#2022-009

The reckoning of sexual violence and corruption: A gendered study of sextortion in migration to South Africa

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09. March 2022

Abstract

This research seeks to understand experiences of sextortion of African migrants migrating to South Africa and how these are gendered. This research is interesting and relevant both for academic and policy discussion, for two reasons. For one, sextortion is an emerging concept that has not been sufficiently studied and for another, South-South migration is still frequently forgotten in studies about migration. This paper analyses and discusses the 16 semi-structured interviews with experts in migration, corruption and gender as a first scoping study looking at migrants' experiences with sextortion in the South African context. The results have highlighted that women are most vulnerable to sextortion and that migrants not only encounter sextortion during their journeys, but also after arriving in South Africa. This can be explained referring to South Africa's culture where both gender-based violence and xenophobia are deeply rooted, making up for an "ideal" environment for sextortion to take place. At last, this paper discusses the different consequences that surviving sextortion has, which are, among others, the spread of STIs, unwanted pregnancies, shame, stigmatisation, and normalisation.

Keywords: Sextortion, Migration, Corruption, Gender-based violence, Sexual violence, Sexual transactions, South-South migration, Intra-Africa migration, South African migration

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1. Introduction

While estimates vary, all agree that migration is a sizable, global phenomenon (Yayboke & Gallego, 2020; International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2019). Even though the interest in studying migration has exploded in the last decade, still much needs to be explored about what migrants experience on their journeys. This is especially true for irregular migration which is "the movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination" (International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 2021a). In this paper, the term irregular will be used to refer to all migrants who enter or leave a country outside of the regular channels regardless of circumstance. Given its invisible nature, little is known about the lived experiences of migrants in transit. This is especially concerning as irregular migrants often find themselves in precarious situations where they face physical and financial risk, exploitation, or even death (Kuschminder, et al., 2015; David et al., 2019). As this paper will highlight, this includes an increased risk of being exposed to corruption, where corrupt officials abuse their position of authority towards already strained migrants (Faigenblatt, 2020; Merkle et al., 2017). However, not each irregular migrant experiences corruption the same throughout their journey.

Based on the idea that the profile of a migrant determines their experience of corruption and treatment in general (Ziersch et al., 2020), it is interesting to consider the role of gender in influencing the corruption to which someone is exposed. To elaborate, men, women and non-binary individuals of all ages are known to experience corruption differently (Merkle et al., 2017). One such way men, women and non-binary individuals experience corruption differently is through their experiences of sextortion, being "the abuse of power to obtain a sexual benefit or advantage" (International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) et al., 2015, p.19)[1]. It is a pervasive, but often ignored form of sexual exploitation and corruption that occurs when public officials seek to extort sexual favours in exchange for something within their power to grant or withhold (UNODC, 2018). Indeed, sextortion is a form of corruption in which sex, rather than money, is the currency (UNODC, 2018). Therefore, in this paper, we focus particularly on a gendered form of corruption, sextortion, which is not only experienced differently by men and women but also has significant potential long-term consequences on their life.

While research on the topic until now has focused mostly on the experiences of migrants arriving in Europe, in this paper we focus on the experiences of Africans migrating to South Africa. According to the OECD and ILO, the world's 82 million South-South migrants form about 36% of the total stock of migrants (2018) and South-South migration is an increasingly significant factor in the economic and social development of many developing countries. Nevertheless, there is a comparative lack of South-South migration literature versus the prototypical South-North migration research (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh & Carella, 2020). In addition, as South Africa can be considered the economic powerhouse of Southern Africa (International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 2021b) and irregular migration between South Africa and its neighbours has become the norm (De Haas et al., 2020) the focus of this paper is extremely relevant.

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[1] It is important to note that there is another form of sextortion, the equally harrowing but separate sextortion, which is "The threat to expose sexual images in order to make a person do something. These threats come from both strangers met online and once intimate romantic partners attempting to harass, embarrass, and control victims" (Thorn, 2021). Though this form of sextortion, which takes place predominantly online, is a serious crime, this form of sextortion and the literature using this definition will not be considered in this paper. For more information on the other definition of sextortion as described here, read (O'Malley & Holt, 2020).

This paper will continue as follows, firstly, an overview of the literature will be presented, followed by an in-depth discussion about the case of South Africa. Thereafter the methodological approach will be provided before concluding with the results and discussion sequentially.

2. Literature Review

Corruption as defined as the "abuse of entrusted power for private gain" (Transparency International, 2021a) knows many different types including: bribery, embezzlement, fraud, extortion and favouritism (Andvrig et al., 2001). As corruption provides "private gain" and not only monetary gain to the perpetrator, it may also include other benefits for an individual or a group (Merkle et al., 2017). Indeed, corruption can affect economic and social behaviour though in the past the focus has been on the economic consequences of corruption (Blackburn, 2012). This shows in most literature relating to corruption there is an assumption that the medium of exchange is monetary (Merkle et al., 2017). From here, literature about sextortion as a form of corruption takes a juncture from traditional corruption literature.

The term sextortion was coined in 2012 by the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) which refers to sex as the subject of exchange, rather than money or other goods (International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ)., 2012). Indeed, in this transaction there must be an abuse of power for personal gain of a sexual nature by a trusted authority (Transparency International, 2020). and therefore, sextortion is defined as "the abuse of power to obtain a sexual benefit or advantage" (International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ)., 2012, p.5). This shows that in all cases of sextortion there must be both sexual elements and corruption elements.

