

**" I DO NOT BELIEVE IN DEMOCRACY IN THE
HOME"**

**MEN'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH AND ABUSE OF
WOMEN**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violence against women has for too long been seen only a women's problem despite the fact that it involves men abusing women. This has been the main reason why men have not been targeted in prevention strategies. At the same time nobody knows the extent of the problem in South Africa. The aim of this study was to investigate the prevalence of abuse as reported by men as well as the risk factors associated with abuse which can be used in the development of programmes aimed at reducing violence against women.

The study was conducted at three municipalities in Cape Town amongst a random sample of 1394 male workers. Individual interviews were held with the men at the work sites. The men were asked to report on both current and previous partners with whom they had meaningful relationships in the past ten years. The men reporting abuse and those not reporting abuse was compared for differences in risk factors.

The findings show that more than 40% of the men reported to have physically and/or sexually abused their female partners within the last 10 years of which more than a 1/3 reported sexual abuse. There is also evidence that this figure is an underestimate. Emotional abuse were 5 more times more likely to be used during conflict with the women by men who abused. Other risk factors associated with reporting abuse included lower education levels, using of alcohol and drugs, the use of violence to resolve conflict, witnessing mothers abuse and reporting more than one partner. The study also showed that women in dating relationships was more at risk of being abused compared to wives. Reasons for conflict was mainly associated with attempts by the men to control their women, their sexuality and their households.

This study has shown that male violence against women is a major problem with many levels of complexities. The fact that this study was done amongst working men is acknowledged as a limitation to a certain extent in that it is not generalisable to all working men or even to all men in Cape Town. However, it must be remembered that gender violence is a feature of all races and classes. No single deterministic factor has been identified and preventive interventions are required at many levels from changing personal perceptions and behaviour of gender and gender roles to addressing the historical and social realities of a deep rooted patriarchal society which accepts violence as a means of resolving conflict. Since men are the primary instigators they should bear the primary responsibility to reverse their behaviour and intensive investment should be directed to working directly with men to address violence in general and violence and men in particular.

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1. BACKGROUND

Male violence against adult women is a public health problem of enormous magnitude (Heise, 1994). With its political and social history, South Africa has produced an environment in which violence has flourished (Human Right's Watch/Africa, 1995, Ramphele & Boonzaier, 1988, & Vogelman & Eagle, 1991) and where it has become part of the South African male identity (Wood and Jewkes, forthcoming).

Despite the fact that gender violence involves men abusing women, it has largely been regarded as a 'women's problem'. As a consequence very little is known about men who abuse women, especially those aspects of their abusive behaviour which have the potential for change. South Africa has few structured and organised programmes for abusers. Some welfare departments and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) offer counselling services for men who attend these clinical settings at the request of their partners or court orders. Most of these programs have been adopted from other countries and therefore do not take into account the needs and resources of the South African environment. As a developing country with a diverse ethnic and cultural population, South Africa has different and limited resources. These must be considered when planning anti-violence strategies tailored to suit local needs and circumstances.

In order to plan preventive strategies we first need to expand research into abusers and to examine the individual and social characteristics of South African men. We also need to know what men understand about their behaviour. This information could be fed into sensitivity and awareness programmes aimed at men serving as a first step to inform men that violence against women will no longer be sanctioned and offer supportive environment in which to change their attitudes and practices.

The overall aim of this study was to determine the prevalence of abuse as reported by men and to identify risks factors associated with abusing. The study only focused on intimate relationships between heterosexual partners and therefore did not include abuse of women which occurs in other contexts (e.g. gang rape). Furthermore, abuse was identified within the context of conflict in relationships between the partners through the use of a modified version of the Conflict Tactic Scale (Struass 1979). This scale consists of a list of actions that a person uses during conflict with another person.

An initial qualitative study of focus group discussions was done with working men to identify the variables and the design items for the questionnaire used in the study (see appendix).

Thus, the findings in this report focus on the prevalence of:

- ◆ ever having abused a woman
- ◆ having abused a woman in the last year
- ◆ risk factors for having abused a woman
- ◆ risk factors for having been abused

The fact that this study was done amongst working men is acknowledged as a limitation to a certain extent in that it is not generalisable to all men in Cape town or even to all working men in South Africa. However, it must be remembered that gender violence is a feature of all races and classes.

The study was funded by the and the National Innovation Fund from the Department Art,

Culture, Technology and Science (DACTS) which is their contribution to the National Crime Prevention Strategy and the Medical Research Council. The research is also done for a PhD by the first author (NA).

2 METHODS

2.1 Setting

Three of the six municipalities in Cape Town participated in the study. Male workers of all races and levels of work were included.

