

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Some scandals in gender-based violence and intimate partner violence

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ABSTRACT

This study was requested by victims of gender-based violence (GBV) and intimate partner violence (IPV), who wanted their voices to be heard. They were not interested in their identities being revealed, but they only wanted to share their stories to expose some rot by high-profile people. This paper sought to explore the meanings that these victims attach to the experiences of GBV and IPV in cases where perpetrators are well-to-do, highly respected persons occupying positions of authority in recognized establishments. Six (6) IPV victims, selected using the purposive sampling method, participated in the study. They were interviewed, and their text data was analyzed. The results show that some high-status people perpetrate GBV and IPV, covering the known types of IPV and generating two new ones of IPV extending to the victim's family and threats to divorce their victim. The paper recommends monitoring and evaluating high-status people and also bars GBV and IPV perpetrators from practicing in high-profile trades.

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INTRODUCTION

Issues of GBV have for many past years been associated with low-key people, such as criminals, illiterates, drunkards, heathens, poverty, and others that are viewed or may be considered to be 'not good' (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2021; Wile, 2023). People in high positions would usually not be expected to inflict such pain on other people. Shange and Goba (2018) report a case on GBV in which the then-South African Deputy Minister of Higher Education assaulted a woman from Ermelo, Mpumalanga Province of South Africa. The violence entailed throwing the woman on the bonnet of a car, slapping her, pouring beer on her face, hitting the woman's aunt, and also hitting her in the face. In 2007, a very high-ranking South African politician was accused of raping a young woman (Hassim, 2023; Gqola, 2007). However, due to manipulations around the case, it was thrown out of court, but the allegations were factual in the eyes of observers. This case was even seen as one way that the South African government did not take GBV seriously, as the perpetrator was a senior politician who later ascended to the highest office in the land.

The many years of male domination have caused many men to think they have the freedom to rule over women (Bridger, 2023). The apartheid government did not consider GBV as a special kind of

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violence in the way modern democratic South Africa takes a stand against violence against women (VAW). Women in the past days, on the other hand, were silent since the power of men did not enable them to protect themselves from men who abuse them (Morrell et al., 2012). Also, as it was part of old culture, women did not expose men who were abusing them. It is believed that over the past years, there were too many women in abusive relationships who did not speak out about their abusive partners and associates and the hostile intimate relationships they endured (Brännvall & Ekström, 2023). Currently, abused women have the law to protect them against abuse and policies for seeking help when abused as a woman, which is a consolation that beaten women have (Turhan et al., 2023). The initiatives include having police dedicated to apprehending perpetrators to protect women. However, more cases emerge much more regularly, showing that women are GBV victims and that GBV against them increases with no limits (Keith, 2023). We are still in a man-dominated environment, as the men are still much in power and are custodians of control of the people even in governments (Williams, 2023).

IPV is home violence that a current or former spouse or partner in an intimate relationship causes the other spouse or intimate partner (Zarling et al., 2017). The GhanaWeb (2023) reported that “Barbara . . . was shot seven times by her husband, a Ghanaian pastor . . . in the United States of America . . . before Barbara left him due to his abusive behavior.” This is an example of IPV since it is GBV in the context of married couples. However, though not widespread, there are men out there who are victimized by women, including men whom their intimate partners abuse (Scott-Storey et al., 2023)—reporting a case of assault by men when a woman is the perpetrator in abuse with mixed reactions. Early days experiences of GBV showed men with ‘no status’ abusing women (Nash et al., 2023). Then later, it became women as well, abusing men (McSweeney, 2023), and also men of status abusing women.

GBV is aggression that a person commits against another person because of their sex or gender, compelling that person to do something against their will through coercion, deception, economic means, force, threats, or violence (Colaguori, 2023). GBV is considered to be gender-neutral. It encompasses violence against a man or a woman and is violence based on their gender or sexual orientation. It is more commonly perpetrated by men on women and rarely by women on men. Matumbu (2023) defines VAW as a GBV that is primarily or exclusively committed by men or boys against women or girls specifically because they are female. Closely related to GBV and VAW is intimate partner violence (IPV), which is violence caused by one person to another person with whom they have a close relationship. A common form includes controlling behaviors emotional, physical, and sexual abuse by a current or former intimate partner who may be a lover or a relative (Cullen, 2023).

