as Burton, (2014); Earles (2017); Hooks (2000) have indicated that feminist philosophy began in the 18th century and grew as a result of the equality movements of the 1970s and 1980s. Burton (2014) claims that although Engles' (1884) work is one potential place to start, feminist thought has its roots in Marxism. Because of the felt need to comprehend the beginnings and subsequent evolution of the subjugation of the female sex, Burton (2014: 2) observed that "Origin of the Family and commentaries on it were central texts to the feminist movement in its early years."

Therefore, feminist theory in this study is viewed as a subdivision of Marxism critical theory that was founded by Karl Marx, which is generally concerned with upending oppressive and power structures (Burton, 2014; Earles, 2017; Hooks, 2000). For example, according to Burton (2014), the main goal of feminism theory is to make it possible to understand how individuals interact with institutions and perhaps provide answers for confronting and eliminating oppressive structures and systems. It is for this reason that the researchers found this theory relevant into this study as it considers the lived experience of any women, with an emphasis on oppression. As hooks (2000: 8) stated, "Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression." This theory was essential for the researchers to also highlight the need for intersectional approaches that consider the overlapping impacts of race, class, and other social identities on women's experiences.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research methodology was used under the content analysis as the primary methodology to describe the challenges faced by women in South Africa. According to Murray (2010), qualitative research is a technique that enables the investigator to "unmask perceptions by attempting to comprehend specific phenomena or experiences." The researcher can better understand how individuals comprehend concepts by using a qualitative research method (Murray, 2010; Rosaline, 2008). To find patterns and themes in the textual data, a methodical review and analysis were conducted as part of a qualitative research approach in this study. Because the purpose of this article was to illustrate the mounting issues faced by women in South Africa despite the annual celebration of Women's Day, the researchers decided to apply content analysis. Additionally, since this is a delicate subject, content analysis was necessary.

Study Design

A systematic, descriptive review design was used to analyse the issues faced by women in South Africa despite the annual celebration of Women's Day. The information sources used to conduct this literature review included peer-reviewed journal articles, books, book chapters and dissertations

that were relevant to this study. Using the University of Western Cape library portal, Proquest, EBSCOhost, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and the theses Repository were accessed.

Search Strategy

A systematic search was conducted using the “advanced search function” on the abovementioned databases. The following search terms were used in various combinations: "women's challenges in South Africa," "gender-based violence," "economic inequality," "access to education and healthcare," "political representation," "cultural norms and gender," and "intersectionality in gender studies."

Inclusions and Exclusions

Inclusion criteria for the review included peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and reports published within the last 10 years that focus on the challenges faced by women in South Africa. Exclusion criteria included articles that did not specifically address women's issues or that were not available in full text.

Triangulation Approach

A triangulation approach was used to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. This involved cross-referencing data from multiple sources and perspectives to identify common themes and patterns. By using a triangulation approach, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive and accurate representation of the challenges faced by women in South Africa. This structured approach to understanding the persistent challenges faced by women in South Africa highlights the need for continued research and action to address gender inequality and promote women's rights and empowerment.

Data acquired using existing literature according to the developed research question

The researchers highlight this section by presenting some of the evidence that is currently available regarding the stated difficulties that women in South Africa continue to encounter even after 1994. Many issues, including gender-based violence, economic injustice, and cultural norms, were brought up by these online newspapers and need attention (Berger, 2014).

In South Africa, since the dawn of democracy, the challenges faced by women has become a growing concern questioning the authenticity of Women's day. Additionally, Hlatshwayo et al. (2022) emphasised that South African women still face significant obstacles in the democracy.

The five primary research questions that were established gave rise to common themes that are revealed in the article's findings. The research questions were addressed by the findings in accordance with the literature compiled from the body of current literature. The five main, noteworthy components of the questions were as follows:

Key Challenges Faced by Women in South Africa

Despite the annual celebration of Women's Day on 9 August, several studies have found that South Africa has one of the highest rates of gender-based violence (GBV) globally (Enaifoghe et al., 2021; Ndlovu et al, 2022). According to Enaifoghe et al., (2021), women in South Africa face issue such as domestic violence, sexual assault, and femicide at alarming rates. This was substantiated by Ndlovu et al. (2022) who affirmed that COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated this problem, increasing rates of violence during lockdowns.

