

**THE EXPERIENCES OF SENIOR WOMEN
TRADITIONAL LEADERS IN ADDRESSING
WOMEN ABUSE IN KWAZULU-NATAL, SOUTH
AFRICA: AN AFROCENTRIC AND NEGO-
FEMINIST APPROACH**

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by

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Introduction and Background

- Women abuse is prevalent in South Africa.
- It as a challenge that has gained a global momentum (1/3rd of women affected globally) and heightened experiences of physical and sexual violence from both the intimate and non-intimate partners (WHO, 2013).
- The KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Planning Commission (2016) cite Gender Based Violence (GBV) as *“one of the most intractable problems, with significant under reporting, lack of funding for interventions with policy and discursive shifts”*.
- Statistics South Africa (2017) indicate that:
 - 1 in 5 women in SA experienced physical violence by a partner
 - Results for sexual violence by any partner over 12 months were similar for women living in urban and rural areas.

Introduction and Background conti.

- It has to be everybody's business: requires multi-sector involvement as acknowledged by Department of Women (2015)
- Institution of Traditional Leadership has a constitutional and legislative mandate to play a role in protecting the vulnerable citizens
- The situation and the statistics are a cause for concern and Question to be asked is:

Until when?

(Statistics vs continued lives at risk)

Problem and motivation

- Traditional Leaders are an entry point and a source of reliance especially within rural communities where government wide services are not adequately dispersed.

KZN urban versus rural setting

Urban images



Rural images



Problem and motivation

- Controversies regarding the position and treatment of women. E.g., women could not become chiefs (Chauke, 2015).
- The Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act (Act 41 of 2003) requires that at least 1/3 of a traditional council must be women. And Yes, women have started assuming positions.
- However, it does not come easy – e.g., Landmark case law of *Shilubana v Nwamitwa & Others in 2008* on gender discrimination.
- The critical role played by Senior Women Traditional Leaders is less documented

Problem and motivation conti.

- According to Dodo (2013)
 - there are still some resistance as the institution is male dominated
 - the appointment of females is still perceived un-cultural
- There are many studies conducted on the role of Traditional Leaders in service delivery but, enormous focus on: their direct involvement/their relationship with municipalities or the judiciary.
- Little attention has been given to policy development and the inclusion of Traditional Leaders to play a key role within policy implementation.

Problem and motivation conti.

- The existing policy framework that deals domestic violence (e.g. Victim Empowerment Programme) is silent in terms of identifying Traditional Leaders among the key role players
- Where efforts have been made to include traditional leaders as stakeholders (such as within the Sixteen Days campaign on gender violence), they are mostly at the receiving end (they are the target group) not afforded autonomy to equally lead as stakeholders but are rather lead.
- Accessibility of traditional courts to women? – it was found that “patriarchy was used as an excuse to the occurrences of gender-based violence and women were blamed for it”.
- Research into the experiences of Senior Women Traditional Leaders could elevate the need to consider the vital role they play in addressing women abuse.

Operational terms

Senior Women Traditional Leader

- Traditional leader
- Senior traditional leader
- *Senior Women Traditional Leader* is use conveniently in this study.

Abuse in relation women

- This study notes that different authors define the term abuse differently.
- For the sake of this study, women abuse refers to various forms of harm, physical, emotional and/or psychological intended to destabilise the well-being of woman and creating a victim perception of no other alternatives except the abusive environment.

Theoretical Framework

- Afro-centric and Nego-feminism approaches form the theoretical framework and ground the study.
- **The Afro-centric approach**
 - Which says: explore alternatives from an African cultural perspective” (Asante, 1983).
 - It challenges perspectives and views misaligned to African value systems. and
 - Rejects diluted hegemonic perspectives about Africans (Monteiro-Ferreira, 2014).
 - Emphasis on viewing phenomena through the lens of Africans, and
 - It seeks to empower African people and restore their dignity and self-worth (Stelly, 1997).

Theoretical Framework conti.

