Understanding Gendered Realities: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Violence Against Women in South Korea

Lea K. Schümann and Signe H. Jørgensen

Master's Thesis

John G. McClellan

June 2, 2026

228,496 characters

Abstract

This project investigates how the issue of violence against women in South Korea has been discursively constructed by the national government, national civil society, and international civil society during the two consecutive administrations of President Moon (2017–2022) and President Yoon (2022–2025), which were liberal/centrist and conservative, respectively. Despite a global norm diffusion of gender equality and non-discrimination in recent decades, women are still exposed to harassment, discrimination, and violence simply because of their gender; this has even increased as a global trend of antifeminist, conservative, and misogynistic attitudes has emerged. Violence against women is a persisting problem violating women's human rights across the world, and it is necessary to explore the tensions between local and global norms in relation to this. This study focuses on Korea as a national case of an international problem; the country has become increasingly influential on the global stage as a tourist hotspot and as a large exporter of economy and culture, especially evident in its domestic culture expanding globally, though it still struggles with high rates of gender-based violence. The project analyses texts from different levels of (inter)national society and from different time periods to show the development of discourse related to gender-based violence. Specifically, the project analyses two reports published by the Republic of Korea (ROK) Government (one by the Moon administration and one by the following Yoon administration), a collaborative report by Korean women's rights NGOs, and a report by Amnesty International. The analysis is guided by a theory of feminist intersectionality and conducted using Critical Discourse Analysis. The texts are analysed in order to interpret how the issue of violence against women is perceived and discursively constructed and which realities the emerging discourses reconstitute for women in Korean society. The analysis found that several discourses are present across the different texts, but they all reflect local and/or global trends related to women, gender, and human rights. The ROK Government (referring here to both presidential administrations) constructs gender-based violence as an individual issue rather than a structural one, and it focuses on preventing recurrence and secondary victimisation rather than changing the sociocultural conditions that enable and reinforce oppression of and violence against women. Contrarily, civil society organisations – both Korean and international – construct gender-based violence as a structural problem rooted in patriarchy and misogynistic attitudes, and they primarily focus on calling attention to the underlying problems and the government's lack of active intervention and protection of women. Essentially, whereas the ROK Government indirectly naturalises gender-based violence, the civil society organisations present the problem as a violation of women's human

rights. Common for all texts, though, is the fact that they construct violence as a physical (and digital) phenomenon, thus ignoring psychological violence and its consequences altogether. The reality that is (re)constituted by each discourse therefore has different implications for women, but they consistently create a reality where women are victims (of violence perpetrated by men). Further, the findings are discussed by situating our findings in a broader social context and demonstrating how the findings reflect the impacts of discourse on society and vice versa – this includes reviewing statics of femicide, which we find to be reflective of trends of antifeminist discourse, and discussing how our identified discourses follow local and global trends of gender equality and non-discrimination. This study concludes that, while the various actors construct the problem of gender-based violence differently, they all reconstitute a reality wherein women are not safe in public, online, or at home – women are not safe *anywhere*.

Table of Contents

Introduction **6**

1. Literature Review **11**

1.1 A Feminist Perspective on Human Rights **11**

1.1.1 Women's Experiences: Androcentrism and The Public–Private Split *13*

1.1.2 The Question of Culture *15*

1.1.3 Connecting the Global and the Local *16*

1.2 Violence Against Women **18**

1.2.1 Redefining the Problem *19*

1.2.2 Understanding Violence Against Women *21*

1.2.3 Addressing the Issue of Violence Against Women *23*

1.3 South Korea: Society, Women, and Violence **25**

1.3.1 The Korean Women's Rights Movement and Violence Against Women *25*

1.3.2 Social and Cultural Norms and Gender (In)Equality *28*

1.3.3 Antifeminism and Misogyny *32*

2. Theory **35**

3. Methods and Methodology **38**

3.1 Philosophy of Science **38**

3.2 Research Design **39**

3.3 Data Collection **40**

3.4. Data Analysis **43**

3.4.1. Critical Discourse Analysis *43*

3.4.2 Ashcraft & Mumby: Feminist Communicology *44*

3.4.3 Method of Analysis *47*

3.5 Limitations **48**

4. Analysis **49**

4.1 Time Period A (2017–2022): ROK Government **49**

4.1.1 Women Are Victims *49*

4.1.2 Men Are Perpetrators *50*

4.1.3 Childbirth and Birthrates *52*

4.1.3 Migrants, Rural Women, and Maintaining the Binary *53*
4.1.5 Critique *55*
4.2 Time Period A (2017–2022): Korean Civil Society **56**
4.2.1 Gender-Based Violence Is a Structural Problem *56*
4.2.2 Women Are Victims *58*
4.2.3 Women As Reproductive Tools *59*
4.2.4 Critique *60*
4.3 International Civil Society **62**
4.3.1 GBV Is Rooted in the Patriarchy *62*
4.3.2 Critique *66*
4.4 Time Period B (2022–2025): ROK Government **67**
4.4.1 Gender-Based Violence is "Expected" *67*
4.4.2 Women As Reproductive Tools *69*
4.4.3 Critique *70*
4.5 Time Period B (2022–2025): Korean Civil Society **70**
4.5.1 Gender-Based Violence Is a Structural Problem *71*
4.5.2 Gender-Based Violence Is a (Women's) Human Rights Violation *72*
4.5.3 Gender-Based Violence Remains "Invisible" *74*
4.5.4 Critique *75*
4.6 Overall Findings **76**
5. Discussion **79**
5.1 Reflection of Trends **79**
5.2 Human Rights **83**
5.3 The Local and the Global: Cultural Flows **85**
Conclusion **87**
References **90**

Introduction

Globalisation is generally known as economic and cultural integration and exchange between countries, and it is a phenomenon which has resulted in varying levels of prosperity. Some understand globalisation as a global diffusion of 'Western' values (e.g., neoliberalism), while others reject the synonymy (Hall, 1997; Held et al., 1999). Nevertheless, globalisation can be conceived as a driving, transformative force behind the rapid changes that reshape societies as well as the increasingly interconnected global landscape (Held et al., 1999, p. 7). It is a process which manifests in the fundamental domains of social life, including flows of economy, politics, and technology, and one which also reflects increasing marginalisation of different communities, and societies (Held et al., 1999). Yet, globalisation is not purely an economic phenomenon of integration and exchange, though that historically has played a major role in the expansion and development of many countries; it also includes *cultural* flows (Ganesh et al., 2024; Held et al., 1999). Flows are especially seen as attributes of globalisation in this new generation of *visibility*, where global phenomena – such as pandemics and discrimination – are magnified, monitored, distorted, and refracted (Ganesh et al., 2024, p. 405). As such, globalisation increases the visibility of global problems to which we need to find global solutions, collectively (Ganesh et al., 2024; Postmus & Hahn, 2007). Since globalisation affects countries differently, it is crucial to explore the relationship between the local and the global and with it, responses to global problems.

An example of a country which has benefitted from globalisation and is becoming increasingly influential on the global stage is South Korea (hereafter Korea). Globalisation processes have influenced key aspects of Korea's social life, including its economy, language, and culture (Song & Kim, 2022). For instance, Korea's economic growth since the 1970s was heavily influenced by globalisation as its processes restructured the economy and facilitated trade expansion; as a result, Korea became a large exporter worldwide. Moreover, the country joined the OECD (Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development) in 1996, which accelerated the country's market liberalisation (Song & Kim, 2022, p. 137). Various social changes have also reshaped Korean society: both tourism and immigration have increased, partly due to exposure and flows of culture, and global promotion of gender equality has affected the birthrate, which has rapidly decreased (Song & Kim, 2022).

Evidently, as part of globalisation, Korea has imported culture, but in recent years Korea has also significantly exported culture. Dubbed the Korean Wave, or *Hallyu*, this global expansion of domestic Korean culture – which includes music, films, dramas, animation, food, beauty, fashion, and more – aims to conquer the global market (Glodev et

al., 2023, pp. 108–109). In fact, Korean pop music (K-pop) and dramas (K-dramas) along with skincare (K-beauty) and the Korean cuisine, specifically, have given the country a financial boost of high proportions and resulted in a sharp increase in tourism (Gan, 2023, p. 16). The country has welcomed more than 16 million tourists in 2024, which is 48.4% higher than 2023 (Tharp, 2025), and it was the fastest growing tourist attraction in Asia.

Then, with globalisation comes the spread of global values. As part of the globalisation process, a 'movement' of human rights discourse and cultural meaning systems emerged, for instance seen in declarations, conventions, and (transnational) social movements (Binion, 1995; Grewal, 1999; Stiglitz, 2002). One such cultural flow is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which along with the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), make up the International Bill of Human Rights (United Nations [UN], n.d.-a). Adopted in 1948 after the Second World War, the UDHR is a set of principles regarding inalienable human rights, as internationally agreed upon (UN, n.d.-a; UN, 2006). The Declaration is thus part of the foundation of the modern human rights system, reflecting the intention of protecting every human person and their dignity and worth and articulating the idea that humans have rights *because* we are human and that these rights should hold good and be respected everywhere (UN, 2006).

Another flow of global values spread through globalisation is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This Convention is known as one of the major pillars in the fight for women's rights and gender equality worldwide, reaffirming the rights of women and girls and bringing attention to the extensive discrimination against them (UN, 1979). Despite the efforts emerging from these treaties, the World Health Organization (WHO) has described violence against women as a "global public health pandemic" (UN, n.d.-b), one which has only become more visible in the era of globalisation. Therefore, efforts to eliminate discrimination against women and girls have further focused on gender-based violence (GBV), i.e., violence inflicted on a person or group based on their gender (Collins, 2014, p. 767). Such efforts emerged in the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, generally referred to as the "Istanbul Convention." The aims of this Convention include protecting women from all forms of violence; preventing and eliminating gender-based violence, including domestic violence which disproportionately affects women; contributing to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women; and promoting actual gender equality as well as producing frameworks and policies which protect and support all victims

of violence (Council of Europe, 2011, p. 2). While the Convention is primarily ratified by member states of the European Union, it is open for signature to non-member states who participated in its development (Council of Europe, 2011, p. 22). Still, despite not being a "universal" convention like the UDHR and CEDAW, the hope of 'globalists' working on such policies is that the values will spread across the globe. Thus, the hopes and desires that came along with documents like the UDHR, CEDAW, and the Istanbul Convention intended for a world of equality where everyone is born and treated equally and where one's worth and dignity is universally respected – a world without discrimination of any kind. However, discrimination continues to exist, and globalisation shines a spotlight on such issues, partly due to the increasing international communication and visibility.

So, in the context of cultural flows – and the global expansion of domestic Korean culture – we wonder if the promotion of gender equality and human rights along with elimination of discrimination against women emerging from these global efforts have also influenced Korea or maybe become a part of Korean values. If Korea as a country has become enmeshed in the global order and if cultural flows have spread global values of non-discrimination and gender equality, then we are curious as to what the situation in Korea looks like with regards to women's human rights and gender.

Korea has had a history of gender issues – as have other nations, e.g., in the form of patriarchy. Historically, Korea's hegemonic patriarchy "embodied powerful masculine authoritarianism in the form of Confucian ideology" (Kim, 2019, p. 21), and such culture was amplified by Japanese imperialism. During WWII, when Korea was a Japanese colony, thousands of Korean women were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military. This phenomenon is known as 'comfort women,' as women of various nationalities, including Korean, were detained in 'comfort stations' as military sexual slaves for Japanese soldiers (Getz, 2018; Kim, 2014). Notably, Radhika Coomaraswamy, who served as a *Special Rapporteur on violence against women and its causes and consequences*, argued for the term 'comfort women' to be changed to "military sexual slaves" as the term 'comfort women' does not remotely reflect the sufferings and abuses the women experienced (Ahn, 2019, p. 5). Then, after decolonisation, the Korean nation-building process perpetuated the hegemonic masculinity and discrimination against women; here, patriarchal capitalism and colonialism both "perpetrate systematic and structural violence which eventually lead to violence against the bodies of women" (Kim, 2019, p. 21). While the sexual slavery of Korean women happened at the hands of the Japanese military and government, Korean survivors of the comfort women system continue to face discrimination in Korean society, for instance in the

form of forced silence and social stigmatisation. In fact, the persisting patriarchal structures have "allowed for and reinforced the abuse and oppression of these women in both the private and public sphere" (Kim, 2019, p. 22), and it was not until the beginning of the 1990s that the issue gained attention from the international community; still, the change in attitudes reflected that Korean society has become more attentive to the trauma of survivors and their stories (Kim, 2019).

Fast forward, the comfort women survivors have become the forerunners of the Korean feminist movement's participation in the global #MeToo movement. Having gained significant attention in 2018, the #MeToo movement in Korea demonstrated that the sociocultural and patriarchal conditions have persisted without much change (Hasunuma & Shin, 2019). Still, the #MeToo movement seems to have provided some momentum for the Korean feminist movement, as it was deemed a historic turning point for the country (Jung, 2024, p. 4). Following this, feminism was heavily embraced by ordinary women in society, and the feminist movement thus peaked in the 2010s (Jung, 2024; Jung & Moon, 2024). In relation the popularisation of feminism in Korea, everyday feminist practice has for instance taken the form of the 4B Movement (*bihon*, *bichulsan*, *biyeonae*, *bisekseu*), with the prefix bi- meaning 'no' or 'not,' i.e., not doing what is traditionally and socially expected of women by saying no to four things: sex, marriage, childbirth, and dating (Lee & Jeong, 2021).

However, in the early 2020s, in alignment with increasing global trends of misogyny, conservatism, and antifeminism, there seems to be a rise in problems regarding GBV in Korea as well, such as technology-facilitated sexual violence (TFSV), femicide, and domestic violence. For instance, a survey conducted by the Korean Women Workers Association found that the prevalence of violence against women and girls is high in Korea compared to other developed nations around the world; of the 404 women surveyed, 74 per cent expressed experiences with discrimination (Shim, 2020). Such discrimination takes place in both offline and online settings, and with the evolving and increased use of technology, digital sexual harassment and violence in Korea has become a significant concern occurring at alarmingly high rates (Jung, 2024; Kim et al., 2024; Yang, 2025).

Additionally, extreme cases of violence against Korean women which garnered (inter)national attention include the *Gangnam Station murder* and the *Nth Room* case. The Gangnam Station murder occurred at a public restroom near the Gangnam subway station in Seoul, 2016, where a man killed a 23-year-old woman, whom he did not know, purely because of her gender. Allegedly, the perpetrator felt ignored or belittled by women, though the murder was presented in the national news and media as a random killing (and a result of

mental illness) rather than a murder with gendered motivations. However, Korean feminists countered this narrative and sparked a social debate about misogyny, gender discrimination, and femicide (Kim, 2021a; Jung, 2024). Then, the Nth Room case, which occurred between 2018 and 2020, involved cybersex trafficking, coercion, blackmail, sexual abuse, and the dissemination of sexually exploitative images and videos of women and (underage) girls via the Telegram app (Kim, 2021b; Seo, 2020). This criminal became a massive focus nationally, and feminists fought to place the issue of technology-facilitated sexual violence on the national agenda – with this, gender issues have become prevalent topics in different areas of society.

Thus, the paradoxical coexistence of international standards and high rates of GBV in Korea sparked the need for this study. As argued by Postmus and Hahn (2007), violence against women is a global problem, and "as a global problem, we must find global solutions by learning from the successes and struggles of others" (p. 781). To explore how a globalised country like Korea can still be dealing with gender discrimination and violence despite global efforts to promote human rights and protections for women, we will be exploring discourse on gender-based violence at different levels of society, looking at both the national government, national civil society, and international civil society. To do so, we ask the following question: *How do the reports created by the ROK Government and civil society organisation reflect the discursive construction of GBV in South Korea*?

Learning about this issue and seeing what is taken for granted in such documents and their discourses is important in order to understand how a developed country like Korea still struggles with gender discrimination; to understand the tensions between local and global norms; and to understand how and why some globalised societies may be selective in their adoption of international standards.

1. Literature Review

This section provides an overview on the existing literature on three strands of feminist scholarship which guide our understanding of our presented problem on violence against women (VAW) in Korea. We first review general scholarship on human rights followed by a feminist perspective hereon to provide a broad overview of feminist scholars' foci and concerns regarding human rights issues in the international arena. We then discuss research on violence against women, from a global perspective, as this is the main topic of our study, and it provides an understanding of how feminist scholarship perceives the issue of VAW. Finally, we review current research on social issues in South Korea regarding VAW, since this local context is the particular area of feminist research on VAW which we want to expand.

With this literature review, we connect the global to the local and situate our project within the current academic discussion. Most of the studies included in this review are qualitative, critical, and feminist in their approaches, and we take inspiration from this in addressing our proposed research question. Thus, our project takes its starting point in studies from these strands in order to expand the existing literature on gender-based violence in an Asian context.

1.1 A Feminist Perspective on Human Rights

Human rights as a field of inquiry is very prominent in the academic sphere and has been intensely studied for decades. Within this field, human rights scholars often discuss the origin, chronology, relevance, justification, and power of human rights. The literature is ever evolving and expanding along with our understanding of *human rights*, but the phenomenon remains "an indispensable idiom of political life" (Goodhart, 2023, p. 2). In relation to this, Goodhart (2023) states:

> Human rights are amazingly rich and complex phenomena: they are at once local, national, regional, and global in scope: they "operate" transnationally, meaning that they are not merely part of international relations among states and international governance organizations (IGOs) but also spill over and cut across political boundaries as ideas, discourse, and practices spread through activist networks and via social media and other channels. (p. 2)

From a normative perspective then, human rights are both a framework and a language for realising social justice and equality for all, based on universally recognised norms and principles. These are articulated in important international conventions and declarations

which make up the International Bill of Human Rights, namely the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Still, human rights are a sight of political struggle as different countries have different interpretations of and commitment to human rights (Lauren, 1998).

Moreover, there have also been suggestions for a possible expansion of the human rights concept. As Goodhart (2023) notes, the concept of human rights has evolved with time and especially with the emergence of globalisation. Similarly, Rothman et al. (2024) argue that our understanding of human rights has drastically expanded since the UDHR was introduced over 75 years ago, thus begging the question of whether the global standard should be revisited: with significant progress made in identification and recognition of human rights coupled with globalisation and potential societal needs, are there "new" or other human rights, which are not reflected in previous declarations, which should be recognised or augmented? (Rothman et al., 2024).

This challenge to the global standard set out in the International Bill of Human Rights connects to feminist critiques of the human rights concepts. Within human rights scholarship, feminists have a unique perspective on human rights, i.e., a broader concern with women's experiences and gender (in)equality. Feminist theorising has greatly influenced the literature on international law and (women's) human rights, and although multiple feminisms exist and have different priorities and approaches to human rights, it is still possible to recognise essential feminist contributions in the field (Parisi, 2002). Importantly, for this project we embrace Parisi's (2017) notion of 'feminism' and 'feminist(s)' as terms to "connote a shared goal of seeking to re-articulate human rights in an effort to achieve gender equality, even though theoretical entry points into the discourse and resulting strategies may vary widely among feminists" (p. 2). Thus, our literature review does not adopt a specific feminist position but rather provides an account of ideas and arguments presented by scholars who identify as feminists and are concerned with women's human rights and gender equality. Additionally, our brief account of the development of the (global) women's human rights movement will primarily focus on feminist theorising and activism from the second wave of feminism and onwards, as many significant developments occurred the latter half of the 20th century (Heo & Rakowski, 2014; Parisi, 2002).

On the international stage in the 1990s, feminist activists from around the world succeeded in advocating for "women's rights as human rights," specifically at the World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 1993, held by the United Nations (UN). Later, in 1995

at the UN Conference on Women in Beijing, this perspective was accepted and ratified in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Heo & Rakowski, 2014). Thus, women's oppression was recognised as a universal problem. However, as mentioned, multiple feminisms exist and diverge in opinions, which also manifested in the transnational feminist movement regarding the question of what counts as 'human rights.' Specifically, definitions were critiqued and accused of being racist and imperialist, partly because modernisation was perceived as 'Western feminist neo-imperialism' by developing countries but also because it resulted in a universalisation of women's oppression, lacking sensitivity and nuance (Heo & Rakowski, 2014; Parisi, 2002). In other words, women's oppression is a universal problem as it affects women worldwide, but the oppression and responses to it cannot be homogenised. Nonetheless, a global civil society was slowly formed through shared goals as transnational feminist activists recognised that patriarchy and manifestations of human rights abuses operate across intersecting oppressions (Collins et al., 2010; Parisi, 2002). Thus, feminist scholars worldwide have a deep focus on gender, power, and intersectionality.

Generally, a feminist perspective on human rights involves critiquing and addressing the broader structures and construct of the patriarchy, i.e., structures that overlap and maintain the patriarchal system and perpetuate women's oppression (Parisi, 2002). Now, there are certain critiques of the human rights framework which echo throughout the literature on gender equality and international human rights, especially of human rights as Eurocentric/Western-centric, androcentric (male-centred), imperial, and universal (Binion, 1995; Collins et al., 2010; Grewal, 1999; Parisi, 2002; Parisi, 2017). Essentially, the framework is seen as reflecting the experiences of white, Western men while excluding those of women and other marginalised groups; this understanding of human rights therefore reflects a lack of intersectionality. In challenging these assumptions and providing an inclusionary approach to (women's) human rights, feminist scholars commonly highlight primary critiques which we are going to review, namely *androcentrism and the dichotomy of the private and public spheres*, *the question of culture*, and *tensions between international norms and particularities of local contexts*.

1.1.1 Women's Experiences: Androcentrism and The Public–Private Split

First, androcentrism and the public–private dichotomy are two important critiques, as pointed out by Parisi (2002) who explores feminist understandings of human rights. These critiques focus on the assumptions that human rights are male-centred and that women are relegated to the private sphere and rendered subjects to male-dominance. The gendered dichotomy

assumes that the family/home is private and distinctive from the public sphere, meaning it is "safe" from interference by the public or the state; it approves of male dominance, and the male experience is accepted as "the *human* experience" while women's experiences are considered "deviant," which renders women subjects to oppressive power and control (Parisi, 2002, p. 577). This notion of excluding women's experiences has been frequently and regularly pointed out by feminist scholars, who argue that the androcentric conceptualisation of humanity and human rights has turned women into something less than human through processes of oppression, exclusion, and othering (Binion, 1995; Collins et al., 2010; Fulu & Miedema, 2015; Parisi, 2002; Spivak, 2003). On the subject of power structures and subalternity (i.e., the condition of being marginalised, excluded, or oppressed, brought about by imperial colonialism), Spivak (2003) argues that women as a group or social category are the most subaltern in all societies. Thus, while women as a group are not a minority, they have been historically subjected to oppressive social and political power structures which has rendered them "inferior" to men.

Next, in challenging the public–private split, feminists argue that the public and private spheres are not distinct and separate but rather interconnected, as social, economic, and political rights are indivisible, and the patriarchal assumption of male dominance in the family hinders the fulfilment and enjoyment of these rights for women – in other words, "the personal is political" (Parisi, 2002, p. 576). This is one of the key insights from feminist scholarship on human rights and gender equality, which is evident in the literature and the use of the slogan (*the personal is political*) in second-wave feminism (Grewal, 1999; Parisi, 2017).