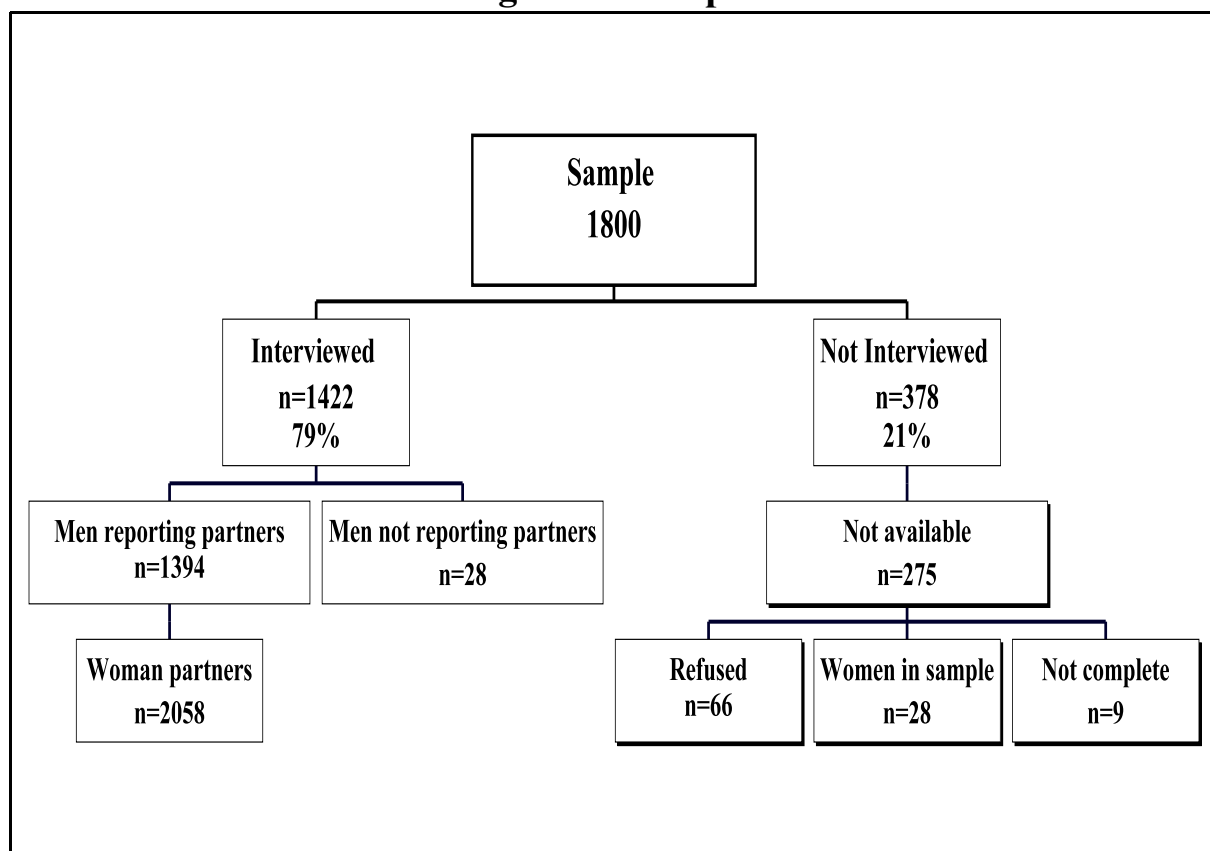
2.2 Study Design

This was a cross-sectional descriptive study.

2.3 Sampling frame and sample

At two of the municipalities the sample was drawn from one department for two main reasons. Firstly the majority of workers within this division were males, and secondly, major restructuring was in progress and we wanted to ensure minimal disruption to the delivery of services. The third site had substantially fewer workers and the sample was thus drawn from all the male workers in this municipality. A list of all the male employees formed the sampling frame and was provided by the Human Resources departments. A random sample of 1800 names were drawn by a statistician, i.e., 600 names from each of the municipalities. Of the 1800 men 1422 were interviewed (Figure 1), giving a response rate of 79.0%. Figure 1 shows why the remaining 378 names were not included and for the majority of cases the men could not be interviewed because of time constraints such as being on leave (annual and sick) or not working any more. Of the 1422 men interviewed 28 did not report any partners and so were not included in the analysis.

Figure1: Sample



2.4 Access

Access was gained through a process of consultation with the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) and the management of the municipalities. The study was further explained to the workers in meetings with both the managers and the shop stewards and they were also involved in the planning of the interviews, which took place at the work sites.

2.5 Interviewing process

Male interviewers were trained to conduct the interviews which lasted 20-30 minutes. Most of the time the interviewer was the same race as the men interviewed and the interviews were conducted in their first language (mostly Afrikaans and Xhosa). Consent was obtained from all the men after confidentiality has been explained and ensured. The men were invited to participate freely and their names were not recorded on the questionnaire.

2.6 Questionnaire

The variables for the questionnaire were informed by the findings of focus group discussions. These were held with men at work in Cape Town and explored their perceptions and experiences of conflict with their partners as well as the nature of the conflicts (see appendix). The questionnaire inquired on their socio-economic background such as age, education, income, home, religious and crime activities, alcohol and drugs; their childhood; their work situations; perceptions of themselves and of women. The men were also asked to identify all their important female partners, which included both current and previous partners over the last 10 years. For each of the partners questions were asked about the type of relationship, age, number of children and conflict management during arguments. At the end of the interview the men who reported abuse were offered assistance and given contact details of a local agency.

2.7 Definitions

Although this study collected data on economic and emotional abuse, this report will focus primarily on physical and sexual abuse. For the purpose of analysis a man was identified as a “man who has abused” when he reported having done one or more of the following to one or more of his female partners: hitting, hit with an object, slapping, smacking, grabbing, pushing, rape and attempted rape. In this report they are referred to as “men who have abused” and the men who did not report the above are referred to as “men not reporting abuse”. We recognised that some of the latter group may have threatened a partner or practiced some form of emotional or financial abuse. The 1394 men identified 2056 female partners whom they had meaningful relationships in the past ten years. These women were divided into “women abused” and “women not abused” in the same way.

2.8 Analysis

The men were divided into the two groups as explained above. Univariate and bivariate analysis was done using SAS. The chi-square test was used to test the significant associations between the study outcome i.e. men who report abuse and men who do not report abuse, and the individual risk factors. Also, the prevalence risk ratio was used to quantify the risk difference between the levels of the risk factors.

3 FINDINGS

Table 1 show the social and demographic factors of all the men interviewed. More than 64% of the men in the sample were Coloured which is a reflection of racial distribution of the male workforce within these Municipalities and the Western Cape in general. Also the majority of the men earned less than R3000.00 which is also the reflection that majority of the male workers in municipalities falls within the lower income employment.

