

# An investigation into the trend of Domestic Violence on Men: The Case of South Africa

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**Abstract:** This paper brings to the fore, experiences of men who are victims of domestic violence where women are the perpetrators. There are masculinity expectations that a man if in pain is not allowed to show his agony in public. This belief is exacerbated by the patriarchal nature of our society that suggests that men are not supposed to cry. These male victims are “hard-to-reach” because they prefer to be in the closet and also because of the stigma that might be attached to them for having shown that they are victims of female domestic abuse. The paper is motivated by the study that was conducted in Vuwani under Makhado Local Municipality of Vhembe District in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. This study used a qualitative research methodology to garner more information about the victims. Domestic violence against men perpetuated by women is not a new phenomenon in our society. But it is rarely spoken about. The patriarchal society that we live in makes it hard for men to open up about their anguish. The study focused on five themes which are as follows: The causes of abuse, nature of the abuse, limits of the law regarding the abuse, the role of police officers and institutions in assisting men. The study was also guided by theories such as family violence perspective and stand point theory. The findings show that men who are victims of domestic violence are reluctant to come to terms with their predicament due to fear of being laughed at by the society, peers and police officials. As the proportion of domestic violence against men is still low when compared with that of women, the findings reveal that most women are knotted in the trap of playing victims while they are themselves perpetrators.

**Keywords:** Patriarchy; Masculinity; Femininity; Domestic violence; Emasculation

## Introduction

Gender based violence comes in different forms such as physical abuse; sexual abuse; emotional, verbal and psychological abuse; economic abuse; intimidation; harassment and stalking. Domestic violence is a global phenomenon without national, economic, religious, geographic and cultural borders. Domestic Violence has negative consequences for social welfare, children, families and the community at large (Thobejane,2010). In exploring domestic violence on men. Violence committed by women against their male counterparts had been largely ignored for several reasons. Firstly, there is a stigma attached to being a man as a victim who is believed to be strong through societal expectations. Secondly, the cultural patriarchal beliefs expect women to be submissive, weak and obedient. That is why they are mostly believed to be victims of domestic violence than men. This is why men are less likely to admit and report that they are being physically, sexually and psychologically abused by their female partners.

This study sought to redress the gap left by other researchers who focused on domestic violence from the perspective of women. To date much attention has been directed towards violence against women yet there is growing evidence that points to the increasing violence against men. Therefore it is crucial to note that domestic violence affects both women and men and for equality to be met, we have to focus on their issues collectively without any bias. The study also questions organizations such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination; Beijing Platform for Action; SADC Gender Protocol and the South African constitution that seems to be turning a blind eye on gender based violence where men are victims .

## Background of Study

Domestic violence may involve a range of intentional actions including sexual, psychological, emotional and verbal abuse, which negatively affect one's health, and perception of self-identity. When a spouse or an intimate partner uses physical violence or aggravation to control the behavior of his or her partner, she or he is committing domestic violence (Thobejane, 2012). The concept of domestic violence is used by policy makers to define the violence that occurs between partners or ex-partners within the context of marriage or cohabitation (Chan and Mulroney, 2005).

However, domestic violence is not just restricted to spouses or those in cohabitation, but also can involve other family members and those who are involved in same sex marriages. Domestic violence can also be directed against children by either parent. It can be between other relatives within the household or against the elderly by their children or grand-children. Moreover, it is important to note that the term suggests that either men or women suffer disproportionately from different forms of domestic violence by their partners. Feminist scholars (Collins et al, 1990) have argued that knowledge based mainly on women abuse represents a twisted or skewed perception of reality and is only incomplete or partial knowledge. Other scholars emphasize that the best way to correct this is to also look at men's daily experiences into account and, on this basis, adopt feminist approaches to building theory and knowledge that transcends gender or politics of sex (Small & Uttal, 2005). Usually when the word 'abuse' is mentioned, what comes to one's mind is that the victim of abuse is either a woman or a child. It rarely or never at all occurs to us to think that the victim of abuse can also be a man. There is stereotypical thinking towards domestic violence which nonetheless is understandable as most of the victims are historically known to be women. However, this study turns the tables around in the sense that it looks at male victims of this scourge.

