

The root causes and extent of domestic violence in the Tshitale rural area of South Africa: An ongoing struggle for a feasible solution

Rirhandzu Phyllis Hlungwane ¹, Petrus Machethe ²

^{1,2} Department of Police Practice, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

² Corresponding author: emachep@unisa.ac.za

© Authour(s)

OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development, Ontario International Development Agency, Canada.

ISSN 1923-6654 (print) ISSN 1923-6662 (online) www.oidaijsd.com

Also available at <https://www.ssrn.com/index.cfm/en/oida-intl-journal-sustainable-dev/>

Abstract: This paper explores domestic violence in the Tshitale policing area in Limpopo province, South Africa. The Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998 provides for the protection of victims of domestic violence, while the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa provides for the security of a person, and the right to equality and freedom of a person. The way in which police officials deal with cases of domestic violence raises questions about whether they are truly capable of dealing with such crimes. While they can differentiate between crimes associated with domestic violence and other criminal activities, the failure by members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) to protect victims of domestic violence not only results in a denial of justice, but also violates the fundamental rights of women in particular. This study adopted a qualitative research method to collect data through a literature review and face-to-face interviews. Purposive sampling was used to arrive at a sample size of 19 participants, which comprised Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (DoJ & CD) members (all from the Tshitale Magistrate's Court), traditional leaders, community leaders, social workers, SAPS officers based in the Tshitale Policing Area, and a leader of a faith-based organisation. The findings revealed that several myths made up the root causes of domestic violence, namely 1) if a man does not batter his wife, he does not love her, and 2) men need not listen to a woman's opinions. Alcohol abuse was identified as exacerbating domestic violence in the area. The researchers recommend that men and women be educated about the dangers of abusing alcohol within the family setting. Drinkers should drink responsibly, and not use alcohol as a scapegoat to justify domestic violence. Furthermore, spiritual leaders should urge men to change their patriarchal ways of treating women. Social services should be prioritised for counselling families, and traditional leaders should gather the men of the community and instruct them to change their ways, to stop mistreating their wives.

Keywords: Alcohol abuse, Domestic violence, Education, Patriarchy, Tshitale Policing Area

Introduction

South African government has tried to curb domestic violence through the establishment of the Domestic Violence Act (DVA) 116 of 1998 (RSA, 1998), yet the high rate of abuse in the family context and amongst intimate partners does not show any signs of decreasing. For the first time, the Victims of Crime Survey (Statistics South Africa [StatsSA], 2014) posed questions about men's attitudes towards women and gender-based violence. Some women experience domestic violence on a daily basis, and are not aware of the seriousness of this epidemic which is a worldwide phenomenon, and is not unique to the people of the Tshitale Policing Area (TPA). Given the way the authorities handle domestic violence-related crimes, however, the community of Tshitale has lost faith in the police. Domestic violence towards women has no regard for demographic sphere, tribe, class or economic status: as Shannon (2009:xiii) states, it affects people of all ages, races, ethnicities *and economic statuses. Members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) do not give the required attention to the dangers associated with domestic violence, as under the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996a) it is not designated a crime within the domestic environment. Instead, it is included under 'murder', making it difficult to identify until a death occurs. Surprisingly, it is victims who, for socioeconomic reasons, refuse to report

domestic violence – they tolerate it, instead of raising the alarm and seeking help. Manndzhi's (2015:3) study in Tshitale focused on the impact of domestic violence on learners at Sekgosese North Circuit (a Department of Education [DoE] demarcation). The study, having confirmed the prevalence of domestic violence, found that most learners were born to women who had earlier experienced such violence in the home.

Problem Statement

Domestic violence seldom sees intervention by police officers in Tshitale, not because they are failing to do their daily duties as law-enforcement officers, but because domestic violence is categorised under crimes associated with the family environment (Limpopo Policy Research Repository, n.d.). Many perpetrators of domestic violence roam free, while women suffer the aftermath of such incidents of aggression. Where crimes related to domestic violence are reported, only a few cases proceed to prosecution. The high rate of domestic violence in Tshitale has escalated to the extent that it has become a concern for the community and the police alike.

Community members complain about the way police handle cases of domestic violence, but many of those who experience such violence are not always aware that they have a problem, or that their lives are in danger. Tshifhumulo and Mudhovozi (2013:5087) found that society normalises wife battering, which leaves abused women with no avenue to leave their abusive partners. Women in particular were dissatisfied with the advice they received from professionals, many of whom continued to treat domestic abuse as a private matter. Victims tend to accept it as a way of life, with the majority who open cases of domestic violence-related crimes later dropping charges against the perpetrators.

Research conducted by Sibanda-Moyo, Khonje and Brobbery (2017:31) indicates that women and girl children in South Africa experience diverse types of violence at different stages in their lives. This includes the deliberate exposure of children to violence, neglect and deprivation; discrimination based on sexuality, race and economic status; and violence in the context of their social positions as conjugal partners, daughters, sisters, students, workers and neighbours. Related incidents occur outside of the women's comfort zones, as well as in spaces considered secure, such as the home and at government institutions charged with protecting them. These experiences of violence are strongly related to women's identities, and the expectations connected to those identities.