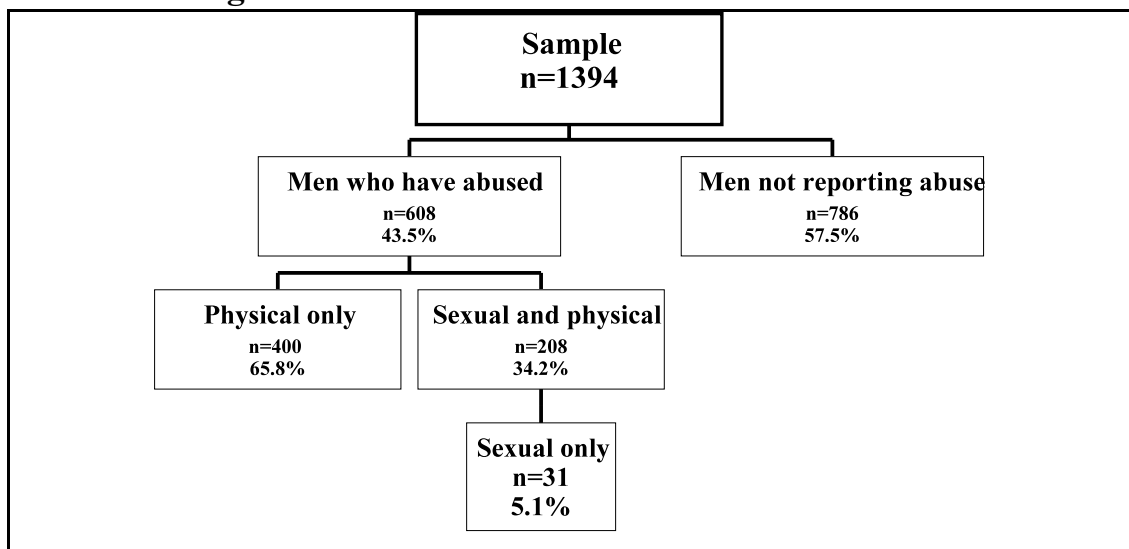
Table 1 Social and demographic factors of the sample (n=1394)

| Variable | | |
|---------------------------|----------|----------|
| Age (mean) | 39.8 | |
| | % | n |
| Race | | |
| African | 25.2 | 351 |
| Coloured | 64.7 | 902 |
| White | 8.6 | 120 |
| Asian | 1.5 | 21 |
| Language | | |
| Xhosa | 24,0 | 335 |
| English | 4.5 | 63 |
| Afrikaans | 71.5 | 996 |
| Educational level: | | |
| No schooling | 6.2 | 87 |
| Std. 7 and lower | 65.9 | 919 |
| Std. 8 and higher | 27.8 | 388 |
| Training after school | 17.8 | 248 |
| Income per month: | | |
| <R3000.00 | 85.2 | 1174 |
| R3000.00 - R5000.00 | 9.1 | 126 |
| >R5000.00 | 5.7 | 78 |

3.1 Prevalence of abuse

In total, 608 (43.6%) of the men interviewed were identified as ‘men who have abused’ (Figure 2). More than 1/3 of these men also reported sexual abuse and except for a small proportion (31)

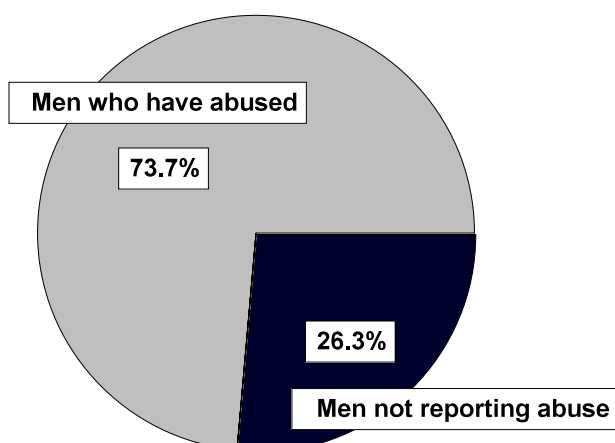
Figure 2: Distribution of men who have abused



most of the men who reported sexual abuse also reported having abused physically.

It is likely that the true prevalence in the sample population is somewhat higher as one would expect that some men would not report physical violence due to anticipated criticism. A possibility of under-reporting lies in the finding that more than a quarter of the men who did not report abuse said it was “acceptable to hit” a woman in certain circumstances (see Figure 3). Table 2 shows the prevalence of men reporting having physically and sexually abused a current

Figure 3: “Hitting a woman is acceptable”



or ex-partner. Most commonly men reported having slapped or smacked a partner. But relatively common also, were pushing, grabbing and throwing something at the partner. More rape was reported than attempts to force rape, which is either a testament to the success of attempts, or reflects under-reporting of attempted rape.

Table 2 Prevalence of physical and sexual abuse (n = 1394)

| | % | n |
|--|------|-----|
| Physical abuse | | |
| Physical abuse within the previous year | 8.7 | 121 |
| Physical abuse ever: | 41.4 | 577 |
| slapping/smacking | 35.4 | 494 |
| grabbing/pushing | 25.8 | 360 |
| throw her with an object | 21.4 | 298 |
| Sexual abuse | | |
| report of ever raped a partner | 9.2 | 128 |
| report of ever attempted to rape a partner | 5.7 | 79 |

Table 3 shows the proportion of men who have abused and men who did not report abuse who reported making threats of violence, or deploying emotional, verbal and financial tactics during conflict. This indicates that the use of all these tactics was much more common among men who have abused. Men who have abused were 5 times more likely to use emotionally manipulative tactics in conflict, 4 times more likely to use verbal abuse, twice as likely to withhold money and nearly three times as likely to threaten their partner.