Similarly to Parisi, Binion (1995) explores how human rights might be understood if they centred women's experiences. Along the same lines, Binion (1995) discusses the public–private dichotomy and poses the following argument:

> While women collectively can argue that *their* experience of oppressive power that denies them moral autonomy, human dignity, and physical security occurs more readily in the home than in the town jail, there appears to be little support outside of the feminist movement for broadening human rights principles to include a wider locus of abuse and a wider range of abusers. (p. 517)

Evidently, during this time, the idea of women's rights as human rights is not readily accepted; rather, the public–private split naturalises and rationalises patriarchy. Furthermore, Binion (1995) argues that the distinction of the public and private spheres ignores the family's "powerful influence in socializing its members, especially the next generation" (p.

520). This is a pertinent point: different levels of society, including the family, influence how we perceive and interact with the world around us, and engaging with all levels of society is important in challenging the patriarchal ideology (Heise, 1998).

Thus, human rights as androcentric is an important critique because it highlights issues of power relations and inequality as well as the dehumanisation of women and other minority groups. Additionally, this links to another critique regarding the role and relevance of culture when investigating issues of (women's) human rights and violations hereof.

1.1.2 The Question of Culture

Another prominent critique of the human rights framework in the literature is the question of culture, which is closely related to the public–private dichotomy (Binion, 1995). This critique is often concerned with two interrelated points, namely culture as a possible justification for violence and the tension between universalism versus cultural relativism, i.e., are human rights universal and inalienable, or are they context-dependent and encoded in culture? (Ackerly, 2001; Binion, 1995; Merry, 2003; Parisi, 2002; Parisi, 2017).

The universal position argues that human rights are inalienable – they are rights that we have simply because we are human beings. This thinking is derived from the works of John Locke, whose idea posits that "rights of individual humans appear to be universal and should take precedence above all else" (Parisi, 2002, p. 578). Human rights are thus applicable to every individual irrespective of one's culture, though this perspective has been criticised for its androcentrism and exclusion of women and marginalised groups because they are not seen as equal individuals in this line of thinking (Parisi, 2002). Conversely, the cultural relativist position argues that human rights are context-dependent and that there is no single standard which can be legitimately applied across all societies. In this view, group rights are prioritised over individual rights, and any external critique or condemnation is seen as a form of Western imperialism (Parisi, 2017). Interestingly, within this debate Binion (1995) presents the question of "why *culture* appears only in regard to gender roles and to the governmental and nongovernmental denials of fundamental rights to women" (p. 521), i.e., culture as a justification for human rights violations.

In an attempt to solve the tension between universalism and cultural relativism, Ackerly (2001) explores the relationship between international/universal rights and local contexts and argues that "the challenges of gaining recognition of women's human rights are as much the challenges of changing local social contexts as they are the challenges of promoting transnational norms of human rights" (p. 311). This means that human rights are

not particularly a product of cultural history derived from the West, and the notion of 'universality' only has meaning contextually in the sense that "the social and historical context of particular mores and practices give meaning to and constrain the use of any universal rights as a tool for social criticism" (Ackerly, 2001, p. 330). Thus, to realise international standards and norms about violence against women in local contexts, there needs to be a mutual, intra-national understanding that gender-based violence is unacceptable by both national and international standards, and responses need to be culturally appropriate (Ackerly, 2019, p. 319). As such, Ackerly (2001) claims that human rights are both local and universal, and although they are also contested, the framework can promote internationally agreed-upon standards in local contexts in a way which is appropriate and respects cultural diversity (Ackerly, 2001). Evidently, there is a great tension between these two ideas: the universal position argues that cultural relativism can be used to justify human rights violations and abuses, and the cultural relativist position argues that universalism disregards the significance of culture (Binion, 1995; Parisi, 2017). Therefore, the question of culture is an essential critique in relation to human rights because it challenges the different interpretations of and commitments to human rights which vary across borders. This type of critique extends to the tension between *global* and *local*.

1.1.3 Connecting the Global and the Local

Lastly, feminist scholarship presents the relationship between local conditions and larger meanings as an important critique; considering the debate surrounding the (im)possible universality of human rights, it is important to further question the relationship between the local and global in the context of a highly globalised world. For instance, in the context of globalisation, Grewal (1999) argues that the struggle to balance the vast differences of women's experiences in a global women's human rights discourse is "made even more difficult by the asymmetries of power of states, nations and groups that both construct and fracture contemporary global conditions" (p. 342). Therefore, in order to understand the human rights framework at national and international levels, it is essential to first understand political, social, economic, state, and cultural contexts, especially because "cross-cultural communication is imbued with power relations" (Grewal, 1999, p. 348). In addition to this, Fulu and Miedema (2015) highlight that the globalisation process differs across societies in terms of how "globalised" societies are, how affected they are, and how much they benefit from it. Fulu and Miedema (2015) also argue that globalisation is "highly gendered," meaning the phenomenon has "complex and contradictory impacts on women" (p. 1432).

Parisi (2017) also discusses the relationship between gender and globalisation. Specifically, she underscores that feminist research has "linked the twin processes of globalization and democratization as detrimental to the achievement of human rights for women" (p. 12). In other words, globalisation has disempowered women and affected their ability to fulfil their economic, social, and political rights earnestly; these rights are connected and dependent on each other, and by being disempowered economically, women are also disempowered politically (Parisi, 2027, p. 12).

Circling back to the idea of universalism and cultural relativism in the context of globalisation, Collins et al. (2010) reiterate that:

> As feminists of the Global South have pointed out, the false universalisms and cultural essentialisms of dominant human rights debates ignore the diverse experiences of women's oppression, especially those who are indigenous, Third World, women of color, poor, rural, disabled and queer. (p. 308)

This is also why intersectionality is central to the gendered theorisation of human rights (Collins et al., 2010). In understanding that "patriarchy operates within and across class, culture, race and sexual orientation" (Parisi, 2002, p. 580), feminist activists and scholars recognise that human rights issues and gender inequality must be viewed and addressed through an intersectional lens. According to Collins et al. (2010), intersectionality is important because "no one right can be easily broken down into a singular issue, as rights are always already constituted through the social structural relations of multiple positionalities" (p. 309). Additionally, within the often-recognised intersections of oppression, i.e., race, gender, class, and sexuality, Collins et al. (2010) further identify the 'nation' as a point of oppression – an argument which has also been articulated by Parisi (2002), who explains that the state is both "the primary abuser and protector of human rights" (p. 578).

Then, Savery (2005) explores cross-national variation in diffusion of women's human rights in Germany and Japan, specifically the dynamic between international norms of sexual non-discrimination and state behaviour. Savery (2005) argues that the variation and effectiveness of norm diffusion is dependent on the "dynamic interaction between various structures and agents, discourse, and power" (p. 90). Here, the 'various structures and agents' refers to "the strength of the gender-biased corporate identity of the state, the degree of international or regional political will to use existing monitoring and enforcement resources, and the effectiveness of domestic feminist activism and private individual or group litigation" (Savery, 2005, pp. 94–95). Thus, a government's conservative or liberal position is not necessarily an impediment to the diffusion of women's human rights; rather, the gender-

biased identity is a crucial factor as the state's self-perception influences how those in power (re)produce values and beliefs. Savery (2005) found that domestic feminist activism and international institutions both greatly affect state behavioural change and policy outcomes. Further, Savery (2005) posits that "structures such as international and domestic socio-legal norms, beliefs and values etc., hold the power to shape social action" (p. 108), thus reflecting the interplay between structures, discourse, and power.

This feminist critique is important when studying human rights and women's human rights issues as it provides a critical perspective and draws attention to the complex dynamics and challenges which arise when invoking human rights on the (inter)national scale. This is especially pertinent in the era of globalisation and cultural expansion and exchange. In sum, human rights scholarship in general has consistently called attention to the validity and universality of human rights, and feminist scholars have a deep focus on centering women's experiences and a commitment to an inclusionary approach to human rights. In advocating for such an approach, feminists have called attention to specific critiques of human rights, especially regarding androcentrism, culture, and tensions of global norms in local contexts. The critiques have provided relevant insight into the complexities in addressing global problems in varying cultural settings, and overall, feminist scholarship on international (women's) human rights demonstrates that despite vast differences, unifying concerns about women's experiences can still be identified across countries and cultures, because women's oppression is rooted in global mechanisms.

1.2 Violence Against Women

The primary topic of our study is violence against women, and this section will review how the phenomenon of GBV is generally understood within the literature, from a global perspective. As such, our understanding of gender-based violence as a social problem is informed by literature produced by the feminist scholars before us. The existing scholarly literature on violence against women spans decades, and many common themes can be extracted, such as the recognition of gender-based violence as a social problem, women's human rights, theoretical frameworks for understanding violence against women, the tension between empowerment and protection, domestic violence discourse, attitudes towards gender-based violence, and family 'sanctity' (Berns, 2001; Bush, 1992; Ferraro, 1996; Fulu & Miedema, 2015; Heise, 1998; Park et al., 2025).

Like Russel et al. (2018), we use the terms gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against women (VAW) interchangeably; we recognise that GBV can be experienced

by people of all genders and gender identities, but our study focuses on women and girls as they are impacted disproportionately (European Commission, n.d.; Russell et al., 2018). Additionally, while not all feminist scholars draw on specific definitions of GBV in their studies, there is a general consensus in the literature that GBV is a social issue rooted in patriarchy, power relations, and gender discrimination (Berns, 2001; Bush, 1992; Ferraro, 1996; Fulu & Miedema, 2015; Grauwiler & Mills, 2004; Merry, 2003; Rose et al., 2024; Thompson et al., 2025). For instance, Thompson et al. (2025) state that "it is important to approach violence as a consequence of power expressed through *racism*, *sexism*, *genderism*, *classism*, and so on" (p. 4). Still, we want to ground our study in a specific definition provided by the United Nations (1993) of GBV as:

> any act of genderbased violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. (p. 2)

Other scholars, such as Russell et al. (2018) have also used this definition. Thus, we embrace the trends in the literature to study GBV in our chosen case. Indeed, much attention has been paid to violence against women in recent decades (Berns, 2001; Bush, 1992; Ferraro, 1996; Fulu & Miedema, 2015; Grauwiler & Mills, 2004; Merry, 2003; Ozaki & Otis, 2017; Parisi, 2002; Park et al. 2025; Postmus & Hahn, 2007; Rose et al., 2024; Thompson et al., 2025), with feminist scholars analysing the phenomenon in both international and national contexts. It is worth mentioning that many early studies on GBV are derived from a U.S.-American context; this may be due to an overrepresentation or due to the country's early feminist movement, as this gave rise to the international movement (Heo, 2010). Still, essential insights can be identified from this, and the feminist literature on gender-based violence as a global phenomenon is continuously expanding and providing new key insights, particularly on *redefining*, *understanding*, and *addressing* the issue of violence against women.

1.2.1 Redefining the Problem

The first key insight from feminist scholars on violence against women is the (re)definition of the issue as a social problem that challenges the naturalisation and rationalisation of the violence. As pointed out earlier, the state both protects and abuses human rights. Then, regarding violence against women specifically, Parisi (2002) elaborates:

> Under international human rights laws, states are not held accountable for their inaction (or inadequate action) that enables gender-based violence in the private sphere, and women's rights are not defined as human rights. (p. 580)

Thus, due to the public–private split which considers issues such as violence to be private family matters, states are not considered responsible for the actions of individuals; as a result, gender-based violence in the private sphere, i.e., in the family and in the home, was not recognised as a human rights abuse until the women's rights movement challenged this perception and redefined the problem (Parisi, 2002).

The development of women's rights movements and their redefinition of violence against women as a public issue is a prominent topic in the literature. For instance, in her comparison of social movements in the United States and India, Bush (1992) explores how these movements redefined violence against women in families as a public issue, and how the movement demands affected policy reform in each country; in doing so, Bush (1992) examines how gender shapes power in families and states (p. 603). An important finding in this study is the fact that, as feminists succeeded in publicly redefining violence against women as a social problem and as their demands became institutionalised in both countries, the original feminist definition of the problem became less apparent: "the bureaucratic structure of the liberal democratic state means that state response to women's movement demands criminalizes violence against women without recognizing that such violence is rooted in unequal gender relations" (Bush, 1992, p. 603). As such, the problem is the individual and not the larger structure and asymmetry in gender and power relations, which means that the problem was still not addressed adequately.

Similarly, Ferraro (1996) examines developments and shifts in discourse on women and violence. Specifically, the study develops a genealogy of domestic violence discourse in the United States from the 1970s to 1980s, highlighting the neglected connection between power relations, a resignification of victimisation (i.e., which victims matter?), and the reflection and perpetuation of certain cultural assumptions. Ferraro (1996) found a discursive shift from gender-based violence as male domination, social transformation, and liberation to that of criminalisation. Like Bush (1992), Ferraro (1996) argues that this reflects a prioritisation of punishing the individual rather than dismantling the (overlapping) structures which perpetuate the inequality.

In relation to this, Berns (2001) examines political discourse on domestic violence, specifically counterattacks to the feminist construction of domestic violence in the United States. This study highlights the importance of representations of social problems on the basis

that “individuals draw on these sources when constructing their understandings of issues such as violence against women” (p. 263). The analysis of men’s and political magazines’ representation of domestic violence reflected what Berns (2001) calls “patriarchal resistance” (p. 262), which manifests in the use of discursive strategies to normalise intimate partner violence and to obscure the responsibility of men and patriarchal structures. Berns (2001) identified two main discursive strategies, namely “degendering the problem and gendering the blame” (p. 264). By using these strategies, magazines were able to degender violence but gender the blame by framing women as responsible. Evidently, the media has great influence in shaping people’s understanding of social issues, which is why addressing discourse and its consequences is essential to addressing the problem itself.

Thus, the feminist redefinition of violence against women as a social issue is an important insight for the study of GBV as it demonstrates that *how* we talk about a social problem also has implications for how the issue is recognised, prioritised, and addressed. This further connects to understanding the etiologies of violence against women and how the phenomenon itself has been studied in the literature.

1.2.2 Understanding Violence Against Women

Next, an important insight from the literature is the *understanding* of GBV as a social problem, i.e., how feminists perceive and present the issue. Then, to understand violence against women as a phenomenon rooted in an interaction between (inter)personal, situational, and sociocultural factors, feminist scholar Lori Heise created a theoretical framework, which identifies predictive factors of abuse at different levels of the social ecology, i.e., the relationship between people and their environment. This framework by Heise (1998), also known as the Ecological model, is greatly recognised and serves as the foundation of many later studies as well as violence prevention work.

Heise (1998) notes that previous feminist theorising on the topic has focused on factors at the macrolevel, especially patriarchy. Building on this, the Ecological model provides a rich understanding of gender-based violence as it demonstrates how each level (personal, micro, exo, and macro) is interconnected and has influence. Heise (1998) explains: “the relationship between patriarchal family structure and violence may in part be fueled by macrolevel norms that approve of male dominance in the family” (p. 270). In other words, if societal norms rationalise and justify violence against women, thereby influencing and shaping the family’s beliefs, then simply telling an individual to not perpetrate violence is inadequate and ineffective. Thus, an understanding of violence against women as a

multifaceted phenomenon acknowledges the importance of addressing patriarchy while also being critical of factors at other levels.

According to Heise (1998), a prominent, indicative factor of gender-based violence is the notion of masculinity. Importantly, while not all cultures define manhood in relation to aggression and dominance, research shows that (hyper)masculinity and cultural ideas of manhood are often linked to violence. This socialisation process produces a definition of masculinity in which men must be "tough, unfeeling, and violent" (p. 278). Such a notion is also closely linked to a sense of ownership and entitlement (Heise, 1998). Heise's comprehensive framework thus demonstrates why it is necessary to examine gender-based violence as more than a manifestation of patriarchy.

Building on Heise's Ecological model, Fulu and Miedema (2015) propose a global level to the social ecology to explore the connection between women's lived experienced in local contexts and violence against women as a global phenomenon. The authors conduct a case study of the Maldives and Cambodia, and by adding this global level, the study contributes to the understanding of how "global shifts interact with and influence the rest of the model" (Fulu & Miedema, 2015, p. 1433). As a result, the authors adapt Heise's model to create a globalised framework, where the *global* level includes the following factors: global ideologies (women's rights and democracy), economic integration, religious fundamentalism, and global cultural exchange (p. 1445)

Similarly to Heise (1998), Fulu and Miedema (2015) stress the link between violence and masculinity: "As society changes, violence become a means by which men construct a new form of masculinity: a compensatory method of exerting control when they feel that their authority has been called into question" (p. 1439); the societal changes inferred here are especially social and economic changes as well as increasing shifts in gender roles, which can trigger a perceived disempowerment or 'reverse discrimination' for men (Fulu & Miedema, 2015). Moreover, with the rise of globalisation and different cultural expansions, Fulu and Miedema (2015) point out that "men are learning new notions of masculinity through the global reach of television, film, music, and the Internet" (p. 1438), demonstrating the media's influence in shaping people's beliefs and understandings of social issues.

Fulu and Miedema (2015) also argue that resistance to change is an influential factor in how women's experiences are affected by globalisation:

> Violence(s) exist across a continuum—from institutional and structural violence to individual experiences or perpetration of violence. Consequently, social change that

> targets the underlying norms, values, and governance systems, which perpetuate these violences, is likely to create a wide range of resistances. (p. 1443)

As such, with globalisation impacting social organisation, both promotion of and resistance to sociocultural change can shape how people understand masculinity and femininity and how they are constituted. Essentially, Fulu and Miedema (2015) demonstrate how social change caused by globalisation links to material effects on women's lives and to the root causes of gender-based violence.

Additionally, in a quantitative analysis, Park et al. (2025) examine attitudes towards Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) on a global scale, particularly to understand acceptance and justification of IPV. In a similar fashion to Heise's theoretical framework, Park et al. (2025) quantitatively analyse risk factors on different levels (individual, interpersonal, neighbourhood, and national). Park et al. (2025) present two important findings, namely that 1) "gender inequality was significantly associated with positive attitudes toward wife abuse" (p. 14), and that 2) "higher levels of democracy were associated with lower odds of positive attitudes toward wife abuse. In countries with greater democratic practices, the odds of positive attitudes toward wife abuse were significantly lower" (Park et al., 2025, p. 14). This is similar to Fulu and Miedema's (2015) findings which reflect that transnational women's human rights discourse and international structures' promotion of democracy are notable features of globalisation and that these global ideologies – often associated with positive progress and promotion of gender equality – effect women's experience of violence.

Thus, understanding GBV as a social problem is an essential insight because it helps identify crucial factors of the phenomenon and provides knowledge on how and why women are disproportionately exposed to violence. Then, the (re)definition and understanding of violence against women as a social problem embedded in overlapping structures has implications for how the problem is addressed.

1.2.3 Addressing the Issue of Violence Against Women

The third and last insight we highlight from the literature is how the problem of violence is addressed and problematised by feminist activists and how the discourses and frames challenge policies, practices, attitudes, and norms. So, combining the ideas of international human rights – or a human rights framework – and the global phenomenon of GBV, feminist scholars have discussed problematisation and framing in different cultural contexts and whether the human rights framework for addressing violence against women works in contexts other than the West. The literature presents various ways in which feminist activists

have framed the issue of GBV, including frames of *family preservation*, *gender inequality*, and *human rights violation* as well as concerns with local and cultural resonance (Berns, 2001; Bush; 1992; Ferraro, 1996; Han & Chun, 2014; Heo, 2010; Heo & Rakowski, 2014).

Here, the notion of the 'social life of human rights' is interesting. The study of human rights extends beyond legal definitions and concepts and explores how rights are practiced, challenged, and embedded in daily life (Short, 2023). From a feminist perspective, and in relation to women's rights issues such as GBV, Collins et al. (2010) explain that the social life of rights "unfolds through complex negotiations" which "occur between the global discourses of human rights and the many creative, inventive and local engagements with them grounded in specific, lived struggles" (Collins et al., 2010, p. 303). As such, international norms are locally translated by activists who seek to challenge the status quo.

In relation to translation of international standards to national contexts and socio-political shifts, Collins et al. (2010) also discuss strategic engagement with human rights advocacy and how social movements and activist groups can "capitalize on the circumstances present in a given socio-political moment in order to advance the cause of gender equality" (p. 313). Thereby, domestic activists can amplify women's rights and strategically advocate for sociopolitical change by framing the issue as well as the movement's demands in ways which cater to the current landscape and has local resonance. For instance, Bush (1992) outlines the respective strategies of feminists in the United States and India for addressing violence against women. The movement in the U.S. linked violence against women to a patriarchal ideology, and the movement in India linked it to the Indian family systems – both movements were able to redefine domestic violence as a public issue and influence policy reform by using strategic framing and connecting the issue of GBV to other social issues (Bush, 1992). So, this insight of how feminists address the issue of GBV is essential as it demonstrates how feminists utilise different frameworks, including human rights, to address GBV as a human rights violation. It also provides crucial knowledge on why and how the problematisations vary depending on different contexts and dynamics.

In sum, violence against women has been studied for decades and remains a widespread phenomenon in today's globalised world. Feminist scholars worldwide have presented various contexts, understandings, problematisations, framings, and etiologies of violence, all crucial for understanding GBV as a social problem rooted in oppressive power structures and gender discrimination. Having demonstrated the international dimension of the problem of violence against women, this section has set the stage for further reviewing

literature on the issue in national contexts. Interestingly, South Korea is one example of a developed nation which still experiences GBV and has been studied increasingly.

1.3 South Korea: Society, Women, and Violence

South Korea is the national context for our study on violence against women, and this section will thus review how the global phenomenon of GBV is generally understood in the local Korean context in the literature, especially regarding historical, social, and cultural developments. The existing scholarly literature on violence against women in Korea has received increasing attention in recent years, and it includes topics such as the feminist struggle to redefine GBV as a social issue, the influence of Confucianism, and various social issues related to VAW (Glodev et al., 2023; Han & Chun, 2014; Heo, 2010; Heo & Rakowski, 2014; Jung, 2003; Jung, 2024; Jung & Moon, 2024; Ozaki & Otis, 2017; Postmus & Hahn, 2007; Roh & Kim, 2025; Song & Kim, 2022). From the academic literature exploring issues of GBV, women, and human rights in South Korea, we want to highlight three prevalent topics, namely *the Korean women's rights movement and violence against women*, *social and cultural norms and gender (in)equality*, and *antifeminism and misogyny*.

1.3.1 The Korean Women's Rights Movement and Violence Against Women

The first prominent topic is the Korean women's rights movement, where scholars often study the development of the movement and its framing strategies, including framing of GBV, as well as the movement's impact on (domestic violence) legislation (Han & Chun, 2014; Heo, 2010; Heo & Rakowski, 2014; Jung, 2003; Jung & Moon, 2024; Lee, 2026; Postmus & Hahn, 2007). As pointed out by various scholars, the global anti-violence movement presents VAW as a social problem, though the specific frames used by local/domestic movements may vary depending on cultural contexts (Heo, 2010; Jung, 2003; Postmus & Hahn, 2007).