In Limpopo, as tends to be the case in rural areas, police visibility is poor. The Victims of Crime Survey (StatsSA, 2014) confirms that Limpopo province lags behind Gauteng in many respects. When households were asked to report on seeing police in uniform and on duty in their area, 52.7% of Gauteng respondents reported seeing police at least once a day, compared to 27.4% in Limpopo. In Gauteng, 8.2% reported never seeing a police official, compared to 21% in Limpopo. The democratic dispensation in South Africa, heralded in 1994, saw laws being amended or newly introduced, as is evident from the birth of the 1996 constitution (RSA, 1996a), the Domestic Violence Act (RSA, 1998), as well as other remedies in combating crime and domestic violence.

Literature Review

The nature and extent of domestic violence in South Africa

There have been mistaken assumptions about the effects of domestic violence. For example, many assume it is punishment meted out against a woman for provoking a man. However, domestic violence can affect people of any gender, at any time – usually without provocation. As Bendal (2010:100) states, violence of this nature is often hidden from view, and not discussed openly. Many women are, for instance, afraid to speak out about what they are undergoing for fear of retaliation by their partner. Domestic violence may assume different forms, the most common in families being violence against women and children.

In this country, there is no crime termed 'domestic violence'. Instead, its multiple forms are captured across a range of different categories of criminal offences, such as common assault or assault with the intention to cause grievous bodily harm, the pointing of a firearm, intimidation, rape or attempted murder, among other charges (Vetten, 2014:2). Domestic violence as a crime which occurs behind closed doors is difficult to define. Although it is the most pervasive form of gender-based violence, it is challenging to address simply because it occurs in secret in the home, and tends to be regarded as a private matter (Geldenhuys, 2014:11).

South Africa is a male-dominated society where men are believed to be the ones in power, and women believe men have power over them. The gender roles were clearly defined (and still are), leading to the late enfranchisement of white women during apartheid, and the systematic degradation of black women in particular (Sonjani, 2011:24). Patriarchy can be blamed for contributing to the marked increase in domestic violence in this country – a scourge which confronts both the government and communities. Women are raped and killed by their partners on a daily

basis. Domestic violence is increasingly a crisis for survivors and family members, even though government has ratified numerous relevant international and regional human rights treaties, in addition to promulgating the Gender Equity Act 39 of 1996 (RSA, 1996b) and the Domestic Violence Act (RSA, 1998).

Organisations such as People Opposed to Women Abuse (POWA) educate women about their rights within the domestic context, and how they can access help. Sadly, such information reaches only a few. Women in rural areas tend not to receive such information due to a lack of resources and outreach efforts. Some might access information via community and national radio stations. Despite knowing what domestic violence entails and how to tackle it, many women find it difficult to leave their abusive partners, and fail to report violence within the family, due to stigmatisation. Many fears having to go back to their parents, as they were told when they married that 'a woman's grave is at her matrimonial home' (i.e., she cannot leave). Traditions and customs thus limit women's decision-making ability. Rape, murder, assault, intimidation, stalking and molestation are all associated with domestic violence, with many women being killed and harassed by male relatives and loved ones.

Factors that perpetuate domestic violence in South Africa

Jewkes (2002:1423–1424) states that poverty, patriarchy, alcohol, aggressive behaviour and associated stress, which occur in all socioeconomic groups, tend to be closely associated with domestic violence. Notably, domestic and family violence is more frequent and severe amongst the lower economic strata. Disputes about the ownership of household goods, so-called male and female occupations, as well as unemployment, often give rise to domestic violence. The stresses of poverty, welfare existence, poor housing and education, limited opportunities, and similar aspects of life on the bottom rungs of the social ladder undoubtedly contribute strongly to family-based violence (Barnet *et al.* as quoted in Brown, Esbensen & Geis, 2013:472).

- **Experiencing domestic violence at an early stage**

What you learn as a child, you implement as an adult. Children who experience domestic violence in the home are more likely to turn to violence when they grow up. This is the case for both girls and boys. Boys who learn that women are not to be valued or respected, and who witness violence being directed against women, are more likely to abuse women when they grow up (StatsSA, 2014:22). Some boys believe violence is the only way to resolve their problems, if raised in a violent family.

- **Inequality between men and women**

Patriarchy, or entrenched inequality between the sexes, is one of the power structures that scholars have identified as driving domestic violence (Mazibuko & Umejezi, 2015:6585). This phenomenon raises alarm bells when linked to the high incidence of aggression in the home, in South Africa. Men who have power over women and fear losing it when women try to empower themselves, feel threatened and become controlling, and this may spur them to violence.

- **Drug and alcohol abuse**

Substance and alcohol abuse can worsen an already fraught domestic situation, but do not cause it. Alcohol consumption being identified as a direct cause of intimate partner violence has often been contested, either on the basis of additional factors (e.g., low socioeconomic status, impulsive personality) accounting for the presence of both, or because frequent heavy drinking can create an unhappy, stressful partnership that increases the risk of conflict (World Health Organization, 2014:1). Mfati (2012:15) notes that drug and alcohol abuse may result in domestic violence and out-of-control behaviour. The number one commonality within the dynamics of most alcoholic families, is poor emotional health.

Types of domestic violence

- **Physical abuse**

Chambliss and Hass (2012:264) describe physical abuse as instances of hitting, slapping, shoving, pinching, biting, hair-pulling, and more. Physical abuse mainly affects the body of a victim, who may experience battering, strangulation, common assault or assault with the intent to cause grievous bodily harm. Although physical abuse can be external or internal, and affects both sexes, for the purposes of this discussion the focus falls on the plight of women.