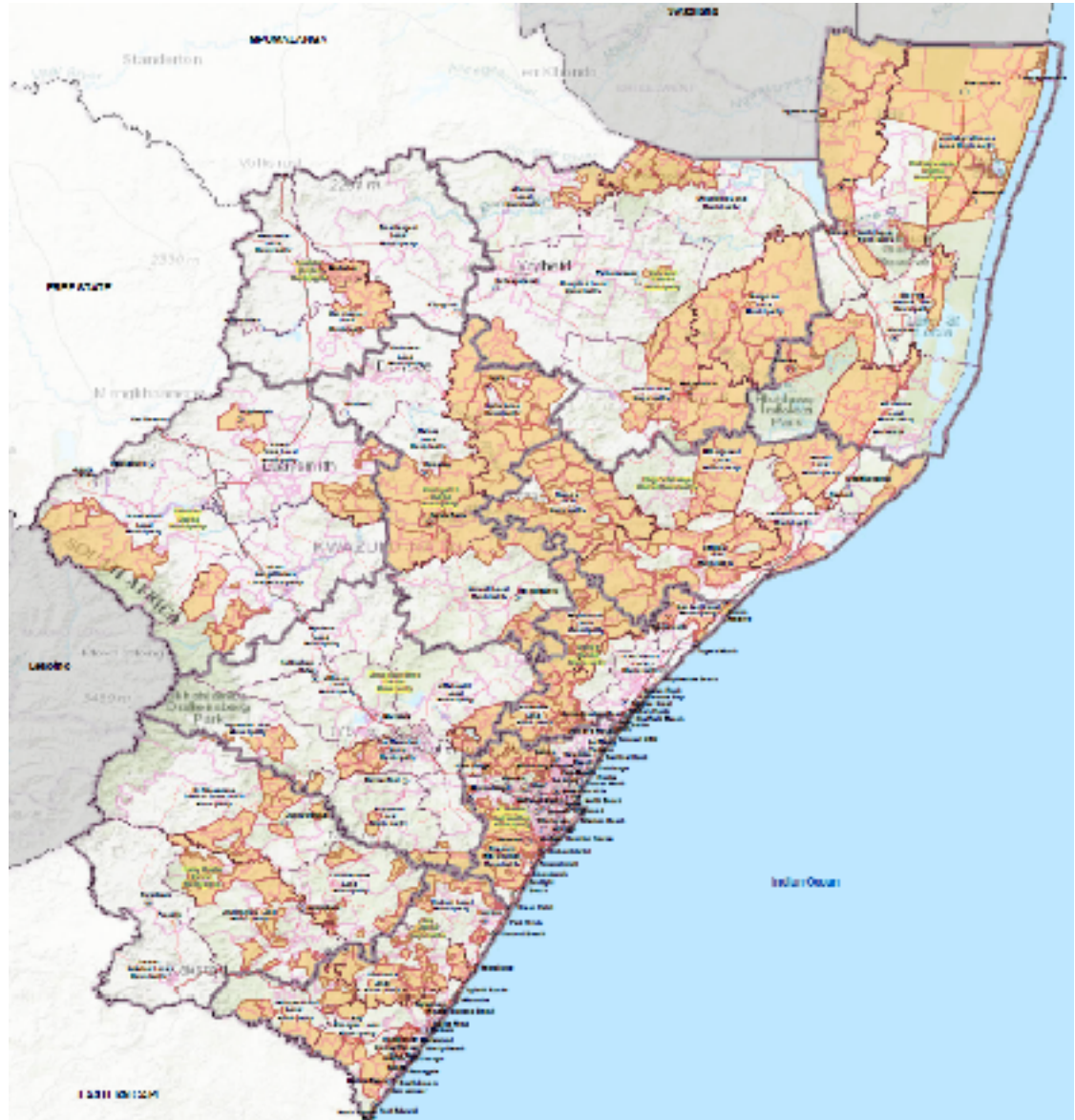
- **Nego-feminism approach**

- Argue for African feminism that is built on the indigenous” (Nnaemeka, 2003).
- It advocate for principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise and balance which form part of shared values in many African cultures.
- The theory firmly acknowledges that patriarchy is there.
- But argues that it should not be dealt with in isolation from other factors such as race, underdevelopment, sexuality etc.
- It charges both male and female to be willing-partners in progress (Alkali, Talif and Jan, 2013).

The Study Location

KwaZulu-Natal

- 8 of the 9 provinces observing Traditional Leadership
- The 3rd smallest province by area
- The 2nd largest most populous province with 11 million people (Statistics SA, 2016).
- Vastly rural and comprise 40% of land controlled by the traditional leadership (KZN Planning Commission, 2011).
- 54% of the population lives in rural areas



Aims and Objectives

Aim:

The aim of the study is to explore the experiences of Senior Women Traditional Leaders in addressing women abuse in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Objectives of the study

To explore the perceptions of Senior Women Traditional Leaders regarding the extent to which Traditional Leaders get involved as stakeholders in addressing women abuse

To understand the challenges faced by Senior Women Traditional Leaders when addressing women abuse in KwaZulu-Natal

To gain insight into the support networks required by Senior Women Traditional Leaders when addressing women abuse

To obtain suggestions from Senior Women Traditional Leaders regarding improvement of policy/legislation and services in respect of women abuse

Research Methodology

- A qualitative phenomenological research design was used.
- Participants were purposively selected.
 - Came from 9 District Municipalities and the Metro
 - Most (16) participants ascended to the throne following the passing away of their husbands and they were holding the throne for their sons.
 - The age difference of participants ranged between 30s to early 60s
- In-depth one-on-one interviews were conducted in isiZulu and translated into English
- Thematic analysis was used