Jung (2003) explores how the issue of sexual violence became a central concern for the Korean women's movement amidst Korea's social, economic, and political transformation. Jung (2003) explains that the Korean women's rights movement was greatly influenced by the rapid economic growth and industrialisation led by the state, as the women's movement emerged in the middle of other social issues such as national liberation, modernisation, democratisation, and reunification with North Korea – during this time of the transformation of Korean society, women were "forced women to sacrifice themselves for the purpose of national development" (p. 264). Moreover, Jung (2003) argues that second wave

feminism in the 1980s took a different form in Korea than in Western countries: “the Korean women's movement rejected separation from the broader political struggle and identified itself as a part of the Democracy movement” (p. 266); contrarily, in the West, feminists created an autonomous, gender-specific movement. However, the Korean women’s rights movement’s connection to the broader political struggle was severed in the 1990s as it sought separatism because “it began to recognise that women's interests and gender equality could only be effectively achieved by women’s autonomous and united organisational efforts” (Jung, 2003, p. 267). Still, even though the movement was able to promote the idea that the personal is political, Jung (2003) states that the movement faces obstacles in changing sociocultural norms and attitudes due to deep-rooted Confucianism:

> Despite changes associated with industrialisation and modernisation in Korea, a fundamental change in social norms seems not to have occurred in Korea. Traditional Confucian ideology is still retained as the predominant one regulating the female body and sexuality, and is used as the justification for women’s inferior position in Korea (p. 275).

So, even though economic development and international norms have caused changes in Korean society, it still embraces Confucianism and a patriarchal social structure. Jung (2003) points out that this development is similar to other non-Western countries where feminist anti-violence movements “have been influenced by fundamental changes in the regime of the state or political turmoil and other social movements” (p. 280).

In a similar vein, Heo (2010) explores the framing strategy of the feminist movement against domestic violence in South Korea as well as how Korean feminists’ struggles shaped and were shaped by social relations and discourses. In relation to the applicability of a human rights framework by Korean feminists, Heo (2010) points out the different opportunities for feminists in the West and in South Korea in problematising and framing the issue of women’s human rights and violence against women: where feminist movements in the West were able to establish *gender* and *women’s rights* as central ideas, the women’s movement in South Korea faced limitations in conceptualising gender in this regard because the movement was “developed in association with other social protest movements in the context of colonialism, national division (North/South Korea), underdevelopment, and military authoritarianism” (p. 226). Thereby, it was difficult to separate the women’s movement from other social problems – this reflects the findings of the study conducted by Jung (2003) as well. Moreover, Heo & Rakowski (2014) expand on this and explain that:

> It wasn't until Korea sought rights for the "comfort women" (forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese during World War II) that Korean feminists were introduced to the transnational "women's rights as human rights" framework at the UN conference on human rights held in Vienna in 1993 (Yoon Louie, 1995). (p. 591)

Still, the Korean women's rights movement was concerned that the human rights framework would not be understood or embraced by decision-makers, journalists, or the public (Heo & Rakowski, 2014). Further, Korean feminists highlight that the concept of *women's* human rights poses a cultural issue as it is publicly and politically resisted on grounds of it prioritising the individual over the family (Heo & Rakowski, 2014, p. 591). Then, upon realising the difference between the feminist perspective and the public's understanding of women's human rights and GBV, the Korean women's movement sought to bridge this gap and redefine GBV as a social problem. Given the sociocultural circumstances, the movement chose a frame with cultural resonance in order to gain public and government support, namely the "preservation of the family" frame because this resonated with Korean family values (Heo, 2010). By doing so, the movement successfully influenced policy and got two legislative Acts passed in 1997 (i.e., the *Prevention of Domestic Violence and Victim Protection Act* and the *Special Act on the Punishment of Domestic Violence Crimes*), and the issue of domestic violence gained cultural and legal legitimacy; however, the framing also "led to government responses that were made in the narrow context of the societal value of preserving families" (Heo, 2010, p. 230). As such, by choosing a culturally resonant frame, the Korean movement faced obstacles in the realisation and implementation of their demands, which were not implemented with the original feminist intention. Because of this, the sociocultural attitude toward GBV was not sufficiently challenged.

Similarly, in a comparative analysis of domestic violence policies in the United States and South Korea, Postmus and Hahn (2007) point to Korean feminists' struggle to change "the goal of family preservation to that of the protection of human rights of each family member, including women's individual human rights" (p. 777). This study found that family preservation discourse presented as a "strong barrier to preventing domestic violence and protecting victims, because the family preservation principle has often been regarded as the first priority over protecting women's human rights" (Postmus & Hahn, 2007, p. 777). This aligns with the collectivism and prioritisation of the family over the individual – and over women and victims of domestic violence by extension.

Thus, the Korean women's rights movement changed their strategy to incorporate the principle of women's human rights in their advocacy. Here, Heo and Rakowski (2014)

expand on the movement's need for a new culturally resonant frame to redefine the issue and challenge attitudes toward GBV. Specifically, feminist activists revived the anti-violence movement in the early 2000s and re-inserted the issue into social and political discourses at different levels of society. The movement now embraced the human rights framework and adapted it so it would resonate with the Korean public; the feminists did so by establishing *women's rights* as *human rights* as a central idea and familiarised the concept of human rights by linking GBV to familiar discourses. The result was the *peace* frame, which "links peace in the nation, the community, and the home" (Heo & Rakowski, 2014, p. 589). According to Heo and Rakowski (2014) such framing was more familiar because it built on an already existing peace movement (centred on reunification with North Korea and peace following militarism), thus replacing discourse of *family preservation* with discourses of a *harmonious family*. The Korean feminists' use of discursive themes related to *peace* "intersects with that of the anti-violence and pro-democracy movements and the concept of women's rights" (Heo & Rakowski, 2014, p. 590), and importantly, the *peace* frame is not associated with Confucianism and a patriarchal social structure as seen in the *family preservation* frame.

The influence and development of the Korean women's rights movement is an interesting topic when exploring issues of human rights and GBV in Korea because it stresses the struggle of addressing VAW while adhering to sociocultural values and beliefs. The cultural resonance of such framing (i.e., the *peace* and *preservation of the family* frames) from the Korean women's rights movement further connects to the values and beliefs deeply ingrained in Korean society.

1.3.2 Social and Cultural Norms and Gender (In)Equality

The second topic that we wish to highlight from the literature on human rights and GBV in Korea is that of social and cultural norms and gender (in)equality. Scholars present the social, political, and historical contexts to explain how and why attitudes, practices, and ideologies are embedded in Korean society (Glodev et al., 2023; Han & Chun, 2014; Heo & Rakowski, 2014; Kim, 2019; Lee, 2005; Ozaki & Otis, 2017; Postmus & Hahn, 2007; Song & Kim, 2022). Specifically, when exploring a human rights issue such as GBV, the literature emphasises the influence of *Confucian ideology* and *globalisation* on Korean society and women's lived experiences.

The most prominent factor mentioned by scholars is that of Confucianism and patriarchal norms. Ozaki and Otis (2017) explain the Confucian ideology as "a system of philosophical teachings originating in China, which focuses on the importance of

relationships between people and their roles in society" (p. 1080). More specifically, in Korea where culture is based on Confucianism, Song and Kim (2022) argue that Confucianism is "a social behavior code rather than a religion" and that values derived from this code include "filial piety, respect for elders, parents' devotion to children, emphasis on education, promoting family values, society in order, work ethics, and social discipline" (p. 148). Song and Kim (2022) further argue that Confucianism is a source of gender inequality – a statement which is heavily agreed-upon in the literature. For example, Postmus and Hahn (2007) point out the gender unequal relations in the family system, arguing that "the traditional patriarchal values stemming from Confucianism provide a structure for the Korean family and the expected roles of members in the family" (p. 771). Here, the "ideal" and harmonious family includes "a father, who should be the head of the family, and his extended family" which also means that without a father, "the family cannot function as a complete unit in society, leaving the wife and children stigmatized" (Postmus and Hahn, 2007, p. 773). Moreover, due to their subordinate status, women are blamed for destroying the family – and the Korean family value system, which prioritises preserving the family over the individual, creates an environment where mothers who remove themselves and their kids from violent situations and leave their abusive husbands are not ideologically recognised as a "legitimate family" in Korea (Postmus and Hahn, 2007, p. 773).

This is the same argument presented by Lee (2005), who states that the Korean family value system clearly establishes and differentiates traditional roles of husband and wife, further establishing "an extreme form of patriarchy" (Lee, 2005, p. 315). As such, the husband's role is historically that of the family's leader while the wife's role is restricted to the domestic sphere as a mother and housekeeper. Lee (2005) further argues that the Confucian ideology "has played a primary role, greatly influencing the degradation of women's status in Korean society" and that patriarchy and male-centeredness derived from Confucian moral principles has "contributed to the socialization of women as dependent" on men throughout their lifetime, i.e., on fathers, husbands, and sons (p. 316). Korean women are thus socialised to accept their subordinate status in society. In connecting Confucianism with the perpetration and justification of GBV, Lee (2005) notes that women in Korea have historically been victims of violence, and that this "has been justified by Korean culture, which is deeply rooted in the perspective of male domination" (p. 317), thus teaching men that they have authority over women and authority to inflict violent punishments on their wives. In addition to this, Postmus and Hahn (2007) note that "it has been difficult to advocate for laws against wife rape because of the strong ideology that the husband has the

right to require sexual contact with his wife as part of the natural elements of marriage itself" (p. 773) – notably, marital rape is still not criminalised in legislation in Korea today, only in case law (Baker McKenzie, 2021; Park, 2024).

Building on this notion of Confucianism and patriarchy justifying violence, Ozaki and Otis (2017) conduct a quantitative analysis comparing male university students in East Asian and Western European contexts in order to explore the relationship between gender inequality, patriarchal cultural norms, and perpetration of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). The study builds on existing research, including an empirical study on Korea linking patriarchal norms and perpetration of IPV. In their analysis, Ozaki and Otis (2017) found that, including Koreans, "Asian male students scored significantly higher on all beliefs/attitudes indicative of patriarchal norms and also reported significantly more severe physical assault and severe psychological aggression than their European counterparts" (p. 1094). The authors posit that these scores are influenced by the Confucian ideology often prevalent in (East) Asian cultures as well as strong norms of male superiority. Specifically, Ozaki and Otis (2017) argue that "the strong patriarchal cultural context is likely a relevant factor in forming individual beliefs and attitudes that support violence against women among Asian men" (p. 1094), i.e., Confucianism and patriarchal traditions justify GBV.

Yet, the potential transformation of society and norms is also a site of national pride, as pointed out by Heo and Rakowski (2014): on the one hand, conservative nationalism defends patriarchal traditions and Confucianism, but on the other hand, Korea wants to be more "advanced" than other developed nations, partly explained by the society's hyper-competitiveness. As such, appealing to familiarity and ensuring cultural resonance works both for and against the goals of the Korean feminists, but importantly, international norms, pressure from the international community, and a fear of "embarrassment" on the international stage can pressure legislators and policymakers into reforming laws and enacting anti-GBV legislation (Heo & Rakowski, 2014, p. 593). Then, regarding Korean nationalism and its intersection with gender, patriarchy, and sexuality, Kim (2019) argues that "the patriarchal structure of Korean society was reinforced by a gendered construction of the Korean nation. Nationalism and gender are mutually constitutive" (p. 24). The Korean hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal traditions embody "powerful masculine authoritarianism in the form of Confucian ideology" (Kim, 2019, p. 23) and enable and perpetrate structural violence, including violence against women. Thus, gender is a fundamental organising principle which has naturalised male dominance in Korean society and of political institutions, and patriarchal structures reinforce violence and oppression.

Another important factor to consider in exploration of Korean society and women's lived experiences (of violence and gender inequality) is that of globalisation. Glodev et al. (2023) explore the Korean cultural expansion in the context of an increasing global popularity of Korean culture (also known as the 'Korean Wave' or *Hallyu*) and a cultural homogenisation of the West and the East. Glodev et al. (2023) argue that, with the rise of globalisation, South Korean presidents have relied on Western cultural standards while upholding traditional Confucian beliefs. Thus, regarding the global popularity, Glodev et al. (2023) concluded that:

> It enhances Korea's image as a prosperous country and displays Korea's present-day culture to the entire global community. The Korean Wave demonstrates to the Asian countries that South Korea is no longer a third world country or a periphery, but a progressive urbanized country with the features of a capitalist society, that influences the cultures of other states and gives them an example to follow in its footsteps. (p. 118)

This demonstrates the hyper-competitiveness of Korean society and underscores the country's capability as a global actor, though the prosperous image masks the strong prevalence of gender inequality and patriarchal traditions which conflict with international standards. Similarly, Song and Kim (2022), who examine the effects of globalisation on Korean society, also note an enhancement of the country's national image due to the Korean Wave: whereas the image was previously associated with poverty, division, and the Korean War, today's image reflects a "trendy, affluent society" (p. 152). Further, regarding the impact of globalisation and social transformation, Song and Kim (2022) note that a significant social change in Korean society is the low birthrate, which can partly be explained by the global promotion of gender equality and which conflicts with the Confucian ideology and prioritisation of the collective and the family over the individual.

Thus, due to the influence of globalisation and Western culture, some scholars argue Korean society is moving away from Confucianism and collectivism toward individualism and materialism (Song & Kim, 2022), whereas others argue that the traditional Confucian values persist (Han & Chan, 2014; Lee, 2026; Roh & Kim, 2025). For instance, Roh and Kim's (2025) study revealed that young men "continue to hold patriarchal views, particularly the belief that men should be breadwinners and bear greater financial responsibility for marriage" (p. 11). This was also found in a study by Han and Chun (2014), who underscore that child-rearing is still seen as women's "most important job" (p. 246) and that, despite political rhetoric of gender equality and the success of state feminism, such progress is not

reflected in women's lived experiences as "there have been limited gains for women when it comes to the socioeconomic sphere" (p. 246). Similarly, Lee (2026) found that despite institutional progress for women's rights and gender equality, young Korean women "continued to experience significant gender-based discrimination" in the 2010s, and "adequate measures had not been taken to address the prevalence of misogynistic crimes and digital sexual assaults" (p. 180). Such findings also align with the points made by Ozaki and Otis (2017) where patriarchal structures and Confucian values are associated with male dominance and a higher prevalence of gender-based violence. As such, the Confucian moral principles persist today as forms of discriminatory and patriarchal traditions which abuse and oppress women, even though the Korean society may be moving towards individualism and materialism. The influence of Confucianism and globalisation on Korean society is therefore an important topic because it demonstrates the historical persistence of patriarchy in Korean society as well as the process of social change and resistance hereto. Such resistance and Confucian moral principles have also reinvigorated the antifeminist movement amidst societal transformation and calls for more gender equality.

1.3.3 Antifeminism and Misogyny

The third topic to consider when studying violence against women in Korea is antifeminism. Within this, scholars call attention to the development, prevalence, and significance of the antifeminist movement and its impact on different levels of Korean society and women's lives, and the topic has gained increasing attention in recent years as antifeminism and resistance to gender equality has become more widespread, both nationally and globally (Jeong & Lee, 2018; Jung, 2024; Jung and Moon, 2024; Kim, 2021b; Roh & Kim, 2025).

Jung and Moon (2024) state that antifeminist discourse in Korean society aligns with the global trend of growing conservatism, and that it is influenced by "the rise of a neoliberal, digitally advanced society" (p. 220). Specifically, the Moon administration (2017–2022) became a catalyst for the rise of the alt-right, as the administration's (pro-feminist) rhetoric was seen as "imposing reverse discrimination on men" (Jung & Moon, 2024, p. 220). Based on perceived victimhood and reverse discrimination, young men "began to view women's rights groups, especially those advocating for political quotas and affirmative action, as promoting female supremacy" (Jung & Moon, 2024, p. 220). Such beliefs are evident in the Korean manosphere (referred to as *Ilbe*), a conservative online community wherein men express their frustrations toward women and feminism by spreading misogynistic discourse,

ridiculing women, and constructing male-centric narratives; the community has been active since the 2010s (Jung & Moon, 2024; Roh & Kim, 2025).

The prevalence of antifeminism in Korea can also be linked to widespread internet usage. In fact, Korea's technology and internet usage surpasses that of other nations, as it is ranked first among 39 countries (Kim et al., 2024), and while antifeminism has existed online in the manosphere since the 2010s, it has since expanded from the digital realm to other settings, both mainstream online platforms and offline settings (Jung, 2024; Jung & Moon, 2024). Jung and Moon (2024) present the differences in antifeminism in Korea as seen in the early 2010s and early 2020s:

> The difference between the mid-2010s and early 2020s in terms of antifeminist backlash may be that backlash has evolved from online misogyny that circulated predominantly in a male-centered manosphere to everyday backlash that is present in large-scale online portals and digital communities as well as social interactions in offline settings. (p. 235)

Evidently, antifeminism has become part of a broader discourse which is increasingly disseminated and reproduced at multiple levels of society. This difference and significant shift toward conservatism is especially apparent in the 2022 presidential election. As the alt-right rose and young Korean men became increasingly dissatisfied with the Moon administration and its (seemingly) feminist stance, populist politicians capitalised on this growing movement. In an exploration of the development of gender conflicts, misogyny, and antifeminist discourse in South Korea, Jung (2024) examines the 2022 presidential election campaign. During this campaign, the People Power Party (PPP) – with Yoon Suk Yeol as their candidate – were able to successfully channel the frustrations of and rally support from young Korean men by reproducing antifeminist discourse and capitalising on the young men's anger towards the Moon administration (p. 6). Upon winning the election, President Yoon Suk Yeol solidified his antifeminist position; policy outcomes influenced by the Yoon administration's conservative antifeminist stance include "budget cuts for initiatives related to violence prevention and victim support, and reductions in funding for various youth assistance programs and employment support programs" (Jung, 2024, p. 7). This development shows how antifeminism increasingly intertwines with politics and how it has material effects on women's lives, and as Jung (2024) argues, it "illustrates how anti-feminist ideas, once relegated to online subcultures, or perceived as fringe beliefs, have now permeated mainstream discourse and significantly influenced the political landscape in Korea" (p. 6).

Notably, scholars also call attention to how the widespread usage of the internet and the rise of antifeminist sentiments in Korean society have introduced and exacerbated a specific type of gender-based violence, namely technology-facilitated sexual violence (TFSV). TFSV can be defined as:

> a broad scope of digital sexual harassment that includes online sexual harassment, gender- and sexuality-based harassment, cyberstalking, image-based sexual exploitation, and coercion of a victim into an unwanted sexual act in the online space. (Powell & Henry, 2019, as cited in Kim et al. 2024)

Such acts incur similar damage as sexual violence and have severe impacts on victims and their physical and mental health. TFSV is a more recent phenomenon and inquiry in academic literature, meaning studies on the prevalence are somewhat limited, but it has been discussed in a Korean context by scholars such as Jung (2024) and Kim et al. (2024) who stress the urgency of the problem. Jung (2024) notes that the issue of digital sexual violence "has become a significant concern for women in South Korea" (p. 4) in this digital era, especially in context of the rise of antifeminism. In fact, as of 2019, 43% of women living in Seoul, Korea reported having experienced TFSV (Kim et al., 2024, p. 3079), and the impacts on victims' personal and social lives included isolation, shame, stigmatisation, anxiety, depression, fear of recurring cyber exposure, and suicidality. Thus, the intertwining of antifeminism and technology has facilitated the emergence of new types of gender-based violence, which have grave consequences.

Lastly, the literature points toward a 'post-feminist' era in Korea, which has several implications for Korean women and society. Regarding the women's rights movement, Jung and Moon (2024) observe an apparent "period of transition or abeyance" which could be a result of internal conflicts or uncertainties following the peak of feminism in the mid- to late 2010s (p. 235). Moreover, the discourse produced by antifeminists is gaining legitimacy, and according to Roh and Kim (2025), young men portray a reality in which men and women are equals – specifically, the authors state that "young men argued that today's women had not faced historical oppression or sacrifice and had grown up with equal opportunities" (p. 11), rejecting feminist concerns of structural and historical inequality. In a similar vein, and like Glodev et al. (2023), Kim (2021b) mentions a neoliberal (re)structuring of Korean society, wherein "the post-feminist myth regarding women's power and agency and the neoliberal discourse about individual success and happiness have left unaddressed the structural issues of gendered precariousness and the specific frustration experienced by young Korean women" (pp. 79–80). Thereby, according to the literature, women's lived experiences are not

reflected or considered adequately at all levels of society. Thus, the topic of antifeminism and misogyny is crucial when studying issues of women's rights and GBV in Korea as it illustrates how discourse and society are dialectic and how antifeminist sentiments directly impact women's lives and puts them at further risk of violence.

In sum, the literature demonstrates how South Korea presents a unique context as a neo-liberal society wherein gender unequal power relations and violence against women persist in forms of Confucian values and patriarchal traditions, despite a national image of prosperity and development. Scholars in this field have presented factors and contexts which have influenced the transformation of Korean society as well as beliefs, values, and attitudes within it, all of which are important for understanding the issue of gender-based violence in a Korean context.

Based on this literature review of various relevant areas related to violence against women, our study will build on the existing knowledge to expand the academic literature on GBV in Asian contexts. We advance the literature on gender-based violence in Korea by examining how governmental and (local and international) civil society actors discursively construct the issue of GBV and what these discourses reveal about Korean women's realities. To do this, we approach the problem with an intersectional, critical lens.

2. Theory

In this section, we present our theoretical framework which guides our analysis. As the research aim is to uncover how gender-based violence (GBV) is discursively constructed at different levels of society over time, we approach the problem through a feminist intersectional lens; this informs our understanding of the systems and structures which enable and reinforce oppression of and violence against women.

For this project, we embrace feminist and intersectional praxis. According to Arinder (2020), feminism focuses on uncovering people's interaction within systems and offers potential solutions to eliminate oppressive systems and structures, meaning the theory focuses on discovering oppressive structures against people in different settings and outlining potential ways of disrupting such structures. Feminism as a theory does not only focus on women; however, this study will primarily focus on women as they are disproportionately affected by violence (European Commission, n.d.). The core concepts of feminism are sex, gender, race, discrimination, equality, difference, and choice, which are all apparent in systems and structures of power and oppression. Challenging the status quo and facilitating change is thus done by disrupting these systems (Arinder, 2020).

Feminism is also at the heart of intersectional theory. Intersectionality analyses and theorises gender by centering power struggles. The theory looks at inequalities, marginalisations, and dominations which are produced by the interaction between different categories of inequalities, i.e., gender, race, class, age, sexuality, ethnicity, etc. (Kantola & Lombardo, 2017, p. 330). Scholars on intersectionality are thus attentive to power and difference as they look beyond women/gender and further take into account how gender interacts with other categories.

The term 'intersectionality' was coined by Crenshaw (1991), and it considers domination, oppression, marginalisation, stigmatisation, and privileges. Crenshaw (1991) discusses 'structural intersectionality,' i.e., structures of oppression and social power and their consequences. When analysing violence against women, then, the focus is on society and how power relations are enacted. Crenshaw (1991) discusses sources of intersectional disempowerment of women of colour, and while the article primarily focuses on the intersection between race and gender in relation to violence against women of colour, she notes that other factors such as sexuality and class are also significant; the intersection of race and gender is thus highlighted to demonstrate how multiple aspects of identity shape (women's) lives (p. 1245). Specifically, Crenshaw (1991) states that "intersectionality might be more broadly useful as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics" (p. 1296). Thereby, it is a meaningful theory when exploring issues of women, gender, and human rights, which is also apparent in Crenshaw's (1991) assertion that:

> In the context of violence against women, this elision of difference in identity politics is problematic, fundamentally because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class. (p. 1242)

Further, Crenshaw (1991) argues that culture also contributes to the suppression of domestic violence and that traditional gendered stereotypes contribute to the social construction of violence (p. 1257, p. 1267).