Furthermore, sextortion can be broken down into four components which separates it from other forms of abuse or corruption: (1) The offender is in a position of entrusted authority, (2) there is a *quid pro quo* element, (3) the benefit in the *quid pro quo* element is sexual in nature, and (4) the person must rely on the coercive power of authority rather than on physical force to obtain the sexual benefit (International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ)., 2012, p.9)

The corruption element is important in understanding sextortion as it is what differentiates sextortion from other forms of 'transactional sex' (Zembe et al., 2013; Stoebenau et al., 2016; Chatterji et al., 2005; Wamoyi et al., 2019; Dunkle et al., 2007). While transactional sex also refers to an exchange of sexual favours for money or gifts (Kirsch et al., 2019), the difference between transactional sex and sextortion is the power dynamic at play. In transactional sex there is not the same abuse of power as sextortion. Therefore, while in theory transactional sex should include two consenting individuals, sextortion includes someone holding a position of power and a survivor[2]. In other words, 'transactional sex' does not prioritise the element of corruption or power imbalance in the same way.

Considering the imbalance of power present in all instances of sextortion, it becomes important to discuss sextortion as a form of sexual violence, here, sexual violence is defined as:

> "Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or
> acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any

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[2] This paper uses 'survivor' to encourage a constructive conversation around people who have been extorted from sexual favours as they should not be diminished to being a victim alone. More information on the 'survivor' versus 'victim' dichotomy can be found in the work of (Boyle & Rogers, 2020).

person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting" (World Health Organisation (WHO), n.d.).

The key to this definition is that there must be some element of coercion. Coercion may comprise of a spectrum of degrees of force from physical force to psychological intimidation, blackmail or other threats (World Health Organisation (WHO), n.d.). As the migrant feels coerced into participating in the sexual act, sextortion can be considered a form of sexual violence. The experiences of sexual violence can therefore provide a base for understanding sextortion.

With a border discussion of corruption and sextortion having taken place, it becomes useful to consider both in the context of migration specifically. Research has shown that corruption and migration are linked in multiple ways and can both impact each other (Carling et al., 2015). In general, countries where corruption is perceived to be widespread are largely countries of emigration. While conversely, countries where corruption is perceived to be less of an issue are primarily countries of immigration (Wheatland, 2015). Considering this, individuals seeking to circumvent laws and regulations is a key motivation for bribery and the field of migration is no exception (Zhang & Pineda, 2008). Research also shows that corruption is largely impacting the most vulnerable hence including migrants (Faigenblatt, 2020). Indeed, migrants are far away from their support structures and thus more helpless when a corrupt official is looking to take advantage of them (Merkle et al., 2018)

As sextortion is a form of corruption, the abovementioned also explains why migrants are vulnerable to sextortion. Yet, considering its element of sexual violence, research has found that the likelihood of becoming victim of sextortion is higher for a migrant who is of low economic status, a woman or has some other vulnerability which can be exploited (Merkle et al., 2018)

Gender plays an essential part in determining vulnerability to corruption in general and sextortion in particular. Gender importantly does not only relate to the physical aspects of someone (sex) but goes further by including the cultural expectations and roles of femineity and masculinity are considered (Unger, 1979; Lips, 2020)

However, it should be noted that cultural perceptions of gender often do include perceptions of sex in some sense (Lips, 2020). Nevertheless, because this paper has gender as a central theme it becomes important to recognise gender non-binary individuals who disrupt and challenge the gender dichotomy, which having a non-binary concept of gender creates (Vijlbrief et al., 2020) and therefore will be included in this research as a third categorisation of gender.

It is well known that gender does impact migration experiences of individuals significantly. Those who were migrating were predominantly men. Furthermore, compared to the women who did migrate, men migrated for longer periods of time (Gouws, 2007). However, these trends have changed in recent history which is exemplified in the fact that single and married women are now migrating independently in search of more security both in the global North or inter-regionally. This increase is termed "the feminisation of migration" and is associated with the changing role of women in the labour force (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.). The change is spurred on by existing gender ideals, norms, stereotypes, and hierarchies (UN DESA Division for the advancement of women, n.d.), all influencing a migrant's experiences in origin, transit and destination countries. For example, smugglers and traffickers may pay border officials with female migrants and therefore specifically seek to carry female migrants for this specific purpose, when facilitating an irregular group (Merkle et al., 2018)

Considering how gender defines a person's migration experience, it must be considered that a person's vulnerability is increased by other social markers such as race, class and ethnicity, the intersectionality of which can increase one's vulnerability furthermore (Anthias, 2013). Moreover, education, physical or mental

disability, and pregnancy or travelling with children also informs as to how vulnerable someone is (Merkle et al., 2018). However, gender remains the largest determining factor/determinant due to the presence of the patriarchal systems which exploits the imbalance of power between the genders (Merkle et al., 2018)

2.1.   Shaping Corruption during Migration

Patriarchy can be seen in how a person experiences corruption. For example, this is seen in instances of corruption where "corrupt officials knew women were generally in a very weak position to object" (Faigenblatt, 2020, p.19). Another example would be where patriarchal structures also exist in families or relationships as there are times where women and girls are used to "pay" for the bribes male relatives cannot afford (Faigenblatt, 2020). Certainly, women may not only be the participant in the corrupt exchange, but also the means (Merkle et al., 2018).