As explained earlier, GBV is more often caused by men against women than women driving it against men. IPV and VAW are also caused more by men against women than by women against men. Also, it is believed that men who lack qualities such as education, wealth, work occupancy, and so on cause these pains to women. GBV and VAW may be used interchangeably because men against women perpetrate most GBV. In reality, though, GBV includes violence against men, boys, and sexual minorities or those with gender-nonconforming identities. This paper sought to explore meanings that the victims attach to the experiences of GBV and IPV in cases where perpetrators are well-to-do, highly respected persons occupying positions of authority in recognized establishments.

METHOD

The study design was qualitative and phenomenological in an attempt to understand what GBV and IPV perpetrators do and (are understood to) say to their victims when they abuse them. The qualitative design approach applies when exploring to understand the meaning of social problems

from the opinions of individuals who have encountered the study phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Qualitative research entails considerable and methodical endeavor that requires asking questions, gathering data, analyzing data inductively, and deducing meaning from the analyzed data. Researchers ought to be sensitive, empathetic, and mindful of the values intrinsic in individuals (Minikel-Lacocque, 2019). On the phenomenological approach, Yu et al. (2023) explain that the phenomenological method is suitable for understanding phenomena and their exclusive context due to experience as they had personal encounters. This study used phenomenological descriptive analysis to create themes and the essence of meaning. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants to respond to the research questions. Being a spouse (wife or husband) of a respectable person who happens to be a perpetrator of GBV or IPV was the inclusion criterion for participating in the study. The participants were seeking advice regarding how they could react to the abuses that they suffered at the hands of their abusers. They asked for a voice or for their stories to have a platform to share their experiences. Rosenthal (2018) states that qualitative research does not require a significant sample size to understand the phenomenon's depth but rather a sufficient number to reach saturation. Hennink and Kaiser (2022) and Lowe et al. (2018) concur that a small sample can be adequate to enable saturation. Rosenthal (2018) and Vasileiou et al. (2018) explain that three (3) participants are the minimum that can lead to saturation. Since the participants' involvement was their request, by default, it was upon their voluntary option to participate.

Moreover, they were formally informed of the study details. They were anonymized using the initials BB, DR, LV, LZ, SB, and SS to hide their identities. The following table presents the participants' profiles:

Table 1. Participants' profiles

Initial	Gender	Age	Status	Partner status	Relationship duration	Home
BB	Female	46 years	HW*	SP*	19 years	Mbombela
DR	Male	29 years	UE*	Teacher	5 years	Rustenburg
LV	Male	34 years	BO*	Secretary	8 years	Zeerust
LZ	Female	31 years	HW	Priest	6 years	Zibeleni
SB	Female	39 years	HW	Priest	9 years	Soweto
SS	Male	41 years	Teacher	Teacher	13 years	Soshanguve

*HW = housewife, BO = business owner, PP = participant, SP = school principal, UE = unemployed

Interviews, which entail a data collection method through dialogues with a specific purpose in mind (Watson 2018), were used to collect data. The researcher interviewed the interviewees or participants by asking questions based on an open semi-structured guide. The questions or items posed to the participants were "Kindly tell how the abuse is/was,"; "When and how did the abuse start?" and "Please say any other thing relating to the abuse."

Analysis was done through thematic content analysis to create themes of the lived experiences. Blaikie (2018) expresses qualitative data analysis as a continual and iterative process in which data collection, processing, analysis, and reporting are interwoven, not just several successive steps. In this study, these steps were followed to guide the analysis. Recorded data were transcribed verbatim and transformed into written script. The transcripts were read, preliminary themes were identified from the data, and the researcher then developed themes that addressed the research questions. Next, the researcher transcribed, translated, and coded the data as data collection continued. According to Moser and Korstjens (2018), themes that did not have enough data to support them were discarded. After fully working out the themes, this manuscript's final analysis and write-up occurred.