The Beijing Declaration for Action as established in 1995; referred to as the Fourth World Conference on Women; identified 12 areas of concern which require urgent attention to achieve the gender equality goal. Violence against women is the most critical area of focus and little has been done to address forms of men abuses. The Beijing Platform for Action goes on to call for an explication of the causes and effects of, and strategies to prevent GBV (UN, 1995, D2), but again it focuses a lot on domestic violence issues that affect women and children. Lack of or inadequate documentation and research on domestic violence, sexual harassment and violence against women and girls in private and in public, including the workplace, impede determinations to design specific intervention strategies (UN, 1995). The Beijing Platform for Action focuses much on violence within conflict, refugee settings rather than domestic violence issues that also affect men.

There is ample Literature that demonstrates the high prevalence of violence against men. The British Crime Survey shows that men made up about 40% of domestic violence victims each year between 2004-05. In 2006-07 men made up 43.4% of all those who had suffered partner abuse in the previous year, which rose to 45.5% in 2007-08 but fell to 37.7% in 2008-09. Cook (1997) further indicated that the figure stood at 48.6% in 2006-07, 48.3% the next year and 37.5% in 2008-09. More than one in four women (28%) and around one in six men (16%) had experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16. These figures are equivalent to an estimated 4.5 million female victims of domestic abuse and 2.6 million male victims. In addition, 6% of women and 4% of men reported having experienced domestic abuse in the past year, equivalent to an estimated one million female victims of domestic abuse and 600,000 male victims.

Regionally, literature demonstrates that VAM( Violence Against Males) has been increasing exponentially in some parts of Africa (Dahir, 2012). It is important to note that violence is increasing with situations where women specifically those with significant incomes and good careers undermine men's authority. For instance, a survey conducted by Maendeo ya Wanaume (Progress for Men) in 2012 indicated that the increase of men abuse cases from 160 000 to 460 000 were recorded in 2009. Most of the women who committed such abuse are of upward mobility and also economically independent. Could this be argued that since in patriarchal societies those who are said to be providers are male, it will be logical that if a female becomes a provider, she will naturally take the role of a man who is known as a dominant and mostly, abuse force in the house and start to emulate his "Machista" behavior?

*Swan.et. al (2008-01-01) indicate that* the increase in the incidences of male battering dovetails or merges with an increase in alcohol dependence among males aged 25-34. These have been found to be despondent males who struggle to eke out a living for their families. Dahir, (2012) further stressed that male battering in Kenya has become so rife. As more men fall back into the vicious cycle of drinking and unemployment, women have been replacing them in the work force. Men who tend to fail in providing for their families as society and African culture expects; are also likely to be economically, physically and even psychologically abused.

Gathogo (2012) argues that domestic violence against men manifests itself in a variety of ways. Sometimes it begins by insults to the man in front of their children who sometimes take sides with their mother-particularly when

they are first incited against their father. In such scenarios, children in their teenage years may participate in attacks against their respective fathers. This may come after their mother first picks a fore-planned or calculated quarrel with her husband. Considering that (their) culture does not allow an African man to scream if he is ever beaten by a woman or a child, the silent man may be eventually battered to death. Other forms of men battering include: slapping; pouring hot water when asleep or pouring hot water over an innocent man; chopping man's genitals; verbal insults; insults before children; slashing; pouring petrol over him and setting him on fire; whips; throwing chairs, benches, stools, utensils and other objects in the house at the man, especially after serious disagreements in the house.

### **Statement of the Problem**

It is generally accepted that there is an under-reporting of domestic violence in general wherein men are victims and women and other men are perpetrators. Men also may be reluctant and unwilling to talk about being victimized, considering that this is irreconcilable with their masculinity, particularly in societies in which men are discouraged from talking about their emotions. The justice system, African cultural norms, patriarchal societal expectations are all compounding complex issues that causes men to be reluctant to report cases of being emotionally, psychologically, physically abused at the hands of their female partners. The scourge of men abuses continue due to lack of self-esteem, and societal pressure.

Domestic violence does occur on a day to day basis and the victims of it in most cases are women, both because they are more likely to report it and because the society we live in is more patriarchal. However; that does not mean that men are not victims of domestic violence in their private domains. Female to male domestic violence is a catastrophe that has existed for a long time, but it has never been given the attention it deserves like domestic violence perpetrated towards women. Violence against men has been trivialized as influenced by social gender stereotypes that see men as head of households, strong, defenders, and even bread-winners.

Swan (2005) suggests that in a fluid and changing social context, the constructions of masculine and feminine identity are said to be complex. Women have historically had little social power, but in situations where the state of affairs changes, there is clearly the possibility and potential for such power to be abused.

### **Literature Review**

South Africa is rated as one of the countries with the highest level of domestic violence against women and children. As a result, more studies are being done about domestic violence against women and children and there is little research done 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 (Straus, 1990). Physical violence is typically defined as the intentional use of force with the potential to cause death, disability, injury, or harm (Roopnaraian, 2003). Definitions of sexual violence include using physical force to compel a person into sexual activity against his or her will and attempted or completed sexual acts with a person who is unable to understand the nature of the act, decline participation, or communicate unwillingness.

### **Feminist Theory and Domestic Violence**

Feminist theory argues that domestic violence has to do largely with gender and power inequality in opposite-sex relationships. It focuses on the societal messages that sanction a male's use of violence and aggression throughout life, and the prescribed gender roles that dictate how men and women should behave in their intimate relationships (Pence & Paymar, 1993). It sees the root causes of intimate partner violence as the outcome of living in a society that condones aggressive behaviors perpetrated by men, while socializing women to be non-violent. Proponents of feminist theory acknowledge that women can also be violent in their relationships with men; however, they simply do not see the issue of women abusing men as a serious social problem, and therefore, does not deserve the same amount of attention or support compared to violence against women (Kwaramba, 2000). Radical feminism promotes the basis for many of the ideas of feminism. It usually clashes with the ideals of liberal feminism, because radical feminists believe that society must be changed at its core in order to dissolve patriarchy, not just through acts of legislation. Sometimes radical feminists believe that they must wage a war against men, patriarchy, and the gender system which confines them to rigid social roles.

### **Limitations of Feminist Approach**

Limitations of feminist theory can be found when trying to explain violence in same-sex relationships (Lawson, 2003). While issues of power, control, and autonomy have also been identified as reasons for intimate partner abuse

in lesbian relationships, issues such as dependency and jealousy also exist (Jasinski, 2001). The point is that partner abuse in same-sex couples requires a more comprehensive analysis and theoretical explanation. A feminist approach is also limited in explaining abuse perpetrated by women. Feminist theory typically explains women's use of violence in the context of self-defense and retaliation for previous abuse. Yet, by so doing, a strictly feminist orientation denies that women can also feel angry and enraged without provocation in their relationships with men (Cebekhulu & Alexander, 2009). Additionally, while much of a woman's use of violence does exist within the framework of retaliation and self-defense, feminist theory does not explain why women perpetrate violence outside their intimate relationships (e.g., at work, with children, or with peers).

### **Notions of Power and Dominance that Emascuate Men**

Notions of power and dominance are thus interwoven throughout ideas of emasculation, feminization, homosexualization and the prevention of procreation or reproduction. It is the loss of power, amongst other things, that is common to all. Power is the essential attribute in all forms of sexual violence, be it rape, enforced sterilization or forced nudity. The heterosexual male is considered the all-powerful. Rape and other forms of sexual violence against men and against women serve to reinforce this status.

The treatment accorded to survivors of rape, whether male or female, by the community may also be similar. In some communities, female victims of sexual violence are shunned and considered to be outcasts; so too, in others, male victims of sexual violence. The added dimension that some women face being shunned by their families would not seem to be present in the case of male victims, possibly because in many societies, it is the male that is considered the head of the household.

Another way in which male victims of sexual violence may feel emasculated is through the process of homosexualization. When reference is made to masculinity, the dominant construct is that of heterosexual masculinity. It is the heterosexual male that is the symbol of power. It is the heterosexual male that fills, or at least filled, the ranks of the armed forces. According to Johnson (2005), the homosexual male is considered less masculine and more effeminate than the heterosexual male. Constructing the male victim of sexual assault as homosexual is thus a means by which to emasculate him, thereby reducing his social status. It is also a means by which to 'taint' him with homosexuality. This implies not only severe consequences on the part of society, but is a means by which the international community can ignore the situation. If homosexuality is involved, even just a 'taint', the international community can carry on with business as usual and turn a blind eye to the situation no matter how egregious it may be.

This may explain why often times, male victims of sexual assault will not just stay silent but actively deny being sexually abused, or, if it is mentioned at all, it will be in the form of witnessing other men being sexually abused, but never themselves. Only late in the counselling or therapeutic process may male victims acknowledge that they themselves were sexually abused.

### **Masculinity, Femininity and Demasculinization.**

Kimmel (2002) mentions that hegemonic masculinity is the form of masculinity that dominates other forms of masculinities. This kind of masculinity is binding and has created a strict boundary of what it means to be a real man. If one starts locating the issue, one will notice that domestic violence against men is not new. There are many women who have been enacting domestic violence towards their partners behind closed doors and mostly they get away with it. Such men may be labeled as double victims of abuse, because not only are they victims in their domestic universe but also the victim of a female wrongdoer, but also risk being giggled at and not being treated with the dignity he deserves when he seeks help. Moreover, the law is more likely to rule in favor of a woman than a man. Compounded, these factors lead to many cases not being reported and many men being silent about their abusive partner.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

Blaikie (2007) defines research design as a plan outlining how the researcher will carry out the research project. He also defines research design as a "plan or blueprint of how the researcher intends conducting research". In addition research design refers to a plan for selecting subjects, research sites, and collection procedures to answer the research question. This research is based on a descriptive that relies on the informants' experiences and their accounts as a means of collecting data. The research design of this study was qualitative, exploratory and descriptive as the researchers intended to describe the lived experiences of domestic violence by men in Makhado local municipality in South Africa, using a phenomenological approach. The design described what men experience with regard to the phenomenon of domestic violence and what meaning does their collective experiences hold for them.

## **Research Methodology**

The researchers used qualitative research to collect data. In qualitative research the data includes words, pictures, descriptions or narratives, as well as life histories (Monette, Sullivan & DeJong, 2008). The reason researchers focused on a qualitative research methodology is because of their interest in wanting to understand in depth, the experiences of men who are victims of domestic violence. The quantitative method could assist with getting the statistics of how many these male victims are, but this became problematic since not all men report the violence that is perpetrated against them.

In-depth interviews were used as a method to collect data for the research. This research employed unstandardized interviews, as they are less structured in nature; which gave freedom to the researchers and the participants. Usually, the unstandardized interview gives platform for the respondent and researcher to interact and talk deeper about the topic and other themes around the topic that may emerge along the interview (Merriam, 2010).

## **Population of study**

In this study the population consisted of all men who experienced domestic violence in Makhado local municipality (situated in the Northern Province of South Africa). The accessible participants were those who made use of the Vuwani Victim Empowerment Centre (located in the city, in the Vhembe district of the Northern Province) as an instrument to address domestic violence issues. The participants were selected from clients who were still undergoing counseling sessions.

## **Sampling method**

Participants were selected by means of purposive sampling. Only those who met the sampling criteria were selected, such as those men who had experienced domestic violence and who have suffered humiliation at the hands of their women as intimate partners. The researchers chose to sample participants within close proximity to the Vuwani Victim Empowerment centre because it would be easier and possible to keep contact with them throughout the study. A sample size comprised of at least six (6) affected men.

## **Data collection techniques**

Arrangement was made with each participant for an interview. All six (6) participants were interviewed at the Vuwani Victim Empowerment Centre. Researchers used both structured and semi-structured interviews with the use of a cellular phone as a tape recorder. The participants were shown the tape recorder and the button to switch it off in case they do not want certain information to be recorded during the interview. The aim of these interviews was to allow the participants to speak freely and on their own terms about their lived experiences of domestic violence. Each participant was told that the duration of the interview would be one hour and thirty minutes because of the sensitivity of the questions.