These examples have shown that "women's experiences [of corruption] are shaped by the fact that, if they have nothing, they still have female bodies" (Merkle et al., 2017, p.38). While irregular migrants are mostly extorted from sexual favours whilst in transit, they may also have engaged in sexual activities as a way to get access to basic services during transit or at the destination, two concepts which can become very blurred during fragmented journeys. Migrants may have to engage in sexual activities to have access to reproductive healthcare, humanitarian aid, basic services or protection (Merkle et al., 2018).

Again, in these circumstances a clear power dynamic is evident between those providing the good or service and the recipient, meaning it is possible to conclude that these are situations of sextortion. Considering this power dynamic, it is possible to see why corruption can disproportionately affect poor women and girls, particularly in their access to essential public services, justice, security and in their capacity to engage in public decision-making (Omotoye, 2020). In summary, this evidences why it is said that gender informs every part of the migration experience from safety and security (Huijsmans, 2014) to the type of corruption to which you are exposed.

However, this does not mean that women are the only survivors of sextortion. Indeed, male migrants can suffer trauma such as beatings from corrupt officials or from witnessing their female counterparts being sextorted and can also be extorted from sexual favours themselves (Merkle et al., 2018). Yet, male experiences of sextortion and the ramification of these experiences is still largely underreported due to social stigma and cultural taboos (Faigenblatt, 2020) meaning the extent to which men experience sextortion is still unknown. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the experiences of men should be overlooked or assumed that they did not happen at all. Indeed, men who are subjected to sexual violence often do not report it as they fear they will be seen as a victim which is not in line with notions of masculinity (Hlavka, 2017). Men who experience sexual coercion and assault often experience feelings of shame and embarrassment, disempowerment, and emasculation which is an explanation for underreporting as it challenges their masculinity (Hlavka, 2017).

Therefore, in order to properly consider the gendered experiences of migrants, the intersectionality of their experiences needs to be considered. To provide a definition,

> "[intersectionality] investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations
> across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life." (Hills Collins &
> Blige, 2020, p.1 of chapter 1).

The core insight to be taken away from the above definition is that power relations of, for example, race, class, and gender, are not discrete and mutually exclusive social markers in a given society, at a given time, but rather build on and work together; and that, while often invisible, these intersecting power relations affect all aspects of the social world (Hills Collins & Blige, 2020). With this, it is important to consider how a migrant can

experience xenophobic violence and a women or non-binary individual can experience gender-based violence, sequentially it is possible to conclude that a non-binary or woman or girl migrant is likely to experience both placing them at the intersection of these two experiences of violence.

2.2. South-South Migration

This conversation around gender, corruption and migration should be placed in a specific context as not all migration experiences are the same. Therefore, it would be remis to not consider how South-South migration offers a unique experience and challenges migrants which are often understudied in comparison to the traditionally studied South-North migration patterns. For the sake of this paper, South-South migration is simply migration between developing countries (Castles & Delgado Wise, 2008; Ratha & Shaw, 2007; Bakewell et al., 2009). As no clear definition has been established of the boundaries between 'South' and 'North' (Bakewell et al., 2009) the common definition of developing countries will be applied henceforth which generally refers the following five regions as per the UN system: Africa, Americas excluding Northern America, Caribbean, Asia excluding Japan and Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand (UN Statistics, 2019).

Considering migration in the South, there are a number of "migration poles" which attract internal and international migrants and shows that migration patterns in the global South are diverse reflecting the legacy of past migrations, recent socioeconomic changes and political transition (Kofman & Raghuram, 2012; Bakewell et al., 2009). Indeed, the role of livelihood and trade, colonialism, post-colonialism refugee movements and identity are all influencing factors in South-South migration (Bakewell et al., 2009). South-South migration differs from other forms of migration as it is generally less remunerative, the journeys are less costly and more accessible for low-income individuals and they are more likely to be in low-wage unskilled jobs in the destination (Bakewell et al., 2009).

This paper will focus on intra-African migration as an example of South-South migration. Indeed, in Africa the proportion of emigrants moving to low-income countries is higher than that to middle-income countries. Even migration between areas of similar income levels can help families diversify income sources and thus reduce risk and therefore be extremely beneficial to the migrant and their family (Kofman & Raghuram, 2012). This paints a very positive image of migration in Africa and contradicts the conventional interpretation of African migration being essentially driven by poverty, violence and underdevelopment (Flahaux & De Haas, 2016).

Indeed, income, proximity, and networks are the major drivers of migration from developing to industrial countries. As South-South income differentials are relatively modest, proximity and networks likely have a proportionally greater impact, while the role of income is more complex (Ratha & Shaw, 2007). Additionally, South-South migration also include seasonal patterns and flight from ecological disasters or civil conflict. Other motivations include transit to the North and petty trade although it must be noted that agreements among countries have had comparatively little impact on South-South migration (Ratha & Shaw, 2007).

Another aspect that makes South-South migration interesting is irregular migration being the primary type of migration that takes place here (Ratha & Shaw, 2007). Indeed, irregular migration can leave individuals open to exploitation and abuse by authorities (Ratha & Shaw, 2007). The high rate of irregularity in South-South migration, coupled with weaker law enforcement in the South than in the North, implies that South-South migrants may face greater risks than South-North migrants. Furthermore, irregular migrants can also be more vulnerable to being robbed in transit, with or without the collusion of authorities as the police and courts (Ratha & Shaw, 2007).

This contextualisation shows the importance of studying the global South as something independent from the global North. Indeed, in failing to consider the contexts and experiences of those in the global South, we can

fail to see the uniqueness of their circumstances and that the global North's migratory patterns are not necessarily applicable in a "one-size-fits-all" manner.