RESULT

Respondents' profiles

Table 1 shows that a sample of size six ($n = 6$) participated in the study, consisting of 3 (50%) males and 3 (50%) females with their ages ranging from 29 to 46 years. Four (4 = 67%) of the abusers were homemakers abused by a school principal, a teacher, and two by priests. One female secretary was abusing a male business owner, and another female teacher abused a male teacher. Four (67%) couples (abuser & abused) had been married for 5, 6, 8, and 9 years, while two others had been married for lengthy periods of 13 and 19 years. Their homes were in the four (4) provinces of Eastern Cape (location of eZibeleni), Gauteng (Soshanguve & Soweto), Mpumalanga (Mbombela), and North-West (Rustenburg & Zeerust).

Abusers' profiles

According to Table 1, 'Partner status' column, abusers were holding mostly respected positions of the school principal, secretary, two teachers, and two priests. One (1.1%) was a male business owner abused by a housewife, and another one (1.1%) was a male teacher abused by a female teacher. The identified abusers are arguably people of status.

Derogatory words of perpetrators during the abuse

"He scolded me and disgraced me in front of people. The whole principal told me he would kill me one day because of my insubordination. He did not like me asking him to take care of us. He is irresponsible in the house but pleases everyone else outside the family. What do you call such a man! A man who would make a loan because an outsider wants money." (BB)

"This woman, she calls me a fool." (DR)

"She says I am a weakling." (LV)

"I wish he were insulting only me, and not my companions. He insults me and tells me how my family is useless" (LZ)

"He calls me with all the names in the dictionary of insults. There are no vulgar words I have not heard being directed to me." (SB)

"She said other men are better than me. She also said she took the wrong man out of the four she claimed wanted to marry her. " (SS)

Wide descriptions of abusive spectacles

The findings show that the types of abuse that the victims endured from people of status and good standing included cheating, economic, financial, and verbal forms. The following quotes attest to these findings.

"The man was a famous school principal, so I thought he was honest and loving and fell for him. All people loved him. Even when I married him, people said I was lucky to attract that man. In the house, what came out of his mouth, yoh! A notorious verbal abuser. On finances, he is such a great miser. I had to ask for money from my cousins, and when he knew, he bit me." (BB)

"My wife was a cheater. When the boyfriend she was cheating with was killed, she submitted my name as a suspect. I did not even know that one boyfriend. The one I knew was later identified as the killer, and they were fighting for my wife. She took money from the house and gave it to her

boyfriends. When she was arrested as an accomplice in jail when I visited, she insisted on me pay and bail both her and him out, but denying their affair and insisted that she should come home so that we could discuss the matter in the house." (DR)

"Her family loved me, but her friends hated me. They were jealous that I treated her well, so they used her to destroy the beauty we had. She only found out after our divorce because one of them confessed to her. When she wanted to leave with her friends, she would start an argument, accusing me of 'this and that.' She never said where she got her stories. She also accused me of being from a family of witches, so she called me a snake. She would slap me to provoke me or pull my dick, making it very painful, and want sex and accuse me of having an affair when I could not do it. She took my business money and wasted it on friends. She said she was borrowing but never returned it. When I asked, we quarreled, so I stopped asking. I was dying." (LV)

"The man I had married is a great pretender. He told me how he wanted my family to do well, as he said he was in a hurry to marry me to change them. He found me working. He insisted I leave my job as he said I was working in a low-status job. At first, he drove me to my home, refusing me to take a taxi that I was used to. He spoiled my family then, but now! He says my family are parasites, and he won't fall into the trap. He never gives me money. Even for women's cosmetics, he goes to the shop and brings me the cheapest. Though I do not mind the cheapness, some stuff he brings gives me infections. He does not care. When I go home, all he gives me is taxi fare. He no longer drives me. He says I am used to taxis." (LZ)

"He never gave me money – not a single cent! But he refused to work. When I went to work, he followed me to my workplace and refused to talk to my male colleagues. When I was paid, he took all the money. As for his money, I know none of it. On other instances when I got a job, he stopped me from going there, threatening divorce on the eve of me starting to work. Once or twice, he slapped me. He administered marriages of couples. When he advised them, I wished he would advise himself. When he preached, I wished he would preach to himself. A wicked priest." (SB)

"She verbally abused me, threw insults at me, and occasionally physically abused me as she would slap me when she realized someone was coming who would not see her slap me but was surely going to see if I slapped back. I asked myself why she did these when she was so beautiful. She is also a very good teacher. When she started to torment me, I wished I was her learner instead of her husband. The way she treated other people well, I was going to be called a liar if I said she was abusive. I do not want her any closer anymore" (SS)

Humiliation from the abuse

The victims indicate to have been humiliated with insults and beatings. The obvious outcomes of discomfort for the victim are confirmed.

"He beats and insults me at will. He uses words to humiliate me." (BB)

"What kind of heart does she have, or even her thinking! She throws insults without looking at me, but she hits the heart. She embarrasses me more when she shows off. She calls me a woman. People even label me a weak woman." (DR)

"The abuse is dangerous, real torture. Insults thrown at me, and physically being abused, are all very painful. Death even feels to be the best option, without needing to experience death." (LV)

"Physical, verbal, economic and emotional abuses. This priest has no heart." (LZ)

"He refuses to get help. When I initiate help, he rushes to people to say that we sorted all our differences. He threatens me with divorce and 'to kill me' if I dare say it to anyone again. There was a time I wanted to commit suicide and make it like I was murdered, hoping they would say it was him. I stopped at the last minute, feeling pity for him." (SB)

"It is abuse, it is painful, uncomfortable." (SS)

Start of the abuse

The abuses started after the marriages. Responses to the question "When and how did the abuse start?" are presented below.

"He cared for me for two months after our marriage, and then he turned a monster after I gave birth." (BB)

"The first time we quarreled was five years after our marriage. She had met a rich guy in a school governing body meeting, and apparently, she tried to leave our house to make it easy for their affair. When I pleaded with her for our sake, she intensified her abuse of me." (DR)

"Her cousin sisters introduced my wife to a very rich man. They also stated that he wanted to marry her and warned her against a poor man, me. My wife offered me money to leave her for him, and I refused. So she made sure that I paid 'for my sins'" (LV)

"We were just having an affair, and then I fell pregnant. He wanted me to abort because he did not want to take responsibility. So when the pregnancy showed, he proposed because, as a priest, he would have been suspended or removed from the role as a priest. So, he hated the child and me for 'deliberately forcing him to marry me,' which was not true. But I suffered because of it anyway" (LZ)

"It started when I saw him kiss one of the congregation young ladies. When I confronted him, he and the woman teamed up to lie that I was having an affair." (SB)

"We had a good life till two years in the marriage. One day, when she returned from home, she made some demands on what she wanted me to do for her family. She accused me of marrying her before she paid back for her upbringing. From there onwards, there was no reverse. There was also some influence from friends. So, our arguments did not have a basis from our house. None of them had solutions. I had to opt out of the marriage." (SS)

Effects on victims

The abusive treatment that these victims received made them forgetful, emotionally hurt, suicidal, and even thinking of avenging and killing their abusers.

"I sometimes wanted to kill his children, then him and take my own life. Only after I spoke to a counseling psychologist, I realized that I have more options in life." (BB)

"With the kind of abuse I received, one can only want to die. I was even suicidal." (DR)

"I was going nuts. I lost concentration easily, and at some point, I did not care. When I crossed the road, I did not check if a vehicle was coming." (LV)

"My children are my lifeline. I decided to live just for them. I wanted to kill myself. If a highly respected man can do these things, with so many people taking him as their idol, who would I convince? They all call him 'good man,' so I am on my own" (LZ)

“You can be suicidal. I was suicidal, in despair as I lost all the hope in life. The man who was like a small heaven is now all of a sudden the devil himself.” (SB)

“I wanted to leave the home. I was not even thinking right. I forgot things easily. I was always in pain. When I looked at myself in the mirror and tried to smile with myself, it was like I was crying. I felt pity for myself. I wished to die.” (SS).

DISCUSSION

The fact that the abusers in this paper are personalities in reputable positions of extreme trust makes their aggressive or abusive behaviors scandalous. Lloyd (2018) concurs that abusers are expected to be personalities in untrustworthy positions, such as drug users, criminals, and uneducated, as their behaviors can be primitive, aggressive, or abusive behaviors appalling. Teachers teach morals, and principals oversee that morals are taught and practiced. Priest preaches morals. Moreover, they officiate and administer marriages and preach ethical practices in intimacy. This paper does not show this consistency from them.