Scholars such as Posel and Casale (2019) stated that economic inequality is pervasive in South Africa, as women often earn less than men and are more likely to be in low-paying, informal jobs. For example, women in rural communities of South Africa, in particular, face severe poverty and have

limited opportunities for economic advancement (Moyo, 2014; Thaba-Nkadimene et al., 2019). This view was shared by Brittain et al (2017); Naidoo et al (2014) who highlighted that as health disparities persist many women have limited access to healthcare, especially reproductive health services, and high rates of HIV/AIDS.

Political representation of women is insufficient, and those in leadership positions often encounter sexism and harassment (Majola, 2019). In academia and professional settings, women, especially black women, face significant challenges, including underrepresentation and discriminatory practices (Zulu, 2021; Herbst, 2020). The pandemic has also intensified the burden of care work on women academics, affecting their professional advancement (Bam et al., 2024).

Moreover, cultural and social norms continue to impose traditional gender roles, limiting women's opportunities and burdening them with unpaid domestic work (Dawood & Seedat-Khan, 2023). This unpaid labour often hinders their participation in the formal economy and limits their economic independence (Singh & Naidoo, 2017). Efforts to empower women economically are often hampered by a lack of access to resources, education, and support services, particularly in rural areas (Sharaunga & Mudhara, 2021). In addition, women in sports management and other male-dominated fields face significant gender inequality and are often marginalised in their professional roles (Singh & Naidoo, 2017).

Legal and policy frameworks, while progressive, often fall short in implementation, leaving women without adequate protection and access to justice (Ronnie & Glaister, 2020). The gap between legislation and practice means that many women are unable to benefit fully from their legal rights. This is compounded by the stigma and discrimination faced by women living with HIV/AIDS, which affects their mental health and access to social support (Brittain et al., 2017). The ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted and exacerbated these issues. Women have borne the brunt of the pandemic's economic fallout, facing increased job insecurity and economic hardship (Dube, 2021). Additionally, the pandemic has increased the burden of care work on women, particularly those in academia and other professional fields, making it more difficult for them to balance work and family responsibilities (Bam et al., 2024).

Despite the recognition of Women's Day, women in South Africa continue to grapple with a complex array of challenges that are deeply entrenched in societal structures. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort from all sectors of society, including government, the private sector, and civil society, to create an environment where women can achieve true equality and empowerment (Ronnie & Glaister, 2020; Dube, 2021).

Gaps in Current Literature on Gender Inequality

It is perhaps necessary to mention that, in South Africa, scholarly work on the difficulties faced by women has increased since the country's democratisation (Batisai, 2018; Hiralal, 2017; Hlatshwayo et al 2022; Mudaly, 2020). These scholarships include the work such as Hiralal's work (2017) on *Women in Anti-Colonial and Nationalist Movements: A Comparative Study of India and South Africa*; Mudaly (2020) account on the 50th anniversary of the 1956 Women's March: a personal recollection. Furthermore, researchers like Munakamwe (2014) and Berger (2014) have written extensively about how trade unions helped politically conscious women during the 1940s and 1970s. Trade unions gave grassroots women a forum for political mobilisation and helped them express "bread and butter" issues. However, existing literature often overlooks the systemic and structural factors that perpetuate gender inequality, such as discriminatory laws, social norms, and institutional biases. Hence, there is a need for more research on the intersectionality of gender with other factors like race, class, and geography to fully understand the diverse experiences of women.

Effectiveness of Current Policies and Programmes

The 1996 Constitution of South Africa is internationally recognised for its comprehensive protection and promotion of women's rights, serving as a model for addressing gender inequalities (South African Constitution, 1996). It obligates the state to address disparities between men and women through robust legislation, policies, and programs. Key provisions, such as Sections 9 and 10, underscore the principles of equality and human dignity, explicitly prohibiting discrimination and ensuring the equal enjoyment of fundamental rights regardless of gender. Moreover, the Constitution endorses affirmative action to guarantee that women, as a historically disadvantaged group, have equitable access to opportunities (South African Constitution, 1996; Sultana, 2020; De Groot & Lemanski, 2021).