Table 3 The relationship between the men’s use of physical treats, emotional, verbal and financial tactics in relationship conflicts and the reporting of abuse (n = 1394)

| Variable | men who have abused n= 608 | men not reporting abuse n = 786 | Risk Ratio |
|--|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------|
| | % (n) | % (n) | |
| Physical threats (to hit/ throw with objects) | 45.6 (277) | 4.3 (34) * | 2.8 |
| Emotional abuse (Ignore her/leave the house/threaten to leave the relationship/stay away the night/weekends) | 90.3 (549) | 47.0 (369) * | 5.0 |
| Verbal abuse (shout/swear at/ use dirty language and rude names) | 82.9 (504) | 31.4 (247) * | 4.1 |
| Withheld economic support | 24.7 (150) | 4.3 (34) * | 2.1 |

* statistically significant, p = 0.001

3.2 Factors associated with abusing women

Table 4 show the distribution of the social and the demographic factors of the men interviewed. The men who reported abuse were younger. Although it was not significant but men who did not have Standard 8 or above were more likely to report abuse. Men who had training after Matric were half as likely to report abuse. Similarly being active in religious activities seem to be associated with lower levels of abusive behaviour. In contrast there was an increase risk of reporting abuse among men who had been reported to the police, detained or jailed or been involved in a fight at work. Men who had been involved with gangs and fights in the neighborhood were twice as likely to have also abused women. This confirms reports of relationships between the physical abuse of women and the use of violence as a strategy in conflict or to gain ascendancy in other circumstances.

Table 4 The relationship between social and demographic factors and the reporting of abuse (n = 1394)

| Variable | Sample n=1394 | men who have abused n=608 | men not reporting abuse n=786 | Risk Ratio |
|---|------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| Age (mean) | 39.8 | 36.6 | 40.7 | |
| | % (n) | % (n) | % (n) | |
| Race | | | | |
| African | 25.2 (351) | 24.2 (147) | 25.9 (204) | |
| Coloured | 64.7 (902) | 70.6 (429) | 60.2 (473) | |
| White | 8.6 (120) | 3.5 (21) | 12.6 (99) | |
| Asian | 1.5 (21) | 1.8 (11) | 1.3 (10) | |
| Educational level: | | | | |
| No schooling | 6.2 (67) | 3.5 (21) | 8.4 (66) | |
| Std. 7 and lower | 65.9 (919) | 72.4 (439) | 66.1 (480) | |
| Std. 8 and higher | 27.8 (388) | 24.3 (148) | 30.5 (240) | |
| Training after school | 17.8 (248) | 10.2 (62) | 23.7 (186) * | 0.5 |
| Active in Religion | 47.7 (604) | 40.2 (223) | 53.5 (381) * | 0.7 |
| Alcohol and drugs | | | | |
| Drinks alcohol | 57.6 (803) | 65.6 (399) | 51.4 (404) * | 1.4 |
| Report alcohol drinking is a problem | 26.4 (287) | 37.3 (192) | 16.6 (95) * | 1.6 |
| Takes Dagga/Mandrax | 12.1 (168) | 19.1 (116) | 6.6 (52) * | 1.7 |
| Criminal activities | | | | |
| Reported, Arrested, Detained by police | 44.1 (614) | 53.1 (323) | 37.0 (291) * | 1.4 |
| Involved in a fight in the neighborhood | 33.7 (358) | 38.8 (232) | 28.8 (126) * | 1.8 |
| Involved in a fight at work | 25.7 (200) | 20.9 (127) | 9.3 (73) * | 1.5 |
| Spend time in jail | 30.7 (428) | 41.3 (251) | 22.5 (177) * | 1.5 |
| Belong to a gang | 06.5 (90) | 11.5 (70) | 02.5 (20) * | 1.9 |

* statistically significant, p=0.001

3.3 The Relationship between the mens childhood experiences and the reporting of abuse

Table 5 shows that significantly more men who reported abuse witnessed their mothers being beaten during their childhood and had witnessed their sisters' abuse by their husbands and boyfriends. There was on average a 50% greater risk for reporting abuse among the respondents who had witnessed abuse during their childhood. In the earlier focus group study the men related stories of severe discipline in their childhood in which their fathers had a central role. However, these findings shows that physical punishment was a common occurrence for both groups. These findings confirm intergenerational transmission of violence against women.

Table 5 Relationship between the childhood experiences of the men and reporting of abuse (n = 1394)

| Variable | Sample n=1394 | men who have abused n=608 | men not reporting abuse n=786 | Risk Ratio |
|---|------------------|------------------------------------|--|---------------|
| | % (n) | % (n) | % (n) | |
| Witnessed mothers' abuse by father/boyfriends | 23.9 (333) | 34.2 (208) | 15.9 (125) * | 1.6 |
| Witnessed sisters' abuse by her husband/boyfriend | 29.1 (353) | 38.5 (211) | 21.2 (142) * | 1.5 |
| Physical punishment as child | 86.1 (1201) | 88.8 (540) | 84.1 (661) | 1.0 |

* statistically significant, p=0.001

3.4 The Men's Partners

Table 6 shows the current and previous partners reported by men who have abused and those not reporting abuse within the last ten years. The men who had only one partner in the ten years and who were still in that relationship were significantly less likely to report abuse. In contrast men who reported more partners and who reported more than one current partner were significantly more likely to have reported abuse. The larger number of partners may be partly related to their younger age. It may also reflect partners leaving them after abuse.