Building on Crenshaw's ideas, other scholars have presented relevant points and areas of focus related to intersectionality. Holvino (2003) highlights the importance of revealing hidden stories at the intersection of race, gender, and class to bring forth a different narrative, one which gets overshadowed by the dominant (male-centered) narrative. It is necessary to bring to the forefront the stories and experiences of women – and specifically of women with different ethnicities, sexualities, ages, etc. – in order to effectively address the oppression and hardships they face in their daily lives rather than reproducing the dominant male experience

of life (Holvino, 2003, p. 261). Moreover, it is important to identify and consider the impacts that are produced by intersections of identity. In other words, it is necessary to study the socially constructed world through intersections of identity to understand how these influence experiences of discrimination, stigmatisation, and privileges (Holvino, 2003, p. 262). Holvino (2003) also emphasises the link between internal and external processes, emphasising the dynamics and mechanisms which facilitate social change, and which are influenced by (the broader) social context (p. 263). When studying violence against women in national contexts, this can thus be understood as exploring the link between the local and the global norms.

Similarly, Waylen et al. (2013) point out a growing strand of research which focuses on broader societal contexts and patterns. With regard to a gendered and socially constructed world, an intersectional approach is necessary when examining how (institutional) structures, systems, and historical legacies impact society at large, for instance how they shape family, polity, society, and knowledge production (Waylen et al., 2013, pp. 13–14). Such focus areas are necessary when exploring issues of women's human rights and the understanding of violence against women at different levels of (inter)national society.

Echoing the sentiments of other scholars, Lépinard (2014) calls attention to the issue of heterogeneity of 'women' as a group, emphasising the need to properly examine various factors which affect women and their experiences differently; while women as a group are marginalised in society, women as individuals face different struggles, and some are more disadvantaged than others. Lépinard (2014) also argues that it is important to consider who is viewed as the 'legitimate bearer' of the intersectional interest, i.e., how intersectional interests are performed and produced as well as whose voices "matter" in these processes (p. 880).

As such, an intersectional approach is useful when exploring issues of women's human rights and gender. With regards to gender-based violence in particular, an intersectional lens is attentive to different intersections which affect women's experiences and opportunities, for instance class and age; women may be economically dependent on their (abusive) partners, and young women may face more sexual harassment in the workplace. Overall, for this project, we draw on feminist intersectionality to examine the structures and conditions which oppress women. Intersectionality examines areas where domination over a marginalised group occurs, which in our case is the violence faced by Korean women in their daily lives.

Additionally, maintaining or disrupting the systems and structures of power and oppression is for instance done through discursive practices. As noted by Waylen et al.

(2013), “social power structures knowledge so that the way we define and value knowledge reinforces patterns of class, race, and gender inequality” (p. 8), meaning that discourse influences social issues and vice versa, and women and their realities are thus shaped by the language around them. Moreover, Waylen et al. (2013) highlight a need for more intersectional research on discourse, ideas, and structures, exploring for instance how discourse and ideas about gender and sexuality influence structures of violence (p. 18). Therefore, it is meaningful to compare how different societal and governmental actors construct the issue of GBV in Korea with regards to gender (inequality) and power.

Finally, based on the reviewed literature and our theory of feminist intersectionality, we hope to contribute to the academic discussion on GBV and its discursive implications in Asian contexts. Thus, we want to advance the literature by studying how the Korean government and (inter)national civil society discursively construct the issue of gender-based violence. Specifically, our study will explore how the discourses (re)produced by these actors relate to women’s rights and attitudes towards women as well as how this makes sense within Korean culture.

3. Methods and Methodology

In this section, we introduce our methods of research. First, we present our ontological and epistemological assumptions, followed by an explanation of our research design, including context for selection of our data time period. Then, we introduce our data and the collection thereof. Afterwards, there will be a walkthrough of the method of choice for the analysis, and how we will be doing the analysis. Finally, we end the section by describing our limitations that this project faced.

3.1 Philosophy of Science

Our methodology for this study is critical and qualitative, and we are further guided by interpretivism and social constructivism. Due to our interest in examining hidden power dynamics, discrimination, and stigmatisation, it is relevant to ascribe the critical axiology framework, which guides the examination of these in the discourses (Fui et al., 2011, p. 129). Additionally, we view gender as socially constructed, i.e., we do not view gender as binary but rather as something constructed through social interactions. With this, we will examine power dynamics and discrimination against women in Korea concerning gender-based violence (GBV), which is communicated through different streams of discourse over time.

Our ontological standpoint is social constructivism, which means that we view reality as being constructed by social interactions, which are continuously unfolding and everchanging (Bryman, 2016, p. 29). The way the world is understood and perceived is generally founded by social artefacts, which are "historically situated interchanges among people" (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004, p. 184). In relation to this, our epistemological standpoint is interpretivism, which aids us in analysing and focusing on the social world (Bryman, 2016, p. 27). The aim of the analysis is to examine the discourse in the social world as related to GBV in Korea, where the social context is of importance, since we view reality as being socially constructed. Furthermore, interpretivism builds on the understanding that human actions and values exist due to social interactions, which leads to different meanings for different individuals. In other words, people in Korea view GBV differently from each other, and therefore the discourse surrounding the issue changes depending on the social interactions it is communicated in.

3.2 Research Design

Our research design includes a critical discourse analysis of reports by the Korean government and (inter)national civil society organisations. Here, we will analyse the discourses that are constructed throughout the text to explore how they construct the issue of GBV. Therefore, we view discourse as a specific way of communicating about and understanding the social nature, gender identity, and the world (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002, p. 1). This means that we view discourse as a particular way of talking about and understanding a specific topic, which in our thesis is gender-based violence and attitudes towards women, human rights, and gender.

The analysis is divided into different two time periods based on different presidencies in Korea to examine potential changes in the discourse on the issue of GBV, both by the government and by the civil society. We are guided by the feminist theory of intersectionality, which informs our understanding of intersecting oppressions as well as structures and systems of power. The first time period (or presidency) is from 2017–2022, where Moon Jae In was president. Moon presented himself and was viewed by the public as the "feminist president," with him attending protests and enacting policies to help women in the workplace and in high positions; however, some argue that he did not do enough for women when in office (Jung, 2024, p. 6). With Moon's focus on gender and equality, he lost support from specifically younger men, who turned to his opponent Yoon Suk Yeol, who is the second president we include in this thesis. Yoon Suk Yeol served his presidency from

2022–2025, and he was removed from office and imprisoned for life due to declaring martial law (Ewe & Kwon, 2026). His views and policies on women and gender issues are also interesting to dissect, with him implementing and promising to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF), as he does not believe that structural discrimination against women exists (Jung, 2024, p. 7). With these two different presidencies and their seemingly vastly different views on gender and women, we expect to find differences in the explicit and implicit meaning systems and discourses surrounding the issue of GBV, though we may also find similarities.

3.3 Data Collection

To find data that provides insight into the discourse surrounding GBV in Korea, we decided on five reports. Specifically, we were looking for reports that contained information on and discussion about GBV in Korea, and to select our data, we set up specific criteria during our data collection process, namely 1) time periods, 2) reputable sources, 3) local and international, and 4) language. First, the texts had to represent the selected timeframe(s), which is from 2017 to 2025. Second, the reports had to be from reputable sources, and this ties in with the third criteria that we needed texts from both the Korean government as well as national and international civil society; all levels are important to connect the local to the global. Fourth, the texts had to be published in English as we do not know Korean, and with the time constraint it would not be feasible for this project to get the reports professionally translated. Fifth and final, texts had to be publicly accessible. We discovered five reports that fit these criteria:

1. Republic of Korea's National Review for Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (2019).
2. National Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA)+25 <Republic of Korea> : NGO Parallel Report.
3. Republic of Korea's National Review for Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (2024).
4. 2025 Gauge of Rage: An Analysis of Femicide committed by Male Partners and by Men Unknown to the Victim, Based on Media Reports.
5. South Korea: Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee; 139th session, 9 October – 3 November 2023.

For more details, see *Table 1* below.

Table 1. Data

	Time Period A 2017–2022	**Time Period B 2022–2025**
Local government	Republic of Korea's National Review for Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (2019)	Republic of Korea's National Review for Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (2024)
Local Civil Society	National Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA)+25 <Republic of Korea> : NGO Parallel Report	2025 Gauge of Rage: An Analysis of Femicide committed by Male Partners and by Men Unknown to the Victim, Based on Media Reports
International Civil Society	South Korea: Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee; 139th session, 9 October – 3 November 2023.	

Our first two texts are from the Republic of Korea (ROK) Government, one from each time period. Both texts are national reports on the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (BPfA), one from 2019 (representing the Moon administration from 2017–2022) and one from 2024 (representing the Yoon administration from 2022–2025). These reports were published by the UN on the Asia and the Pacific Gender Portal in connection with the 25th and 30th anniversaries of the BPfA; the reports will therefore be referred to as *BPfA+25* and *BPfA+30* to refer to the 2019 and 2024 reports, respectively. The BPfA is an agenda for empowering women everywhere; it was signed in 1995 by 189 governments during the Fourth World Conference on Women hosted by the United Nations, and it was at the time, the largest commitment to improving gender equality and living standards for women and girls worldwide (Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2015, p. 3).

The national reports are thus published to showcase progress made and future plans for improvement, and women's rights and GBV are large focus areas; therefore, we have chosen these two reports as our data representing the local government as they are written around the same source material but during different times, allowing for examining differences and similarities in the discourse over time. The reports were written by different ministries in Korea; BPfA+25 was written by 16 ministries, including the Ministry of Gender

Equality and Family, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health and Welfare, and Ministry of Employment and Labor, among others (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 5), and BPfA+30 was written by 20 ministries, including the same ministries (BPfA+30, 2024, p. 1). Both reports were written by the ROK Government and then send out to get reviewed by other experts and civil society, with BPfA+25 being "revised and complemented after consulting civil society organizations and experts" (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 5) and BPfA+30 was "further modified and refined through inputs gathered from civil society organizations and relevant experts" (BPfA+30, 2024, p. 1). However, these reports are still considered to be governmental, since the origin of the reports stem from governmental representatives working in collaboration with each other.

Our third and fourth texts represent the national civil society, i.e., reports written by Korean NGOs. To represent the first time period, 2017–2022, we have chosen a report which parallels the ROK Government's national BPfA+25 report. Written by 15 Korean women's rights organisations in 2019, the *National Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA)+25 <Republic of Korea> NGO Parallel Report* (hereafter *Parallel Report*) contains the local civil society's response to the ROK Government's BPfA+25 report, i.e., the report shows how Korean CSOs view the government's implementation and adaption of the Beijing Declaration. The participating organisations were coordinated by Korea Women's Associations United (KWAU) and supported by Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (Parallel Report, 2019). In the report, the organisations propose areas of positive movement, non-movement, and areas of negative movement, and they also propose ideas of change to direct dilemmas or issues. The Parallel Report is posted on the website of The NGO Committee on the Status of Women, NY, which is a coalition of civil society organisations and individuals who advocate for equality of women and girls; it is a body under the United Nation, where they monitor the implementation and evolution of BPfA (NGO CSW, n.d.). With this report paralleling the government's national report, there may be differences or similarities in the discourse as related to women and GBV.

To represent the second time period, 2022–2025, we have chosen a report written by a single Korean women's rights organisation, as there unfortunately was not a parallel report available for the BPfA+30 anniversary. Instead, we selected a report titled *2025 Gauge of Rage: An Analysis of Femicide committed by Male Intimate Partners and by Men Unknown to the Victim, Based on Media Reports* (hereafter *2025 Gauge of Rage*), which was written by Korea Women's Hot-Line (KWHL), one of the participating organisations of the 2019

Parallel Report. KWHL was founded in 1983 and was the first organisation in Korean society to offer counselling and shelter to survivors of GBV (Korea Women's Hot-Line, n.d.). The 2025 Gauge of Rage report was originally published both in Korean and English, and it examines femicides in Korea in 2025, though it was published in March 2026 to honour the victims during International Women's Day. Still, we have selected this report to represent our second time period as it contains information about GBV during 2025 and earlier, and it discusses the Yoon administration.

For our fifth and final text representing the international civil society, we have selected a report titled *South Korea: Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee; 139th session, 9 October – 3 November 2023* (hereafter *Submission to the UNHRC*) by Amnesty International from 2023. This report contains concerns from Amnesty about gender equality, GBV, and discrimination in Korea on the basis of gender and sexual orientation, and more (Amnesty International, 2023). The Submission to the UNHRC was selected to include and present the general international perspective, though the timeframe criteria was treated differently for this text as we only include one text from the international civil society and thus did not want to bind it to one time period and not another; it was, however, published after the shift in administrations from Moon to Yoon, so it may reflect developments and differences. Additionally, we are not interested in the potential changes in discourse from the international community, but we are interested in potential changes within the country itself. Thereby, the Submission to the UNHRC is included to show how the international community views the issue of GBV in Korea, and if it differs from the national/local discourse(s) and views.

With these above-mentioned texts as our data, we will examine how the discourse surrounding GBV is presented by the local government, local civil society, and international community. Furthermore, we will explore if there are potential changes over time under two different presidencies/time periods, as sociocultural trends and attitudes may change and influence different levels of society, including the general public and the government. Thus, our data consists of five reports, equalling about 300 pages in total.

3.4. Data Analysis

3.4.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

To analyse our data material, we will be doing a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which aims to show the linguistic-discursive scope of the social and cultural elements and processes of change in the later modernity (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002, p. 61). We will analyse texts to

further understand and examine what the language says about the social and cultural phenomena, while also incorporating analysis of power struggles, hidden power relations, and other power elements – this analysis will also concern gender, as informed by our intersectional theory. Furthermore, CDA scholars view discourses as a form of social practice that both *constitutes* the social world around, while being *constituted* by other social principles (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002, p. 61). Viewing discourse like this entails that discourse not only (re)shapes social structures, but also reflexes them, which means it is necessary to examine what influences a discourse and what the given discourse says about the world in which it exists. CDA scholars have different definitions of the 'critical' or power element, though the most general idea is that CDA seeks to expose the role of discursive practices that maintain the social world, including the ones that involve unequal power relations (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002, p. 63) This makes the principle of CDA interesting for our data analysis, since we want to examine what the different organisations and institutions say about GBV in Korea and how the discourses potentially change during different time periods under different presidential administrations, as well as how these discourses influence and are influenced by society and structures.

For our project, we have chosen to take inspiration from Karen Lee Ashcraft and Dennis K. Mumby's (2004) method of feminist communicology of organisations, meaning we analyse our data through a critical discourse analysis inspired by Ashcraft and Mumby's (2004) premises. Combining CDA as a method with theoretical premises from Ashcraft and Mumby will guide our analysis to understand the discourses surrounding GBV in Korea and the evolution during two different presidencies.

3.4.2 Ashcraft & Mumby: Feminist Communicology

Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) present a new way examining feminist communication in organisations by analysing the communication that happens between the members and seeing how the larger discourses in the world influences these (re)productions of gender. The aim of their research and the method is to examine the dialectical tensions between the everyday micro-level social interactions and macro-level institutional processes of transformation and reproduction (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p. 115). This means that the method seeks to examine and understand the tensions between the mundane members of an organisation and the institutional processes that (re)produce discourse tendencies.

Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) view gender as a complex and ongoing contradiction that unfolds at the core of communication, with it also being situated, embodied, and enacted in a

field of discursive and nondiscursive relations of power, accommodation, and resistance (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p. 115). This means that gender gets (re)produced through communicative interactions, which are changing and ongoing through different contexts and influenced by different discourses. When they examine discourse, the authors are interested in the subject which performs the discourse (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p. 116). Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) describe their position on discourse as being "interested in discourse not simply as text or symbolism but as invoked by social actors who engage with a real—albeit socially constructed—world" (p. 116), meaning that people as social actors are at the helm of the discourse and it is necessary to examine how they invoke, (re)produce, and interact with a real world, even though it is socially constructed.

Communication, according to Ashcraft and Mumby (2004), is "the dynamic, situated, embodied, and contested process of creating systems of gendered meanings and identities by invoking, articulating, and/or transforming available discourses" (p. 116). Furthermore, they argue that communication is never without context or disembodied, meaning that context and embodiment define and shape the communication.

Next, we introduce the theoretical premises as outlined by Ashcraft and Mumby. Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) set up six premises to examine feminist communicology, with the first theoretical premise being the assumption that *gendered subjectivity* is unstable and constructed through communicative practices (p. 117). With *gendered subjectivity*, they argue that subjectivity is both decentred and agentic, with them seeing "no contradiction between viewing people both as decentered selves who are the product of multiple discourses and as agents who engage the social world in an active and meaningful way" (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p. 119). This means that the researcher should view people as being a product of discourse and as agents who (re)produce discourses in the world around them at the same time. People or subjects produce, reproduce, and represent themselves depending on the context of the situation they are in at present, as they appropriate, accommodate, and resist available discourses to them (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p. 119).

The second theoretical premise is about the *dialectic of power and resistance*, where Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) approach power and resistance with attention to dynamic power relations in contradictory and disconnected ways throughout mundane communication (p. 120). In this way, discourses are not inherently resistant or dominant but are interconnected in convoluted struggles within various groups of people, meaning that a discourse cannot be objectively dominant, but is used in a domineering way through communication. Furthermore, this approach to power and resistance "draws attention to irony, ambiguity, and

contradiction in gender-work relations and examines them through the connections between micro-level communicative processes and macro-level discursive, political, and economic forces" (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p. 120).

The third theoretical premise by Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) relates to *historical context* and the understanding of the changes and historical understanding sheds light on the radical ruptures and contradictions that organisations can experience (p. 121). For the authors, it is also important to view bigger historical and institutional discourses as work for a specific agent, which are not necessarily individual social actors, but institutions, groups, social movements, etc. (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, pp. 121–122). By examining history as a discourse, Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) argue that it becomes possible to "understand how dominant groups and institutions mobilize partial meaning systems by drawing in and articulating together existing cultural discourses" (p. 121). Ashcraft and Mumby's (2004) goal is to:

> engage in "the engendering of historical narrative" (Benhabib, 1992, p. 212), displacing the idea of history as uniform, homogeneous, and linear, in order to examine how the relationship among gender, identity, and work is subject to shifting and frequently contradictory cultural, political, and economic forces. (pp. 122-223).

The fourth theoretical premise presented by Ashcraft and Mumby is the *dialectic of discourse and materiality*, wherein they aim to highlight how organisational discourse has an effect in constructing the "material" world, and with that they not only refer to the macro-level, i.e. economy and politics, but also to micro-level principles such as body and sexuality (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p. 123). To do this, they have constructed three links that combine communication and materiality, with the first being that "the material world serves up impetus from communication" (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p. 175), meaning that communication responds to the material world. Secondly, "communication takes the material world as its material" (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p. 175), which means that communication and discursive practices are inscribed on the interaction and presentation, e.g., the uniform of an airline pilot. Thirdly, Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) argue that "communication generates material conditions beyond embodied subjectivities" (pp. 175–176), meaning that communication cannot just reproduce material conditions, but can also invent it from new.

Ashcraft and Mumby's (2004) fifth theoretical premise on *dialectic of gender relations* argues that "social construction of gender identity is a dialectical, ongoing, and highly interdependent and interactive process, and we take seriously the idea that masculine and feminine gendered identities are coconstructed" (p. 125). This means that they view

gender as being co-constructed through communication, discourse, and (re)produced through contexts that are ongoing and interactive. In other words, gender identity is constantly being constructed through everyday practices and discourses that compete and intersect and are appropriated and engaged but also through macro-level discourse, i.e., political and economic discourses (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, pp. 125–126).

For their sixth and final premise, Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) present *feminist ethic*, which they describe in the following way:

> We need to ask, what or whose interests and values are served through the communicative construction of certain (gendered) realities and identities, and in what ways does this construction process limit agentic possibilities for certain groups? Thus we see communication as unethical to the degree that it engages in "discursive closure" (Deetz, 1992a) and systematically limits the participation of groups and individuals in the construction of a meaningful social world in which their particular interests and values are represented. (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, pp. 129–130)

Thus, *feminist ethics* looks to unpack the relationships between power and truth in an effort to reveal the moral and ethical consequences of benefitting specific power-knowledge relations over others (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, pp. 127–128). Finally, for our critical discourse analysis, we do not treat Ashcraft and Mumby's premises as a method of analysis; rather, we take inspiration and incorporate their ideas in our own method, which we will describe in the section below.

3.4.3 Method of Analysis

To conduct our critical discourse analysis with inspiration from Ashcraft and Mumby, we have created a method consisting of six steps: 1) read the texts, 2) code the texts, 3) analyse the texts, 4) present discourses from the texts, 5) critique discourses from the texts, 6) compare and discuss findings from all texts. First, we read our chosen data to get a full picture of the discourses. Second, we code the reports in detail as inspired by the topics from our literature review and as related to GBV and discrimination, gender/family, power, (women's) human rights, and intersections, as these are all themes which emerge when exploring the issue of violence against women. Third, we analyse the texts in detail and identify salient discourses. Fourth, we present the salient discourses from each text and show how these are (re)produced by the different actors, with regard to the cultural and socio-historical contexts. Fifth, we critique the (intersecting) discourses to discuss what kind of reality the discourses, when taken together, reconstitute for women and their experiences

related to GBV. Finally, in our 6th step, we compare the texts, their discourses, and the discourses' impacts within and across the two time periods and the different actors, i.e., we compare how the government discursively constructs GBV in Korea in both time periods; how the local civil society constructs GBV in both time periods; how the international civil society constructs GBV; and differences and similarities between the government and civil society. In doing so, we highlight the discourse at different levels of society and how these may differ and/or change over time and depending on the actor. Importantly, we present the texts in chronological order of publication to show potential changes over time, i.e., our order of analysis is as follows: 1) BPfA+25, 2) Parallel Report, 3) Submission to the UNHRC, 4) BPfA+30, and 5) 2025 Gauge of Rage.

In analysing our data, we will approach gender as something complex, ongoing, and contradicting which gets unfolded during communication, meaning that we approach gender as something that happens through communication in different contexts. We are also aware of the social actors who invoke, create, or reproduce the discourses in a socially constructed setting; therefore, it is important for us to understand the social, cultural, and historical context surrounding the issue of GBV in Korea, but also the setting in which the texts are created as well as the context of their response and messages. This is an inspiration taken from Ashcraft and Mumby regarding their stances on gender, discourse, and historical context.

3.5 Limitations

For this project, we are limited by a time and space constraint. Because of this, we had to limit the scope of our research which impacted our amount of data and local/global contexts. We chose to explore an international problem through one national context, but with this project, we believe our findings can be used to compare it to other national settings, ultimately enriching the literature. Another limitation that goes with time and data relates to accessibility; we have chosen reports in English since we do not speak Korean and do not have time to get Korean texts properly and adequately translated. Therefore, we rely on official translations from the organisations or institutions themselves to get the truest reflection of their discourse on the topic of GBV.