South Africa's legal and policy frameworks on gender equality are deeply embedded in its Constitution, which was crafted during the nation's transition from apartheid to democracy. These frameworks embody the values and commitments of various stakeholders involved in the Constitution's creation, providing a solid foundation for gender equality. The Constitution explicitly mandates the state to promote equality and prevent unfair discrimination, thus setting the stage for subsequent legislation and policies (Naidoo & Wielenga, 2024).

Despite these legal provisions, South Africa faces significant challenges in implementing gender-revolutionary laws, particularly regarding domestic violence and economic oppression. Historical, cultural, and social norms perpetuate patronising attitudes towards women's issues. While early liberal feminist movements successfully secured formal equality—such as the right to vote and access to education—deeper systemic issues, including economic and social inequalities, remain pervasive (Paxton et al., 2020; Olojede et al., 2020).

In response to gender inequality, South Africa has developed several policies and frameworks, including the National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality. This framework, alongside international conventions like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), aims to advance women's rights and address gender disparities. However, the challenge lies in effectively implementing these policies and changing societal attitudes towards gender issues (Commission for Gender Equality, 2017; Sanadgol et al., 2021; Khodayari-Zarnaq et al., 2020; Upadhaya et al., 2020).

Awareness campaigns play a critical role in promoting gender equality and addressing gender-based violence (GBV). Campaigns such as 'No More Violence' and 'Takuwani Riime' have been instrumental in raising public awareness and shifting attitudes towards GBV (Jewkes et al., 2017; Levy et al., 2020). While these initiatives have increased media coverage and public discourse on GBV, their long-term impact on transforming societal norms remains uncertain (Few-Demo & Allen, 2020; Meeussen et al., 2020; Bertrand, 2020).

Support services for GBV victims, including police services and community-based organisations, are available but are often hindered by societal attitudes and structural challenges, such as male dominance in both familial and public spheres (Sibanda-Moyo et al., 2017; Achoki et al., 2022). Despite a supportive legal and policy framework for GBV victims, the effectiveness of these services is frequently undermined by the lack of societal change (Etim & Daramola, 2020; Pillay et al., 2020; Frescura et al., 2022).

In conclusion, while South Africa has made notable progress in establishing legal frameworks and policies to promote gender equality, ongoing challenges in implementation and societal attitudes continue to hinder the full realisation of these goals (Reddy et al., 2020; Adam & Moodley, 2023;). The Constitution and related laws provide a strong foundation, but more concerted efforts are

needed to achieve genuine gender equality and protect women's rights in practice (Enaifoghe et al., 2021; Gibbs et al., 2020; Navsaria et al., 2021).

Influence of Intersectional Factors

Studies conducted on women in South Africa emphasise the many obstacles that arise from their location, race, and class. Economic inequities still exist today, affecting women differently depending on their ethnicity and socioeconomic background, despite the advancements in post-apartheid legislation (Gibbons et al., 2017). As to the findings of Gibbons et al. (2017), women are more prone than men to labor unpaid, encounter occupational segregation, and endure poverty and abuse. Women's experiences with crime and jail are influenced by the intersections of race, class, and gender (Agboola & Rabe, 2018). Patriarchy, racism, and economic exploitation are just a few of the many ways that women of color are oppressed (Lekgau, 2021). Language hurdles, xenophobia, and a lack of support systems exacerbate the difficulties confronting immigrant women, especially when it comes to domestic abuse (Hiralal, 2017). In South Africa, the combination of these variables leads to intricate obstacles that women must overcome to obtain social support, employment, healthcare, and education.

Numerous individuals who are in abusive marriages and relationships are detained. This essay situates the claim within the intersectionality framework, arguing that gender, racism, class, ethnicity, and religion are crucial categories of study to comprehend the complexity of immigration issues facing women (Hiralal, 2017). The experiences and limitations faced by women in leadership roles in South African schools are significantly influenced by intersectional factors such as location, class, and race (Schmidt & Mestry, 2014).