Table 6 Relationship between current and previous important partners and the reporting of abuse (n = 1394)

| Variable | men who have abused n=608 | men not reporting abuse n=786 | Risk Ratio |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------|
| | % (n) | % (n) | |
| Previous partners only (no current partners) | 4.2 (26) | 7.1 (56) | 0.6 |
| Current partners only (no previous partners) | 54.3 (330) | 75.6 (594) * | 0.6 |
| Both previous and current partners | 41.1 (252) | 17.3 (136) * | 1.8 |
| More than 1 current partner | 12.3 (75) | 4.9 (39) * | 1.6 |
| Range of current partners | 0 - 4 | 0 - 3 | - |
| Range of previous partners | 0 - 7 | 0 - 5 | - |

The 1394 men reported on 2056 female partners . Their abuse status is shown in Figure 4. 40.8% (838) were identified as women abused and a further 214 (11.7%) were not abused but were partners of men identified as abusers. This later group of women can be said to be at risk of being abused as well.

Figure 4: The men’s partners

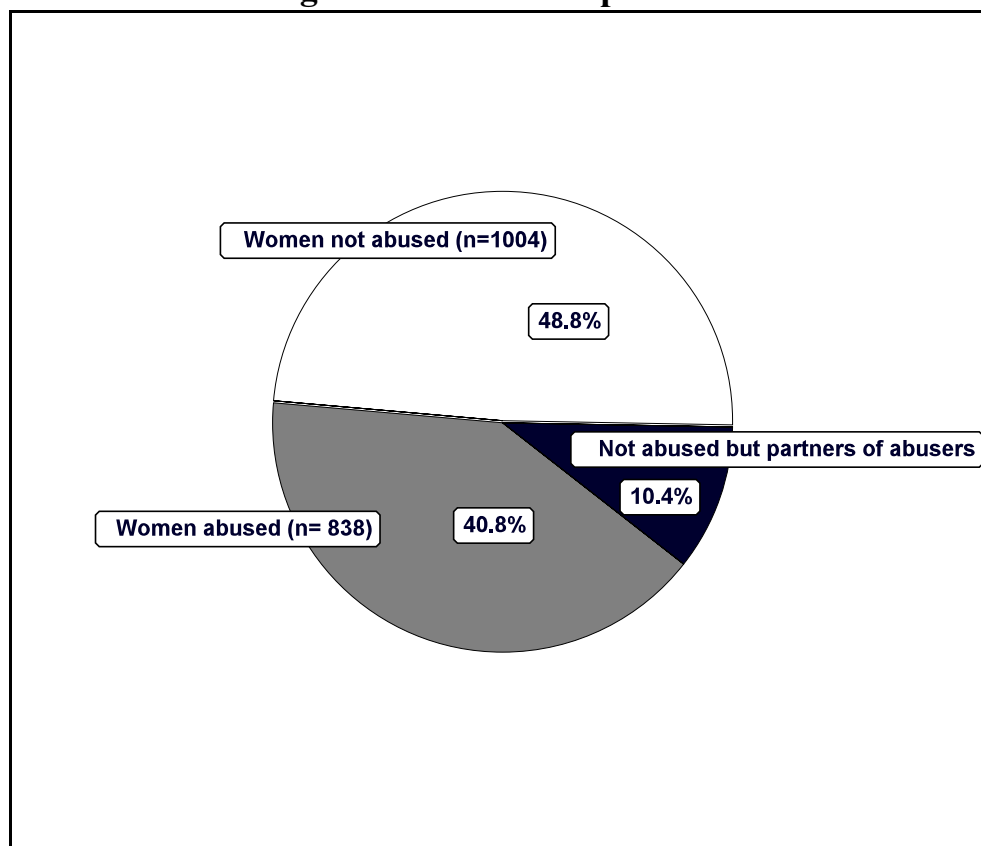


Table 7 shows the relationship status and the social habits of the female partners. There was a 50% increased risk associated with being a live-in girlfriend. It is notable, however, that nearly a third of the women were abused whilst in a dating relationship. Increased risk was associated with alcohol use and, particularly, the women’s alcohol drinking being perceived by the man as a problem.

Table 7 The relationship between the socio demographic factors of the female partners and having been abused n = 2056

| Variable | Sample n=2056 | women abused n= 838 | women not abused n=1218 | Risk Ratio |
|--|------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| | % (n) | % (n) | % (n) | |
| Marital status | | | | |
| wife | 53.6 (1103) | 49.6 (416) | 56.4 (687) | 1.0 |
| girlfriend with whom he lived | 27.4 (13.3) | 19.2 (161) | 9.3 (113) | 1.5 |
| girlfriend with whom he did not live | 67.1 (32.6) | 30.7 (257) | 34.0 (414) | 1.0 |
| Alcohol use | | | | |
| She drank alcohol | 27.8 (572) | 36.3 (304) | 22.0 (268) * | 1.5 |
| Her alcohol drinking caused problems in their relationship | 39.1 (226) | 53.5 (161) | 23.4 (65) * | 1.7 |

* Statistically significant, p = 0.001

3.6 Reasons Given for Conflict

The reasons for conflict presented in Table 8 emerged from the initial focus groups conducted as part of the questionnaire development. The phrase “*she sits on my head*” was commonly reported as a reason for conflict and referred to a man’s perception of his partner not respecting his ‘*authority*’ in the home or wanting to ‘*override*’ it. Similarly “*when she answered him back*” was also perceived as the women undermining his authority. “*Talking to other men*” was related to the men’s mistrust of their partner and fear (imaginary or grounded) of infidelity (see Appendix).

Much less conflict were reported overall by men who did not report abuse in their relationships. There was a significant difference between the two groups for all the reasons reported. Particular types of conflict were much less frequently reported among men who had never used physical violence. This indicates that in these relationships there is less of an expectation that the women will obey their partners (or less of a challenge to male dominance in the home), less of a belief in male sexual entitlement in a relationship and to partnerships outside, less fear of infidelity (grounded or otherwise), and less conflict over his drinking alcohol. At the same time it is also possible that abuse happens without conflict and provocation which were not explored in this study.