## **Ethical considerations**

The word “ethics” is derived from the Greek word ‘ethos’, meaning one’s character or disposition (see Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2007:140). It is related to the term “Morality”, derived from the Latin term ‘Moralis’ meaning one’s manners or character. The consideration of ethics in research, and in general, is of growing importance. This study was guided by the following ethics: Informed consent, right to withdraw, and confidentiality, avoidance of harm, as well as avoidance of deception, amongst others.

## **Informed consent**

The first ethic that has been considered in this research is informed consent. This ensured 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 researched.

## **Right to withdraw**

The researchers informed the participants so that they fully bear knowledge of what the study entailed, and that they had the right to withdraw from the study should they so wish. Creswell (2003: 64) recommended that this is probably the most method in social research. Informed consent essentially entails making the subject fully aware of the study, its possible dangers and the credentials of the research.

### Biographical data of the participants

Section A: Biographical Data							
Name	Age	Marital Status	Sexual Orientation	Country of birth	Province	Education al Level	Employment Status
1.Dakalo	28	Married	Male	South Africa	Limpopo	TVET	Part-time
2.Muratho	36	Married	Male	South Africa	Limpopo	University level	Full-time
3.Tshililo	35	Co habiting	Male	South Africa	Limpopo	GRADE 12	Full-time
4.Ranwedzi	35	Married	Male	South Africa	Limpopo	GRADE 10	Full-time
5.Masenyani	27	Separated	Male	South Africa	Limpopo	University level	Student
6.Mmbudzeni	36	Married	Male	South Africa	Limpopo	GRADE 11	Unemployed

### Interviews

The first question sought to establish as to whether participants have experienced any form of abuse in a marriage or intimate partner abuse in the past 12 months. The researchers in this case wished to capture the complexity of the answer to this question. To do this, the question asked was: *“have you experienced any form of abuse in your marriage or an intimate partner relationship?”* They all affirmed. However, they elaborated differently but similarly in some instances. Among the six, two of them responded as having experienced emotional, psychological and sexual abuse at the hands of their partners

Dakalo, (28) responded by saying that his wife used to insult him and used vulgar words in the presence of kids when talking to her. He thinks she disrespected him because she was more educated than him and held a powerful position at work. Straus & Sweet (1992, p. 347) call this some form of Psychological aggression and as behavior that is demeaning, belittling, or that undermines the self-worth of one’s partner.

Muratho (36) revealed that his wife has been flirting with another man and discovered that through social Media (cellular conversations) she was actually cheating on him.

Muratho said the following: *“I’m being abused by my wife of 8 years with whom I have two sons. We are still married but there is no intimacy between the two of us. We no longer share the same bed. When I try to be intimate, she frowns at me and pretends I am not existing”.*

*Muratho says that this has been going on for the past six months.*

The third respondent (Tshililo, 35) revealed that his partner is too demanding. When asked what he thinks the cause might be for her to act in this fashion, he said that she is too materialistic and does not take No for an answer. She comes from a rich family and she sometimes demands grocery and some commodities that are way beyond his salary. He further stated the following:

*“She also dictates terms on how we should spend my salary. I am often without money during the course of the month because she shall have spent it on clothes and on entertainment.*

Masenyani, (27) who is now separated from his wife, was taken to the maintenance courts so that he can pay a monthly fee for the upkeep of his child. But he says that since their ordeal, he was never allowed to see the child in spite of the fact that the maintenance court allowed him to.