3. Background on South Africa

This chapter will give some background on the case study of South Africa, presenting relevant discussions on migration, corruption and gender in the country.

3.1. Migration

According to the Africa Migration Report (AMR) (The African Union (AU) et al., 2020) most Africans migrating relocate within the continent and that intra-African mobility has never been higher with South Africa being a significant destination for migrants mostly from the African continent, with a projected 2,860,495 million foreign migrants (or 4.8 percent of the overall population) living in the country as of mid-2020 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), 2020). Since democratization in 1994, South Africa's migratory flows have also changed dramatically. Indeed, since the end of Apartheid, there has been a considerable increase in the net number of migrants (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), 2019). This net increase of migrants can be explained by low rates of emigration and high rates of immigration, including a vast increase in irregular immigration (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), 2019). However, accurate data and information on these trends is scarce, making it impossible to estimate the true number of migrants living within the nation with any real certainty (Heleta, 2018).

Nevertheless, it is known that South Africa is the most significant destination for asylum seekers and refugees in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). At the same time, South Africa has one of the lowest acceptance rates for asylum requests in the world, with 92 percent of all applications being rejected or abandoned mid-process in 2019 (World Data Info, 2019). This restricted asylum system in South Africa has been accompanied by mass deportations (The World Bank., 2018).

Statistics show that a significant motivation for migrants migrating to South Africa is economic opportunity. The country's high level of industrialization on the continent makes it an attractive destination for many who are in search of better opportunities and a higher standard of living relative to their countries of origin (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), 2019). Its geographic location and strong economic position are of central importance in influencing migrants' decision to choose South Africa as a country of destination.

However, while research on the economic effects of migration show that immigration can have a beneficial effect on local employment in the long-term (Peri, 2014), labour migration to South Africa has significant policy consequences for South Africa's anti-immigrant discourse, which often portrays newcomers as direct competitors for scarce employment opportunities (Kalitanyi & Visser, 2010). Indeed, South Africa provides a challenging social-political situation as South Africans carry strong xenophobic sentiments toward migrants in the nation (Kalitanyi & Visser, 2010).

This xenophobic sentiment which informs migrant experiences is strongly connected to the complexity of identity and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa (Otu, 2016). The obscured concept of citizenship is coupled with xenophobic attitudes and are working in conflict with the status and the role of migrants living in the country, where migrants have been portrayed by politicians and the public in general as a threat to the South African economy and nation who seek to steal the fruits of democratization (Klotz, 2016). South African law and human rights clearly define and make provisions for migrants' entitlements and freedom to live in the

country (Otu, 2016), though this does not mean that it is reflected in the experience of many migrants. Instead, the process of nation-building seems to have triggered a general obsession with "autochthony" where roots and origins are the basic criteria of citizenship (Chenzi, 2020).

Therefore, in South Africa xenophobia is systemic and spurred on by the "lack of effective policing to protect foreign nationals and their properties" (Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2019). Though it is impossible to measure integration, or the lack thereof, in South Africa, it is possible to speculate about the direness of the situation in South Africa and South Africa's seeming outright rejection of foreign nationals.

3.2. Corruption

In Africa, corruption hinders economic, political, and social development (Transparency International, 2021b). It is a major barrier to economic growth, good governance, and basic freedoms, such as a citizens' right to hold their government to account (Transparency International, 2021b). Indeed, according to Transparency International's Global Corruptoon Baronmeter (2019), 55% of Africans believe that corruption is on the rise and two out of three believe that their government is not doing enough to counter corruption. Furthermore, Transparency International found that concerns about the integrity of public officials remains high as 47% of Africans believe that most or all police are corrupt and 39% of Africans believing that most or all government officials are corrupt (Transparency International, 2019).

Likewise, in South Africa, corruption is viewed as a major concern in the public sector (Manyaka & Nkuna, 2014; Kroukamp, 2006) particularly within its migration institutions (GAN Risk and Compliance Portal, 2020). The work of Manyaka & Nkuna, (2014) explains that custom officials' low wages and lack of meritocracy means officials are more likely to engage in corrupt practices which is worsened by the lack mechanisms to detect and control these actions. Within the context of irregular migration, undocumented migrants and asylum seekers are often at the mercy of corrupt officials who are not held accountable. For example, the Refugee Reception Offices (RROs) in South Africa have been noted as a corruption hotspot (Amit, 2015a) where 62% of respondents outside the RRO in Pretoria reported experiencing corruption at some point during the asylum-seeking process during DHA's mission to curb corruption in 2015 (Amit, 2015a).

Therefore, better policy needs to be made to provide clear protections against abuse by unchecked government officials (Institute for Security Studies (ISS), 2020) and having to endure subhuman detention conditions (Feiring & Taska, 2005). However, it should be noted that researchers like Manyaka & Nkuna (2014) exclusively refer to the bribe being monetary, which is a common practice in South African migration research. A similar observation is made when studying the asylum seeker system (Amit, 2015b) and when studying the rights of irregular migrants and asylum seekers (Landau, 2006).

