



An Investigation of Cultural Expectations and Standards as Contributors to Domestic Violence Perpetuated Against Men: A Case Study of Limpopo Province

Sabelinah, M. Tshoane; Adewale, A. Olutola; Paul, O. Bello; Jacob, T. Mofokeng

Department of Safety & Security Management, Faculty of Humanities, Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa

E-mail: tshoaneSM@tut.ac.za

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Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a complex social problem, a major global concern, and an obstacle to social and economic progress in the developing regions of the world (South Africa not exempted). Generally, intimate partner violence occurs in the private sphere of the family and poses serious risks to human beings and the broader society. This article was prompted by the paucity of data to address the growing problem of IPV against men in Limpopo province of South Africa, particularly the narrow focus on cultural norms and standard towards men. It also examines the impact of cultural values on IPV against men. Furthermore, the article evaluates what changes may be implemented within cultural norms and standards to include male as victims of domestic violence. To get a thorough understanding of the impacts and implications of cultural norms and standards imposed on men, this article adopted a qualitative research method to garner men's perceptions of IPV, which enables an in-depth understanding of how cultural norms and standards perpetuate IPV against men. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with ten members of the House of Traditional Leaders. Findings indicate that instances of Intimate Partner Violence against men in Limpopo province are primarily influenced by the cultural norms, values, language, and other traditional factors that are like the dust in the air, which surrounds everyone. In addition, the article argues that IPV against males can be reduced by societal education and greater research, which can influence culturally effective strategies to combat IPV against men.

Keywords: *Intimate Partner Violence; Cultural Norms; Societal Standards*

Introduction

Social and cultural norms are rules or expectations of behaviour and thoughts based on shared beliefs within a specific cultural or social group. While often unspoken, norms offer social standards for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour that govern what is (and is not) acceptable in interactions among

people (WHO, 2009). Social and cultural norms are highly influential over individual behaviour in a broad variety of contexts, including violence and its prevention, because norms can create an environment that can either foster or mitigate violence and its deleterious effects.

Different social and cultural norms influence how individuals react to violence. Researchers have hypothesized that the social and cultural norms that lead to the tolerance of violence are learned in childhood, wherein a child experiences corporal punishment or witnesses violence in the family, in the media, or in other settings (Abrahams and Jewkes, 2005; Brookmeyer, Henrich, & Schwab-Stone, 2005; Lansford and Dodge, 2008; WHO, 2009). Religion influences social conventions and forms cultures as well as social, political, and economic lives.

Societal perceptions of IPV as a predominantly female issue have led to the development of research perspectives, frameworks, measures, and methodologies unable to capture the full scope of male victimization (Walker, Lyall, Silva, Craigie, Mayshak, Costa, Hyder, and Bentley, 2020). Women's violence against males has mainly gone unnoticed for a variety of reasons (Tshoane, 2022). Firstly, being a victim who is perceived by society to be strong because of societal expectations carries a stigma for men (Tshoane, 2022). African cultural traditions and patriarchal societal expectations all contribute to men's reluctance to report situations of emotional, psychological, and physical abuse at the hands of their female partners. Because of societal pressure, the pandemic of domestic violence against males persists (Thobejane, 2019).

Patriarchy has been embedded in history at multiple layers across global societies (Malik & Nadda, 2019). Although the primal understanding of patriarchy puts men on gain an advantage over and women on a one-down position, no one really benefits from patriarchy. For the word patriarchy reflects "man-dominance," it is quite easy to extricate its defeatist impact on men (Malik & Nadda, 2019).

Research on the relationship between cultural expectations and domestic violence is limited in the literature of domestic violence in South Africa. To address this gap, the current research explores the link between cultural expectations, standards and domestic violence in South Africa. The research attempts to answer the question of, how do cultural expectations and standards in the African cultural context influence domestic violence against men. Although academics have given greater attention to Intimate Partner Violence in recent years, there has been little focus on cultural expectations and standards on Intimate Partner Violence on men. These cultural factors are ingrained in men from the day they are born, and can play a role in either ending or perpetuating violence. Frequently, the legal system and society has failed to see men as victims and women as perpetrators because of the culturally pervasive stereotype and viewing women as perfect victims.

Background of Study

Traditional masculine norms describe how society views men's actions, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, including their roles and rights in society (Moore & Stuart, 2005). SADC Gender Protocol and the South African constitution that seems to be turning a blind eye on gender based violence where men are victims. Cultural norms still exist that perpetuate the problem. For example, the tradition of not interfering in matters between family members that occur in private has led to reluctance for men victims to speak about their experiences and for the government, the criminal justice system, and other systems to respond to domestic violence effectively and equally, even after it became a crime.

