THE HIDDEN SIDE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: ABUSED MEN IN INTIMATE HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence is one of the major social issues that characterize our country, both as a contributing factor to other social problems and as a result of other social problems. Domestic violence has been made to be only an issue that affects women; it has been gendered. Men are only brought into domestic violence discourse and research only as perpetrators. However, it affects both women and men as men can also be victims of domestic violence. Domestic violence rates have increased regardless of developments in legislation. In addition, role players in the implementation of legislation tend to emphasize more on female victims which leaves male victims marginalized. This leads to male victims suffering in silence and thinking that there are no interventions for them. This paper explored experiences of abused men in intimate heterosexual relationships using qualitative approach. Data collection took a form of in-depth individual interviews. Data was analyzed using thematic content analysis. Findings indicate that men are also victims of domestic violence and are willing to share their experiences; however there are limited platforms for male victims. Their reasons for staying are multifaceted such as giving their children an opportunity to grow up with both parents. Effects of domestic violence ranged from psycho-emotional to professional development. Social workers as professionals need to sensitize themselves to the reality of male victims of domestic violence and acknowledge that men can also be victims.

Key words: Domestic violence, gender, heterosexual, intimate relationships, men, social workers

The association of domestic violence with women deters society from achieving visible gender equality. This, however, is said with acknowledgement of the effects of patriarchy in the structure of society as well as structure of intimate relationships; that a high number of victims are women violated by men. In addition, in intimate relationships power often lies with men.

Nonetheless, in order to achieve gender equality, which is one of the Millennium Development Goals, it must be acknowledged that both men and women can fall victims of domestic violence. Lack of focus on men as victims leaves them with much pain yet no structures to respond to their outcry. Hennings, Jones and Holdford (2005) argue that a male victim of domestic violence is a controversial issue. The controversy might be due to stereotypes attributed to men as well as the hegemonic masculinity beliefs. It is posited that males have more strength and high levels of aggression; as a result, hearing about male victims of domestic violence becomes astonishment. In light of these stereotypes and people's ignorance to the reality of male victims of domestic violence, these victims end up suffering in silence encompassed by feelings of shame, humiliation and embarrassment (Wykes & Welsh, 2009).

This article pays particular attention on the following: the nature of abusive relationships, explores reasons that make men stay in such relationships, and the effects thereof. In conclusion, it looks at intervention strategies that these men employed in trying to deal with the problem and building on, how social workers can intervene with male victims of domestic violence. This paper will define domestic violence; explain approaches of domestic violence, causes and consequences of domestic violence and lastly interventions of domestic violence.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Violence is a phenomenon that is found both in the public and private sphere. Domestic violence is acknowledged as a massive social problem (Choudhry & Herring, 2006), especially in private spaces where individuals are expected to be safe and secure. Article three of the Convention on Human Rights (1953) states that 'no one shall be subject to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment including actual body harm and physical or emotional suffering'. Everyone should be free from public and private violence. However, domestic violence infringes this right. The South African government recognized the alarming levels of domestic violence-related cases in the country and formulated a law to safeguard those affected. In spite of the legal intervention Jewkes, Levin & Penn-Kekana (2002) argue that South Africa has become tolerant of domestic violence. This might be an indication of the failure of the psycho-social and/or legal frameworks that have been put in place to deal with this problem.

Barnett, Miller-Perrin and Perrin (2005) argue that it is essential that a legal definition of domestic violence is given as it has an impact on the victims' lives. According to Section 1 of the South African Domestic Violence Act No 116 'domestic violence' means 'physical abuse; sexual abuse; emotional, verbal and psychological abuse; economic abuse; intimidation; harassment: stalking; damage to property: entry into the complainant's residence without consent, where the parties do not share the same residence; or any other controlling or abusive behavior towards a complainant where such conduct harms, or may cause imminent harm to, the safety, health or wellbeing of the complainant'. The Act outlines various types of domestic violence and attempts to look at domestic violence holistically without neglecting any aspect of it. This definition is very inclusive and as a result; it may create vagueness of what is domestic violence. For instance, emotional abuse is a type of domestic violence, however when victims report it they are often faced with challenges as they are often required of evidence. Emotional abuse evidence is not tangible. Due to the inclusivity of the Act's definition, it might be that the available rates are an underestimation of the reality of domestic violence. Domestic violence does not only occur in dyad relationships but also in families. However, for the purposes of this study, the focus is on dyad relationships due to the unnoticed and under-reporting by male victims of domestic violence in intimate relationships. Domestic violence is often a cycle which explains the nature of domestic violence occurrence.
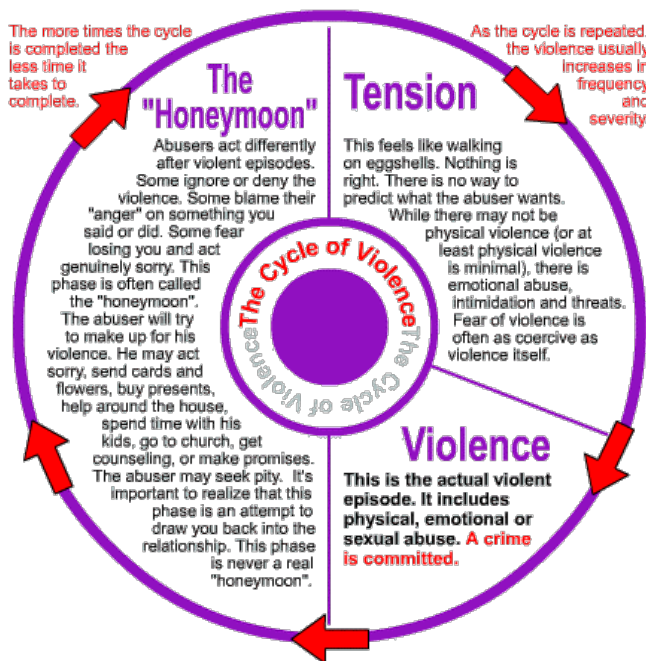

Figure 1: Cycle of domestic violence. Source: Coalition Against Violence Avalon East (n.d).

PERSPECTIVES OF ABUSE: SYMMETRIC AND ASYMMETRIC APPROACHES

Viewing women as the only victims of domestic violence is not a holistic picture of the phenomenon as men are also affected. Disregarding men might be adding to the problem in that the problem is only looked at from one angle. It has been acknowledged by Dobash and Dobash (2004) that domestic violence has two approaches; symmetry and asymmetry. Symmetry approach argues that both men and women can be perpetrators as well as victims of domestic violence. The other side is referred to as the asymmetry, which argues and acknowledges that men are the ones who mostly perpetuate domestic violence. Nonetheless this study is not meant to undermine women's experiences of domestic violence, but to create awareness that men also fall victims of domestic violence. Dienye and Gbeneol (2008) describe domestic violence against men as violence that is perpetuated by women against their intimate partners. However, this is a rare finding. Hence, there is not much literature on it, which serves as the significance of this study. Stavarianos, Zouloumis, Dietrich, Papadopoulos, Diamantopoulou and Moumtsakis (2011) posit that domestic violence is a phenomenon that affects both males and females.

Lupton and Gillespie (1994) and Dobash and Dobash (2004) state that women become violent only when they are under threat and they in turn have to defend themselves that is acting in self-defense. This notion proposes that women who abuse their partners are equally abused or have previously been abused. This suggestion seems to have an inherent belief that men are the initiators of violence in intimate relationships. This suggestion may also impact on the intensity and severity of abuse perpetuated by women, which may include emotional abuse, burning the victim or even killing. It can be argued that this notion is not entirely true as there are women perpetrators of domestic violence who do it for dominance, power, and control. Both genders fall victims of domestic violence, however, they conceptualize it differently. Kimmel (2002) posits that men might underestimate their violence while women may overestimate theirs. Kimmel (2002) argues that although there might be differences in frequency, severity, purpose and or reactions, all victims of violence must be offered the necessary support and assistance.

CONSEQUENCES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON MEN

Gorde, Helfrich and Finlayson (2004) say that abuse can affect victims directly, but it can also have consequences on those within close proximity to the victim, depending on the circumstances. The effects of the abuse can be felt socially, psychologically, emotionally, spiritually and economically. Parmar and Sampson (2007) argue that it creates uncertainties, insecurities and expectations of the next assault. For the

purpose of this study, the discussion of the effects of abuse will be limited to men who have experienced abuse.

Domestic violence has psycho-emotional effects with long-term effects. The two psycho-emotional consequences of domestic violence are depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (Atmore, 2001). The word depression is often misused; whenever a person feels down and sad they refer to that as depression. However the Mental Health Institute (n.d) states that it should interfere with one's daily life, affect both the individual and those around him. The following are listed as symptoms of depression; persistent sadness, anxiety and empty feelings. The man might feel he is nothing due to the experience abuse. This actually links with the next symptom that is feelings of guilt, worthlessness and helplessness. The man can feel helpless due to the social pressures and expectations laid on him. 'Domestic violence can cause the person to harbor intense fear and feelings of helplessness or horror' (Kasiram & Khosa, 2008, p. 223). The abuse inflicted either fall into Type 1 Trauma, which is once-off or Type 2 Trauma, which is ongoing depending on the action taken thereafter (Kasiram & Khosa, 2008). Due to shame and guilt, it may come as a challenge for men talk about their abuse. Men are characterized as active, independent, strong and tough (Brannon, 2008) and failure to live up to these might be viewed shameful. Therefore, when abuse occurs they become imprisoned by their own masculinity (May, Strikwerda, & Hopkins, 1996). In addition, due to the continuous abuse the victim may become numb to the experience and end up seeing it as a normal part of his life. This makes leaving the abusive relationship difficult even when the victim is at the doorstep of finding help.

Domestic violence may also have long-term health consequences and these continue even after the abuse has stopped (Campbell, 2000). Domestic violence causes harm to the health of the victim, and it undermines human development (Gender Policy Framework for Local Government, n.d). In terms of individuals' development, it can be physical, emotional, social, psychological, and cognitive. It poses stress on the individual experiencing it, which usually impacts the victim's health. Consequences can also be economical in nature.

Adams, Sullivan, Bybee, and Greenson, (2008) posit that economic abuse decreases the victim's standards of living especially when they leave. This might be one of the reasons that make victims stay in abusive relationships. This links to the social and economic consequences of domestic violence. Bunthal, Somphy and Socheath (2010) posit that victims of domestic violence suffer economic loss due to the inability to work. Inability to work means loss of income. Other macro-level consequences of domestic violence include adults missing work which may result in loss of income. Reasons that may make an adult miss work include; going to the doctor or hospital to seek medical attention as domestic violence can result in injuries (Campbell, 2000); and in various ways these can negatively affect the community's development as well as society as a whole (Campbell, 2000). Families

that are marked by violence greatly contribute to a society of violence as the family is the primary agent of socialization.

INTERVENTIONS TO ADDRESS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is a complex issue that needs intervention by various professionals and at different levels. Rossiter (2011) discusses three prevention strategies. These strategies can influence each other.
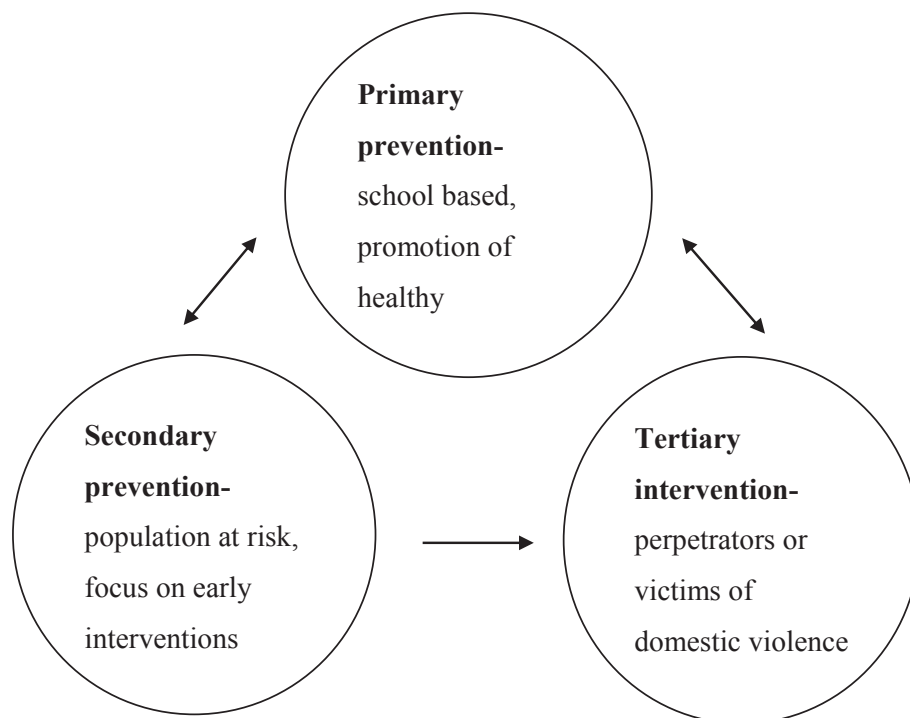
Primary prevention- school based, promotion of healthy

Secondary prevention- population at risk, focus on early interventions

Tertiary intervention- perpetrators or victims of domestic violence

Figure 2:   Domestic Violence Intervention Strategies

The first one is primary intervention strategies; which aim at the whole population and they attempt to prevent domestic violence from occurring, therefore they are preventative in nature. Examples of these entail school-based based initiatives that promote healthy relationships and conflict resolutions skills. Because it is school-based, school social workers can use them through employing the educator role whereby the client system benefit from information that will enhance their interpersonal effectiveness (Potgieter, 1998).

Secondary intervention strategies target individuals who are at risk of being perpetrators or victims of domestic violence; it is more community-based (Rossiter, 2011). This level emphasizes early interventions (Butler, McArthur, Greely & Weston, 2009). 'Prevention and early intervention strategies aim to influence children's, parents' or families' behaviors'. An important goal of prevention and EI is to change the balance between risk and protective factors so that the effect of protective factors outweighs the effect of risk factors, thus building resilience' (Butler et al, 2009, p.10). One of the roles that the social worker can employ at this level is the role of a broker. By employing this role the social worker would be achieving the social work goal of linking 'people with systems that provide them with resources, services and opportunities' (Zastrow, 1993, p. 51). As a broker the social worker would assess the situation, assess resources (with male victims this would be a challenge as they are limited resources for them), and give information (in terms of protection order), advocate for the client and provide service system linkage (Potgieter, 1998).

Tertiary intervention strategies are aimed at individuals who are already perpetuating or experiencing domestic violence (Rossiter, 2011). It is here then that social workers will employ their typical role of being counselors. This role links to the social work goal of 'enhancing problem solving, coping and developmental capacities of people' (Zastrow, 1993, p. 51). However, social work as a profession has been criticized for not responding to victims of domestic violence. Critique points include blaming the victim and giving advice. Social workers are not supposed to give advice to their clients but they are supposed to work with them in finding strategies to deal with the problem at hand.

Although there are different levels for social workers to intervene at, the profession has been criticized for its lack of action on the issue of domestic violence. They have not prioritized the issue of domestic violence and they are seen as bureaucrats (Danis, 2003). Social workers need to be made aware of the issue and to embark upon dealing with the issue. As they have been accused of blaming the victims, it is important for social workers to have a comprehension of factors that prevent one from leaving an abusive relationship (Danis, 2003). As mentioned earlier, these prevention strategies have an influence on each other. For instance, people who participate in primary prevention initiatives might be people who are at risk or people who are already victims or perpetrators. And those who are perpetrators might be in need of initiatives offered at primary prevention level.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher employed qualitative research approach. 'Qualitative research is a broad approach in social research that is based upon the need to understand human and social interactions from perspectives of insiders and participants in the interactions' (Greenstein, Roberts & Sitas, 2003, p.49). The research was interested

in understanding domestic violence from the perspective of male victims. Qualitative research provides findings that are not numerical or statistical but textual (Golafshani, 2003). Textual data makes the voices of participants in the research more audible.

The narrative design was used because it is based on the assumption that the life world of a person and the stories told can best be understood from his or her own account and perspective (Fouche & Schurink, 2011, as cited in De Vos, 2011). Previous research on domestic violence is more based on women and men's involvement is often from a perpetrator perspective. As a result their possible contribution to domestic violence is ignored. However, through the use of narrative design the researcher was able to understand men's perspective of domestic violence.

Participants were recruited through the use of purposive sampling, which is about recruiting participants based on the researcher's judgment (Sarantakos, 1998; Neuman, 2000; Silverman, 2000; Bless, Higson-Smith & Kegeen, 2006). Bless et al. (2006) continues to argue that purposive sampling is one of the ways of ensuring trustworthiness of your research study. It ensures that relevant units of analysis are selected as participants in the study. Participants were recruited from Moshate Organization based in Hillbrow, working specifically with male victims of domestic violence. Participants were from various parts of Johannesburg.

Participants in the study had to be in an intimate heterosexual relationship. Five participants were interviewed. Data was collected through the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. In-depth individual interviews are useful for conducting detailed information about a person's thoughts or behaviors and they offer a relaxed atmosphere for the interviewees (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Thematic analysis was used in analyzing data.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Terre Blanche, Durkheim, & Painter (2006) state that research ethics are of great importance for researchers in all stages of research; in planning, designing, implementing and reporting. Ethical practice legitimizes the whole research (Payne, 2005). They also ensure that participants are protected and are aware of their rights with regard to being participant in a research study.

Voluntary participation

People are to participate in research willingly, not forcefully which is what the ethic voluntary participation ensures. With that, they should not be lied to in attempt to get their participation. Researchers need to be honest which then leaves people with free will. The researcher gave the information sheet to participants explaining what the research is about as well as their rights. It was explained to them that they have a right to either be part of the research or not and their refusal will not impact on them in anyway.

Informed Consent

Informed consent is required in order for the participant to make an informed decision regarding whether to participate or not; it requires the researcher to give the potential participants sufficient information. Participants signed consent forms after being given sufficient information about the research.

Non-maleficence

It is important that the researcher does not cause harm to participants. At times, harm is done intentionally and here we talk about psycho-emotional harm. Due to the sensitivity of the subject under study, the researcher made arrangement for counselling services at Sophiatown Community Psychological Services.

Confidentiality/violation of privacy/anonymity

Ensuring confidentiality has great potential to increase openness and honesty with participants. Babbie and Mouton (2001) write that as soon as the researcher has conducted the data with participant's particulars those should be replaced with identification number. Participants' names are not included in the report and this ensured anonymity with an exception of the researcher. The interviews were conducted in a place that ensured confidentiality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1:   Demographic information of participants

Participant	Employment	Race	Age	Marital status	Types of abuse	Duration of the abuse
1	Self-employed (taxi owner)	Black	47	Married	Psycho-emotional and physical	16 years
2	Retention Specialist	Black	41	Married	Psycho-emotional, economic and physical	7 years
3	Librarian	Black	40	Married	Psycho-emotional, economic and sexual	6 years
4	Cleaner	Black	41	Single	Physical	12 years
5	Self-employed	Black	40	Married	Psycho-emotional	3 years

Nature of an abusive relationship

All the participants in the study reported their relationships being characterize by violence. Most of them reported physical abuse with elements of other types of abuse. The South African Domestic Violence Act of 1998 outlines a number of domestic violence acts and the men in the study seemed to have a fair understanding of what constitutes domestic violence. However, there were some variations, for instance what constitutes sexual abuse for them is when a woman refuse sex. The abuse occurs as a build up, in a form of disapprovals. This phase was identified in the research; whereby you find the couple fighting about things such as children or how one spends his money.

> 'I had a friend whom I was working with on a tender and he took the whole money I think R500 000 because the tender was under him. I just came to assist, the government sent the money to him…the account was under his name, he took the money and gambled it all at Carnival City. You come with such things to your wife, my women will never advice you. she will keep quiet and one day you will have an argument and she will tell you that indeed you are a fool, you are useless, I don't see what you are working for, you just sit and they eat your money' (Participant 1).

Wallace (1999) argues that at this stage the victim is likely to take blame and become withdrawn. One of the participants showed thoughts of self-blame. He attributed the abuse to the period that they got married, saying that maybe it was early. The extent

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that the abuse has gone, he often does not voice out his pain to his wife, instead he decides to keep quiet. Lack of communication in a relationship or marriage might be one of the factors that contribute to the continuation of the abuse. The second phase in abusive relationship is referred to as the acute phase; whereby there is an actual violent outburst (Barnett & Miller-Perrin & Perrin 2005). Some of the participants reported being physically assaulted by their partners.

> '...I had been attacked with a spade, open hands, brick, I have been pointed with a gun, was beaten up and pulled to the street and I almost broke my spinal cord but I reported the matter to the police but the police ended up arresting me although I was hurt' (Participant 4).

After the first violent outburst, there is progressive increased occurrence of violence (Sivakumaran, 2007). However, this is not the case with male victims; there is no increase of violent outbursts. Then the last stage is referred to as the honeymoon phase, which is characterized, by remorse and fear of losing the partner (Barnett & Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2005). However, the findings generated from this research disputes this; the occurrence of the abuse does not reach this stage with male victims. In some instances, there is retaliation.

> 'I found myself in a situation that labeled me bad whereby she started shouting me in front of people; one day I slapped her, I hit her so strong her nose broke, she went to hospital' (Participant 1).

There is humiliation that becomes more intense when the belittling occurs in front of people which facilitated retaliation. It can be argued that retaliation to abuse results into the abuse being mutual.

Domestic chores as form of abuse

Domestic violence has been categorised mainly into four types. However, in the study there are incidents that are not included in the discourse of domestic violence (Domestic Violence Act) which men categorize as forms of abuse. These include taking care of the children and doing house chores. Four of the men in the study reported that they do the cleaning, cooking and taking care of the children in their marriages. This is done while the wives are in the house.

> 'My wife will not even wipe water on the floor. The helper comes once a week and other days it is me who clean the house with the children' (Participant 1).

> 'I clean do the laundry and when the windows are dirty I get up and clean them' (Participant 3).

Some of the men brought their children up while the mother is present. However, they also have a sense of pride in that. One of the men reported that when he asks the wife for food and why the house is not cleaned the wife would respond by saying

that those are not the reasons she is married. The men might be feeling doing house chores is abuse because we have been socialised into believing that house chores are for women. One of the participants reported that his wife does not get along with his family, especially the mother and the sisters, and as a result she does not attend family gatherings and he feels that is a form of abuse (emotionally) as that affects him. In the black communities when there are traditional ceremonies the *makoti* (the wife) should go to assist. Consequently, when the wife does not go, the man feels his manhood is being challenged because other men would be with their wives; he then feels like his not married.

Consequences of staying in abusive relationships for various reasons

The findings from this research were able to show that there are numerous, multi-layered factors that make men stay in abusive relationships. However, Barnett, