

EQUALITY BEGINS AT HOME: DISRUPTING VIOLENCE WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

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Sunday, 14 February 2016, marks three years since Reeva Steenkamp was shot and killed by her boyfriend, Oscar Pistorius. Despite his claim that he mistook her for an intruder, her death shone a light on the deeply troubling pattern of gender-based violence that characterises our society.

Three years on little has shifted, with numerous cases of women being killed at the hands of their partners being reported since 2013 (including Jade Panayiotou, Rachel Dolly Tshabalala and Fatima Choonara)¹. These cases represent only a fraction of the problem, with research documenting that a woman is killed every eight hours². The continuing “war at home”³, as some have dubbed the gender-based violence epidemic, suggests that we need to re-examine how we research and develop policies regarding violence, and gender-based violence in particular.

Practices of violence are intimately intertwined with practices of gender inequality. In a context where men and women are deeply unequal, violence occurs as a somewhat “ordinary” happening and is deemed a “necessary” and “appropriate” way for men to display and enforce their power over women.

How then do we begin to dismantle these practices? We believe everyday practices of inequality, such as those that occur in homes, represent an important site of intervention, as it is within the home that children are first exposed to notions of gender and gender (in)equality.

Alongside global campaigns such as One Billion Rising, which aims to bring people together to challenge gender-based violence, we dream of a situation in which violence is “unthinkable”⁴. This requires a dramatic restructuring of our everyday thoughts and actions.

In order to better understand “everyday (in)equality” we asked a number of South African families how they think about and practice gender (in)equality within their homes. The results suggest that “everyday (in)equalities” are capable of either promoting or disrupting practices of violence and, therefore, reconfiguring these (in)equalities is an important first step in disrupting practices of violence. Based on the results of our research, we have produced a policy brief [<http://www.samrc.ac.za/policybriefs/GenderInequality.pdf>] which outlines key insights and recommendations for policy-makers, in the hope that the connection between “everyday (in)equality” and violence will be prioritised.

¹ <http://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/when-leaving-him-was-a-fatal-mistake-1959635>

² Abrahams, N., Mathews, S., Jewkes, R., Martin, L. J., & Lombard, C. (2012). Every eight hours: Intimate femicide in South Africa 10 years later. Available from: <http://www.mrc.ac.za/policybriefs/everyeighthours.pdf>

³ <http://www.genderlinks.org.za/article/the-war-at-home---gbv-indicators-project-2011-08-16>

⁴ <http://www.onebillionrising.org/about/campaign/one-billion-rising/>