*“I think I am a victim of domestic violence because I am being denied access to seeing my child since we separated seven months ago. We separated because she was too demanding. She thought that by reporting me for*

*maintenance, she would get more money from me through the maintenance court. I am paying everything for her. It is me who sees to it that her school fees, medical costs, transport costs, clothes and pocket money for school is taken care of. But I'm denied access to my daughter while she is currently staying with her new boyfriend".*

Ranwedzi, (35) said the following during the interview:

*"I broke up with my girlfriend because she was very violent. When angry, she would throw missiles at me. She also threatened to pour boiling water on me while asleep. I was hospitalized on several occasions because of the psychological trauma I received from her. This is where I drew the line and decided enough was enough. I took my belongings and left her.*

Mmbudzeni, (36) said that his wife was stalking him all the time. She was so jealous that she believed he was having an extra-marital affair. Tjaden & Thoennes, (1998, p.2) described stalking as "a course of conduct directed at a communication, or verbal, written, or implied threats, or a combination thereof, that would cause a reasonable person to fear". Stalking behaviors may include spying on someone, standing outside their home or workplace, making unwanted phone calls, or vandalizing their property (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Mmbudzeni experienced all of the above. When asked why he could not break up with the wife, he said that in spite of all these abuses, he still loves her.

*Mmbudzeni characterized the stalking as follows:*

*She always wanted to know what I was doing, where I'm going, what friends I'm with, and what time I'm coming back home. If she can't get in touch with me, she'll call a hundred times by using different names and sit outside the house to wait and see what kind of a car is bringing me home. The poor driver will then get a scolding for bringing me home late".*

### **Reasons that prevent battered men from reporting**

During the interviews, the following question was posed to the participants:

Do men report to relevant authorities when battered by women?" In this case, close to 70% of the respondents gave an affirmative "No" for an answer. Asked why the situation occurred, various reasons were provided such as religious leaders that advise the couple to seek the face of God rather than "washing dirty linen" in public; parents' fear of embarrassment; male ego, close friends who prefer to downplay the magnitude of the problem; fear of being laughed at; fear of the taboo or abomination associated with the cultural dictates of the African societies; fear of divorce in cases where the man relies on the "rich" woman for his daily upkeep; and the embarrassment that goes with shame and exposure of being seen as a "weak man".

The fear of reporting to the relevant authorities is further compounded by the fact that in most communities in Africa, it is an abomination to see a man crying after being beaten by a woman. In such scenarios, the "crying man" would lose status due to the cultural barriers and stigma attached to it. Others feel guilty for being irresponsible to their families, hence the silence amidst battering. There are several reasons why abused men continue to suffer through cycles of violence. The uppermost of these are their children, financial stability, and pressure from relatives and friends to try and make the relationship work. Several men in this study expressed concern about their children's wellbeing if they left an abusive relationship. They may feel like they would be doing more harm to their children if they broke up.

### **Recommendations**

The data from this study suggested that legal provisions must be introduced to protect men from violence or threats of violence directed against them by their abusive partners. Guidelines must be adopted by the police in the process of pursuing domestic violence wherever it occurs. The criminal justice system should be fully implemented irrespective of gender, when a case of domestic violence is reported or handled. Appropriate sentencing policies must be developed, including compulsory attendance at programs designed for abusive partners. The South African government's efforts to sign Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is highly recommended. But it is also urged to look at this scourge from the male perspective where some victims of domestic violence are men. Law enforcement personnel should be trained in procedures and enforcement of the Prevention of Family Violence Act and about the social and psychological context in which domestic violence against men occurs. Police are indebted to ensure protection and equal enforcement of the law in domestic abuse cases. Police must be trained to eliminate gender, class and race bias in their responses to such abuse and to realize that domestic violence is not to be excused, tolerated or condoned. However, consistent arrest policies should be considered for domestic

violence cases. Police who are involved in investigating rape cases should receive proper training in pathological skills and in the importance of medical information. Police must provide prompt protection to women and men by diligently enforcing court orders that prohibit abuse and reduce the abuser's access to the victim. Police stations must make it a priority to respond speedily to both men and women's urgent calls in cases of domestic violence. The government should create a self-governing apparatus to monitor and mastermind police treatment of both men and women victims of violence without any bias.

### Conclusion

It is evident that men too are victims of domestic violence. However, their plight is not made clearer as to that of women victims. The research reveals that women who are perpetrators are usually susceptible to play the victim when a case of domestic abuse is reported against them. Most women who are knotted in the trap of domestic violence as perpetrators tend to apply for protection orders to camouflage their action and to look defenseless within the justice system. In this instance, there has to be a thorough investigation by the police and some concerned parties, to make sure that the perpetrator is brought to book.

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