Table 8 The relationship between the reasons for conflict with the female partners and reporting abuse n = 1934

| Variable | men who have abused n = 608 | men not reporting abuse n = 786 | Risk Ratio |
|--|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------|
| | % (n) | % (n) | |
| Household finances | 59.5 (362) | 27.7 (218)* | 2.0 |
| About the children | 67.6 (411) | 38.4 (302)* | 2.0 |
| When she 'sits' on his head | 69.4 (422) | 24.5 (193)* | 2.8 |
| When she answers him back | 62.8 (382) | 21.9 (172)* | 2.5 |
| When she wants him to spend more time with her | 57.7 (351) | 29.5 (232)* | 1.8 |
| When she talks to other men | 35.2 (214) | 6.7 (53) * | 2.2 |
| When she does not want to have sex | 35.0 (213) | 6.1 (48) * | 2.3 |
| When he has drunk alcohol | 71.0 (432) | 37.4 (294)* | 2.2 |
| When she suspects him of having affairs | 62.8 (382) | 19.1 (150) * | 2.7 |
| About relatives | 41.6 (253) | 19.1 (150)* | 1.7 |

Statistically significant, p = 0.001

4 CONCLUSION

The important findings from this study are:

- Male violence against women is indeed widespread amongst the study population.
- 40% of the men in these workplaces physically or sexually abused a partner in the last 10 years.
- This self report estimate suggest that there are more conflict in the relationships and that threats of physical violence are also common.
- More than 30% of the men reported ever sexually abusing a partner.
- Emotionally abuse was reported 5 times more by the men who reported abuse.
- Similarly, verbal abuse were also 4 times more often reported by the men who reported abuse.
- The men who reported abuse of partners were younger, less well educated, more likely to be Coloured and more likely to drink alcohol and take drugs and also reported the use of violence at work and in the neighbourhoods, to deal with conflicts. The relationship between having been involved in criminal activities, including the use of violence at work, and violence in intimate relationships indicates that there are links between violence against women and the broader spectrum of violence in South African society. It also may support the assertion of Simpson (1991) of violence against women being related to the use of violence as a first line strategy in conflict resolution.
- The associations between abuse and witnessing mothers' abuse during childhood is in keeping with findings of Hotaling and Sugarman (1986). These suggest that violence is a learned behaviour and they argue that it can therefore be unlearned, since many values and morals learned during childhood are abandoned for new ones during adulthood and there is no reason to believe that violence is not dissimilar. It also highlights the importance of work now to break the intergenerational cycles of violence so that the next generation of South Africans can grow in a more peaceful society.
- The reported reasons for conflict confirm associations between violence against women and patriarchal ideas of gender roles. Conflict was mainly associated with attempts by the men to control their women, their sexuality and their households. Research in other sub-groups of South African society has shown that this control lies at the heart of the meaning of being a 'real' man in those groups. Violence is used not just to maintain control and dominance but to counter real or imagined threats to 'manhood' (Wood & Jewkes, forthcoming; Mager 1998). This needs further investigation in this context.
- Violence against women is associated with multiple risk factors and effective intervention are required at all the levels from personal behaviour changes to the elevation of poverty.
- Although one must be cautious about allowing perpetrators to be seen as victims, many of the men reporting abuse showed obvious psychological stress during the interviews.

Many broke down and cried. This was a clear indication that abusers have a need for help. A further indication for some form of intervention for the men in general was their obvious gratitude for an opportunity to speak to someone about issues which men are normally not encouraged to speak about. This provides windows of opportunity for interventions with men who abuse women.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ The conventional approaches to the reduction of violence against women have been characterised by an over reliance on women's behaviour change. Any improvement in women's position requires a change among men and since they are the primary instigators, they should bear the primary responsibility to reverse their behaviour. It is recommended that preventive intervention should be increased and intensive investment should be directed to working directly with men.
- ◆ As this study has shown violence against women cannot be explained by one single factor. Interventions are required at all the levels ranging from personal level changes in perception and behaviour of gender and gender roles to addressing the historical and social realities of a deep rooted patriarchal society.
- ◆ Effective preventive strategies should include programmes which deals with gender sensitivity and awareness, non-violent conflict management skills and communication. A pro-active approach to break the intergenerational cycle of violence would be to targeting young men. This might be costly initially but cost effective in the long run.
- ◆ Changing men's perception and behaviour should be part of the South African transformation process and be accepted as mainstream in political, social, educational, economical, health and labour sectors.
- ◆ Employee organisations and trade unions should be targeted to implement programmes aimed at raising men's awareness of gender equality and violence and simultaneously mobilise people and resources.
- ◆ The opportunities for progress are greater now than ever before as the topic of violence against women has become an important political issue and the need to stop the spread of violence in current and future generations are being recognised as a key part of raising the status of South African women.

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Focus Group Study : Men on violence against women Naeema Abrahams & Rachel Jewkes

Introduction

In South Africa, in 1997, violence against women has become a national priority. The women's organisations, who have tried for years to have their voices heard, are finally being given national recognition and many government Departments are now developing joint working with NGOs to tackle gender violence. One of the ironies of the long years of struggle by women's organisations, however, is that now gender violence is on the agenda it has been labelled as a 'women's problem'. The essential role of men in gendered power relations and violent interactions, has been substantially ignored as interventions have focused on support for abused women (which obviously is very important) and various forms of women's behaviour change. As a consequence very little is known about men who abuse women, especially those aspects of their abusive behaviour which have the potential for change. The neglect of this area is counterproductive since reductions in levels of gender violence depend critically on male behaviour change.

Why do men abuse women?