4. Analysis

In this section, we explore the different ways in which the issue of gender-based violence (GBV) is discursively constructed and represented in Korea. For this analysis, we have identified several discourses associated with GBV in Korean society as related to socio-historical contexts, which constitute specific realities for Korean women. The discourses emerge in Korean society through the different texts, and in the following sections we present the discourses and texts in chronological order to show the social, cultural, and political developments and how the prevalent discourses have changed over time.

4.1 Time Period A (2017–2022): ROK Government

The first text analysed was *BPfA+25* written by the Government representing the time period of the Moon administration, i.e., 2017–2022. After conducting our analysis, four salient discourses emerged: 1) Women are victims, 2) Men are perpetrators, 3) Migrants, rural women, and maintaining the binary, and 4) Childbirth and birthrates. The sections below present and critique these discourses.

4.1.1 Women Are Victims

The first discourse which emerged in the text was that *women are victims*. This discourse shows that the government acknowledges that women are victims of violence, but it does not acknowledge that the violence is structural, i.e., rooted in gender-unequal structures.

We found that they describe women as the victims of GBV since the report directly asks what the government has done to strengthen the prevention of violence against women. The government responded with this:

> With the occurrence of various types of violence against women such as dating violence and digital sex crime, the government strengthened policies for the protection and support of the victims of such violence against women by enacting the Framework Act on the Prevention of Violence against Women of 2018 (enforced on December 25, 2019). (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 6)

The Framework Act on the Prevention of Violence against Women of 2018 is an act enforced after the occurrence of dating violence and sex crimes. The ROK Government visibly produces the discourse that women are victims, especially of crimes that are sexual in nature. Sexual crimes and harassment are the two most prominent types of GBV that the ROK Government focuses their policies on.

The ROK Government implemented laws and educational schemes that have reiterated that women are discriminated against, unequal in society, and victims of the dominant part of the society, whilst men are portrayed as perpetrators and criminals. Some examples of these are: “Furthermore, "Sexual Violence Investigation Team" was expanded to launch "Investigation Team for Women and Children" in 251 police stations nationwide, not only actively arresting perpetrators but also protecting and supporting victims” (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 8). Here the ROK Government shows that they view women as victims, and that they have made specific legislative implementations to protect them against violence, specifically sexual violence. Additionally, they included them in the title of the team’s name to further construct this discourse to the public, perhaps in an attempt to show their stance on the issue or to further represent women as victims.

The ROK Government present different initiatives to prevent discrimination and sexual harassment against women and girls, many of which focus on the workplace and education institutions. There are multiple examples of this in the report, for instance: “mandatory to review the performance of education on the prevention of sexual violence, sex trafficking, and domestic violence” (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 12). Here the ROK Government implemented special education in the workspace, to create a more gender equal and safe environment for women. In the educational sector, the ROK Government “advised universities to open courses (February, 2018) in the liberal arts about gender equality and to include education on sexual violence prevention in the “First Year University Students’ Orientation Guideline.”” (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 26). These special enforcements and implementation (re)produce that women are victims of violence, furthering the notion that there needs to be specialised training and laws for the public (men), to combat the violence that women experience.

4.1.2 Men Are Perpetrators

The second discourse which emerged in the text is that *men are perpetrators*. While using gender-neutral language (“perpetrators” rather than “men”), the discourse that the government produces is that of men being the perpetrators of violence against women. This means that the ROK Government writes and portrays indirectly that men are the ones committing gender-based violence, with women as victims of these crimes.

During the time of this report, and a few years later, there was an antifeminist discourse brewing within the younger male demographic of the population, who believed that they were being “reverse” discriminated against (Kim, 2022a). Still, the Moon administration

did, however, make implementations in society and legislation, which reflect some potentially antifeminist views.

The ROK Government under Moon's administration prioritised different actions to address violence against women, with one entailing to work with men and boys, but they are not mentioned once in that entire section. The government writes: "To prevent violence against women in the form of sexual harassment and sexual violence, the government works to improve violence prevention education in public institutions as a national task" (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 53). The UN formulated questions and prioritisation points for the government to select from, where the ROK Government chose working with men and boys, but they have not used any form of gendered language in this selection. Therefore, the ROK Government implicitly (re)produces the discourse that men are the perpetrators, since they do not write anything differently.

When questioned by the UN in the report, what strategies the government has used in the past five years to prevent violence against women, the ROK Government did not select the option mentioning implementing strategies on working with men and boys (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 54). So, the government has prioritised actions, which according to them include working with men and boys, but they have not worked with them to create strategies to prevent the violence from occurring. This shows signs of a carefully crafted language, due to the political power aspect in re-elections and not alienating half the population, since the voters give the president and the administration their power.

When addressing the individual committing gender-based violence, the ROK Government uses the gender neural term of 'perpetrator,' but the underlying language and context reproduce the discourse that *men* are the perpetrators. One example of this is seen when the report explains the punishment that perpetrators of GBV in positions of power are to receive:

> To ensure strict punishment and prevent the recurrence of sexual violence with the waves of #MeToo movement, the government improved relevant laws and policies: increased legal penalties for sexual assault or harassment by the abuse of occupational hierarchy or authority, strengthened punishment standards for sexual harassment perpetrated by public officials (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 6)

Here they directly tie the perpetrators to the #MeToo movement, which primarily encompasses male perpetrators, which further represents men as perpetrators of gender-based violence against women.

4.1.3 Childbirth and Birthrates

The third discourse which emerged in the text was that *women are not having enough children*. The ROK Government writes a lot about women's health during pregnancy and about their implementations to aid the financial expenses that come with having children. Furthermore, they include women with different intersections, but with a primary focus on their reproductive capabilities and encouragements to have more children.

The ROK Government presents the issue of low birth rates as a social problem: "With emerging social problems such as low fertility, aging, and women's career interruption, the demand for work-family conciliation has been increasing in the Republic of Korea." (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 15). With this notion, they are implicitly putting the blame on women for having children later in life and having low fertility, which puts a negative view on women and their agency to live their lives as they please. Furthermore, this (re)produces discourse that women should put an emphasis on having children earlier in life, before they get "too old", and their fertility drops.

On the issue of the financial burden of pregnancy and childcare, the ROK Government presents this incentive: "In addition, the government revised law to significantly reduce National Health Insurance premiums for the period of childcare leave, with a view to alleviating financial burden associated with pregnancy and childbirth." (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 15). Here, the government is silently and implicitly urging and hoping that women will have more children by alleviating the financial burden that comes with pregnancy and childcare. This reflects the idea that women should prioritise pregnancy and children; however, mothers also need to return to the job market after maternity leave so that they can fulfil their roles as breadwinners too.

Furthermore, the ROK Government has implemented different policies and incentives for women with other intersections such as women with disabilities. However, they never define which disabilities they are referring to, and the lack of definition implies that all disabled people fit into one box, which they do not. Disabilities come in many forms, both physical and mental, and can vary in severity. Disabilities are only somewhat briefly defined when addressing the punishment of sex crimes committed against children and youth: "These include forced harassment, rape, manslaughter, and murder crimes at children and youth aged under 13 and children and youth with physical or mental disabilities" (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 12). When the disabilities affect children, a definition is somewhat used, but when discussing disabled women, they write this:

> Since 2012, KRW 1 million per fetus has been given to women with disabilities who gave birth or had a miscarriage/stillbirth at or after 4 months of pregnancy. The aim is to reduce financial burden and foster birth-friendly culture for women with disabilities. To address various needs and concerns, the government has also provided a wide range of support for women with disabilities since 2006, including medical and welfare services, various information, counseling and case management, capacity building and training programs, self-help meetings, and introduction to community resources. (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 19)

Here they pay immediate attention to women with disabilities that have either given birth or experienced a miscarriage/stillbirth to aid them financially. Their attention to pregnant women with disabilities further proves the government's attention towards the low birthrates, without explicitly writing it into the report. Furthermore, this (re)produces the above-mentioned discourse that women need to have more children. The focus from the government is not to help educate women with disabilities on the best possible reproductive direction for their future, but on reducing the financial burden and to "foster a birth-friendly" culture. Studies have found that women are at a higher risk of intimate partner violence when they are pregnant (Wallace et al., 2021, p.1); therefore, one could argue that it would be more beneficial for the ROK Government to address and prevent future GBV in society.

4.1.3 Migrants, Rural Women, and Maintaining the Binary

The fourth and final discourse which emerged in the discourse was that the ROK Government *maintains the binary view on women*, specifically by not addressing other sexualities and gender identities. This means that the ROK Government actively selected to address issues pertaining to migrants, rural and women with disabilities, who also deserve legislative attention, but this maintains the binary discourse.

The UN explicitly put women with diverse sexual orientation and gender identities as an option for the countries to focus on, however, the ROK Government selected different intersections. During this time in Korea, there was a growing resistance towards the LGBTQIA+ community from the conservative party (Roth, 2019). This social context may have influenced the policies enacted by President Moon and the government.

The ROK Government focuses on the intersections of migrant and rural women and women with disabilities, with their focus being on education, living conditions and their abilities to thrive during pregnancy and after maternity leave. This is what the ROK Government presents on rural women:

> the Ministry is expanding its support to alleviate labour burden on female farmers by improving child-rearing environment in rural areas, by developing and distributing female-friendly agricultural equipment, and by executing hard tasks for female workers. (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 18)

The expanding support for "child-rearing environment" and distributing "female-friendly agricultural equipment" (re)produces yet again the earlier mentioned discourse that women need to have more children, and that they are victims to their circumstances.

The attention to migrant women is shown in two forms, which enhances two of the above-mentioned discourse. The ROK Government highlights that migrant women are disproportionately affected by violence:

> Migrant women are more vulnerable to violence due to economic status, and unstable visa status and are less likely to respond to violence properly. The government strives to provide support for these migrant women's independence and protect their human rights through medical and legal assistance, treatment/recovery programs, vocational training and housing provision. (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 21)

Here they explicitly mention that migrants are more vulnerable to violence due to their financial status, unstable residency, and less knowledge about their rights and responses to violence. This view of migrant women being vulnerable further enables the (re)production of women being victims of GBV.

Furthermore, the ROK Government once again (re)produces their discourse on women needing to have more children:

> The MOJ supports legitimate international marriage and assists marriage immigrants and their children to settle in Korea. Since 1 April 2014, the MOJ reinforced visa screening standards of marriage immigrants for a stable social integration. The new standards include a foreign spouse's proficiency in Korean language, a Korean spouse's substantive ability to support a family, and a limitation on number of invitations sent for a foreign spouse's visa. (BPfA+25, p. 20)

Here they quite blatantly show their discourse on women and childbirth by supporting and assisting children of marriage immigrants to settle down in Korea. This could be seen as an open invitation to women from neighbouring countries to get a better life in Korea, as long as they have children with Korean men to boost the low birthrate in society. Even though the government spent much attention on implementing better legislation to protect and aid women living in rural areas or women who are migrants, they failed to improve legislation

for women with diverse sexual orientations or gender identities, which also maintains the binary understanding of gender identities.

4.1.5 Critique

This discourse of women being victims and someone that needs to be protected reconstitutes a reality for women where they are viewed as such by society. Thus, violence against women is naturalised, and this discourse makes it harder for women to be viewed and present themselves in a different way, since the discourse gets reproduced and legitimised at different levels of society. Furthermore, identities and gender get produced in the moment through communication with different discourse in specific contexts, which then in turn can shape how women perceive themselves and therefore they might see themselves as victims (in advance) and someone who needs extra protection.

The same harmful discourse is presented when the ROK Government repeatedly insinuates that women need to have more children, which is not directly mentioned in the report, though it is heavily implied. This creates a reality wherein the important thing about women is their ability to have children, therefore tying women's value to reproduction and thus prioritising their right to pregnancy over other rights. This view was also found by Han and Chun (2014), when they discovered in a study that women's "most important job" is childrearing (p. 246). Furthermore, the naturalisation of violence against women can be seen in the lack of acknowledgment of martial rape, which has not been criminalised or prioritised as a concern.

In sum, the discourses in this report constitute a reality in which women need protection and are victims of individual crimes. This means that GBV is not acknowledged as a structural problem but rather as isolated incidents. Yet, men are portrayed as the primary perpetrators of said violence, a representation which typically indicates an imbalance in power. As such, women are victims of violence, but the motivations behind the violence are not perceived to be gendered. Moreover, the discourses maintain the binary, as the report does not mention different sexualities or gender identities, thereby assuming women to be cisgender and heterosexual. Binion (1995) argued that if principles of justice are not legalised then they are prone to national control or abuse and subjected to moral outrage by the opposition (p. 513). This argument reiterates the importance of legalisation and laws to prevent abuse of power and power-imbalances, whilst creating a space that is open to perpetrators committing crimes and discrimination to vulnerable people.

Another discourse that is (re)produced in this report is that women are not having enough children, and that financial aid is used as an incentive for women to birth more children. Pregnancy is portrayed as the most important healthcare area when it comes to women for the government, however this is also the time where women are at a higher risk of intimate partner homicide (Wallace et al., 2021, p. 762). Thus, the ROK Government is more focused on adding human rights education and helping victims of violence after a crime, rather than challenging the status quo in society.

4.2 Time Period A (2017–2022): Korean Civil Society

The second text analysed was the *Parallel Report* written by Korean NGOs representing the time period of the Moon administration, i.e., 2017–2022. After conducting our analysis, three salient discourses emerged: 1) Gender-based violence is a structural problem, 2) Women are victims, and 3) Women as reproductive tools. The following sections present and critique these discourses.

4.2.1 Gender-Based Violence Is a Structural Problem

The first discourse which emerged in the text was that *GBV is a structural problem* in society. This means that GBV is rooted in gender-unequal power structures, which enable and reinforce violence and discrimination against women. The report argues that the ROK Government failed to address the urgency and origins of GBV:

> The Framework Act on the Prevention of Violence against Women was enacted without addressing important contents, which include the fact that violence against women is caused by gender-based unequal power relationship and gender discriminatory culture, the obligated responsibilities of the government and other related parties for eradicating combating violence against women, and the judicial procedures from gender perspective. (Parallel Report, 2019, p. 9)

Here, the authors discursively construct GBV as a structural problem within society, highlighting the unequal power relations and gender discriminatory culture. Furthermore, they critique the ROK Government for failing to change and address those issues before enacting policies to protect women.

Moreover, organisations argue that the ROK Government fails to recognise and understand the concept of gender-based violence: “Intimate partner violence against women is still considered as an individual issue or a conflict between equally powered man and woman” (Parallel Report, 2019, p. 9). Here, the text challenges the status quo and emphasises

both the structural root of the problem as well as the unequal power relations and gender discriminatory culture.

Another example of this discourse is seen when the organisations behind the report express their view of the ROK Government, which they believe "lacks political willingness and effort to clarify the gender equality as major vision and goal of national policies and integrate and reflect the gender perspectives to establishment and implementation" (Parallel Report, 2019, p. 2). This further reproduces the discourse that gender-based violence is a structural problem and shows the unwillingness that the civil society perceives from the ROK Government, in order to change the unequal power relationships and gender discriminatory culture. Moreover, it shows a rift between how the authors and the ROK Government view the issue and have different ideas of change. This text, as mentioned in the data collection section, is written as a report for the UN on the foundation of the government's BPfA+25 report, therefore this text is very critical of the government and their implementations.

Furthermore, they argue that the gender-discriminatory social structure still exists due to the government, but also due to the people implementing and practicing the laws and systems:

> The gender-discriminatory social structure still prevalent in daily lives and lack of gender sensitivity in legislative and administrative officers implementing policies act as the main reason why gender equality and human rights of women related law and system are not effectively practiced on the ground. (Parallel Report, 2019, p. 2)

This shows that the organisations are not just critiquing the legislative branch of the state, but also in the executive and judicial branches that are on the ground and performing the gender-discriminatory actions against the vulnerable female population. This demonstrates that GBV is a structural problem which persists in multiple different areas of the society.

The organisations behind the report furthermore show the structural problem of GBV in their critique of the judicial system. Specifically, the ability of defendants of sexual violence to use the victim's prior sexual history in court and the defendant's ability to falsely accuse or file defamation lawsuits against a victim, which would halt the court proceedings on the sexual assault violation. They recommended:

> When false accusation claims and defamation claims are filed against victims of sexual violence, their legal rights as sexual victims (the right to request private proceedings, the right to company with a person in confidential relationship, and etc.) should be applied mutatis mutandis. Moreover, aggravated punishment should be applied to defendants who file such claims. The court should assess justification

> defenses for fact statement defamation (an accusation that constantly threatens the rights of sexual violence victims) with a more lenient standard. (Parallel Report, 2019, p. 7)

They advocate for stronger protection of the victims during court proceeding, as well as keeping the victims' special legal rights as sexual assault victims' and transferring them to potential defamation suits filed by the defendant. These falsely accusation suits or defamations suits, could function as a scaring tactic to have the victim recant their accusation or completely drop the court proceeding. This ability could be a power imbalance between victim and defendant/perpetrator, since the victim bears the burden for proof of the sexual crime, whilst the defendant/perpetrator has already shown a tendency to violence and intimidation. Furthermore, this power imbalance and court setting (re)produces the discourse that gender-based violence is a structural problem within society, built on unequal power relations and gender discriminatory culture.

4.2.2 Women Are Victims

The second discourse that emerged from the report is that *women are victims*. Here, the discourse means that women are victims of violence perpetrated by men, and that the motivations behind the violence are gendered.

This discourse that women are victims can be seen with the fact that "legal standard continues to require the presence of strong violence, threat, and the victim's resistance in order to prove that an adult woman was raped, and the burden of proof still lies on the rape victim" (Parallel Report, 2019, p. 6). Here, the authors of the report directly mention the "adult woman" as the victim, i.e., they gender the problem. Moreover, the burden of proof lies on the victim to prove that they were assaulted, which should be a job for the police, which falls under the executive branch of the governing state. This notion that the victim needs to bear the burden of proof further shows the structural issue of GBV.

Furthermore, the organisations behind the report highlight that the laws on domestic violence especially aim to "'maintain and restore the family'" (Parallel Report, 2019, p. 9), which emphasises the tendency of the Korean society to view families as the foundation of society and to view domestic violence as a family issue, wherein the family is prioritised over the individual. This idea furthers the (re)produced discourse that women are victims in the form of domestic violence, since they usually are the ones to report the crime. This does not mean that men cannot be victims of domestic abuse, but that women are disproportionately affected due to gendered power imbalances.

Another example of the produced discourse that women are victims is presented here when discussing statistical evidence on female homicides:

> There is no government's crime statistics on female killings and violence crimes committed by intimate male partners. According to the analysis of the Korea Women's Hot Line on incidents reported in the media, 561 women were killed or threatened to be killed for 3 years (2015~2017) by their intimate male partners. At least, one woman on 2 days is victimized by intimate partner violence. (Parallel Report, 2019, p. 8)

Here, the authors of the report show another focus area of gender-based violence which has been overlooked, which is the issue of femicide. Evidently, the ROK Government has not prioritised collecting statistical data on female killings and violence committed by intimate male partners. Furthermore, they explicitly state that one woman is being victimised every two days and 561 women had been killed or threatened over a three-year period. This emphasises the fact that women and their lives are at risk, but that this is not an area of concern. Again, the structural roots and the gendered motivation behind the violence are ignored, which sustain the systems which enable and reinforce gender-based violence.

4.2.3 Women As Reproductive Tools

The third emerging discourse from the report is that *women are viewed as reproductive tools by the government*. The authors behind the report present how the ROK Government views women as individuals who need to have more children and actively encourages them to pursue motherhood.

This discourse of women as reproductive tools is found when the organisations criticise how the government views women and their bodies:

> the perspectives of the government which views women's body as a reproductive tool in the designing and implementation of policies in term of pregnancy and abortion […] Thus, policies for women have been centered around the protection of motherhood and support for childbirth under the guise of policies for women. (Parallel Report, 2019, p. 4).

This discourse of women's bodies being viewed as reproductive tools is something that the organisations would want to inform their audience about to help them understand the bigger issue at stake. Since the perceived reality that some women could find themselves in, could be taking away agency from them, if they viewed themselves as a reproductive tool to society. Furthermore, this plays into the idea and discourse surrounding importance that is

placed on family from the government, presented by the organisations in this report, where women are reduced to childrearing and family life, even after a domestic violence incident.

The authors behind the report (re)produce women as victims of unequal power relations and gender discriminatory culture, which allows for gender-based violence to persist, with an example being abortion:

> While the government has been implementing policies to prevent the termination of pregnancy and intensify the relevant penalties, it has been neglecting the health and reproductive rights of women who terminate the pregnancy. It is also confirmed through the fact that there is no mention of the anti-abortion law in the national report for the review. […] (CEDAW) (2011, 2018) on decriminalization of abortion, the government has not been taking any measures on the issue (Parallel Report, 2019, p. 4).

The abortion law stated in 2019 that abortions were illegal, unless conception was due to rape, risk to the life of the pregnant person, and other health reasons, which further removes agency from the pregnant individual and shows an unequal power relation between the individual and the ROK Government. The abortion law and lack thereof, further (re)produces the discourse that women are reproductive tools and that the government views them as such. Moreover, this also (re)produces the structural issue of unequal power imbalances between the genders in society, by removing agency from women over their childbearing wants, while men are left out of the equation.

Furthermore, according to the authors of the report, the ROK Government has focused on preventing women's "career interruptions", instead of solving gender discrimination. They write that the "government is still focusing on preventing "career interruptions" caused by pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing and promoting reemployment". This furthers the (re)production of women as reproductive tools in society and the notion that they should return to work in a fashionable manner so as to not experience too many "career interruptions." This importance from the ROK Government further (re)produces the structural issues that is GBV and gender discrimination, since women are expected to have children and return to the labour force.

4.2.4 Critique

These discourses are, however, not without any critique. The organisations continue to (re)produce a more binary view on gender and women, which (re)produces gender stereotypes within the binary gender perspective, furthering women's perceived realities to

centre childbirth for example. They do include a recommendation for “improvement in legal gender change for transgender women; improvement in sex-reassignment surgery” (Parallel Report, 2019, p. 6), though this comes in a section on healthcare improvements for women. This is the only mention of transgender women in the entire report, even though these women face GBV and other forms of discrimination due to their gender and intersections of gender identity. This lack of attention to transgender women surrounding the issue of gender-based violence (re)produces a harmful notion that transgender women are not women. This discourse can make it harder for transgender women to be recognised as women by society and the justice system, for example would they be viewed and treated differently as victims of sexual crimes? This maintains the binary discourse, which can also be seen in the discourse surrounding women as reproductive tools. This view of women and their bodies further reflects Lee’s (2005) argument that the Korean value system (re)produces “an extreme form of patriarchy” (p. 315).

Contrarily, the authors of the report have a section on the discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity where they argue for more protection in legislation of lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women (LBTI), to end discriminatory laws against them and for the government to prevent hate crimes (Parallel Report, 2019, p. 16). The notion that the authors are (re)producing is of protection, ending of discrimination and hate crimes towards women who have different sexualities or gender identities than the binary. Though the intent of the report is to help and protect women who have different sexual orientations or gender identity, it is however linguistically presented and produces a different view that compares women to each other. Thus, the authors (re)produce once again that women are victims, but also the binary understanding of gender. This can create a reality for women where, based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, they are viewed as less of a woman, simply due to the binary view that is being pushed by the ROK Government and social norms. Thus, once more, women and individuals who present themselves as women, are being tied to mother- and victimhood, by gender-based violence or hate crimes.