Acts of physical abuse cause not only immediate injury, but might also result in psychosomatic disorders such as chronic pain, disfigurement, physical limitations and miscarriages (Masetywa, 2009:9). Many women find

themselves in situations where their partners assault them on a regular basis, yet these victims are seldom aware that they are in an abusive relationship – they think assault is common in, or typical of, any union. Brown *et al.* (2013:465) suggest that some women who are beaten do not see themselves as true victims, but rather as suffering just as other females do. Physical abuse can include behaviours such as denying the victim medical care when needed, depriving her of sleep or food, or forcing her to engage in drug or alcohol use against her will. It can also lead to physical injury being inflicted on other targets, such as children or pets, in order to cause psychological harm to the victim (Madzivhandila, 2015:28).

- **Sexual abuse**

Some victims experience sexual abuse on a daily basis, at the hands of those whom they trust most. Exposing women to rape and molestation by their partners (or any adults in their surroundings) is very disturbing and is unconstitutional. Sexual abuse includes, but is not limited to, marital rape, attempted rape, molestation, attacks on the sexual organs, enforced sex after physical violence has occurred, or sexually demeaning treatment (Chambliss & Hass, 2012:264). Children believe their parents or other adults will offer them shelter or protection, which makes it simple for the perpetrators to get to them. This kind of abuse influences the wellbeing of a child, and lays the foundation for such a child to become an abuser as an adult.

- **Emotional and psychological abuse**

Gosselin (2003:12) describes emotional or psychological abuse as the intentional infliction of anguish, pain or distress, in an attempt to control the victim. Emotional abuse is a way of instilling fear in a victim by swearing at, degrading or disrespecting her. Name-calling and demeaning a victim cause emotional hurt, and destroy their dignity and self-confidence.

- **Economic abuse**

In many communities there is the perception that men should provide for their families, by being the breadwinners. This increases their power over their partners. The economic power men wield, deprives women of the opportunity to express their views or be involved in the family's financial planning. This kind of abuse threatens the freedom of women. In some instances, women stay in an abusive relationship because they are financially dependent on their partner. Economic abuse might be considered emotional abuse, for when control of the family resources is used as a mechanism to degrade women, it requires them to ask/beg for money or other resources, much like a child would ask for an allowance (Payne & Gainey, 2009:136).

- **Intimidation**

The Domestic Violence Act (RSA, 1998) defines intimidation as uttering or conveying a threat, or causing a complainant to receive a threat which induces fear. The perpetrator might use different tactics to instil fear: brandishing dangerous weapons around victims will instil in them a fear of being hurt, causing them to be submissive. The message to the victim is, 'obey, or you will get hurt or die'.

- **Harassment**

Engaging in certain conduct may instil fear in, or harm, the victim. The Domestic Violence Act (RSA, 1998) defines harassment as someone engaging in a pattern of abuse or inducing fear of harm in a complainant. This includes repeatedly watching or loitering outside or near the building where the complainant resides, works, carries on business, studies, or happens to be. Also included are the aggressor repeatedly making telephone calls or inducing another person to make telephone calls to the complainant, whether or not a conversation ensues; and repeatedly sending, delivering or causing the delivery of letters, telegrams, packages, facsimiles, electronic mails, or other objects to the complainant. Sending threatening text messages and emails to the victim, resorts under harassment. This is done in such a way that the perpetrator ensures that his/her victim 'gets the message'.

- **Stalking**

There is no single definition that best defines stalking. According to the Domestic Violence Act (RSA, 1998), stalking involves repeatedly following, pursuing or accosting the complainant. The definition of stalking overlaps with that of harassment, to some extent.

- **Damage to property**

According to Burchell (2013:736), malicious damage to the property of another is caused unlawfully, yet intentionally. This includes damaging the belongings of the complainant in a domestic violence-related incident, or breaking down the property of the victim, with the purpose of instilling fear.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Tshitale, in Vhembe district. The Tshitale police station is situated 56.8 km from Makhado (formerly Louis Trichardt). According to Census 2011 (Firth, 2011), the Tshitale Policing Area had a population of 30 640 at the time. This study's population included males and females between the ages of 28 and 70, who resided in the area, as well as SAPS members, social workers, faith-based organisations and community leaders.

The researchers opted to use qualitative research, given the nature of domestic violence – it is a sensitive matter, which should be treated with caution. Members of a sample are chosen purposefully to represent a phenomenon, group, incident, location or type, in relation to a critical criterion. In qualitative data collection, interviewing, the study of documents, and secondary analysis are usually used. A semi-structured interview schedule is an instrument used to collect data, which are supported by secondary sources such as periodicals and published documents.

The researchers conducted a pilot test on the semi-structured interview schedule with a small number of persons who had similar characteristics to the target group. All questions were found to be unambiguous and accurate in both the pilot and final instrument, after the necessary improvements were made. The interviews were conducted using open-ended questionnaires. Two Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (DOJ & CD) members were selected from the Tshitale Magistrates Court, where they worked as presiding officers (magistrates); along with three traditional leaders and three community members (leaders) who worked closely with traditional leaders. Six SAPS officers based in the Tshitale Policing Area were interviewed (two warrant officers from the Crime Prevention Unit, two constables stationed at the CSC [Community Service Centre], one constable stationed at the domestic violence office, and one detective sergeant), four social workers and one faith-based leader with experience of domestic violence cases.