Rosenbaum and O'Leary (1981) compared data on relationships with and without abuse and found that the only significant differences between the two groups were differences between abusive and non-abusive husbands. The abusers were less assertive than their wives, were more likely to have been abused as a child and to have witnessed parental abuse. Hotaling and Sugarman (1986) performed a meta-analysis of 52 studies to evaluate potential risk factors (a characteristic that is associated with an increased probability of husband to wife abuse) and found the strongest factor associated with the use of violence towards wives was the witnessing or experiencing violence in the childhood home. The findings of this review indicate that violence is a learned behaviour, which suggests that it can be unlearned, since many values and practices learned during childhood are modified in later life there is no reason to believe that violence is not dissimilar.

Walker (1983) also found that abusers had low self esteem which is associated with emotional dependency, manifested as jealous behaviour and fears that their partners will leave them. Low self-esteem has also been associated with greater difficulties in dealing with frustrations and insecurities which arise from outside the home such as work pressures or economic problems. These frustrations are then displaced into anger or abuse of somebody over whom they have power and control (Pence & Paymar, 1993). In South Africa the abuse of alcohol and drugs has been identified as a major problem with teenagers and the public at large (Flisher, et al 1993). In international studies of violence against women, alcohol clearly and drugs to a lesser extent have been associated with violence and often have been suggested as precipitants of violence (Powers & Kutash, 1982).

Abuser intervention programmes

Research explaining gender violence has had a considerable impact on the way in which programmes for men who are violent have been developed. In South Africa there are few structured and organised programmes. Some Departments of Welfare and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) offering counselling services for men who attend these clinical settings at the request from their partners. Unfortunately the number of men accessing these is quite limited.

There is very little in the way of outreach interventions, for example in workplaces or community settings, which can reach men who may not identify themselves as ‘abusers’ or wish to be publically identified as such. There are also few community awareness initiatives which could help change attitudes towards the social acceptability of gender violence and offer men a supportive environment in which to change their perceptions and attitudes. Developing these is a priority for the country but before doing so research is needed in order to better understand why men abuse women and their attitudes towards gender violence.

This paper presents the findings of four focus groups which were held with men in a Cape Town factory. The focus group discussions were arranged with the assistance of the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU). Their aim was to explore men’s perceptions of gender and violence in their relationships with women and they were held as part of the preparation of a questionnaire for a workplace based survey of male attitudes towards and experiences of abuse of women. The groups consisted of both married and unmarried Coloured, Afrikaans-speaking men with their ages ranging from mid twenties to mid forties. They were line function workers such as machine operators, motor mechanic assistants and trucks loaders.

Findings

The origins of conflicts

When the men spoke of how arguments developed in their relationships, they often blamed their partner, revealing a lack of trust. For example, one man explained that if his woman was seen *‘speaking to somebody I do not know’* it would give him *‘thoughts’*, whilst another explained that it happened when *‘you hear that your wife has talked to a man’*. The men explained that their fears were based on their observations of other married women, for example one said *‘you see the married women with other men and you start to think that your wife can do the same thing’* and perceptions that they did not always know what their wives did as they worked shifts. One participant said he thought the jealousy revealed double standards as *‘you do not want your girl to speak to somebody but you expect her to understand when you speak to another girl’*. Many of the others reacted by defending their behaviour saying that it *‘was natural for a man to react like this’*. One admitted having assaulted his girlfriend with a knife when he saw her speaking to an unknown man.

When conflict arose in their relationships due to their behaviour, the women were described as wanting to *‘own’* and possess them. This appeared particularly later in marriages when arguments about past relationships arose or when women were seen to want to control their men’s activities such as not wanting them to play too much sport. Conflicts also arose from perceptions about women’s and men’s *‘roles’* in the housework. One man explained *‘My problem for example is I do not see it the same way...I do not want to do the dishes...I see it as essentially her role to perform in the relationship’*. This same informant later admitted that he physically abused his girlfriend. A few of the men disagreed and felt that men and women can compliment each other and both can do the housework. However, in later discussions, all of them agreed and stated that the man must be the *‘head of the house’* and that he is the *‘authority’*. Many of the men spoke of how arguments arose when the woman does not respect this *‘authority’* or wanted to *‘override’* it.

The term *‘to sit on a man’s head’* was used often in the discussions and referred to women’s behaviour which undermined or failed to acknowledge the man’s *‘authority’*. As one informant explained *‘she wants to tell him to do this ...and if he does not do it then that evening he gets the back or he has to go to sleep on the couch’*. A few men who were active in religious activities

particularly strongly stated that the *'man is the head of the house'* and argued that this was supported by their religion. One described how his mother and father had had many arguments but after a while she came to *'realise that she just want to sit on his head'*, she *'converted'* to religion and *'has come to lower herself... and accept what her [husband] said'*. The same man felt *'a bit disappointed in the way the constitution had been done because it allows the woman to stand equal...'*. Another informant, who admitted to abusing his girlfriend, also described his perceptions *'I do not believe in democracy in the home. That is something up there in the government - not in the house'*. Many of the men distinguished between the *'authority'* in the house (their role) and the *'boss'*. The latter role they often admitted was held by either their *'wife'* or their *'mother'*.

The men also described how conflicts often originate over *'little things'* such as a *'dirty cup'*, *'not watching the pot'*, *'a broken hair dryer'* or *'giving the dog food'*. This would usually be when men were *'frustrated'* about something that happened at work and *'you go home with this mood'* and *'will do something that you know will end in a fight'*. In these cases the real origin of the conflict was outside the home but the reaction would be displaced into the home.