Something interesting that the authors of the report do not mention is marital rape, which has a complicated legal history in Korea. Marital rape is not criminalised in the legislation, though some cases has been ruled as marital rape, but those are few and far between (Baker Mackenzie, 2021, p. 7). This lack of attention to this issue further shows the importance of family and the power imbalance between husband/man and wife/woman, further showing the structural issue of GBV and the unequal power relationships. This creates a reality for women wherein violence, in this case rape, perpetrated in the home is not seen as

violence but as a private conflict, and wherein male dominance is naturalised, like Postmus and Hahn (2007) argued. The lack of attention and advocacy for the complete criminalisation of marital rape in this report removes agency from women and further ties her role back into the (re)production of the discourse on motherhood and childrearing, while putting the political focus on family and family values.

These different discourses come together to create a reality that influences women and their lives. The organisations behind the Parallel Report are attempting to change the status quo on GBV and how women are being viewed in Korea, by society and the government by expressing that GBV is a structural issue, which is shown through unequal power relationships and discriminatory culture. Still, the discourses reconstitute a reality wherein women are victims and need protection from the government. These discourses tell women that they are in need of more legislative protection against men/perpetrators, who are unequal to them in their power-based relationships. Overall, the discourses attempt to change the trajectory of future political policies to prevent GBV and discrimination from happening by recommending actions that the ROK Government can take. Furthermore, they reproduce views on the topic of women with different sexual orientations and gender identities, who still need to be protected more explicitly in national legislation, which could potentially be seen as a weakness.

4.3 International Civil Society

The third text analysed was *Submission to UNHRC* written by Amnesty International (here after Amnesty). Although not representing a specific time period, it was published in the beginning of Yoon's presidential term. After conducting our analysis, one salient discourse emerged, namely that gender-based violence is rooted in the patriarchy. The following sections present and critique this discourse.

4.3.1 GBV Is Rooted in the Patriarchy

The discourse that emerged from the report is that *GBV is rooted in the patriarchy*, meaning that the violence that women face by the hands of men stem from the male dominated system of power and domination. The ROK Government and social culture is built on the patriarchy, where men hold the primary power, political power and social privilege in society.

Amnesty highlights that it is "concerned with regard to violations committed in the context of discrimination, sexual orientation and gender identity, gender equality, violence against women, right to life" (Submission to the UNHRC, 2023, p. 2). This concern is

presented throughout the report on different areas pertaining to human rights and shows an international perspective of the observed discriminations in Korea. Furthermore, this report was written and submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Committee in 2023, one year after President Yoon Suk Yeol's electoral win. He made several remarks on women:

> During his election campaign in early 2021, President Yoon Suk-yeol made several anti-feminist remarks; blamed the country's low birthrate on feminism; and claimed that systemic gender discrimination does not exist in South Korea, despite statistical evidence suggesting that the country has a long way to go to achieve gender equality (Submission to the UNHRC, 2023, p. 3)

In this quote from the report, Amnesty makes their opinion clear on President Yoon; they present how he spreads incorrect information, rejects the structural reality, and (re)produces a dismissive discourse about gender inequality. With their addition of the statistical evidence, the report produces a discourse that GBV (thereby also discrimination) is rooted in the patriarchal system, which President Yoon leads. Due to the implementations and laws under his presidency, he further shows a tendency for patriarchal leaning policies, but more on this in the following analysis section on BPfA+30, which is during his presidency.

Amnesty additionally found a double standard, which interestingly (re)produces a contradicting discourse on behalf of the ROK Government:

> South Korea has repeatedly voted in favour of UN Human Rights Council resolutions calling for an end to discrimination and other expressions of support for such international statements of intent. However, the National Assembly has failed to enact numerous comprehensive anti-discrimination laws that have been proposed over the last 15 years. (Submission to the UNHRC, 2023, p. 3)

Korea has been internationally showing their support to end discrimination and other likewise expressions publicly to the world, all while quietly within their own country negating to comply with the international image. Publicly, the ROK Government has expressed views that support ending discrimination, while privately (re)producing an unwillingness to introduce these legislative implementations nationally. This presentation by Amnesty brings forth the double standard by the ROK Government and shines a light on the possible importance of international acclaim for the government, while not believing, understanding, or caring for the root issue within the country of Korea. Amnesty once more reproduces a discourse of the root issue of gender-based violence being the patriarchy and the people gaining power from it, like the president, politicians and other high ranked members of society. Furthermore, it highlights how important the international image is to potentially

keep the country as a tourist hot spot, whilst still keeping the power imbalance between women and men. This is also argued by Glodev et al. (2023) that the government uses "public diplomacy in promoting an attractive image of the country on the world arena" (p. 115).

Furthermore, Amnesty expresses their concern for the abolishment of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF), which was announced in 2022 as part of a reorganisation:

> Amnesty International is deeply concerned that replacing 'gender equality' with 'population, family affairs and welfare' may directly or indirectly reinforce discriminatory and long-standing stereotypes about the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society. (Submission to the UNHRC, 2023, p. 6)

This "deep concern" over the reorganisation of MOGEF highlights the importance for Amnesty that gender equality stays as part of the title to protect their accountability to ensure more implementations on gender equality for women in Korea. In English, the titled stayed the same, however in Korean it did change in 2025 from the Ministry of Women and Family to align with the English title of Gender Equality and Family (Rhee, 2025). Thus, this name-change and reorganisation shows the deep political and social rooted patriarchy, which affects how women are being treated and advocated for. During this time in Korea, there was a strong antifeminist leaning discourse, where men felt reverse discriminated against and that women had been given special treatment; however, some could argue that women were simply just gaining more agency and power, which men felt was taken away from them. Therefore, this name-change and reorganisation, probably felt like a win for conservatives and a further proof of the root issue of GBV.

Amnesty further expresses their concern for the legislation on sexual violences, such as rape:

> Amnesty International is concerned that the current definition of rape in article 297 of the Criminal Code requires proof of "means of violence or intimidation" and that the Committee's previous recommendations to specifically criminalize marital rape in legislation, rather than only in case law, have not been implemented. (Submission to the UNHRC, 2023, p. 7)

Amnesty is the first of our reports to comment on marital rape, which has been negated in both reports from 2019. This shows the importance of criminalisation from the international community. Furthermore, the lack of inclusion in the Korean reports could (re)produce a notion to some married men that they can assault their wives and it being somewhat legal, whereas the international consensus is very much for criminalisation. This notion of married

men feeling entitled to control over their wives is also presented by Lee (2005) and Postmus and Han (2007), both of which found that the Korean family value system naturalises male dominance, particularly within intimate relations. Therefore, it is important for Amnesty to highlight their concern, to show the international community that the ROK Government does not align themselves with the public image that they are displaying in the UN. Furthermore, this adds to the discourse that GBV is rooted in the patriarchy and displays the power imbalance and discrimination that takes place everywhere. This discourse allows for a continuation of violence and discrimination within the homes of private people, which proves that the patriarchy benefits all men in society and not only the ones in political power.

Moreover, they express concern over the required proof of "means of violence or intimidation", which puts the burden on women and dismisses their experiences, thus reinforcing the view that only physical violence (and proof hereof) is a crime. This negates the psychological violence that women can experience in abusive relationships and only victimises women of physical violence in the justice system.

A further concern that Amnesty expresses is over the early dismissal of The Digital Sex Crimes Task Force Team's Expert Committee:

> The Digital Sex Crimes Task Force Team's Expert Committee was officially disbanded on 15 June 2022, with two months remaining in its mandate. The disbandment came after 17 members of the task force resigned under pressure from the newly inaugurated administration of President Yoon Suk-yeol, which stated that the task force had already fulfilled its intended purpose. (Submission to the UNHRC, 2023, p. 7)

This dismissal of the task force further (re)produces the discourse of patriarchy being at root of GBV, due to President Yoon and his administration ending the task force saying that it had fulfilled its purpose. The task force's purpose was to prepare policies to respond to digital sex crimes, though the ROK Government failed to enact a "sustainable emergency response system", which led victims to be further exposed and at a constant fear of redistribution (Submission to the UNHRC, 2023, p. 7). Furthermore, the task force was established in August of 2021 and disbanded in June 2022, just three months after President Yoon's electoral win in March and one month after his inauguration on May 10th (Kim, 2022b). This further shows that the patriarchal hierarchy has a heavy foundation, and that President Yoon (re)produces implementations, policies, changes, and views that are very antifeminist and anti-protection against GBV.

Finally, Amnesty expresses their concern for women's right and access to safe abortions:

> Amnesty International is concerned that despite the decriminalization of abortion, access to safe abortions continues to be limited by a number of unnecessary legal and administrative hurdles and restrictions on access to information and services relating to abortions. (Submission to the UNHRC, 2023, p. 7)

Abortion had at this time been ruled decriminalised, but the ROK Government had not taken any action to revise the existing laws, therefore making it incredibly difficult for women to access safe abortions. Furthermore, no oral abortion medication had been approved by the Food and Drug Safety, which further confined women into having children to increase the birth rate, which President Yoon blamed on feminism. Thus, in creating more stipulations and troubles for women to get a safe abortion, the patriarchy controls and removes agency from women over their bodies and wishes for their futures. Moreover, this blame on feminism from President Yoon shows a lack of care and reliance on the patriarchy, which for some women is the real reason for the low birth rate. The (re)produced discourse that GBV is rooted in the patriarchy affects all areas of women's lives, not just during violent crimes, but also during hidden power imbalances in women's health care, and between women and men in their daily lives.

4.3.2 Critique

The reality that is constituted for women in this discourse is anchored in the patriarchal foundation of society. In this reality, they are bound by the limitations set upon them by the President, politicians, other high ranked officials and frankly other men in society, since it is built around them and their power. Women's agency and power is stripped from them, since the men in their lives and governing institutions have taken control of their agency. This is seen for example in their strict and almost non-existing access to safe abortions, as well as having a governing task force that disband when they are pressured to it by President Yoon and his administration. Furthermore, this discourse has shown how essential the president is to the (re)production of the patriarchal discourse, since many of his policies and political implementations had connotations and connections to the (re)production of stronger patriarchal ties within the social and political structure of Korea as a nation.

Moreover, the discourse of GBV being rooted in the patriarchy brings forth the notion and view that humans, specifically women, still need to be protected against the patriarchy as a whole. They need to have their agency freely and to be treated as equal members of society

to men. However, they need help from the government and society, if they were to overturn and change the societal structure that allows the patriarchy to persist the way it has all these years. Parisi (2002) argued that the state is both "the primary abuser and protector of human rights" (p. 578), which is further shown within Amnesty's critique of the ROK Government, since they are portrayed as the abuser and protector of human rights.

Furthermore, the discourse of GBV being rooted in patriarchy is supported by literature, since Heise (1998) argued that different levels of society influence how individuals think and act in society. Therefore, the legal status on marital rape is further pushing the patriarchal view on women and society. Heo (2010) found that "[t]he failure to conceptualize gender violence as incorporating all forms of violence against women can be blamed on widely accepted cultural understandings of differences between rape and wife beating" (p. 228). This further describes how marital rape and gender-based violence is rooted in the patriarchal system.

4.4 Time Period B (2022–2025): ROK Government

The fourth text analysed was *BPfA+30* representing the time period of the Yoon administration, i.e., 2022–2025. After conducting our analysis, two salient discourses emerged: 1) GBV is "expected" and 2) Women as reproductive tools. The following sections present and critique these discourses.

4.4.1 Gender-Based Violence is "Expected"

The first discourse which emerged from the text was *GBV is "expected,"* which constructs GBV as a "natural" part of the woman's life cycle. This means that violence against women is naturalised and entrenched in the sociocultural structures and is not addressed as violence rooted in gender discrimination.

The discourse appears especially in the text's focus on supporting victims rather than changing or challenging the societal attitude towards women and gender equality. This focus on support is consistent throughout the text as it mentions and highlights the establishments of various support centers, services, shelters and more for victims as well as a need for stronger punishment of perpetrators. For instance, the focus on reforming perpetrators is seen in the ministries' goal of "strengthening punishment and preventing recidivism for offenders" (BPfA+30, 2024, p. 11). Arguably, the emphasis on support for victims and reforming perpetrators shows a fragmented treatment of GBV; by underlining these as the primary aims and achievements, the violence is naturalised as something which cannot be changed but to

which the response can become stricter – it becomes the status quo. This is further evident as there is more emphasis on preventing violence from *re*occurring than preventing violence from occurring originally. For instance, guidelines will be changed "to ensure swift responses to violence against women and to strengthen the prevention of the recurrence of such crimes" (BPfA+30, 2024, p. 36). Consequently, the support, prevention, and intervention are more likely to happen *after* the woman has been exposed to violence as opposed to strengthening primary prevention. Similarly, the text comments on prevention of stalking: "These amendments aim to prevent stalking from recurring and escalating into more serious crimes and enhance practical protection measures for victims by supplementing and strengthening relevant institutional mechanisms" (BPfA+30, 2024, p. 83). Again, attention is paid to preventing escalation and reoccurrence.

In addition, the discourse is seen in the text's reflection of the public–private split. When primary prevention is mentioned, it is regarding violence prevention in the public sphere, such as in the workplace. Moreover, when discussing GBV in the public sphere, the text primarily addresses sexual violence. However, the text does not address violence in the private sphere in the same way; here, the focus is on preserving family and relationships rather than active protection or intervention, reflecting the Korean value system where family is prioritised over the individual, and sexual violence is not addressed. For instance, the text mentions mitigating family conflicts as an area of concern in domestic violence (BPfA+30, 2024, p. 33). Similarly, regarding international marriages, there is emphasis on "fostering mutual respect and resolving conflicts among couples" (BPfA+30, 2024, p. 30). Evidently, domestic violence is primarily addressed as "relationship conflicts" rather than acts of GBV.

The discursive construction of gender-based violence as "natural" is also seen in the text's understanding of power dynamics. When power is mentioned or questioned, it is in relation to the workplace in the form of superior/subordinate power imbalances. An example of this is the identification of "power-based sex crimes" (BPfA+30, 2024, p. 138) as a major type of violence; violence is power-based, yet the unequal power relations are not gendered. Thus, the gendered power imbalances are invisible and not perceived to be a factor in the violence, which further connects to the text's lack of response to marital rape and femicide. Thereby, the text reproduces a discourse that since structural gender discrimination is naturalised, or justified, the root of such social problems is not "gendered," but rather a sociocultural norm, i.e., GBV is part of the woman's lifecycle.

4.4.2 Women As Reproductive Tools

The other discourse that emerged from the text was *Women as reproductive tools*, which constructs GBV in relation to support, social reintegration, and motherhood. This means that women who are exposed to GBV need support in order to re-enter society – and eventually fulfil their societal roles as mothers.

This discourse appears primarily when discussing (violations of) women's rights, gender (in)equality and gender discrimination, and it connects to the previous discourse where family is prioritised over the individual. For instance, the text places great importance on pregnancy, childbirth, and the low birth rate in relation to gender equality and discrimination. An example of this is seen in how the ROK Government plans to promote the rights of marginalised women and prevent discrimination against these groups. With specific regard to women and girls with disabilities, the report states that "[t]he ROK Government has taken several actions to [...] foster a childbirth-friendly culture" (BPfA+30, 2024, p. 29). This is also the only action mentioned regarding preventing discrimination and promoting the rights of women and girls with disabilities, meaning their right to become pregnant is emphasised more than their right to not be discriminated against. In other words, pregnancy is promoted but other rights are not, and the group's intersecting identities and experiences as marginalised women are not addressed.

The emphasis on and prioritisation of pregnancy and fertility is further seen in a section on improving health services and outcomes for women and girls, where the Government only mentions pregnancy, fertility, and mental health issues related to pregnancy: "Secondly, as of the end of 2023, the Government is leading the way in enhancing the mental and psychological health of infertility couples and mothers who are suffering infertility, prepartum, and postpartum depression" (BPfA+30, 2024, p. 69). Health (especially mental health) is thus only an area of concern when women are pregnant, otherwise the section focuses on the mental health of children and students.

Moreover, the text reinforces the traditional gender roles of women as mothers: "The ROK Government has established a lifecycle support system for women's work and childcare, continuously expanding various programs, such as reduction of working hours, infertility treatment leave, maternity leave, childcare leave, and parental leave" (BPfA+30, 2024, p. 6). Here, women's most important job in society is still considered to be motherhood; the lifecycle support system reflects how women's lifecycle automatically includes motherhood, and the support system is intended to adjust women's work-life balance to accommodate women's roles as mothers. Still, the report also notes that "childbirth and

child-rearing still serve as a hindrance to women's economic activities" (BPfA+30, 2024, p. 19). Taken in its context, this reflects the coexistence of traditional gender roles of women as mothers and neo-liberal principles of work and social competitiveness.

In general, then, the text illustrates that pregnancy and childbirth are promoted with the aim of increasing the low birth rate, meaning the discourse implies that pregnancy discrimination is the most pressing form of gender discrimination. This reinforces the overall idea of women as reproductive tools, because in preventing discrimination and promoting women's rights, the focus is on their right to become pregnant and to work while pregnant.

4.4.3 Critique

Together, the discourses construct GBV and motherhood as natural parts of a woman's lifecycle. The discourses create a reality in which support for victims of violence focuses on social reintegration, meaning that if women are victimised by GBV, they will receive support to 'swiftly' return to society (mainly to work). Further, the discourses marginalise women and categorise them as reproductive tools due to the significant amount of attention paid to pregnancy and childbirth in relation to women's rights, gender equality, and gender discrimination. It is also seen in the fact that the state's primary concern for women's health is pregnancy.

Since gender-based violence is presented as a "natural" occurrence in a woman's life rather than a structural problem rooted in patriarchy and power imbalances, it reconstitutes a reality for women where the violence they are exposed to is not considered a violation of their rights; it is more so perceived as a cultural norm influenced by Confucian values and male dominance, hence the focus on preventing recurrence and escalation. This is further evident in the public–private split where primary prevention in the public sphere is focused on sexual violence, while prevention of domestic violence remains vague. Additionally, it perpetuates cultural assumptions and promotes the view that sexual violence is not a form of domestic violence, because it occurs in the home between partners. Such assumptions are also reinforced by the lack of criminalisation of marital rape.

4.5 Time Period B (2022–2025): Korean Civil Society

The fifth and final text analysed was *2025 Gauge of Rage* written by Korea Women's Hot-Line representing the time period of the Yoon administration, i.e., 2022–2025. After conducting our analysis, three salient discourses emerged: 1) GBV is a structural problem, 2)

GBV is a (women's) human rights violation, and 3) GBV remains "invisible." The following sections present and critique these discourses.

4.5.1 Gender-Based Violence Is a Structural Problem

The first discourse that emerged from the text was GBV is a structural problem, which constructs GBV as an issue rooted in sexism, unequal power relations, and gender discrimination. This means that violence is perpetrated against women based on their gender, and women are exposed to and affected disproportionately – violence is thus a consequence of power.

This discourse is for instance reproduced as the report frames GBV as a public issue: "Violence against women in intimate relationships can no longer be left to the realm of private conflict or treated as isolated incidents" (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 15). Further, the text directly states how women are targeted based on their gender alone: "Women suddenly became victims of violence while working, waiting for a bus, walking down the street, or simply going about their daily lives—targeted for no reason other than that they were women" (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 12). These quotes reflect the view that women are vulnerable and disproportionately exposed to violence and that this type of violence is not a question of isolated cases but rather reflecting a concerning pattern. This pattern is also seen in the numbers of femicides in Korea, reflecting a concerning and consistent trend:

> The reality that hundreds of women lose their lives every year, without any marked reduction in scale, demonstrates that sexist culture and attitudes remain deeply entrenched in our society and that progress toward gender equality has been inadequate. (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 13)

By discursively constructing GBV as a problem rooted in structural discrimination and power imbalances rather than individual instances, the text questions the status quo and the public perception of GBV. Additionally, the text describes how the Yoon Suk Yeol administration "denied the existence of structural gender discrimination and gravely rolled back democracy" (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 13); these actions reject the existence of GBV, thus showing how this first salient discourse directly challenges the narrative promoted by President Yoon. The discourse also challenges the sociocultural conditions which enable violence against women, and the attitudes, which are likely influenced by ideas of traditional Confucian values and male dominance, are reflected in the answers given by male perpetrators regarding the reasons for why they killed or attempted to kill the female victim:

> "*"Because she looked down on me"*
> *"Because she refused to have sex with me"*
> *"Because she was too loud"*
> *"Because she told me to be quiet in a public place"*
> *"Because I was in a bad mood"*
> *"Just because".*" (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 12)

Femicide is the most extreme form of violence against women, and the abovementioned reasons for such a crime illustrate sexist discriminatory attitudes and how men perceive women as persons over whom they may exert control and act at will. In relation to this, the discourse also constructs GBV as a structural problem by approaching and understanding the violence as a consequence of power:

> Yet on closer examination, many of these cases cannot reasonably be understood as spontaneous responses to an interpersonal disagreement amongst equals. Such cases included: strangling a girlfriend for attempting to report the perpetrator's violence to the police; beating a girlfriend with a blunt object because she said something he disliked in her sleep; killing the victim to prevent their extramarital intimate relationship from becoming known publicly; and threatening a wife with a knife because he disliked her chosen profession. All of these show that this violence is grounded in power imbalance and in the perpetrator's posture toward the victim, treating her as property to be controlled and someone he can kill if he so chooses, rather than a human being to be respected. (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 6)

This example directly addresses the problem at its root, illustrating violence as a means to exercise power and control, specifically by men over women. Moreover, it presents GBV as a social and public issue rather than a private issue between two equals in order to underscore the gender discrimination and power imbalances. Thus, the text reproduces this discourse when explaining the conditions which enable GBV, and especially femicide. Consequently, this discourse is also closely connected to the second salient discourse from the text, because GBV is further discursively constructed as a violation of women's human rights.

4.5.2 Gender-Based Violence Is a (Women's) Human Rights Violation

The second discourse which emerged from the text was GBV is a (women's) human rights violation, and it constructs GBV as acts that violates and disregards women's rights and their freedom to live. This means that male perpetrators (of femicide) perceive women as persons whom they own and whom they may "rightfully" deprive of their right to life.

The text clearly reflects and produces this discourse by stating that violence against women "directly infringes women's right to life and human rights" (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 15). By approaching the issue of GBV through a human rights lens, the text demonstrates how women as a group are still marginalised and targeted, and it underscores the gravity of such violence and urges protection and intervention to keep women safe. Additionally, this discourse underscores how women and men are socialised differently, where women are taught to be cautious of men and ensure their own safety from men, while men are taught different ideas of women's boundaries. Then, in connection to the first salient discourse, the text explicitly states that male perpetrators of intimate partner violence (IPV) treat women as "property to be controlled and someone he can kill if he so chooses, rather than a human being to be respected" (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 6) – this shows how men dehumanise women and disregard their safety and human rights, again illustrating the danger women face regularly.