Preliminary findings

| Emerging themes | Sub-themes |
|--|--|
| Addressing women abuse as a critical role | Role expectations Reported cases of abuse |
| Addressing women abuse as a challenge | Being a woman Institutional limitations |
| Ways of addressing women abuse | Consultation as a tool to address women abuse Emphasising rights of women through negotiation |

Theme: Addressing women abuse as a critical role

- Traditional Leaders face criticisms that they rely on deference (demanded respect from their subjects), place the community ahead of the individual, and applying a non-democratic form of governance (Logan, 2012).
- However, recent studies have argued that by being located at the grass root level and living with people in the villages, traditional authorities have a key role to play in fostering democracy and advancing social equality (Mawere and Mayekiso, 2014).
- Senior Women Traditional Leaders in this study reported that survivors and communities have expectations on them and that they address a variety of cases of women abuse.

Sub-theme: Role expectations

- *These comments were made by some participants to attest to what is expected of them when addressing women abuse:*

“they expect that one, for you to make the pain go away”.

“They still expect me to perform. I am expected to perform miracles, that I always have solutions even when there are injuries”.

“Now the person who brought the case is of course expecting the support but now, they can’t afford the lawyers. That’s where we intervene, it’s...people that don’t have lawyers”.

Sub-theme: Reported cases of abuse

- Participants reported receiving a variety of women abuse cases. The cases were interlinked but differed in magnitude.
 - ✓ *“you find that a woman who is married, her husband passes away...then she gets abused by the family. Consider that she was already abused by her husband.....she gets even more abused...like with fights over the will”.*
 - ✓ *“...lobola may have been paid but not necessarily that they’re actually married. So when this girlfriend is now in the picture, he kicks out the woman....there are children ...a woman goes around without a settled home”.*
 - ✓ *“Another man hit a woman...when I asked the man..., he simply said it was because she did not want to sleep with him”.*
 - ✓ *“She disclosed that she was once beaten while pregnant to an extent that she delivered a baby and the man took the dead body of the baby and buried it”.*
- The above reported cases are of survivors who experience multiple forms of abuse [physical/emotional/psychological/ dispossession of property/sexual abuse etc..

Theme: Addressing women abuse as a challenge

- Participants shared their experiences of challenges they face when addressing women abuse. The challenges are:
 - embedded in the position being a male dominated one and therefore impacting on being a woman;
 - the lack of resources and the limitations imposed on the Institution of traditional Leadership;
- These factors acted as barriers limiting Senior Women Traditional Leaders from unleashing their full potential in addressing women abuse.

Sub-theme: Being a woman

- The male domination imposed challenges despite participants being in position of power within their communities. The negative experiences seemed to take a toll on participants.
- one participant shared her frustration saying:
 - *“I haven’t understood it till today, I really haven’t. It becomes a secretive environment and just the issues of this status of being a female iNkosi that is in charge”.*
- the other participant shared how she experiences abuse herself and being looked down upon in her position:
 - *“Someone comes here, you’ve discussed their issue, they go out and say “it is such a problem that women are in power, nothing gets done”.*

Sub-theme: Institutional limitations

- Frustrations shared by participants indicated that the institution suffers challenges of not being a significant other within the system of governance. One of the comments made:
 - *“if [they] go to lawyers, they will advise them that iNkosi is not qualified to discuss the case, and [they] come to me with a written letter”.*
- Despite sharing on how they struggle with providing adequate interventions, participants also shared how the limitations imposed on the institution as well as the negative and undermining perspectives contribute to their difficulties in addressing women abuse. Participants said:
 - *“...we can’t even get people to compensate for wrongdoings...when you try to do that, they’ll ask you where that law is because the government says we don’t have the rights to do that”.*
 - *“they should also not believe that we abuse people... The government should research more broadly on what happens here instead of making assumptions about us”.*

Theme: Ways of addressing women abuse

- Findings attest to a variety of ways used by Senior Women Traditional Leaders in addressing women abuse. Perceptions shared by all participants were that Senior Women Traditional Leaders use consultative and negotiation to addressing women abuse.

Summary of findings

- Senior Women Traditional Leaders play a critical role in addressing women abuse.
- Despite their critical role, they experience various challenges that undermine their status and making it difficult for them to address women abuse.
- It is possible to solve women abuse through the application of African cultural principles.
- It is also possible to negotiate solutions using African conflict resolution mechanisms as an immediate response to women abuse.

Recommendations

- Based on these preliminary findings, it is recommended that:
 - Policy makers should elevate African conflict resolution mechanisms within the policy development as a theory of change in order to harness and capitalise on its appealing nature to humanity in addressing women abuse.
 - Real partnerships be established with Senior Women Traditional Leaders in order to advance the scope of fighting women abuse.
 - Although the study only purposely selected women as participants, further research into the experiences of Male Senior Traditional Leaders may be useful to explore further in this area.
 - With full support and capacity building, traditional leaders might just serve as an alternative resource in addressing women abuse.

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