The researchers took notes when conducting the interviews, and a voice recorder was used to capture the collected data. The data were subsequently transcribed and interpreted, then analysed using thematic analysis (to categorise the extensive data collected under the proper headings), by identifying common themes from the participants' descriptions of their experiences. To protect the identities of the study participants, each was assigned a number (e.g., P3 or P16).

Findings

Participants' understanding of domestic violence

This question sought to give the researchers insight into the participants' knowledge of domestic violence. It was vital for the latter to understand its definition, as this would pave the way for better results in preventing, detecting and dealing with the problem in the communities of Tshitale. It could also help the primary victims (women). The participants answered this question in different ways: most understood domestic violence as violence in the family context, of interpersonal violence. An example would be when somebody abused someone else, or mistreated him/her, be it a child or a mother. Domestic violence is an act where people who are related, use aggression against others in the same familial relationship. As P4 said:

We are talking about the violence between people who are related, e.g. wife and husband. DV [domestic violence] is the family conflicts, of which people who are related, fight [] in different ways. [...] [It] is when there is conflict between male and females.

P13 did not understand the concept, admitting:

Domestic violence? In fact, I don't understand what is it. I do sometimes hear people talking about it, I hear that people who deal with that are police officers and social workers. As for me, I have no idea of DV. All I can say is if you come across such challenges you can consult the police or social workers; those are the people who can help you.

P16, P17, P18 and P19 understood domestic violence as the conflict between family members/lovers/children, and as a social problem where a husband abuses a wife, or vice versa. P18 elaborated that domestic violence can spill

over and affect the children in a family. On the whole, the majority of participants showed some understanding of what domestic violence entails.

The causes of domestic violence in Tshitale Policing area

A question was posed to determine the root causes of domestic violence. The responses were found to vary, depending on the nature of the incident. Often, such aggression was reportedly not triggered by a particular incident, but by daily routine activities. P4, P6, P8, P17, P18 and P19 pointed out that domestic violence is closely linked to poverty. Other factors identified were a lack of communication between partners, financial problems, extramarital affairs and a lack of trust.

P1 and P2 shared the view that social development, the level of education, societal problems and a culture of violence in the community were catalysts of domestic violence. For instance, if a son saw his father abusing his mother, he would also do so.

When women ask a man about the outside affairs, then they start to fight about that. Moreover, when a woman does not want to give h[er] man sex because she is tired, that can also cause conflicts. [...] it leaves the man to force a woman to have sex, which ends up [in] conflicts. (P11)

Lack of trust, according to P15, P16 and P19, frequently led to domestic violence. As P3 emphasised:

Sometimes there are a lot of causes. Poverty, you can find that someone is working, the husband is not working, when the husband ask[s] the money from [the] spouse it can cause conflict, it can cause DV. You can find that in the family [there are] three groups: children, mother and father. You may find that the mother is against the father and the father is against the mother, and the mother is against [the] children. A husband is bringing another woman, a wife in[to] the house, the owner of the house (wife) cannot allow that, it can cause DV. Not forgiving one another. Hiding something from your spouse. Not communicating in a good way, as spouses.

Based on these responses, the women of Tshitale were subjected to violence for different reasons. P16, P17, P18 and P19 identified women's financial dependence on men as the cause of familial violence. The same participants identified stress, a lack of knowledge and education, unemployment, not being heard (by men), patriarchy within the family, and stepchildren (loving own children more than the others), as causes. P18 emphasised that the in-laws can cause conflict between a husband and wife: *They can abuse [the] woman emotionally by calling her names. Sometimes it leaves the man [...] in the middle of these conflicts.*

P19 mentioned two myths which bind women to their husbands' bad deeds and play a role in causing domestic violence to be meted out to women:

Myth 1: When a man does not batter a woman he does not love her; a man's love [for] his wife is shown through battering. Myth 2: A man should not listen to a woman. This myth creates fear of men [amongst] women.

The role and responsibilities of officers policing domestic violence at Tshitale

Most participants who were employed as police officers said they were responsible for the matter brought to them, being in charge of the process in court proceedings. They did not decide which case would go to court; they only led the process. As P2 stated: *"My role is to head the process."* P4 indicated his role as follows:

First, when a victim comes to CSC we interview him or her, after that is where we decide if [it] is DV or not. We have to explain his or her rights; there is a certain form which we fill [out], to show that we told him/her concerning these rights. We then assist the victim – if he/she wants – to open the case or if s/he needs medical attention it is our role to assist him/her. In addition, another thing when [they] need transportation from point A to point B as a result of DV, we help with such issues. We also refer victims to the social worker and also to the office of the magistrate.