The investigations cited above indicate that, despite South Africa celebrating National Women's Day for 56 years, there are still several issues that affect women today, including racism, abuse, class, geography, and race. These elements may cause women to feel inadequate when carrying out their responsibilities at home or work, or they may cause them to experience anxiety and despair. Consequently, I conclude that, in South Africa, women continue to face abuses of some kind.

Agreements and disagreement

The following section provides major agreements and disagreements that were found in this article:

Many sources agree that South Africa faces alarmingly high rates of GBV, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and femicide. This issue has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified violence during lockdowns (Enaifoghe et al., 2021; Ndlovu et al., 2022).

There is consensus on the pervasive economic inequality affecting women, particularly regarding lower wages compared to men and the prevalence of women in low-paying, informal jobs. Rural women experience severe poverty and limited economic opportunities (Posel & Casale, 2019; Moyo, 2014; Thaba-Nkadimene et al., 2019).

Scholars agree on the significant health disparities faced by women, including limited access to healthcare and high rates of HIV/AIDS (Brittain et al., 2017; Naidoo & Wielenga, 2024).

There is a shared recognition of inadequate political representation for women and the challenges they face in leadership roles, including sexism and harassment (Majola, 2019; Zulu, 2021; Herbst, 2020).

Agreement exists on the impact of cultural and social norms that impose traditional gender roles and unpaid domestic work on women, limiting their participation in the formal economy (Dawood & Seedat-Khan, 2023; Singh & Naidoo, 2017).

Major Disagreements:

There is debate over the effectiveness of South Africa's legal and policy frameworks for gender equality. While some argue that the Constitution and related policies provide a strong foundation (De Groot & Lemanski, 2021; Sultana, 2020), others highlight significant gaps in implementation and the need for more effective societal change (Paxton et al., 2020; Olojede et al., 2020).

Opinions vary on the impact of awareness campaigns on GBV. While some argue that initiatives like 'No More Violence' have increased public awareness and media coverage (Jewkes et al., 2017; Levy et al., 2020), others question their long-term effectiveness in transforming societal norms (Few-Demo & Allen, 2020; Meeussen et al., 2020).

There is disagreement on how comprehensively current literature addresses intersectionality. Some scholars call for more research on the intersection of gender with race, class, and geography to fully understand women's diverse experiences (Gibbons et al., 2017; Agboola & Rabe, 2018). Others argue that existing research already captures these intersections but may still overlook systemic issues (Hiralal, 2017).

While there is broad agreement on the critical issues affecting women in South Africa, debates persist on the effectiveness of current policies and the depth of intersectional analysis in existing research.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study highlighted the persistent and multifaceted challenges faced by women in South Africa, viewed through a theoretical lens emphasising intersectionality and systemic inequality (Enaifoghe et al., 2021; Ndlovu et al., 2022). Despite legal advancements, South Africa remained plagued by high rates of gender-based violence (GBV), including domestic violence, sexual assault, and femicide. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues, as lockdowns intensified domestic tensions and reduced access to support services (Enaifoghe et al., 2021; Ndlovu et al., 2022). Feminist theory, particularly from a Marxist perspective, revealed how GBV was rooted in power imbalances and patriarchal structures that perpetuated control and violence against women (Burton, 2014; Earles, 2017; Hooks, 2000).

Economic disadvantages for women were also significant. The study found that women continued to face substantial economic inequalities, including lower wages and precarious employment in informal sectors (Posel & Casale, 2019). Rural women experienced exacerbated economic hardships, aligning with feminist critiques of capitalism that argued economic exploitation and inequality were systemic issues ingrained within South Africa's socio-economic structures (Moyo, 2014; Thaba-Nkadimene et al., 2019). The presence of sexism and discrimination, particularly against black women, in political and professional settings further demonstrated the intersectional nature of oppression. This underrepresentation in leadership roles highlighted the failure of societal structures to challenge and dismantle patriarchal and racist barriers, as emphasised by feminist and critical race theories (Zulu, 2021; Herbst, 2020).