3.3. Gender

Turning the attention of this case study from corruption to gender, in Africa, there is no one paradigm of gender roles. The continent's various cultures have many distinct beliefs regarding male and female roles, therefore no one generic attitude towards gender can be applied to the diverse continent. However, using the OECD's (2014) Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) Regional Report for sub-Saharan Africa it is possible to draw some conclusions about the gender experiences in the region. The SIGI (2014)[3] showed that while the region has strong political participation rates, with some of the highest percentages of women in parliament in the world, it still faces significant challenges in protecting women's land and property rights, ensuring their freedom from

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[3] This is the most recent version of this indicator at the time of writing, an updated version is scheduled for publishing later in 2021.

violence, and protecting girls from early marriage and other harmful practices. Despite political promises, legal changes, and progress in specific sectors in recent years, the region remains one of the worst performers internationally in the SIGI (2014). Moreover, they found more than half of the nations had high to extremely high levels of discrimination, as well as limited access to resources and assets and discriminatory social structures. All of which have a detrimental impact on women's educational attainment and labour force participation, as well as technical advancement and productivity (OECD, 2014).

This considerable power imbalance can also be seen in South Africa. Indeed, while (World Economic Forum's (2021) *Global Gender Gap report* (GGGR) shapes a relatively positive picture, this is not necessarily the experience of women on the ground. For example, one way in which this imbalance of power presents itself through the prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) which the country sees which is a widespread problem that impacts almost every aspect of life (Enaifoghe et al., 2021). GBV is prevalent in South Africa and Southern Africa (Amnesty International, 2021) with South Africa ranking fourth out of a hundred and eighty-three countries when it comes to femicide, or the killing of a woman or girl on account of her gender, according to the most recent data from the World Health Organization (Lyster, 2019).

Intimate partner violence and sexual coercion are the most common forms of GBV worldwide, according to reports (Enaifoghe et al., 2021) and in South Africa the rate of intimate femicide is five times higher than the global norm (Gouws, 2021). This is partnered with the statistics provided by the South African Police Service (SAPS) is the number of reported rapes was 42289 cases and there were 7749 cases of sexual assault in 2019/2020 (Gouws, 2021). Moreover, a woman is killed every 3 hours in a GBV related incident (Dlamini, 2020).

Considering South Africa's culture of violence against women and violence against foreigners, intersectionality will therefore be an important consideration in this research. Indeed, it has already been evidenced that South Africa has two pre-existing attitudes of inferiority, one against women, one against migrants. Therefore, it is important to consider how women migrants experience the double burden of both of these attitudes. They are subject to xenophobia and subject to gender-based violence. The intersection of these two themes stands at the centre of this research. It should be noted that there is limited literature on the intersectional experiences of migrant women in South Africa and that this is an area of potential exploration in the future.

4. Methodological approach

Given the sensitive nature of the research, this research has used semi-structured interviews, which allow flexibility in their design but also in the actual interview which means that creditability of responses can be considered, and underlying motives can be explored more directly (Hortom et al., 2004).

With South Africa being taken as a case study, the experts who were interviewed had a well-informed and detailed understanding of South African migration and were able to offer a unique perspective on the prevalence of sextortion in this field. The interviewees included representatives and staff from academic institutions, civil organisations, international organisations, non-governmental organisations and governmental bodies. Both convenience and snowball sampling were used to recruit the interviewees (Naderifar et al., 2017). In total, 16 interviews have been conducted.

Considering the vulnerable population around whom this paper is centred, close attention is given to ethical considerations throughout each step of the research process. With these considerations in mind, meticulousness was used developing the interview guide to ensure all questions asked are appropriate and well-considered. Furthermore, this research abided by the *Do No Harm principle* (Massabni, 2018) and has undergone institutional ethics review.

Several possible limitations were encountered when working on this project. Firstly, with the COVID-19 pandemic still ensuing, delays in communication time and networking opportunities were faced. Secondly, interviewing stakeholders was advantageous given the exploratory nature of this research. Therefore, interviews with migrants themselves would be a priority for future research. As speaking to only to stakeholders provided a limitation with the voices of migrants themselves being excluded. Indeed, migrants have agency which may not be represented when only secondary sources are being utilised. This leads to a third limitation in that interview participants largely discussed sextortion in South Africa and did not often touch upon during migration – this can be largely the case as you only spoke to those working in South Africa and not in the countries of origin, meaning something future research can explore as whether stakeholders in origin/transit countries have different perceptions.

5.   Analysis and Discussion

By conducting expert interviews, a better understanding about sextortion in South Africa could be gained. These interviews meant it could be gauged, "Who is migrating?", "How are they preparing to migrate?", "Where does sextortion happen and who are the perpetrators?", "What is being exchanged?", "Why does sextortion happen?", and "What are the consequences of sextortion for the migrant?". These questions paint a picture of what the experiences of sextortion, for African migrants, migrating to South Africa looks like, by creating a wholistic image of what is happening during migration, both during the journey and at the destination. Thereafter, this section will critically engage with the findings of this research, by comparing and contrasting it to the existing literature.

5.1.   Who is vulnerable to sextortion?

The profile of someone who survives sextortion is somewhat predictable, with the same characteristics coming up during this research, that consistently emerged in existing sextortion literature (Merkle et al., 2018). Indeed, most interviewees noted that female, and especially young female, migrants were more vulnerable. This is consistent with previous studies on sextortion which shows its gendered nature (Merkle et al., 2017).

Additionally, lack of educational attainment and rural origin were commonly mentioned characteristics. One's undocumented and economic status all emerged as social markers, which are likely to increase someone's vulnerability to sextortion, with the latter two being the most significant social markers. The significance of these social markers is that it means most people who are migrating to South Africa are economic migrants. These migrants are facing severe economic vulnerability during their journey to South Africa, which in partnership with other characteristics makes them vulnerable to sextortion.

Finally, another significant social marker was the fact that they are migrants, which in itself comes with some predisposed vulnerabilities including being far away from your network and that support system, or having increased language barriers which makes navigating immigration processes more difficult (Interviewee 3).