We must see to it that form one and form two are completed, especially for the victim. The person is going to be referred to [the] DV office, s/he wants to apply for the protection, we come with the completed protection order and hand[] it to the person concerned. One must see that two people are separated for [their] safety. (P5)

First, I have to take the statement and fill in form[s] 1 to 12, and refer[] the case to the DV office. (P6)

When a person come[s] [to] the charge office to report DV, we first look if the people concerned are staying together. If they are [...], we make sure that we give the victim a shelter to sleep over until we refer such a victim to the relevant stakeholders where the victim can get help. (P8)

We take the person to the police, we in fact first ask the victim if [s/he] can be safe with the respondent. If s/he says that s/he will be safe, we give him/her certain forms in which s/he must sign that 'I agree' that 'I promised the police officers that I would be safe'. Or we take [him/her] to the relatives where s/he can confirm his/her safety, or we can take the victim to the victim empowerment office, and then refer him/her to the DV office. (P9)

P10's responsibilities included "[making] sure that the victim is kept in [a] safe place, and [...] that we arrest the perpetrator. We also do the pre-counselling, to give them information." It is the role of police officers to protect the victims of domestic violence, and to come up with preventive measures.

The roles and responsibilities of social workers in dealing with domestic violence in Tshitale

P16 stated that they followed procedures in line with the Domestic Violence Act (RSA, 1998). If there is a need to conduct joint interviews they do that, if possible, and advise the victim to take out a protection order: "*We do not force the victim, but advise the victim. If there is a physical abuse, we refer the victim/woman to the SAPS.*"

P17 pointed out that if the victim reports the case, it may be at the police station or to the magistrate. These two departments may refer the case to the Department of Social Development (DSD). If social workers receive such cases, they sit down with the victim for her side of the story, and then the spouse or partner for his side. The social workers start a session of "family preservation", of which counselling forms part.

P18 stated that social workers outline the process of educating perpetrators and victims about the importance of the family, and taking care of the family. They remind the perpetrator of why he is part of a family, and its importance:

The role of each member within the family is significant; if you are a husband, you have a role to fulfil [...] as [does your] wife. These roles go with responsibility. Each member should be responsible for his/her role and stay away from neglecting their roles. It is import[ant] for the husband and wife to support each other on the roles within the domestic settings. The decision taken within the family must suit all of [them], because if not, there will be conflict.

P19 stated that the role of social workers, in respect of victims of domestic violence, depended on the presented case: "*You find a woman coming here to report a case. The social worker will diagnose the problem and deal with it. The social worker will request [...] a joint sitting between the victim and the perpetrator.*"

The social worker will conduct a number of sessions with both parties. In cases where social workers receive complaints about a particular family,

as a social worker, I go to the affected (reported) family. I should not disclose the person who reported the matter to DSD; the approach must be professional and [done] in a respectable manner. [...] through observation I will notice the abnormalities within that family. Mainly the victim ... they do not talk, they protect the perpetrator. Through observation, we can see if there is a problem. We [...] can advise the victims, depending on the nature of the case. We work with different stakeholders – a SAPS, DOJ, traditional leaders, and faith-based organisations. (P 18).

Police officers' response to domestic violence

The way in which a police officer responds to domestic violence can actually increase the victimisation of the aggrieved party, and lead to the inappropriate handling of such cases. To explain the police participants' responses to domestic violence, P1 outlined her responsibilities as follows: "*When I receive the matter, I explain the rights of both parties involved and find out if there are witnesses.*" P2 described his role as follows: "*I will explain the rights of both parties involved, if there are any witnesses, if it is civil or family matter.*"

When we are at the scene of [the] crime, our duty is to make sure that the victim is safe and we locate the respondent, in other words, we separate them. The victim is separated from the respondent. The victim will tell us as police officers what must we do to assist her. We will explain those rights again. The victims [have] the rights to open the protection order or to open a docket. Alternatively, both the protection order and docket. We then separate them; we take the victim away from the deponent to her family, if the victim

does not have a place to go, we take her to our victim empowerment office. If she wants to open the case, we open the case and arrest the respondent. The case will be referred to the magistrate's court. (P4)

P5 said: *"In a DV situation, one must act as soon as possible, one must see to it that if there is any danger between two people, they must be separated. Take one to the place of safety."* P6 clarified: *"I have to make sure that the victim is safe [and] arrest the suspect. Make sure that the suspect is taken to court."* P8 stated: *"We take the victim and place her in[] our car, then we deal with the respondent, the person who is victimising the victim. If the victim has injuries, we take the suspect away from the victim to the SAPS, and then we take the victim to court."*

P9 said: *We arrive at the scene, on arrival we go to the victim, we do not go to the respondent, we go to the victim so that she tell[s] us the problem. Then we go to ask the victim; we tell the victim about the choices she can have, the first one is: she can open a criminal case, and we arrest the respondent, secondly if you do not want to open the case, we take you to the police station to the victim empowerment offices. Lastly, then we refer the victim to the DV office to open the protection order.*

P10 said: *"If we did not find the suspects, that [is] where I fit in, as I work in a detective's office. CSC are the ones who deal with that."*

Dealing with domestic violence at faith-based organisations and traditional councils

P3 spelled out the processes involved as regards traditional councils:

I use my office to solve the problems, whatever I do in my office I have a logbook that I record the person whom I am helping. I write down. It is my personal issue between me and the person I am helping and my God. When we receive a case of domestic violence, we write a letter which summon[s] the complainant and defendant to tribal court, for their case [to] be heard, then we summon them until we [reach a] conclusion.