Regionally, the literature demonstrates that recent violence against men has been increasing exponentially in some parts of Africa (Jasinski, 2011). It is important to note that violence is increasing with situations where women specifically those with significant incomes and prestigious jobs undermine men's authority

Statistics on male abuses are under-documented due to massive under-reporting of such cases. Anyuor (2012) argues that underreporting is due to cultural norms and the need to preserve the age-long practice of patriarchy and the adage that says, “Men do not cry”.

In the Tshivenda language, largely spoken in the Vhembe district of Limpopo, South Africa, the following are said to be some cultural norms regarding men:

"Mubva ha na nzie nzie dzi khoroni"-A man has to go all out to get something for his family

"Tshakule tshi wanwa nga muhovhi"- Good things do not come easily so a man has to strive to succeed.

"khokhonya ila maanda ayo"-A man has to eat his sweat and, in this case, cannot expect anything from a woman.

"Mudi wa goswi au na malila"-A house of a weak man won't last"

"U tshi kokodza luranga u kokodza na vhana vhalwo"-A married man is entitled to take responsibilities of taking care of both the wife and her kids"

The Tsonga adages are as follows:

Nwanuna I nyimpfu u rilela ndzeni. A man does not cry.

Almost all South African languages contain cultural norms and standards that contribute to cultural abuse of men. The Sepedi ones are as follows:

Monna ke Nku O llela teng- Men cries within.

Statement of the Problem

To comprehend intimate partner violence, it is necessary to investigate how cultures generate beliefs, expectations, and conventions about gender and family. Cultural expectations and standards placed on men by society are all compounding complex issues that causes men to be reluctant to speak and seek help from cases of being emotionally, psychologically, physically abused at the hands of their female partners. Men are reluctant to talk about the emotional, psychological, and physical abuse they have experienced at the hands of their female intimate partners due to a variety of complex concerns, including African cultural standards and patriarchal societal expectations.

The scourge of men abuses continue due to societal and cultural pressure. Males are frequently encouraged in all cultures to be stronger, less sensitive, and more accepting of their intimate partners' mistreatment. The cultural adage such as Monna ke nku o llela teng (“A man must suffer in silence”). It is important to acknowledge the cultural norms that victims bring with them. These norms dictate how men may experience domestic violence and how they may react to it. Men who lives in rural communities adheres to strong values of independence that prevent them from seeking help from “outsiders” or urban programs.

Literature Review

South Africa is rated as the country with the highest level of domestic violence against women and children. As a result, more studies are being done about the domestic violence against women and children and there is little research done in South Africa about domestic violence against men.

Research on domestic violence has expanded over the past 30 years to include several overlapping, but distinct types of victimization. Studies of domestic violence began in the late 1970s and early 1980s with inquiries into physical and sexual violence in the context of intimate partner relationships (Anyuor, 2012).

Research Design and Methodology

This article adopted a qualitative research method to garner men's perceptions of cultural expectations and standards as contributors to domestic violence perpetuated against men, which enables an in-depth understanding of how cultural norms and standards perpetuate Intimate Partner Violence against men.

Population of study

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. The approach was found appropriate, considering the nature of the study that requires an in-depth knowledge and experience sharing the phenomenon under study. Qualitative research approach also allows for a robust understanding of participants' views of a phenomenon, which may not be thoroughly explained using a survey approach.

Limpopo province, South African, was the site of this study. Although South Africa has nine provinces, however, this one province was selected as a representative of the country, as Limpopo is rooted in its culture. Limpopo is one of South Africa's nine provinces and the fifth largest. Limpopo Province is South Africa's northernmost province, which shares borders with Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Botswana.

Participants for this study were drawn from house of the traditional leaders. A sample of ten participants, drawn from this organisation, were invited to participate in this study. A major criterion used in selecting participants for the study was their years of experience within the organisation and their involvement – whether directly or indirectly in domestic violence and how it affects men. Specifically, sampled participants from the above indicated institutions or organisations had a minimum of 15 years of active engagement and experience in domestic violence matters, and how it affects men in South Africa.

Sampling method

A convenience sampling procedure was used to recruit 10 men aged 18 years and above, these criteria include factors such as those men who had experienced physical, verbal, emotional, financial, legal, Reproductive/ sexual abuse and who have suffered humiliation at the hands of their women as intimate partners, and discrimination from the hand of the police officials.

For sampled participants who were officials of an organisation, it was only those who met certain criteria that were selected. Data was collected through interviews and analysed using thematic content analysis to bring meaning to the large amount of collected data into a readable document. These men were contacted and requested to participate in the study. Additional data was obtained from key informant interviews and supplemented by information from secondary sources including published and unpublished studies, journal articles, and online resources.

Data collection techniques

The study required the participants to be able to express their views and perceptions freely, therefore, it utilised interviews to collect data. Interviews are a method of gathering information through an oral transformation using an interview schedule. Shneiderman and Plaisant (2005) highlight that using interviews allow for the obtaining of detailed information, as well as a direct contact with the participants leads to specific and constructive suggestions.