Moreover, the text describes the home as "the most dangerous place for women" (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 6), though this is the place where one is supposed to feel the safest. This is illustrated in the statistic that IPV occurs most frequently in the victim's home (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 6), and the text elaborates:

> These cases show that violence against women in intimate relationships penetrates the victim's personal living space against her will, as it is characterized by the perpetrator's use of the intimate relationship to obtain information about the victim's residence, workplace, and other aspects of her everyday life. (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 7)

Such acts further demonstrate how women's safety, boundaries, and rights are disregarded, disrespected, and infringed upon. The text further explains that "[p]erpetrators use this informational advantage to track victims, to continue acts of violence, and ultimately kill women who attempt to escape their control" (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 7). In these cases, women live under men's control regardless of their relation to the perpetrator (known or unknown to the victim). Women have no safe space in society because men continuously invade their private bubbles, and this also shows how the state, as the protector of rights, fails to keep women safe and maintains sociocultural conditions which allow for men to trespass every aspect of women's lives.

4.5.3 Gender-Based Violence Remains "Invisible"

The third and final discourse that emerged from the text was GBV remains "invisible," which constructs GBV as a problem that is naturalised in Korean society. This means there is a lack of protection for women, because the hidden realities of violence are not brought into light and thereby not acknowledged or addressed, ultimately leaving women vulnerable and their lives at risk.

An example of this discourse is the text's aim to "expose the gravity of violence against women" (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 1), implying that the issue of GBV is inadequately represented or hidden, thereby also hiding or disregarding the realities of women's lived experiences. In reporting findings on the issue, then, the authors of the text state: "Thus, even now, in the 17th year since the Gauge of Rage began reporting these figures, comprehensive official statistics that present the scale and patterns of femicide in intimate relationships in a multidimensional way remain absent" (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 1). Evidently, women's experiences are not reflected in national prevention frameworks and statistics, and by failing to encapsulate these realities in statistics, the problem becomes – and stays – invisible. The gravity of the issue is further explained in the following quote:

> From 2009 to 2025, at least 1,697 women reported in the media were killed by a male intimate partner. Including attempted murder and related cases, the total rises to 4,002; including additional victims, it reaches 5,096. In other words, over the past 17 years, at least one woman every 1.55 days has been killed or placed at risk of being killed by a male intimate partner. Yet comprehensive official statistics that reveal the scale and patterns of femicide in intimate relationships in a multidimensional way still do not exist. (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 10)

Here, the text illustrates the frequency of femicides in Korea spanning 17 years, revealing a severely overlooked area of concern. The text further reports that, in 2025 alone, "at a minimum, one woman every 22.5 hours was killed or placed at risk of being killed by a husband, boyfriend, or other male intimate partner. Including additional victims, one person every 13.02 hours was victimized" but that "the actual number of women killed or placed at risk of being killed by male intimate partners is likely to be far higher" because the report's data is based on articles from the media (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 2). Moreover, the text also highlights the fact that the 2025 Statistics on Violence Against Women did not include femicides by men who were previously unknown to the victim (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 14). All these examples indicate that the gender-based motivations behind such murders are not considered; since official statistics on femicides are absent (or lacking), murders of

women and girls are categorised as homicides, which neglects the gendered context. Evidently, the problem of GBV – and femicide, especially – is currently and has historically been obscured by the lack of proper statistics and the state's lack of intervention. As such, this discourse primarily highlights the unseen realities that women live daily.

Lastly, this discourse explicitly calls out the ROK Government and authorities on their lack of protection, concern, and response. The text states that "victims have been left exposed to repeated violence and the risk of femicide even after reporting abuse and requesting protection" and that "[t]he state can no longer leave victims in a situation where they repeatedly seek help and are still killed or placed at risk of being killed" (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 15). These quotes further show how the state has actively failed victims, specifically women, and that its passivity and lack of intervention automatically puts and keeps women in vulnerable positions.

4.5.4 Critique

By discursively constructing the problem of GBV as structural yet invisible and as a violation of women's human rights, the text reconstitutes a specific reality for women. In this reality, women are constantly in danger as they are not safe in public nor in their private homes, i.e., women are targeted by men anywhere. This reflects a society wherein socialisation is influenced by Confucianism, resulting in girls being taught to be dependent on men while also implicitly burdened with protecting themselves from men, as Lee (2005) also argues.

This is also a reality wherein the government – which is supposed to protect human rights – fails and neglects women, leaving them at risk of being exposed to violence. As noted by Parisi (2002), the state is both "the primary abuser and protector of human rights" (p. 578), and this contradiction is further apparent when discussing GBV as a human rights abuse, because states are not held accountable for the behaviour of individuals in the private sphere, though this is the place where most acts of violence against women occur (Parisi, 2002, p. 579). This notion is reflected in the discursive construction of gender-based violence as simultaneously structural, invisible, and a women's human rights violation; it demonstrates how the ROK Government is responsible for providing protection and intervention for women yet does not acknowledge the structures and attitudes which allow for GBV to persist in society and within different spheres, including the home.

Together, these discourses also create a reality that denies women's truth, because their lived experiences are not acknowledged and not reflected in statistical data. In itself, this hides women's experiences, but what the discourses reconstitute is that official statistics on

violence against women, including on femicide, will aid in creating a safer future for women in Korea; the statistics help reveal the gender-based motivations behind the violence, help identify risk factors, and help inform prevention work. In other words, if statistical data reflect women's lived experiences, then their reality is not as easily denied but hopefully more recognised and addressed.

4.6 Overall Findings

In our analysis, we found that the ROK Government generally (re)produces the same discourses throughout the two different presidencies. They reproduce notions that gender-based violence is an individual issue (isolated incidents) and not a structural one, like the civil society organisations found. They do not view this issue as a national one, it is crimes which happen between private people, or at work between hierarchical people, i.e. superior and subordinate. Furthermore, both administrations focus on GBV in the form of sexual harassment in the workplace or at educational institutions, and less on the violence that could take place in the home. The way that both administrations are trying to prevent GBV is through educational courses on human rights, and through training programs at workplaces, and publicly humiliating them if they fail to comply or meet a specific standard.

The presidents and their administrations did however disagree when viewing women as victims. President Moon and his administration reproduced discourse that viewed women as victims of violence and harassment, while President Yoon and his administration viewed gender-based violence as something that is "expected". This difference shows the social and cultural evolution/change, from viewing women as victims of crime, to them almost being viewed as a possession of men in both the public and private sphere. Furthermore, this evolution is found in the change in young men, and them feeling "reverse discriminated" by the attention that President Moon and his administration gave women during his presidency. This voter pool moved to the conservative President Yoon, who brought his view on women with him into his presidency. Therefore, we did not find the discourse of women as victims, but that GBV is something that women are "expected" to go through due to the cultural ties to traditional family values. Therefore, President Yoon and his administration are more focused on hindering secondary victimisation rather than changing the social norm and view on women and their agency.

Although the administrations had different views on women in connection to GBV, they shared their view on women as mothers, or their lack of childrearing. They showed this through their policy implementations and financial incentives, which they offered women

who are pregnant or women who already had children, in the form of childcare post maternity leave and an easier re-entrance into the labour force. Furthermore, this discourse was made prevalent throughout their descriptions of women in the family unit, which is a cultural norm in Korea that women are viewed as "bad" if they break the family unit. This discourse continued to be (re)produced with the administration discussing the implementations and their focus areas surrounding women's health, centered around pregnancy, childcare, and postpartum care. This shows that both the administrations centre women's value around their ability to have children, and that this is important to the administrations. This is further (re)produced, since they do not include any other health concerns for women after they have gone through menopause, even though KWHL found these women to be at risk for femicide. Another piece of evidence for this discourse is that both administrations selected to implement policies to improve marriage migrant's rights and lives in Korea, while negating to implement policies to improve the lives of women with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

This lack of attention to women with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities reflect gender binary views by the administrations, which further shows the value that is placed on women's reproductive capabilities. Moreover, the political climate in Korea during both of the presidencies were heavily rooted in traditional family structure and values, which is further rooted in Confucianism. Additionally, this produced power imbalances between the administration and women, wife and husband, and between women and men with no prior relations.

When comparing the (inter)national civil society movements, we found that they generally (re)produce the same discourses on GBV and women. They discursively construct gender-based violence as a structural issue and as one rooted in the patriarchy, which is the opposite of what the administrations portrayed. All three of our (inter)national civil society organisations present that the violence that women experience stems from issues within the structure of society and its historical/cultural views on women. These organisations focus on different aspects of violence, with Parallel Report focusing on everything mentioned in BPfA+25, the Submission to the UNHRC focusing on human rights, and 2025 Gauge of Rage focusing on femicide, which is the final and most extreme form of gender-based violence.

Even though violence against women in Korea is getting attention from (inter)national civil society organisations, it still remains invisible according to KWHL. This idea is somewhat touched upon by the other two organisations, where they mention that the root issue of GBV is overlooked by the administrations, and therefore it remains invisible.

Furthermore, this notion of invisibility is that there is a lack of official statistical data showing the prevalence of violence and crimes women are exposed to. This is touched upon in both BPfA+25 and BPfA+30, as something the administrations wanted to improve on, however they did not succeed at it according to the organisations. Thus, the full picture of gender-based violence is still relatively unknown and invisible, and therefore difficult to properly protect women from through policies and implementations.

Something that all three civil society organisation reports have in common is that they view women as victims of GBV. This view or (re)production of discourse for some, further shows throughout all three reports, how women have been victims of societal and political structures. Evidently this is the focus area for the reports, since two of them (i.e., the national civil society organisations) are written specifically on the issue of GBV and Amnesty choosing to include it heavily in their reports. Still, this discursive construction impacts women and society, and it especially reinforces the idea that women *need* protection – from men and by the state.

When discussing women, both national civil society organisations (re)produce the view and idea of the binary gender identities. This is found in Parallel Report, when they indirectly argue that transwomen cannot be victims of GBV and in 2025 Gauge of Rage, where they simply do not include transwomen in their study. However, the Parallel Report does argue and campaign for better protection of transwomen and women with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. This (re)production of the binary is however not present in Amnesty's report, where they express their concern for women with diverse sexual orientations and gender identity, which shows a potentially more inclusive international view on women. The 2025 Gauge of Rage focuses on femicides and not on gender; nevertheless, they do not include women with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

So, what do these discourses mean for women in Korea? First, the discourses reproduced by the presidential administrations create contradicting pulls of realities, where women are being socialised to see violence as something natural and as a norm rather than a violation. Furthermore, in this reality women perceive themselves and are perceived as victims, and as someone that needs protection afterwards and against secondary victimisation. Additionally, in this reality women are in danger in their own homes, especially considering the lack of criminalisation of marital rape.

Additionally, the (inter)national civil society organisations reconstitute a reality wherein women are at risk of getting violated, and wherein the government is unequipped and failing to protect them. In this reality, women are left at risk by the ROK Government,

due to social and political structures. These structures are hindering meaningful elimination of gender-based violence. Moreover, these structures remove women's agency and keep the unequal power-based relationships in place privately and publicly, reflecting traditional gender roles and patriarchal traditions.

Based on these findings, we note that the reports created by the ROK Government and the civil society organisations reflect multiple discursive constructions of GBV in Korea. All the discourses together constitute a reality for women where they are victims of violence, specifically physical violence. However, none of the reports reflect on psychological violence or include it in their construction of gender-based violence. In this reality for women, the discourse only presents physical violence as important or something that they need protection from. Furthermore, the victim bears the burden of proof, which could be a reason as to why physical and technology-based crimes are more discussed in the reports, since they are much easier to prove than psychological abuse. Moreover, both of the administrations put an emphasis on sexual violence and harassment as something they wanted to combat, which could potentially relate to women and their role in society as mothers and childrearing. Therefore, the general reality created for women is one in which they are at risk in both the public and private spheres.

5. Discussion

In the sections below we compare and discuss our findings as related to the identified emerging discourses, their impacts on society and women, and the significance of these.

5.1 Reflection of Trends

In conducting our analysis, we exemplified how discourse impacts society and vice versa. The political situation is interesting for this study, since we also examine the discourses (re)produced by presidents with different ideologies. There is a mutual influential relationship between the public as voters and politicians, where they are both influencing and being influenced by one another at the same time. Voters vote for politicians that closely match their own opinions, while politicians influence the voters through discourse which can sway the voters one way or another. Therefore, the socio-political context is interesting in connection to our reports.

One poignant example of this mutually influential relationship, happened with the election of conservative President Yoon (2022–2025), who won the election after appealing to young conservative men. A growing group of men in Korean society felt that they were

being treated as unequal to women after the presidency of Moon, due to his feminist-forward policies. These men felt “reverse discrimination” due to political attention and power being “removed” from them, in their opinion (Fulu & Miedema, 2015). The so-called preferential shift in political attention influenced a group who had previously been privileged through policies, to feel neglected and for them to express their views on women and the administration publicly. This caught the attention of Yoon, and he included these views in his election campaign, which did result in his electoral win in 2022.

With President Moon (liberal/centrist) and President Yoon (conservative) being on different sides of the political spectrum, it would be assumed that their discourses on women and gender were different. We, however, did not find that much difference in the discourses surrounding GBV or gender from the two administrations. This could be due to structural issues in society, or the political structure that exists outside of the administration (e.g., the National Assembly), or a combination of both.

Whilst analysing 2025 Gauge of Rage, we found some interesting tendencies reflected in the report’s statistics and tables. Specifically, these statistics on femicide reflected the impact of antifeminist discourse. The table examining “Victims of femicide by male intimate partners reported in the media, 2009-2025” (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 10) shows both women who were murdered and attempted murdered. The numbers of femicides and attempted femicides over the past 17 years reflect the societal trends and prevalence of conservatism, antifeminism, misogyny over time, and particularly during different presidential administrations.

During Moon’s presidency (2017–2022), there were an accumulated 502 murders and 869 attempted murders which were reported in the media (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 10). Some interesting key points during his presidency is the increasing femicides from 88 in 2019 to 97 in 2020, this is most likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which did cause a spike in domestic abuse cases (Kim & Moon, 2025, p. 1). The attempted murders are interesting here, since they are very steadily rising from 103 in 2017 to 225 in 2022. An interesting key point here is from 2018 when there were a reported 125 attempted murders, which then falls to 108 in 2019, then increasing to 131 during 2020, then 177 in 2021 and ending at 225 attempted murders in 2022 (25 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 10). Here we find a steady increase, which almost explodes during the pandemic and keeps gaining momentum. This momentum could be due to the rise in antifeminism. We found that the violence escalates or that the media attention towards attempted femicides increases, but the murders stay steady with an average

(calculated by us) of 83.6 femicides and 144.8 attempted femicides a year during Moon's presidency.

Now, the femicides and attempted femicides reported in the media look very different under President Yoon. During his term (2022–2025), there were 542 reported killings and 1162 attempted murders by intimate partners reported in the media (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 10). The amount of femicides increased from 86 in 2022, to 138 in 2023, to 181 in 2024 and the back down again to 137 in 2025, which is still higher than the amount of reported femicides prior to his presidency (2025 Gauge of Rage, 2026, p. 10). The same explosive increase is found in attempted femicides with 225 in 2022, increasing to 311 in 2023, to 374 in 2024 and then down to 252 in 2025, which again is higher than any amount prior to his presidency. This evolution in violence against women is extremely worrying, since it correlates to the politics and societal discourses that are being produced. Thus, further reconstitutes the reality for women that they are in danger everywhere, since this specific statistic just focuses on femicides committed by intimate partners and not including perpetrators unknown to the victim. These are cases of women being murdered or attempted murdered by men they should be able to trust to not harm them, but they are actively in danger of being harmed or killed by someone they love.

This statistic is created based on the femicides and attempted femicides that are reported in the media, therefore there should be an expectation of an increasing dark figure, since not all crimes get reported in the media. However, there are no official statistics on femicides or attempted femicides from the ROK Government, which is why Korean Women's Hot-Line created their own to visualise the magnitude of the violence that women experience in the form of femicides and attempted femicides. This lack of official data and statistics further shows the discourse produced by the 2025 Gauge of Rage report that GBV is an invisible problem, since the ROK government failed to produce official data on the severity of the GBV, especially femicides. This further expresses that the violence is structural rather than isolated incidents, and that the motivations behind are gendered.

The statistic shows how femicides follow the political administration and the discourses they (re)produce surrounding women and gender-based violence. Additionally, there is a continued exponential increase of attempted femicides after COVID-19, which could be related to the social effects that quarantine had on society. However, the main reason for this increase in violence is probably due to an unequal power relationship between women and men, with some men potentially feeling a right to hurt women due to various reasons, like the ones found in the analysis. This constitutes a reality where women are in

danger based on their gender which is somewhat what the Yoon administration (re)produces in the BPfA+30 report, with them believing that GBV is "expected." Their discourse of GBV being "expected" is properly seen in the statistic with an average (calculated by us) of 135.5 killings and 290.5 attempted killings a year, over a presidency lasting approximately four years. The averages from Yoon's presidency compared with the average from Moon's presidency show how impactful discourses are on society. During Moon's presidency, there was an average of 83.6 femicides a year, whereas there was an average of 135.5 femicides yearly during the Yoon administration. This is almost double the amount, which is truly worrying for the women in Korea. The same thing applies to the attempted femicides averages with 144.8 during Moon's presidency and 290.5 during Yoon's, which is more than doubled.

The violence that women experience has increased explosively during the past nine years when examining the statistics, and this increase has been propelled by the antifeminist views and discourses brought to power through President Yoon and his administration. This has caused further harm and danger towards women in society, both in private and in public. Furthermore, this statistic visualised that women are not safe anywhere, for some especially not at home with their male partners.

After this discussion of the most extreme form of physical violence and the surrounding discourse, it does make one wonder about other types of violence that constitutes GBV. Now, the reason for this wonder is that when analysing all the five selected reports, one type of violence was missing for us, which is psychological violence. There are no mentions in any of the reports of protection from, education on, or implementations against the psychological violence that women can experience in abusive relationships, whether they are romantic, familiar, or other. The existing discourse that is present (re)produces a reality where violence has to be physical or digital to be classified as violence or as something the Republic of Korea (ROK) Government and civil society organisation can protect against at this time and in these reports.

Furthermore, laws exist that make victims of assault bear the burden of proof (Parallel Report, 2019, p. 6), which further adds to this reality that there must be physical evidence for a violent act to have happened or to be admissible in court. It is considerably more difficult to prove that psychological violence took place in an abusive relationship, whereas beatings and sexual assault leave physical evidence behind on the victim. This shapes a reality for women wherein they might not see the psychological violence as violence or as something out of the norm, if that is what society has socialised them to believe. This shows a society that places

more attention towards physical violence, which is important, but neglects the psychological forms of GBV. Additionally, this fuels the micro-level power imbalances or unequal power relationships between women and men in society, which has been rooted in traditional gender roles, with the men holding the power over women.

If we look further into the psychological part of GBV or recovering from GBV victimisation, then we find that the most used word in this context is "support." The ROK Government aims to support victims of GBV, but what does this support actually mean? They never truly define what the support entails when addressing women's mental health or anything related to it; they are more focused on housing, financial support, medical support, and getting the women reintegrated into society. They do however mention support in ways that insinuates psychological support, but it is never mentioned in relation to violence. When the ROK Government in BPfA+30 discusses mental health in general it is in the context of women going through pregnancy complications, postpartum depression, and infertility, or in the context of students going through educational institutions. This ties in with women as reproductive tools discourse that the government (re)produced in the report, which also was present in the BPfA+25 report. Furthermore, the Moon administration included a section that addresses expanding resources to women's mental health programs and facilities focusing on mental illnesses and depression (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 41). This inclusion of mental health further shows the more progressive attitude that President Moon and his administration had towards women and their psychological wellbeing.

Furthermore, we found that medical and legal support gets mentioned more often in the BPfA reports, which further presents a lack of attention or awareness of the importance of psychological support for the victims. Any type of support is important, but they are neglecting a key part of the recovery of victims. Trauma presents itself in both physical and psychological ways, with the latter being an important element in the support for women to truly heal from the violence they have been exposed to. This lack of attention and definition of support produces a reality wherein women are not informed of their support options, along with their mental health not being prioritised in the recovery process, furthering the discourse that GBV is natural and expected for them to go through.

5.2 Human Rights

Something that should be discussed in relation to the issue of GBV is human rights, which we reviewed literature on in the beginning of the thesis. There are different interpretations of what constitutes human rights and how they were first created. However, like Goodhart

(2023) mentioned, human rights are "an indispensable idiom of political life," and they are a complex phenomenon that operates on different levels throughout society (p. 2). This is evident in our analysis, since we found mentions of human rights throughout all five reports.

Both the Parallel Report and 2025 Gauge of Rage report included explicit views that GBV is a human rights violation, and that specifically women's human rights were being violated by these crimes. Both reports further included sentiments that the government is failing to protect women. Parisi (2002) explained that the state functions as the primary abuser and the protector of women's human rights (p. 578), which is what the Korean civil society movements show through their reports. They (re)produce the discourse that gender-based violence is a structural issue in Korea, and that the government is failing to address the root issue of the violence that women are experiencing. Therefore, the state becomes the primary abuser due to the laws and neglect, while also being the protector of their other human rights. This makes it quite difficult for women, since the state is protecting their human rights like housing and access to food and water, but their right to life and right to be protected from violence is not secured.

Both Korean civil society reports view and express the same human rights violations as Amnesty does. Amnesty also views what is happening in Korea as a human rights violation (Amnesty, 2023, p. 2), which shows a correlation between the local and the global. This shows that the global and local civil societies follow the same trends when discussing human rights and different interpretations thereof, but also that this is influenced by international discourses. The international discourse on the phenomena of human rights, women's rights, and GBV is something that influences civil society all over the world, partly due to globalisation, through communication and sharing of views between the civil society movements. Furthermore, governments get influenced by discourses and by each other, since many countries partake in the conferences held within governing bodies under the UN-umbrella. The ROK Government has sent representatives to these conferences, and they voted in favour of resolutions to end discrimination and other likewise proposals by the UN Human Rights Council (Amnesty, 2023, p. 3).

Like explained in the analysis, the ROK Government did not implement the anti-discriminations legislation that they voted for in the UN Human Rights Council. Furthermore, they do not explicitly portray GBV as a human rights violation, like their civil society organisation counterparts. When discussing human rights in the BPfA reports, they focus on education and maintaining the human rights of the people. This view on human rights presents the reality for women that these physical crimes are not violating their rights as

humans. The ROK Government was more focused on preventing the recurrence of the crime and on preventing secondary victimisation of the victim.

To prevent the recurrence of the crimes, the different administrations strengthened the punishments and gave the perpetrator education and psychological help, so that they would be less likely to reoffend, whereas to prevent the victim from going through secondary victimisation, they would provide them with support and specific trained aids that would help them through the court process. The focus is therefore not on the national prevention of GBV, but on helping the victim not be victimised by the state and the justice system. This further reiterates the discourse that gender-based violence is something "expected" to happen to women throughout their lives, but also that the government is more worried about the victims getting victimised by the justice system afterwards.

The primary form of human rights that the government writes about in both reports is on 'human right education.' They never fully explain what it is, but it gets mentioned in relation to the prevention of violence against women. Human rights education is something that the government in 2019 encouraged higher education to offer their students, to combat discrimination, inequality and GBV, but was also offered as pre-marriage education to marriage migrant women (BPfA+25, 2019, p. 7). In this way, the government tries to influence how society views women and gender-based violence, but it is difficult to understand the full context, since they never mention what this education is. This lack of definition or information on this education makes it difficult for us to make any forms of comments on, but also for the people in the UN reading this report.