5.2.   Where does it happen and who are the perpetuators?

5.2.1.   During the journey

The places where sextortion most commonly took place included border posts, with the Beitbridge border between Zimbabwe and South Africa consistently named as a hotspot by the Interviewees.. Additionally, the "Bush routes", the term for the popularly used irregular routes between South Africa and its neighbours, were also mentioned. Furthermore, smugglers, also known as "the hyenas" (Tshabalala, 2017) were mentioned as common perpetrators of sextortion.

However, South African Defence Force (SANDF) soldiers were not found to be innocent either. SANDF soldiers monitor the borders between South Africa and their neighbours, they work in isolated areas where there is little accountability for any transactions that a corrupt solider may engage in. This makes it possible to highlight a common characteristic of perpetrators of sextortion: it always involved people who felt disempowered in their vocation or situation. As one interviewee explains:

> It's usually… I would almost say, and this might be counterintuitive, a sense of disempowerment. And by that, I mean somebody who feels the need to exert their power and therefore abuse it. So, it's not usually some massively high-ranking person, but usually somebody who's just above the vulnerable person and somehow controls their entry or exit into a particular place. So, it could be anything from a lowly civil servant to some dodgy piece of crap, who opens and closes the border gates. So, it's usually somebody who is not in a very particularly powerful or authoritative position. And that's why I say I think probably a common characteristic among perpetrators is a feeling of disempowerment and a need for a sense of empowerment. And that's why they prey on the vulnerable.

This means that the people who are perpetuating sextortion are people who feel disempowered by their station and are looking for a way to assert their dominance or their power. This is similar to findings, in literature, where rape can be used as a tool of social control, by those who feel disempowered by political systems (Moffett, 2006).

The interviews for this study also highlight other potential perpetrators, such as truck drivers who were offering transportation to hitch-hiking migrants. However, this interaction would fall under transactional sex rather than sextortion, as it does not include the corruption element required for it to be considered sextortion, and will therefore not be elaborated upon for the sake of this research. It should be noted that border officials were not included on this list of likely perpetrators. Many of the experts being interviewed were unfamiliar with situations where, even anecdotally, sextortion took place there. This, of course, does not mean that there is no sextortion taking place in these environments but rather means that is going unreported if it is happening, which emphasises the insidious nature of this exchange.

5.2.2. In South Africa

Upon arriving in South Africa, the migrant's vulnerability to sextortion remains. Indeed, in line with the above discussion that one of the main characteristics of sextortion is that the perpetrator feels some degree of disempowerment in the destination. Thus, the most commonly mentioned perpetrators of sextortion were the South African Police Service (SAPS), which is perhaps one of the most significant findings of this research. This reveals that the most common incidences of sextortion, that a migrant is likely to experience, is not on their journey as originally surmised but rather in the destination.

The conclusion that SAPS are the most prevalent sextortion culprits fits with data from Viewfinder & GroundUp (2021) which revealed that police officers are accused of thousands of violent crimes each year. Rape and sexual assaults are among the most severe and are opportunistic abuses of power, perpetrated by police in the country. Data from the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) shows that they get away with it on a regular basis (Viewfinder & GroundUp, 2021).

Therefore, it should be noted that many of the interviewed experts felt that existing laws should be better implemented to increase accountability of police officers, soldiers and other government service agents whom have been named as alleged perpetrators of sextortion.

5.3. What is being exchanged?

Considering the perpetrators being described, common transactions often included sex in exchange for silence, border crossings, documentation or special treatment. The majority of these were again in South Africa, as a destination, and occurred at places such as at Department of Home Affairs (DHA). The most common subject of the exchange was silence whereby police or other authorities promised to not report an irregular migrant, with inadequate documentation to be in South Africa, in exchange for sexual favours. This then creates an interesting dynamic as the migrant sees themselves as having earned the right to stay in South Africa, feeling they have been "paying their dues" to be allowed to stay (Interviewee 12). This underlines another important differentiation between sextortion and sexual violence. Here, the sexual interaction is transactional and it gives the migrant the perception that they have used an irregular route to obtain the right to stay in the country, because of the position of authority that the police officer holds. In summary, this is sextortion because of the transaction element and the corruption element which are not present in instances of sexual violence.

5.4. Why does sextortion happen?

5.4.1. Social norms at play and intersectionality

The recurrence of social norms in this research showed the importance of considering an intersectional experience when trying to understand anyone's vulnerabilities. Indeed, class, race, gender, ethnicity all provide more insight into that individual's experience. While this research sought to understand the gendered experiences of migrants, this research would be incomplete without acknowledging that other social markers are also influential but more that these social markers in combination can mean that someone is all the more vulnerable for them. Therefore, this conversation around sextortion is placed within a global conversation about inequality whereby

> the larger global political economy places these women in a position of disadvantage. Therefore, this opens them up to exploitation. Corruption is not just an exchange of bribes or gratification but it is about the abuse of the integrity of an entity [...]. This structural reading is very important to prevent us from gaining a very narrow understanding [of what sextortion is]. We should not only begin with what happens within the journey but rather start with the recruitment into the journey (Interview).

What this quote so effortlessly communicates is that sextortion can only happen because the global system is rife with imbalances. Indeed, the global system of inequality, be it gender inequality, income inequality, racial inequality or others, means that some people are placed at an inherent disadvantage. Sextortion would not happen without systems in place that allow people to be vulnerable, to be exploited because of their sheer desperation.