Responses to conflicts

Three of the men admitted during the discussions that they abuse their partners. They openly spoke about the incidents, which were received with mixed reactions from the men in the focus group. Some laughed, whilst others said that they found them unacceptable. All the men also spoke about their reactions during arguments and several said they employed a variety of strategies to avoid hitting women. The one said he *'ignores'* her, another said *'all you do is just sit there like a dummy'*. They perceived that this behaviour was the *'best way to treat them rather than to hit them'* because *'women can't take it if men ignore them'* or *'if they give you food and you do not eat it'*. Some of the men said they *'walked away'* because they are afraid that *'if they stay longer then I will get to her'*. More than one man spoke about going off and *'coming back the next day'* or spoke about staying away weekends. None of the men admitted giving in to the arguments as this would be allowing the women to *'sit on their heads'*. The men that found the abuse unacceptable also spoke about alternatives such as *'talking'* and *'communication'* to their partners as means of dealing with conflict. One of them said he learned this at school and the other said that he learned it as an example from his own parents.

Childhood experiences

Many of the men related stories of severe discipline in their childhood, in which their fathers had a central role. This resulted in one eventually running away from the home at the age of 14 years. Most of the men said that they did not want to be like their fathers but at the same time they perceived that discipline was required to ensure the children's safety in the environment in which they are raised. Some described their childhood experiences of bizzare punishments, including being placed in ice cold water. Some informants talked about observing the abuse that their mothers' suffered and spoke about the consequences such as the mother becoming a *'nervous wreck'* as a result of the *'strict rules'*. Experiences of parental abuse were not always directly linked to personal use of violence. One who admitted hitting his wife, said that his *'parents did not fight...I do not know where I have learned these [abusive] manners.'*

Low self-esteem

Most of the men said that they did not find it easy to speak about their feelings. They admitted to *'pretend'* a lot and felt that it was due to *'pride'*. Many experienced *'frustrations'* as a result of *'pressure'* at work where they have to *'accept the shit of the bosses'*. One informant described

his experiences of 'racism' at work, which resulted in him feeling 'belittled'. He felt this was made worse by his wife wanting him to do household tasks in front of her friends and as a result conflict would follow. Another explained that he 'get frustrated' when he was not able to 'provide adequately' for the family since he felt responsible for them as 'it is one of the things to be a man'.

Home environment

Most of the men lived in overcrowded conditions in sub-economic housing which they recognised as contributing to conflict in the house. One informant explained how his father was under 'pressure' because their family lived in a room within another household and as a result his father made very strict rules for which he (the informant) was often punished if he broke. Another explained how he and his wife lacked privacy when they wanted to have sex and 'had to wait for the children to go away at weekends' and this strained their relationship.

Alcohol was perceived by the men as playing a role in conflict in multiple ways. During an incidence of abuse related in the group, one informant spoke about taking alcohol beforehand in order 'to get a sparkie- some steam' because he wanted to beat his partner for suspected infidelity. He said this was necessary as if he is 'sober then it is almost like I am a lamb'. Other men spoke about how rape can occur when some women do not want to have sex with men when they are drunk. When men spoke about their childhood experiences in their parents, home the issue of alcohol was also raised. More than one informant described 'father's' and 'step fathers' who 'drank a lot' and one perceived this as part of the reason why his mother had 'nervous' problems. Alcohol was also used to suppress feelings and tensions as other men mentioned going to the 'pub' when they felt frustrated to avoid violence at home.

Perceptions of violence

Violence in general was identified as a daily occurrence in these men's lives. They hear and see it particularly 'over weekends when the alcohol flows'. Several informants narrated accounts of violence that they had seen or heard of, mostly the incidents resulted in severe physical injury. When the men were asked what they considered to be violence against woman, most of them agreed that it would be physical such as using the 'hand' or a 'knife' or when 'you leave a mark'. Most of the men agreed that shouting and swearing at the woman was not a form of violence and neither was humiliating a woman as this is 'merely breaking down her humanity'. One of the men who hit his wife said that she perceived this to be worse, he reported that she often told him that 'I could rather hit her than to use dirty words'.

Discussion

Much of the conflict which was described related to men's views of gender roles and perceptions that they owned and had a right to control their women and their households. Conflict thus arose over suspected infidelity (which was acceptable for men), women trying to control mens activities, women making men do housework and perceptions that women did not accept at all times their authority as 'head' of the house. Some men suggested that the conflict arose from the relationships within the homes themselves, whereas other identified the origins in frustrations particularly resulting in low self-esteem, from the external environment including work, alcohol and poor living conditions.

Violence was described as a daily occurrence in the men's lives as children as well as in adults. Many men indicated that they thought it was wrong and described a variety of strategies for dealing with conflict which avoided physical violence. These included verbal communication,

ignoring women, refusing to eat their food, staying away weekends and going to the pub for a drink. The findings of the focus group suggests that the reported relationship between alcohol and violence may be more complex than surveys often reveal as here alcohol use amongst abusers was described as a means of getting the strength to be violent as well as a direct cause of violence.

The finding that men in the focus groups who abused women, and many who did not, expressed ideas of what might be called 'rigid and conservative' gender roles, may support Walker's (1983) finding that men who hold these are at higher risk of becoming abusers. This is not to argue that within South African society there *are* rigid gender roles, indeed multiple discourses of gender were revealed within these small group discussions, but rather to suggest that ideas of gender roles are deployed by men as justifications for abuse of women, just as in other situations notions of "culture" are also similarly deployed. The observations from the study that there are multiple discourses of gender within a fairly homogeneous group of men and that some men have well tried strategies for consciously avoiding conflict escalating to the point of violence suggest that there is potential for changes in attitudes and for training men to develop strategies for better management of conflict. This small study suggests gender violence is a complex and interventions are required at multiple levels, ranging from personal changes in practices and attitudes, to improvements in the humanity of working conditions and reducing poverty. The importance of work directly with men, however, is highlighted by international research which reveals gender violence to be a feature of relationships of all social classes.

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