With the contradicting views on whether or not GBV is a women's human rights violation, this creates two contradicting realities for women. In the reality produced by the government, women are not having their human rights violated but they are victims of crimes committed to them, though it is not the same. However, in the reality reconstituted by the (inter)national civil society, the crimes that are being committed against women are a violation of their human rights. Women are being told two contradicting things, which creates a confusing world to navigate, but regardless, women are not safe.

5.3 The Local and the Global: Cultural Flows

Based on our findings, we want to further reflect on the tensions between the local and the global, i.e., how the discourses make sense within Korean culture and how this is influenced by the global spread of norms of gender equality and non-discrimination as well as trends of antifeminism and conservatism. As demonstrated in our analysis, the discourse on women

and gender-based violence in Korean society is (still) heavily influenced by the historical legacy of Confucianism and patriarchy. Additionally, the ROK Government appears to be selective in their adoption of international standards regarding women's rights, as indicated by the response from civil society as well as Korea's large gender (pay) gap. In fact, Korea has consistently ranked towards the lower end on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index (GGI), ranking 101st out 148 countries in 2025 (World Economic Forum, 2025, p. 43, p. 333). While not reflecting a complete rejection of social change, it does show a stable trend and a tension between local and global norms of gender equality. This is further pointed out by the reports from both the national and international civil society, who express that the ROK Government has a tendency to highly value social consensus and prioritise it over adopting international standards of gender equality and women's human rights (Parallel Report, 2019, p. 2; Submission to the UNHRC, 2023).

Moreover, the realities of women are not properly reflected in statistical data and legislations, which is for instance evident in the government's lack of attention towards femicides (both in regards to data collection and criminalisation), as mentioned above. This reinforces Han and Chun's (2014) argument that despite the success of promoting gender equality in multiple levels of law and policymaking, not much has changed for women in Korean society regarding their socioeconomic rights (p. 246) – the discourse on and attitudes towards women has thus consistently shaped and been shaped by persisting patriarchal practices.

Finally, by international standards, violence against women is considered to be a human rights violation, and this idea especially spread as a result of the CEDAW as a global cultural flow (UN, 1993). Our analysis demonstrated that the civil society organisations aligned with this idea, claiming that GBV is a violation of women's human rights; however, the ROK Government does not explicitly consider or construct it as a human rights violation. Once again, this demonstrates a tension between the local and the global. Evidently, there are still patriarchal practices present in Korea's structures and systems of power, and these continue to enable and reinforce discrimination and violence against women. At the same time, these are also influenced by and contribute to global trends of antifeminism and misogyny, which increasingly penetrate the existing discourses in Korea.

Conclusion

This project has expanded the existing literature on gender-based violence in Korea by exploring discourses and their impacts to shed light on how and why a globalised country like Korea still struggles with issues of discrimination and violence against women despite global efforts to improve gender equality. We set out to answer the following problem formulation: *How do the reports created by the ROK Government and civil society organisations reflect the discursive construction of GBV in South Korea*?

Through our critical discourse analysis, we found that the Republic of Korea's (ROK) Government and the civil society organisations use somewhat different discourses to construct GBV to fit with their perspectives and intentions. The ROK Government used discourse that constructed gender-based violence as an individual problem and not a structural problem in society. Furthermore, the government constructed GBV as natural and something "expected" for women to go through, but the punishment and reform of the perpetrators can be strengthened. In connection to the victims of GBV, the government is more concerned with them re-entering society and preventing recurrence of the crime. We did find a small shift in the discourses used by the different presidential administrations, with the later administration of President Yoon producing the discourse that GBV is expected and a natural part of women's life, which was not a salient discourse during the first time period. Still, neither of the two administrations view gender-based violence as a violation of women's human rights; they view it as a standalone act of violence and something that is "expected" for women to experience.

The (inter)national civil society organisations discursively produced and constructed GBV as a structural problem rooted in sexism and patriarchal structures. All three of the reports (re)produced discourses that construct GBV as a structural issue in society, but only the Submission to the UNHRC explicitly mentions the term 'patriarchy,' while the Parallel Report implicitly hints at it. All three reports further mention that they view gender-based violence as a violation of women's human rights, with Amnesty outright expressing their concerns for women, their rights, and their safety. 2025 Gauge of Rage reflected that the rate of femicide increases and is influenced by antifeminist discourses. Furthermore, we found that the national civil society organisations mirror the global organisation, showing the influence that global trends or discourses can have on local organisations and vice versa.

The ROK Government and the civil society organisations all discursively construct GBV differently, which shows that they have different ideas of the issue of gender-based violence, as well as different perspectives of unequal power-based dynamics between women

and men. This difference in perspective can also be found in the variation in how they want to combat GBV: where the Moon administration wanted to prevent individuals from committing the violence and implement human rights education, the Yoon administration prioritised implementing stronger punishment and reform of the perpetrators, further showing that this is an individual issue not a social structure one. The civil society organisations want to change the social structure that GBV is rooted in, but this would further entail a change in the patriarchal power structure which is also entrenched in Korean society. The power-based inequality between men and women serves as a divide in how the elimination of gender-based violence is to happen.

A common thing that we found across all five reports was a focus on physical violence with no mention of psychological violence, which goes along with the fact that the burden of proof falls on the victim. Physical violence is easier to prove, since it leaves physical evidence behind, like bruises or bodily fluids, whereas psychological violence is more difficult to prove since there is a lack of physical evidence left behind. This lack of acknowledgement from the reports further shows how the Korean and international community views the need of physical evidence in the justice system.

Another common discourse that existed in two out of the five reports is the view that women's value is tied to childrearing and that women should have more children. The two governmental reports, BPfA+25 and BPfA+30, reproduced discourse that viewed women as reproductive tools. Therein they proposed and explained implementations that would help alleviate some of the financial burden that pregnancy and childcare cost, as an incentive for women to have more children.

When we analysed the realities that these discourses construct for women, we found that the common theme was danger. When just reviewing the reality that the government produces, violence is something that women are expected to experience since it is a natural part of society. The only real worry that the government expresses is about recurrence of the crime and secondary victimisation of the victim, instead of actively preventing these crimes from happening in the future. This shapes the reality that women find themselves in, since they are heavily connected to the politics that is implemented in their lives, while also being under the administration's power. The reality that the civil society organisations reconstitute is one where women are also in danger of violence. The organisations claim that women are being let down by the administrations, since they are not addressing the root issue of gender-based violence and are instead masking the issue. This constructs a reality for women, where they are being neglected by their government who should be the ones to protect them against

violence, but essentially, they act like an enabler of the violence with their views and discourses.

These constructed realities exist simultaneously, which can make it very confusing for women to exist in the Korean society, since some discourses tell them that the violence is normal and "expected" while other discourses inform them that it is a violation of their human rights. This contradicting discursively constructed reality further shows the variation that exists in different societal levels, both locally and globally. However, both of these contradicting worlds agree on one thing: women are not safe from violence. Ultimately, we conclude that the persisting misogynistic and antifeminist attitudes and socio-cultural conditions shape and are shaped by discourses at different levels of society, which all influence the general perception of women and gender-based violence and which in turn impact women. Together, the texts all reconstitute a reality wherein women are not safe *anywhere*: not in public, not online, and not at home.

References

Ackerly, B. A. (2001). Women's Human Rights Activists as Cross-Cultural Theorists. *International Feminist Journal of Politics, 3*(3), 311–346. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1080/14616740110077537

Ahn, Y. (2019). *Whose Comfort? Body, Sexuality and Identities of Korean 'Comfort Women' and Japanese Soldiers during WWII*. World Scientific Publishing. https://www.worldscientific.com/doi/10.1142/9789811206351_0001

Amnesty International. (2023). *South Korea: Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee; 139th session, 9 October – 3 November 2023*. Amnesty International. https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa25/7164/2023/en/

Arinder, J. A. (2020). Feminist Theory. In J. Egbert & M. F. Roe (Eds.), *Theoretical Models for Teaching and Research*. Pressbooks. https://opentext.wsu.edu/theoreticalmodelsforteachingandresearch/chapter/feminist-theory/

Ashcraft, K. L., & Mumby, D. K. (2004). *Reworking gender : a feminist communicology of organization (Online-Ausg.).* Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452229461

Baker McKenzie (2021). *Fighting Domestic Violence: South Korea*. https://resourcehub.bakermckenzie.com/en/resources/fighting-domestic-violence/asia/south-korea

Berns, N. (2001). Degendering the Problem and Gendering the Blame: Political Discourse on Women and Violence. *Gender & Society, 15*(2), 262–281. https://doi.org/10.1177/089124301015002006

Binion, G. (1995). Human Rights: A Feminist Perspective. *Human Rights Quarterly, 17*(3), 509–526. https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.1995.0022

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Bush, D. M. (1992). Women's movements and state policy reform aimed at domestic violence against women: A comparison of the consequences of movement mobilizations in the U.S. and India. *Gender & Society, 6*(4), 587.

Collins, A. (2014). Gender-Based Violence. In T. Teo (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology* (pp. 767–771). Springer New York. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7_121

Collins, D., Falcón, S., Lodhia, S., & Talcott, M. (2010). New Directions in Feminism and Human Rights: AN INTRODUCTION. *International Feminist Journal of Politics, 12*(3–4), 298–318. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1080/14616742.2010.513096

Council of Europe. (2011). *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*. https://rm.coe.int/168008482e

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(6), 1241–1299. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039

European Commission. (n.d.). *What is gender-based violence?*. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-based-violence/what-gender-based-violence_en

Ewe, K., & Kwon, J. (2026, February 18). Yoon Suk Yeol: Who is the South Korean president jailed for life for leading an insurrection? *BBC*. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2nyp3pxrko

Ferraro, K. J. (1996). The Dance of Dependency: A Genealogy of Domestic Violence Discourse. *Hypatia, 11*(4), 77–91. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1996.tb01036.x

Fui, L. Y., Wong, E. S. K., & Chong, W. Y. (2011). The Epistemology Assumption of Critical Theory for Social Science Research. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 1,* 129-134. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260123138_The_Epistemology_Assumption_of_Critical_Theory_for_Social_Science_Research

Fulu, E., & Miedema, S. (2015). Violence Against Women: Globalizing the Integrated Ecological Model. *Violence against Women, 21*(12), 1431–1455. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215596244

Gan, L. (2023, November). Star Creation, KPOP, and Korean Economy: *A Case Study. Advances in Economics Management and Political Sciences, 31*(1), 14-19. ResearchGate. https://doi.org/10.54254/2754-1169/31/20231489

Ganesh, S., Stohl, C. & James, S. (2024). Chapter 20 Generational Shifts: The Emergence of Visibility in Globalization Research. In V. Miller & M. Poole (Eds.), *Organizational Communication Theory and Research* (pp. 403–422). De Gruyter Mouton. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110718508-021

Getz, G. (2018). Honour and Dignity: Trauma Recovery and International Law in the Issue of the Comfort Women of South Korea. *Journal of International Women's Studies, 19*(1), 63-77. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/honour-dignity-trauma-recovery-international-law/docview/2008323529/se-2

Glodev, V., Wijaya, G., & Ida, R. (2023). The Korean Wave as the Globalization of South Korean Culture. *Wacana: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Komunikasi, 22*(1), 108–120. https://journal.moestopo.ac.id/index.php/wacana/article/view/2671

Goodhart, M. (2023). Introduction. In M. Goodhart (Ed.), *Human Rights: Theory and Practice* (4th ed., pp. 1–6). Oxford University Press.

Grauwiler, P., & Mills, L. G. (2004). Moving Beyond the Criminal Justice Paradigm: A Radical Restorative Justice Approach to Intimate Abuse. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 31*(1), 49. https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.2960

Grewal, I. (1999). "Women's rights as human rights": Feminist practices, global feminism, and human rights regimes in transnationality. *Citizenship Studies, 3*(3), 337–354. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621029908420719

Hall, S. (1997). The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity. In A. D. King (Ed.), *Culture, Globalization, and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity* (pp. 19–39). University of Minnesota Press. http://www.jstor.org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/stable/10.5749/j.ctttsqb3.6

Han, J. H. J., & Chun, J. J. (2014). Introduction: Gender and Politics in Contemporary Korea. *The Journal of Korean Studies, 19*(2), 245–255. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43923271

Hasunuma, L., & Shin, K. Young. (2019). #MeToo in Japan and South Korea: #WeToo, #WithYou. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy, 40*(1), 97–111. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1080/1554477X.2019.1563416

Heise, L. (1998). Violence Against Women: An Integrated, Ecological Framework. *Violence Against Women, 4*(3), 262–290. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1177/1077801298004003002

Held, D., McGrew, A, Goldblatt, D., & Perraton, J. (1999). *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*. Stanford University Press.

Heo, M. (2010). Women's movement and the politics of framing: The construction of anti domestic violence legislation in South Korea. *Women's Studies International Forum, 33*(3), 225–233. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2010.01.005

Heo, M., & Rakowski, C. A. (2014). Challenges and Opportunities for a Human Rights Frame in South Korea: Context and Strategizing in the Anti-Domestic Violence Movement. *Violence Against Women, 20*(5), 581–606. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1177/1077801214536287

Holvino, E. (2003). Complicating Gender: The Simultaneity of Race, Gender, and Class in Organization Change(ing). In R. J. Ely, E. G. Foldy, & M. A. Scully (Eds.), *Reader in gender, work, and organization* (pp. 260–265). Blackwell Publishing.

Jeong, E., & Lee, J. (2018). We take the red pill, we confront the DickTrix: online feminist activism and the augmentation of gendered realities in South Korea. *Feminist Media Studies, 18*(4), 705–717. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1447354

Jørgensen, M., & Phillips, L. J. (2002). *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208871

Jung, G., & Moon, M. (2024). "I Am A Feminist, But . . ." Practicing Quiet Feminism in the Era of Everyday Backlash in South Korea. *Gender & Society, 38*(2), 216–243. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1177/08912432241230557

Jung, K. (2003). Practicing feminism in South Korea: the issue of sexual violence and the women's movement. *Hecate, 29*(2), 261–284.

Jung, K. (2024). "Gender wars" and populist politics in South Korea. *Women's Studies International Forum*, (104), 1-8. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277539524000530

Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (2017). Feminist political analysis: Exploring strengths, hegemonies and limitations. *Feminist Theory, 18*(3), 323–341. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700117721882

Kim, H. J., & Moon, P. W. (2025). A gender-based pandemic? COVID-19 and attitudes towards gender and relief policies in South Korea. *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, 1–18. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1080/17516234.2025.2502081

Kim, H.-A. (2022b, April 23). Yoon Suk-yeol's rise from rebel prosecutor to president. *EASTASIAFORUM.* https://eastasiaforum.org/2022/04/23/yoon-seok-yeols-rise-from-rebel-prosecutor-to-president/

Kim, J. (2021a). Sticky Activism: The Gangnam Station Murder Case and New Feminist Practices against Misogyny and Femicide. *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies, 60*(4), 37–60. https://www-jstor-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/stable/27063795

Kim, J. (2021b). The Resurgence and Popularization of Feminism in South Korea: Key Issues and Challenges for Contemporary Feminist Activism. *Korea Journal., 61*(4), 75–101. https://doi.org/10.25024/kj.2021.61.4.75

Kim, M. (2014). Comfort Women, Monuments, Memory, Human Rights. *Asian Politics & Policy, 6*, 83-96. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1111/aspp.12089

Kim, M. (2019). Reparations for "Comfort Women": Feminist Geopolitics and Changing Gender Ideologies in South Korea. *Cornell International Affairs Review, 12*(2), 5–43. DOI:10.37513/ciar.v12i2.513.

Kim, S. (2022a, April 10). *How Misogyny Swayed the Course of South Korea's 20th Presidential Election*. Glimpse from the Globe. https://www.glimpsefromtheglobe.com/regions/asia-and-the-pacific/how-misogyny-swayed-the-course-of-south-koreas-20th-presidential-election/

Kim, S., Choi, E., & Champion, J. D. (2024). Technology-facilitated Sexual Violence in South Korea: A Content Analysis of a Website for Victims. *Violence Against Women, 30*(11), 3077–3090. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1177/10778012231172712

Korea Women's Hot-Line. (2025). *2025 Gauge of Rage*. https://hotline.or.kr/news_en/?q=YToxOntzOjEyOiJrZXl3b3JkX3R5cGUiO3M6MzoiYWxsIjt9&bmode=view&idx=170334025&t=board

Korea Women's Hot-Line. (n.d.). *About Korea Women's Hot-Line.* https://hotline.or.kr/who

Lauren, P. G. (1998). *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Lee, E. (2005). Marital conflict and social support of Korean immigrants in the United States. *International Social Work, 48*(3), 313–324. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872805051734

Lee, J. (2026). Women's Right to Have Rights: Hannah Arendt and the Political Praxis of Femizone. *The European Legacy, 31*(2), 173–189. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1080/10848770.2025.2595743

Lee, J., & Jeong, E. (2021). The 4B movement: envisioning a feminist future with/in a non reproductive future in Korea. *Journal of Gender Studies, 30*(5), 633–644. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1080/09589236.2021.1929097

Lépinard, E. (2014). Doing Intersectionality. *Varieties of Feminist Practices in France and Canada, Gender & Society, 28*(6), 877–903. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1177/0891243214542430

Lewis-Beck, M. S., Bryman, A., & Liao, T. F., (2004). Constructionism, Social. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods* (3rd ed., pp. 184-185). SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412950589.n164

Merry, S. E. (2003). Constructing a Global Law-Violence against Women and the Human Rights System. *Law & Social Inquiry, 28*(4), 941–977. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-4469.2003.tb00828.x

Mlambo-Ngcuka, P. (2015). Introduction. In United Nations (Ed.), *Beijing+5 Political Declaration and Outcome* (pp. 3–5). United Nations. https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration

NGO CSW. (n.d.). *ABOUT US*. https://ngocsw.org/about-us/

NGO Parallel Report. (2019). *National Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA)+25 <Republic of Korea>* [Parallel Report]. NGO CSW. https://ngocsw.org/beijing25-ngo-participation/submitted-ngo-parallel-reports/

Ozaki, R., & Otis, M. D. (2017). Gender Equality, Patriarchal Cultural Norms, and Perpetration of Intimate Partner Violence: Comparison of Male University Students in Asian and European Cultural Contexts. *Violence Against Women, 23*(9), 1076–1099. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1177/1077801216654575

Parisi, L. (2002). Feminist praxis and women's human rights. *Journal of Human Rights, 1*(4), 571–585. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1080/1475483021000031399

Parisi, L. (2017). Feminist Perspectives on Human Rights. In N. Roy (Ed.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.48

Park, Y., Song, J., Wood, B., Gallegos, T., & Childress, S. (2025). A Global Examination on the Attitudes Toward Intimate Partner Violence Against Women: A Multilevel Modeling Analysis. *Violence against Women*, 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012251338388

Postmus, J. L., & Hahn, S. A. (2007). Comparing the policy response to violence against women in the USA and South Korea. *International Social Work., 50*(6), 770–782. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872807081903

Republic of Korea (ROK). (2019). *Republic of Korea's National Review for Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (2019).* https://ngocsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Korea-NGO_Parallel_report.pdf

Republic of Korea (ROK). (2024). *Republic of Korea's National Review for Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (2024).* Asia Pacific Gender. https://www.asiapacificgender.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/Republic%20of%20Korea%27s%20National%20Review%20for%20Implementation%20of%20the%20Beijing%20Platform%20for%20Action%20%282024%29.docx

Rhee, E. (2025, September 30). *Korea's Ministry of Gender Equality and Family to remove 'women' from Korean title amid relaunch*. Korea JoongAng Daily. https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/2025-09-30/national/socialAffairs/Koreas-Ministry-of-Gender-Equality-and-Family-to-remove-women-from-Korean-title-amid-relaunch/2411665

Roh, G. W., & Kim, H. J. (2025). The rise of the South Korean alt-right: the 'silent counter revolution' of young men. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 1–19. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1080/13676261.2025.2518949

Rose, E., Mertens, C., & Balint, J. (2024). Structural Problems Demand Structural Solutions: Addressing Domestic and Family Violence. *Violence against Women, 30*(14), 3633–3655. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012231179212

Roth, K. (2019). *World Report 2019*: South Korea. Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/south-korea

Rothman, S. B., Dyliaeva, K., & Ghotbi, N. (2024). An Update on the Ethical Breadth of the Human Rights Concept. *Asian Bioethics Review, 16*(4), 595–613. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41649-024-00288-3

Russell, S. G., Lerch, J. C., & Wotipka, C. M. (2018). The Making of a Human Rights Issue: A Cross-National Analysis of Gender-Based Violence in Textbooks, 1950-2011. *Gender & Society, 32*(5), 713–738. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1177/0891243218786686

Savery, L. (2005). Women's Human Rights and Changing State Practices. *Journal of Critical Realism., 4*(1), 89–111. https://doi.org/10.1558/jocr.v4i1.89

Shim, E. (2020, March 2). *South Korea survey: 74 percent of women face discrimination*. UPI. https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2020/03/02/South-Korea-survey-74-percent-of-women-face-discrimination/7791583174371/

Short, D. (2023). The Social Life of Human Rights. In M. Goodhart (Ed.), *Human Rights: Theory and Practice* (4th ed., pp. 113–134). Oxford University Press.

Song, S., & Kim, D. (2022). The Effects of Globalization on Korea. *Korea Observer, 53*(1), 135-159. https://doi.org/10.29152/KOIKS.2022.53.1.135

Spivak, G. C. (2003). Can the Subaltern Speak? In B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, & and H. Tiffin (Eds.), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (24–28). Routledge.

Stiglitz, J. E. (2002). *Globalization and its Discontents*. W.W. Norton & Company.

Tharp, C. (2025, September 26). *South Korea is the fastest-growing tourism destination on the planet, but it comes at a cost*. The Telegraph. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/asia/south-korea/the-travel-boom-transforming-south-korea/

Thompson, L., Donnelly, L., Turley, E., Frances, T., & Lazard, L. (2025). Intersectional Consciousness in Studies of Violence: Feminist Psychological Perspectives. *Feminism & Psychology*, 1–10. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1177/09593535251405847

United Nations (2006). *The Core International Human Rights Treaties*. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/coretreatiesen.pdf

United Nations (n.d.-a). *International Bill of Human Rights*. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. https://www.ohchr.org/en/what-are-human-rights/international-bill-human-rights

United Nations. (1979). *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women New York, 18 December 1979.* Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women

United Nations. (1993). *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/eliminationvaw.pdf

United Nations. (n.d.-b). *The Preventable Pandemic: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*. https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/preventable-pandemic-sexual-and-gender-based-violence

Wallace, M., Gillispie-Bell, V., Cruz, K., Davis, K., & Vilda, D. (2021). Homicide During Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period in the United States, 2018–2019. *Obstetrics and Gynecology (New York. 1953), 138*(5), 762–769. https://doi.org/10.1097/AOG.0000000000004567

Waylen, G., Celis, K., Kantola, J., & Weldon, S. L. (2013). *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199751457.013.0034

World Economic Forum (2025). *Global Gender Gap Report 2025*. https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2025.pdf

Yang, S. H. (2025). Unveiling Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in South Korea: Signs of Gender-Based Violence, Legal Reforms, and the Role of Criminal Law. In A. Wagner & A. Condello (Eds.), *(In)Visible Signs of Gender-Based Violence* (pp. 353–382). Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-35513-4_18