Therefore, placing sextortion within the global system of inequalities, this paper will focus on the double-burden of gender and migrant status, which means that migrant women are seemingly powerless in these situations of sextortion.

5.4.2. Gender Norms

Gender norms inform the experiences of survivors of sextortion because women are sextorted whilst men hold the position of authority. Not one single interviewee had heard a story of sextortion, in Southern Africa, where the roles were reversed. Multiple interviews argued that this is because in South Africa there is the belief that women are fundamentally inferior and with the aid of the patriarchy, a brutal version of male power is affirmed. Underlying this lies the belief that women should always be submissive and women are the object of male ownership. Thus, explaining the source of South Africa's epidemic of gender-based violence.

Therefore, this marks the greatest determinant of someone's experience of sextortion: their gender. It is well-known that women are more vulnerable but these attitudes of gender inequality have devastating consequences for this population, pre-disposed to this vulnerability. One interview highlighted that indeed, because there is the belief that women are beneath men, women can be subject to a second victimisation or stand the risk of not being believed when they tell their story. For example, their gender means they are disqualified from being a reliable source, when reporting SGBV, at many police stations.

These experiences of sextortion are also defined by the culture of stigmatisation associated with other forms of SGBV (Interviews). Interviews explained that many victims are met with narratives of blame that prevent them from sharing their stories or narratives of shame, which stop them from admitting to themselves that this has happened and that they need to seek help. These feelings of needing to keep up appearances are explored in the literature relating to shame after experiencing sexual violence (Feiring & Taska, 2005). Indeed, in instances where sextortion or sexual violence occurs the victim can be blamed as one interviewee put it

> "It's the stigma, it's the blaming, because a lot of times when we deal with young women who've been violated, or younger girls when they open up and talk to their families, the first question they get asked is – 'What did you do?'. So, because it's seen as their fault" (Interview).

This is in line the findings of Du Plessis (2007) that victims blame themselves for being raped or fear that family, friends or law enforcement agencies will blame them and that these disbelieving and sceptical attitudes, that are rooted in the acceptance of rape myths which are myths or inaccurate beliefs, which skew perception of rape (Smythe, 2020).

Nevertheless, there were instances where women played a key role as a facilitator of sextortion but this was in instances of trafficking. Sextortion can occur while someone is being trafficked and does not only occur as a separate event (Interview). In these cases, women would act as a recruiter and thus be a facilitator of sextortion. The other instance in which women acted as a facilitator is when they were using another woman (for example a granddaughter, niece, daughter, cousin, etc.) as the means of the exchange, usually after being subjected to sextortion themselves and thus continuing the cycle of violence (Interview).

Finally, this discussion of gender would be incomplete without acknowledging that men are victims of sextortion too. However, as little is known about sextortion in a male-female power dynamic, even less is known when a man is the survivor. Of the experts interviewed, one had heard a story of sextortion where a man was being sextorted by another man. In this interaction, a young homosexual gentleman from Zimbabwe went to renew his papers at the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) and while male security guard was making advances on him, saying that if they have sex every time that he comes to the DHA office, he will be allowed to go to the front of the queue. The young man did participate in the transaction because of the long queues and difficulties that can be encountered when trying to navigate the DHA's processes. In this case the subject of the transaction was given special treatment in exchange for sex, by someone in a position of authority, which makes this a case of sextortion. However, what is significant about this story is that the interviewees were unfamiliar with cases where a heterosexual man was sextorted.

This addresses another gender norm in South Africa, homophobia. South Africa is a very heteronormative country where homophobic violence is common (Rakhetsi, 2021; Interviews). The relationship between homophobia and sextortion is an area that should be explored in further studies. However, the lack of information around these interactions demonstrates that whilst silence, shame and stigma are part in parcel for women experiencing sextortion, this is exacerbated by male experiences of masculinity and African sentiments

of homophobia, meaning there is little to no reporting of these kinds of events., This again shows another element of how intersectional experiences of sextortion are.

5.4.3. Xenophobia and Violence

The experiences of migrants in South Africa are informed by the country's culture of xenophobia. Indeed, there is the general attitude in South Africa that migrants are perceived to be less valuable and that there is a hierarchy of nationalities, which determines how they are treated. Sequentially this means that not all migrant experiences are equal and that migrants, who are from closer within the region and therefore have more cultural and specifically language similarities, have an easier time than other migrants from further afield (Interviewee 6). This is partnered with the burden of being far from their network for migrants who have travelled long distances and are therefore more vulnerable in general.

At this juncture it becomes important to note the difference between cultural xenophobia and institutional xenophobia, an important distinction made by one of the interviewees, where cultural xenophobia refers to the "what they encounter on the streets from regular people" whilst institutional xenophobia refers to "what they encounter from home affairs, from police or at hospitals". This highlights the important reality that a migrants experience means that xenophobia is not only encountered during the day to day, but that xenophobia limits their access to services as well.

Xenophobia limiting a migrants access to services can have devastating consequences when someone has gone through a sextortion experience. Indeed, many migrants do not have safe access to health care services or police responses after being sextorted. Indeed, one interviewee put it as follows:

> "The biggest underlying problem here is that umm police are quite exploitative and aggressive towards undocumented migrants, so that's, that is the response. There is a discourse that is perpetrated and perpetuated, by government and by the police, that is very negative toward foreign nationals. Also the position adopted by Home Affairs as well makes it difficult for foreign nationals to acquire work permits or asylum seekers to get proper asylum within South Africa to get their cases recognized it's a very delayed process so from a government point of view there is an anti-foreigner sentiment and so that is one issue that work is required on, to be less discriminatory for it to treat all individuals in South Africa fairly and to treat undocumented migrants in a professional and respectful way." (Interview)

This means that on the one hand, xenophobia can stimulate the occurrence of sextortion and on the other hand, hinder a survivor of sextortion to receive the support that they need.