P12 said: *"When the two come here to tribal court, [...] we try to reconcile them so that the DV should not occur. And again, to warn the perpetrator that he should not repeat the same mistake again."* P12 added that, if conflicts arise, the victim and perpetrator can approach the tribal court for help. P13 said: *"As headmen, we take two people and try to sit them down with the tribal council, to help them solve their problems."* As P14 explained, *"people come with their problems and then I check who is wrong and try[] to hear [...] both sides of [their] stories and try to solve the problems."*

Clearly, as indicated, dealing with domestic violence is not solely the responsibility of police officers. The only way to curb this scourge is if the SAPS, faith-based organisations, traditional leaders and the community work hand in hand to defeat it.

The role and processes of social workers when dealing with domestic violence

P16 and P17 stated that when they deal with domestic violence incidents, they apply procedures as per the Domestic Violence Act:

If there is a need to conduct joint interviews, we can do that. If it is possible, we can advise the victims to open the protection order. We do not force the victim but we advise the victim. If there is a physical abuse, we refer the client to the SAPS's aftercare services. (P17)

P19 stated that the process of dealing with the victims of domestic violence depends on the nature of the case presented to the social workers:

You find women coming here to report a case. The social worker will diagnose the problem and deal with it. The social worker will request for a joint sitting between the victim and the perpetrator. We will have [...] a number of sessions. We do not have [a] victim empowerment office. There are cases whereby the victims are reluctant to open [...] cases. If she opens the case today, she no longer continues with the case. Even if the victim is hurt, she will join council and case, and as a social I do not have a say. The victims might be experiencing threats from the families of the perpetrator ... 'If you continue with this case I will kill you, with your family' ..., the in-laws and her friends.

Community members' refusal to report domestic violence

Due to stigmatisation, there is the notion that what happens between partners belongs behind closed doors, not in the public eye. Often, a case is made but then withdrawn by the same spouse who pressed charges. As one participant argued:

Most people focus on their own issues. Here in our communities, we have a challenge of people not interfering with the couple's conflicts. For example, [a] woman was once battered by her husband, in the process of this abuse the woman was screaming seeking for [help], but none of the people came to her rescue. People were listening and aware that the woman is in trouble, but they keep on saying, 'It is the issues of two people (married couple).' It was unfortunate that the people's assumptions were correct, because after the case was opened, the woman cancelled the case. In most cases, the community is not involved in combating domestic violence. (P 16)

The challenges facing victims of domestic violence at Tshitale

The repercussions of domestic violence are many and diverse. In this regard, P16 said:

It affects victims of domestic violence emotionally. You may find that the victim is forgetful. She hardly remember[s] things. She isolate[s] herself from other people. Her behavioural pattern changes, because of being victimised. You may find that other women have bruises and scars from physical abuse ...

It disturbed the victim's daily functioning. You may find that it leads the victim to abuse her children as well, because of the abuse she receive[s] from her husband. We see the following challenges: Depression, fail[ure] to leave [an] abusive husband ... They get used to the abuse. (P17)

It affects women to the extent where you find her not seeing anything. Her mind becomes locked. [...] Some [are] no longer [...] able to face the reality of life. She became disorganised. It disturbs her mind and her daily activities. The victim will run away from her family that will affect her emotional wellbeing. She might leave her children and her belongings behind, which may affect her daily [life]. It will be difficult for her to start a new life. This may lead her to go back to her husband and the victimisation will go on. Her behaviour will change. Lack of concentration. She will become lonely [...]. She might lose contact with her children. (P18)

One participant expanded on the challenges facing abused women:

They are affected negatively, they are degraded, depressed, worthless. They are used as tools. They [...] no longer care about their own hygiene. [...] They isolate themselves from other people such as friends and family. They become lonel[y], [have] suicidal thoughts. They stay in a relationship for the sake of material belongings, such as failing to leave an abusive husband because they built a house together. They vow that [they would] rather die in that marriage tha[n] go[] home and start a new life. They fail to accept the reality of abuse within the domestic environment. (P19)

Discussion

The causes of domestic violence in the Tshitale area

The researchers identified different causes of domestic violence, including stress, alcohol abuse, poverty, a lack of knowledge and education, unemployment, and patriarchy. Seabi (2009:71) notes that men who wish to carry out a violent act may become drunk in order to perform the act. Then, when the violence occurs, both partners excuse his behaviour on the grounds that he was inebriated and therefore not accountable, thereby allowing the perpetrator to avoid taking responsibility for his actions.

A study by Shamu, Abrahams, Temmetman, Musekiwa and Zarowsky (2011:7) found that the abuse of alcohol or drugs by a partner (or self) is a risk factor for being abused. Unemployment leads to social and psychological distress, which creates the basis for domestic violence: in such cases, men's economic insecurities and inability to provide adequately for their families may cause them to lash out (Seabi, 2009:72). Violence against women is thus seen not just as an expression of men's prowess and dominance over women, but also as being rooted in male vulnerability, stemming from social expectations of manhood that are unattainable because of factors such as poverty (Jewkes, 2002:1424).

The researchers found that when a woman disobeys the needs (for sexual intercourse) of her husband/partner, that might lead to domestic violence. Men being asked about affairs, women refusing to have sex, and men forcing their partners to have sex, invariably end in conflict.

The researchers also found that certain conflicts are triggered by an existing situation in which the woman finds herself trying to protect the assets within the household. The participants reported that the involvement of the in-laws can cause conflict between husband and wife, as the former indulge in name-calling, causing a division between husband and wife, with the wife not being protected by her husband.

The nature of domestic violence in Tshitale

The researchers found that neighbours who reside next door to a home in which domestic violence occurs, are likely to report this to the social workers. With their help, social workers can take domestic violence-related cases to the police. Neighbours play a vital role in reporting such incidents. Domestic violence was found to affect all women, both literate and illiterate, yet the latter suffered more abuse. As P5 and P10 noted, those who are not educated tend not to report domestic violence, for fear of being driven from the home without resources, having no qualifications or job-related skills to rely on.

The researchers found that there is a good relationship between the SAPS, DSD, DOJ & CD, traditional leaders and community members, when it came to combating domestic violence. Yet, some police officers were reluctant to enforce the law in domestic-related incidents.

The effects of, and challenges facing, victims of domestic violence at Tshitale

The researchers found that female victims of domestic violence suffered from depression, a lack of concentration and suicidal thoughts, in addition to the daily challenges confronting them in the home. Gordon (2016:963) identified several red flags that could prompt suspicion of domestic violence, which include depression. As the findings showed, the effects of such violence on women extend to the victimisation of their children. Threatening to withdraw support or harm the children is a means men use to dominate women. In this way, the abuser maintains control in the relationship, making it increasingly difficult for the abused woman to break free, for fear of her loved ones suffering in the process (Jack, 2014:69).

Many South African women remain profoundly economically disempowered as they rely on their partners for financial support, which makes escaping very difficult (Gordon, 2016:963). The researchers found that women fail to leave an abusive spouse or partner due to their investment in the union, and their financial dependence on the other party. Failure to leave an abusive relationship means the abuse will never end. Economic dependency is likely to develop if the aggressor is the sole provider in the family, and denies his partner access to resources, but also when one person uses threats or intimidation to take control of the finances (Jack, 2014:69). The researchers also found that the traditional leaders, religious leaders, the DoJ and CD, and social workers addressed domestic violence by working hand in hand with the police.

Recommendations

Education

It is vital to educate the men and women about the dangers of abusing alcohol within the family setting. Everyone should drink responsibly, and not use alcohol abuse as an excuse for (domestic) violence. Spouses should go for marriage/partner counselling to manage stress and rebuild trust within the family setting. Women should receive education about their rights, including the right to say no to forced sexual intercourse. Conflict avoidance between in-laws, spouses and family members should be managed better, with parties avoiding any interaction, in order to avoid conflict.

Programmes to combat domestic violence

Programmes which focus on preventing domestic violence, should be implemented at Tshitale. Every woman involved in domestic disputes – whether it reaches the police or traditional courts – must undergo trauma counselling, to ease her emotional distress. Victim empowerment offices must help women deal with the challenges arising within their family setting. Non-profit organisations should become more involved in the area, to help deal with related concerns.

Police officers should be assigned to deal more appropriately with domestic violence, and should use the tribunals and laws available for such matters, including the Domestic Violence Act (RSA, 1998). Training SAPS members to

deal with domestic violence will capacitate them. The researchers further recommend that the SAPS assign psychologists to the Tshitale branch, as the area does not have access to this service. The Tshitale SAPS should also employ social workers for this purpose. The DSD employs the only social workers available at Tshitale, and they service the entire policing area in different spheres.

Conclusion

The findings revealed that the SAPS, traditional leaders, social workers, community leaders as well as faith-based leaders were very positive about tackling domestic violence. The causes of such violence were found to vary from case to case. However, in some instances violence in the home was not triggered by a particular incident, but had become a way of life. Infidelity by men (and, to a lesser extent, women), men's desire to dominate, weak law enforcement, suspicion and a lack of trust, excessive alcohol consumption, the use of violence to silence women, poverty and dependency on intimate partners, were found to be among the reasons for domestic violence (see also Raditloaneng, 2013:66).

Domestic violence was found to affect women emotionally: they became forgetful, depressed, and often isolated themselves. As Jewkes (2002:1425) found, abusive men tend to restrict their partners' movements and contact with others. Thus, abused women become isolated and this isolation is compounded by the effects of abuse on their mental state, which can see them becoming withdrawn. Compassion fatigue was noticeable in those who played a supportive role, as victims often return to the perpetrators or defend/excuse their actions.

Retief (2013:289) found that although police officers attend to domestic violence incidents on a daily basis as part of their job, they generally lack insight into the social context and psychological character of intimate violence, and how to effectively enforce their discretionary powers. Victims of domestic violence, who suffer at the hands of their loved ones, tend not to act against the abusive partner, which affects not only their wellbeing, but also their self-esteem. As the researchers found, many factors need to be taken into consideration at Tshitale: the region does not have a place of safety for victims of domestic violence, but relies on the services of Mavambe Place of Safety, which is 100 km away. The Centre for Youth and Child Care of the Thohoyandou Victim Empowerment Programme (TVEP), which services the people of Limpopo, is also 100 km away. The lack of empowerment centres for victims of domestic violence in the area adds to the challenges facing victims.

For the sakes of all girls, women, mothers and daughters, the victims of domestic abuse must be better protected and informed, and men must be conscientised and reminded of their duty to care and protect.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the Tshwane University of Technology Research Ethics Committee and the South African Police Services (SAPS) for permission to do field research in the Tshitale Policing Area, and the participants who shared their experiences of domestic violence.

References

1. Bendal, C. 2010. The domestic violence epidemic in South Africa: legal and practical remedies. *Women's Studies*, 39(2):100–118.
2. Brown, E.S., Esbenson, F.A. & Geis, G. 2013. *Criminology: explaining crime and its content*. 8th ed. USA: Anderson Publishing.
3. Burchell, J. 2013. *Principles of criminal law*. 4th ed. Claremont: Juta Law.
4. Chambliss, W.J. & Hass, A.Y. 2012. *Criminology: connecting theory, research and practice*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
5. Firth, a. 2011. Local municipality 968 from Census 2011. [Online]. Available on: <https://census2011.adrianfrith.com/place/968> [Accessed 10 July 2015].
6. Geldenhuys, k. 2014. Crime series: the Modimolle Monster. *Servamus Community-based Safety and Security Magazine* (November).
7. Gordon, C. 2016. Intimate partner violence is everyone's problem, but how should we approach it in a clinical setting? *SAMJ*, 106(10). [Online]. Available on: <http://isssasa.org.za/resources/intimate-partner-violence/intimate-partner-violence-iseveryone2019s-problem-but-how-should-we-approach-it-in-a-clinical-setting/ipv-in-aclinical-setting.pdf> [Accessed 10 April 2017].
8. Gosselin, D.K. 2003. *Heavy hands: An introduction to the crimes of family violence*. 2nd ed. US: Prentice Hall.

9. Jack, K.M. 2014. Lived experiences of women staying in physically abusive relationships. Dissertation. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
10. Jewkes, R. 2002, April 20. Intimate partner violence: causes and prevention. *The Lancet*, 359:1423–1429. [Online]. Available on: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.476.8911&rep=rep1&type=pdf> [Accessed 15 March 2015].
11. Limpopo Policy Research Repository. n.d. 2014/2015 final report: knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of the police towards the victims of domestic violence. [Online]. Available on: <http://policyresearch.limpopo.gov.za/> [Accessed 5 July 2017].
12. Madzivhandila, A.C. 2015. The policing of domestic violence in the Tshwane policing precinct. Master's dissertation. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
13. Manndzhi, E. 2015. The impact of domestic violence on learner's scholastic performance at Sekgoses North Circuit. Master's dissertation. RSA: University of Venda.
14. Masetywa, N.M. 2009. The perceptions and experiences of African women in violent partner relationships: an exploratory study. Master's dissertation. Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch.
15. Mazibuko, N.C. & UMEJEZI, I. 2015. Domestic violence as a 'class thing': perspectives from a South African township. *Gender & Behaviour*, 13(1):6584–6593.
16. Mfati, L.N. 2012. An institutional study of North-West University students on domestic violence in South Africa. Master's dissertation. Mafikeng: North-West University.
17. Payne, B.K. & Gainey, R.R. 2009. *Family violence and criminal justice: a life-course approach*. 3rd ed. New York: Anderson.
18. Raditloang, W.N. 2013. An analysis of gender-based violence and reactions in southern Africa. *Wudpecker Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 1(5):60–71. [Online]. Available on: <https://catalogue.safaiids.net/sites/default/files/publications/An%20analysis%20of%20gender-based%20domestic%20violence.pdf> [Accessed 15 November 2017].
19. Republic Of South Africa. 1996a. *Gender Equity Act 39 of 1996*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
20. Republic Of South Africa. 1996b. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
21. Republic Of South Africa. 1998. *Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
22. Retief, R.T. 2013. Police officer's experiences of policing domestic violence in the Western Cape Province. Dissertation. South Africa: Stellenbosch University.
23. Seabi, A.T. 2009. Marriage, cohabitation and domestic violence in Mpumalanga. Master's dissertation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.
24. Shamu, S., Abrahams, N., Temmetman, N., Musekiwa, A. & Zarowsky, C. 2011. A systematic review of African studies on intimate partner violence against pregnant women: prevalence and risk factors. [Online]. Available on: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0017591> [Accessed 12 March 2017].
25. Shannon, B.J. 2009. *Domestic violence*. Health Reference Series. 3rd ed. USA: Omnigraphics.
26. Sibanda-Moyo, M., Khonje, E. & Brobbery, M.K. 2017. *Violence against women in South Africa: a country in crisis*. Braamfontein: CSV. [Online]. Available on: <https://www.csvr.org.za/pdf/CSVr-Violence-Against-Women-in-SA.pdf> [Accessed 10 December 2017].
27. Sonjani, T.B. 2011. An evaluation of the handling of domestic violence cases in the Alice cluster by South African police service officials. Dissertation. Pretoria. University of South Africa
28. Statistics South Africa (Statssa). 2014. Victims of crimes survey, 2014. [Online]. Available on: <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0341/P03412014.pdf> [Accessed 14 October 2016].
29. Tshifhumulo, R. & Mudhovozi, P. 2013. Behind closed doors: listening to the voices of women enduring battering. *Gender & Behaviour*, 11(1)(June).
30. Vetten, L. 2014. *Domestic violence in South Africa*. Policy Brief 71 (November). Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.
31. World Health Organisation. 2014. Intimate partner violence and alcohol fact sheet. [Online]. Available on: <https://womensaidorkney.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/WHO-IPA-and-Alcohol-Fact-sheet.pdf> [Accessed 14 October 2016].