The association of GBV or IPV with a particular person description does not hold since this paper exposes cases of IPV perpetrators who should be the ones protecting people against it and also not being abusive. This, however, is the exception that men cause most GBV and IPV (Applin et al., 2023). The perpetrators in this paper are widely different in terms of their professions and home backgrounds. They are also educated/literate and know the laws on women's rights.

The notable themes emerging from the responses are ‘cheating,’ ‘disrespect,’ ‘emotional abuse,’ ‘external influence,’ ‘financial abuse,’ ‘humiliation,’ ‘hypocrisy,’ ‘IPV extended to victim’s family,’ ‘mental weakness,’ ‘money offer to let go,’ ‘physical abuse,’ ‘suicidal,’ ‘threats to divorce,’ ‘threats to kill,’ and ‘verbal abuse,’ which are explained below.

Cheating. SB explains, referring to her husband, that she “saw him kiss one of . . . the ladies” under the section ‘Start of the abuse,’ and DR states, “My wife is a cheater” under the section ‘Wide descriptions of abusive spectacles.’ Buller et al. (2023) highlight that cheating often occurs when some men display romantic jealousy but still aim to hold on to power over their intimate partners.

Disrespect. All the incidents of abuse exemplify disrespect, as the perpetrators are not considerate when imposing themselves on the victims. This point is echoed by several authors (Adinew et al., 2023; Gebeyehu et al., 2023; Mwasha et al., 2023; Yalley et al., 2023) who all view abuse and humiliation as being equivalent concepts that express disrespect for the victims.

Emotional abuse. EZ indicates to be abused “...and emotional” under the section on ‘Humiliation from the abuse.’ Signals of this show where LV explains under ‘Effects on victims’ to be losing concentration even when crossing the roads. Engel (2023) points out that there is no single reason for emotionally abusing a partner or anyone. This is not expected from an educated and experienced human, as Ness (2023) insinuates. Hence, scandal is attached in the case of this study as abusers are the ones not expected to abuse.

External influence. External influence is shown where under ‘Start of the abuse’ LV states, “Her cousins introduced her to a wealthy man . . . warned her against a poor man,” and SS states, “There was also some influence from friends.” Faur et al. (2023) point out that it is common for adolescents to be influenced by friends and families, but He et al. (2023) do not expect adults to be quickly affected, not even by parents.

Financial abuse. Under 'Wide descriptions of abusive spectacles' DR informs that "She took money from the house and gave it to boyfriends"; LZ states, "He never gave me money"; and SB also states, "He never gave me money, not a single cent . . . as for his money I know none of it". Fernqvist et al. (2023) explain that abusers tend to exercise financial abuse in many forms, such as refusing to pay maintenance costs for children, not giving a spouse money, taking a spouse's capital, and, like in the case of this study, refusing a partner to take up a job even when 'you do not give her/him money.'

Humiliation: the section on 'Humiliation from the abuse' sums it up. However, the nature of every victimization is humiliation. Varman et al. (2023) explain that humiliation takes place with every abusive behavior, but that when it is at home, it is an enormous burden because many are then stuck. They view humiliation and abuse as exploitation. Selten and Ormel (2023) view low status as associated with humiliation.

Hypocrisy. Priests are supposed to uphold peace and stability in their families and others. They should protect people against violence, aggression, and humiliation by the nature of their profession. Teachers should also guide the world by preaching and practicing ethical and peaceful behaviors. This paper demonstrates the opposite. Tiwari et al. (2023) argue that high status, such as the ranks of the abusers in this paper, is a place to provide social responsibility services. When they do the opposite, as demonstrated, they play hypocrisy.

IPV extended to the victim's family. This is shown in the section 'Derogatory words of perpetrators during the abuse' when LZ states 'He . . . tells me how my family is useless'. Hearn et al. (2023) point out that the effects of abuse extend even to work, where, in some instances, it leads to poor performance, while families who realize the abuse are also sometimes affected. In the case where an abuser challenges the family by stating that they are useless, the extension to them is a form of provocation.

Mental weakness. Under the section 'Effects on victims', LV says, 'I was going mad . . . I lost concentration . . . I did not check if a vehicle was coming. According to White et al. (2023), mental health is one of the results of abuse. Alswedani et al. (2023) explain that abuse can have adverse mental effects that may equal or even exceed the effects of drugs. Moreover, IPV consequences in Hispanic IPV women victims revealed that many of them end up with mental challenges as a result of the abuse.

Money offer to let go. Under 'Start of the abuse,' LV informs that the wife wanted him to freely opt out by accepting money, as he states, "My wife offered me money to leave her for him." Oso Casas (2010) shows consistently that love, money, and sex are usually intermixed, and cash offers or bribes may not be a surprise in love affairs. However, Andrikopoulos (2021) explains that money offers in bribing for displacing intimate partners usually happen in cases of cross-border marriages.

Physical abuse. The case of physical abuse is typical in GBV and IPV. The instance of GBV was explained when a deputy minister of higher education in South Africa threw a woman against the bonnet of a car and also slapped her. From the responses, under 'Wide descriptions of abusive spectacles,' LV informs that "She would slap me," SB stated ". . . he slapped me," and SS also claimed ". . . she would slap me". Scott-Storey et al. (2023) explain that physical abuse happens mostly by male perpetrators on female victims, even though rare cases exist where female perpetrators abuse men. Another dimension of physical abuse is the after-effects of poor performance for student GBV victims (Renner et al., 2023).

Suicidal. The case of victims being suicidal does occur as well. Under 'Humiliation from the abuse,' SB shares that "I wanted to commit suicide." Then DR, under 'Effects on victims', informed that "I was

even suicidal,” while SB also said, “You can be suicidal. I was suicidal”. Ardit-Arbel et al. (2023) point out that IPV women victims have tendencies to be suicidal, particularly a few weeks before giving birth.

Threats to divorce. SB, under the ‘Wide descriptions of abusive spectacles’ section, states that her priest husband intimidated her from not going to work, saying “. . . he stopped me from going there, threatening divorce”. Again, under the ‘Humiliation from the abuse’ section, SB informs that her husband “. . . threatens me with divorce”. Engel (2023) points out that many threats made to threaten divorce do not mean it. They occur mainly to heighten verbal abuse and not necessarily to promise divorce.

Threats to kill. BB informs under the ‘Derogatory words of perpetrators during the abuse’ section that her husband “told me he would kill me one day.” SB, under the ‘Humiliation from the abuse’ section, points out that his wife ‘. . . threatens . . . to kill me’. Pichler et al. (2023) insinuate that it is typical for fighting intimate partners, or even fighting friends, to pronounce that they would kill, even without meaning it. Walker et al. (2023) also explain that killing in IPV by women victims usually happens in self-defense, as they destroy the male abusers without having threatened or planned to kill. This suggests that threats of killing may not always be said to mean it, but they do occur at times.

Verbal abuse. The entire ‘Derogatory words of perpetrators during the abuse’ section explains the way verbal abuse took place. Any hostile words directed at another person in a way to hurt them constitute verbal abuse. For example, under this section, SS was told by his wife that “. . . other men are better than” him, and that “. . . she took the wrong man”. In line with Muñoz-Rivas et al. (2023), verbal abuse is more relevant for immature intimate partners as their reactions tend to lack reasoning. The words thrown at abuse victims include weakling, useless, other men are better than the victim, and fool, among others

CONCLUSION

High-status abusers show the patterns of abuse in IPV as not being different from those that are common, but they are not expected to cause or perpetuate any IPV. They engage in types of IPV that are common/known and new ones generated by only six victims. Therefore, they are not expected to perpetrate any form of abuse, as they are expected to be role models. The threat of divorce by the perpetrators, as well as IPV extending to family and offering money to let go, is not a rife occurrence. They are generally unheard of under the types of IPV. This means that high-status IPV perpetrators have a way of causing IPV, as it appears in literature while coercing occurrences of IPV patterns that have not been in customary literature. These people are, in fact, not expected to cause IPV, and as socially responsible personalities, they should prevent IPV. Since high-status people are not expected to cause violence to other people when they cause it, they are perpetrating IPV, and therefore, it is a scandal. The study recommends that high-status people should not be allowed to hold offices of extreme trust in the event they display unethical or illegal tendencies such as supporting or causing violence. Hence, these positions should be evaluated at all levels, such as private and public (or government), to promote moral role modeling.

DECLARATION

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Solly Matshonisa Seeletse composed the research

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Original statements from the respondents are available and can be asked from the author.

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