5.5. Consequences of surviving sextortion

Interviews for this study highlighted that the consequences of sextortion can be physical and mental. Some of the physical consequences are experiencing physical violence as an addition to this form of sexual violence, STDs and STIs and the risk of pregnancy. Pregnancy came with another mental health deterrent, as women must then decide the best course of action for them, whether they will stay pregnant, abort or put the child up for adoption all of which come with their own stigmas and triggers (Interview). Importantly, nearly every expert interviewed noted trauma and mental health consequences as a result of this ordeal.

Indeed, the trauma does not end with the sextortion experience. Interviewees discussed that the ramifications of this experience can be seen in their lack of trust of authority figures in the future and the lack of trust in future relationships. Moreover, the consequences of surviving sextortion can be seen in the perpetuation of this cycle of violence, where sextortion is normalised and survivors' start believing it is okay to use others as a means of

exchange in the future, for example, a mother using a daughter as a means of exchange because it was done to her. Therefore, experiences of sextortion have a generational impact, as the psychological consequences of these experiences influence every part of their future relationships (Interviews).

Many of the interviewees agreed that this trauma is further contextualised by the fact that in many ways Southern Africa is very conservative, and so shame and stigmatisation are common experiences for survivors of any SGBV experience. Although, not uncommon with other experiences of SGBV, guilt is often seen as an added repercussion of sextortion whereby the survivor battles with self-blame as "people are filled with guilt because this is not something they wanted to do, so there [it] could be easily be claimed that it was consensual" (Interview).

An important note here is that the survivor's trauma can be compounded in the destination. This can happen in two ways. The first is that the trauma they experience is compounded either because of further experiences of SGBV or because of the high stress process of trying to regularise within South Africa's unplayable asylum system, which determines someone's ability to access basic services like healthcare and employment (Interview; Schockaert et al., 2020; Crush & Tawodzera, 2014) thus further marginalising the survivor.

According to the interviews, the second way that the trauma can be compounded is through the experience of second victimisation whereby "behaviours and attitudes of social service providers that are "victim-blaming" and insensitive, and which traumatize victims of violence who are being served by these agencies" (Campbell & Raja, 1999). Second victimisation is known to happen in situations where survivors bravely came forward to police services and are either disregarded, shamed or sexually harassed or assaulted again (Du Plessis, 2007; Mgolozeli & Duma, 2020; Viewfinder & GroundUp, 2021).

In instances where the survivor has been harassed again, this can lead to the normalisation of violence which has long term psychological consequences (Interview). For example, one interviewee put it so harrowingly that someone who had endured an experience of sextortion (in partnership with other forms of SGBV), asked "do you think I am still human" (Interview). This shows the level of degradation and dehumanisation that can occur when someone is abused multiple times.

6. Conclusion

This research adds important nuance to the discussion around sextortion. Firstly it provides a reflection on the existing literature pertaining to the topics of corruption, migration and gender, and sextortion which sits at the intersection. Sequentially, this research considered the experiences of African migrants migrating to South Africa, which was the central case study of this research. Within this case study, migration trends, experiences of corruption and perceptions of gender in South Africa were considered.

This literature review and case study provided the context for the expert interviews, which are central to the findings of this research. The interview process allowed for conclusions to be drawn about the context in which sextortion for South Africa-bound migrants occurs, what the gendered experiences of sextortion are and what makes them specifically vulnerable. These findings then considered the pre-existing theories around sextortion and their applicability in this context.

This research has shown the importance of understanding and continuing to research sextortion, which it frames as a form of sexual violence. The exploratory nature of this research means that there is now a better understanding of what sextortion looks like in intra-African migration. It must be acknowledged that this research should be taken further, in the future, by interviewing migrants themselves. Nevertheless, given the

fact that no research like this exists, this thesis stands as a solid foundation for future research, by appropriately finding out what the gendered experiences of sextortion of African migrants migrating to South Africa looks like. Therefore, this research has answered the research question on what the gendered experiences of sextortion of African migrants migrating to South Africa are, with the experts interviewed offering a number of hopeful solutions for how South Africa can better interact with this phenomenon.

By answering this question and the respective sub-questions, it is possible to gauge how sextortion is experienced for those coming to and in South Africa specifically and their gendered experiences. Additionally other social markers were considered to build the profile of someone who may be vulnerable to sextortion. By considering the social norms at play, like a prevalent culture of gender-based violence, in partnership with other norms, like xenophobia, it shows the intersectional nature of sextortion in South Africa and how this should be treated as an intersectional issue. Therefore, considering all the findings of this research, a number of policy recommendations will be presented hereafter, which suggest how sextortion can be countered going forward.

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List of Abbreviations

AMR	African Migration Report
AU	African Union
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
DHA	Department of Home Affairs
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GBVF-NS	National Strategic Plan on Gender-based Violence and Femicide
GGGR	Global Gender Gap report
GMDAC	Global Migration Data Analysis Centre
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPID	Independent Police Investigative Directorate
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PACCA	Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act of 2004
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
RROs	Refugee Reception Offices
SADC	Southern African Development Corridor
SANDF	South African Defence Force
SAPS	South African Police Service
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Index
UN	United Nations
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCD	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

WHO	World Health Organisation

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