Cultural norms continued to confine women to unpaid domestic labor, reinforcing economic dependency and limiting their participation in the formal economy (Dawood & Seedat-Khan, 2023; Singh & Naidoo, 2017). These norms were deeply embedded in the societal fabric, hindering efforts towards gender equality. Feminist theory critiqued how these norms were perpetuated through institutional and cultural practices that upheld patriarchal values (Dawood & Seedat-Khan, 2023). Health disparities, particularly regarding reproductive health and high rates of HIV/AIDS, illustrated the intersection of gender and systemic neglect (Brittain et al., 2017; Naidoo & Wielenga, 2024). Feminist analysis emphasised how healthcare inequities were a result of both systemic neglect and patriarchal control over women's bodies and health.

Although South Africa had progressive legal frameworks intended to address gender inequality, challenges in their implementation persisted (South African Constitution, 1996; De Groot & Lemanski, 2021). The disparity between legal protections and real-world outcomes reflected broader issues within the justice system and societal attitudes (Paxton et al., 2020; Olojede et al., 2020). Existing literature had made strides in documenting women's challenges in South Africa, yet it often overlooked systemic factors such as discriminatory laws and institutional biases (Hiralal, 2017; Batisai, 2018). While research had explored various aspects of women's experiences, there remained a need for more comprehensive studies that addressed the intersectionality of gender, race, and class. This gap suggested a need for deeper exploration into how systemic and structural factors perpetuated gender inequality and affected diverse groups of women (Berger, 2014; Munakamwe, 2014).

South Africa's Constitution and various policies aimed to address gender disparities, but challenges in their implementation persisted (Commission for Gender Equality, 2017; Sanadgol et al., 2021). The effectiveness of these frameworks was often undermined by societal attitudes and inadequate resources (Sibanda-Moyo et al., 2017; Achoki et al., 2022). While initiatives like the National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and campaigns against GBV had made strides, their practical impact remained limited due to structural barriers and insufficient enforcement (Jewkes et al., 2017; Levy et al., 2020). The study highlighted how intersectional factors such as race, class, and geographic location compounded the challenges faced by South African women. Economic and social inequalities were not uniformly experienced but varied significantly based on these intersecting identities (Gibbons et al., 2017). Immigrant women, for instance, faced additional barriers such as xenophobia and language barriers, complicating their access to support and resources (Hiralal, 2017). Intersectional analysis proved crucial for understanding these complex experiences and for developing targeted interventions that addressed the unique needs of different groups of women (Schmidt & Mestry, 2014).

In conclusion, the findings of the article underscored the importance of a comprehensive approach to addressing gender inequality in South Africa. By incorporating feminist and intersectional perspectives, the study revealed the deep-rooted and multifaceted nature of gender-based challenges and highlighted the need for more effective and inclusive policies and interventions (Navsaria et al., 2021; Mkhize & Bennett, 2020).

Recommendations

To move forward, the article advocated for strengthening legal protections, expanding support services for survivors of gender-based violence, and addressing economic and healthcare disparities. It emphasised the importance of promoting women's leadership, challenging harmful cultural norms, and supporting intersectional research to inform policy and practice. The researchers believe that adopting the highlighted recommendations, South Africa could advance toward genuine gender equality and improve the well-being of its women, paving the way for a more equitable and inclusive society.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the article underscored the persistent and multifaceted challenges faced by women in South Africa despite the country's robust legal frameworks and celebrated efforts such as Women's Day. The high rates of gender-based violence, significant economic disparities, and inadequate access to healthcare revealed deep-rooted issues that continued to hinder women's progress. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these challenges, highlighting the urgent need for effective policy implementation and societal change.

The findings suggested that while legal protections and policies existed, their effectiveness was often compromised by inadequate enforcement and persistent socio-cultural barriers. Economic

inequality remained pervasive, with many women, especially those in rural areas, experiencing severe poverty and limited opportunities. The intersectionality of gender with race, class, and geography complicated these issues, underscoring the need for targeted, inclusive approaches in addressing women's challenges.

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