The study used a semi-structured interview schedule as it allowed the researcher to use the pre-planned schedule, and for elaborate discussions between the participants and the researcher. The interviews were in-depth and done on a one on one this was done to illicit detailed information. The interviews took place at locations that were chosen by the participants and the duration ranged from 30-40 minutes, this was dependent on how much information the participants were willing to share.

Ethical considerations

The consideration of ethics in research, and in general, is of growing importance. This study was guided by the following ethics: Informed consent, and confidentiality, avoidance of harm, and avoidance of deception, amongst others. The first ethic that has been considered in this research is informed consent. This ensures that each participant has a complete understanding of the purpose and methods used in the study, the risks involved, and the demands of the study. Obtaining informed consent implies that all possible or adequate information on the goal of the investigation; the expected duration of the participant's involvement; the procedures which will be followed during the investigation; possible advantages; disadvantages and dangers to which respondents may be exposed; as well as the credibility of the researcher are communicated to the participants.

The researchers informed the participants so that they fully understood knowledge of what the study entailed, and that they had the right to withdraw from the study if they so wished. Informed consent essentially entails making the subject fully aware of the study, its possible dangers and the credentials of the research.

The first question sought to establish whether cultural norms and standard are contributing to domestic violence perpetuated against men.

P1- Men who come forward to admit that women are abusing them are judged harshly for failing to control them (women).

P3, p7 and p9, shared the same sentiment, that men are expected to be breadwinners and to be strong, over women. Consequently, this cultural expectation forces men to be providers irrespective of whether they are working or not.

According to P10, male children are groomed from an early age to be strong, act like men, and not cry when they are hurt.

According to P2, shame of victimization and cultural gender stereotypes are hurdles to r "I just feel intimidated by the whole thing.

P5- "if people find out that I am abused, especially by a woman I do not know how I will cope from being a joke. People do not respect weak men and I do not want to carry that label. This will just ruin my name. Culturally am expected to be strong and handle of hardships and pain like a man".

P6- "The society expects us men to be strong and to control our wives instead. Besides feeling ashamed I feel like no one would believe me just because I am a man"

P8- "I'm in agony, yet I'm embarrassed to talk about it. We say in our culture, 'Monna ke nku o llela teng,' which means that as a strong man, I should suppress the pain no matter how terrible the circumstance is. If I confess that my wife is assaulting me, people will be surprised, they will think less of me, and guys would no longer want to associate with me. No man would befriend someone who has been abused by his wife; this will have an impact on my other relationships. A Pedi guy should be capable of resolving his problems. So I'm still exploring for safer solutions to this."

P4- "As an African man, I am compelled to remain silent." I am referring to the Sepedi proverb "Monna ke nku o llela teng." Yes, I see that I am in pain, but I cannot jeopardize my manhood simply to assert

that my wife is the man in this family. That is impossible for a man who launched African processes. I am telling you; even my ancestors may abandon me. In our society, a man who sheds tears in public is not a real man."

Lastly, to evaluate changes which may be implemented within cultural norms and standards to include male as victims of domestic violence

P6-Recognizing men's vulnerability throughout society and through chieftaincies, as the majority of Limpopo settlements are still administered by chiefs. Traditional leaders of the country trying to eradicate violence should increase awareness of violence inflicted against men in order to modify perceptions that perceive men as solely perpetrators of violence. It exists, and people must recognise it.

P8- "Since the South African government has made a name for itself in the fight against violence against women, why not try to strike a balance between the genders as the South African government's policies strive for gender equality?" The gender equity paradigm must be implemented; Men wants to see it so that they can feel safe."

These views correspond with findings by Tsui (2014), who noted that services could be improved through increased awareness of IPV against men and through advocacy tailored at gender inclusive practice. Laws and policies must be reviewed, and there should be increased availability of resources. McCarrick, Davis-McCabe, & Hirst-Winthrop, (2016) further add that the development of more services that are accessible to men to increase support and tailored to respond to their needs is important.

Recommendations

According to the findings of this study, there is a need to address the cultural expectations and standards that influence the perpetration of men abuse and disclosure of their experienced violence, as well as to confront men's preconceptions about masculinity and vulnerability.

Conclusion

It is important to state that this new focus is in no way intended to minimize the experiences of female victims, but rather to develop a more rounded and complex view of the subject that accounts for a diversity of experiences. However, in order to educate society on how our culture influences how we do things on a daily basis, as well as how we perceive others and ourselves. It has an impact on our values—what we regard to be right and wrong. This is how our society shapes our choices. However, our decisions can have an impact on others and ultimately help shape our society. It is necessary to establish a comprehensive plan to affect change at multiple levels in society in order to improve outcomes for this under-served population (male victims).

Men, too, are clearly victims of domestic abuse perpetuated through cultural norms and gender expectations. However, their situation is not highlighted as much as that of female victims. The study demonstrated that cultural norms and standards contribute to domestic violence against men.

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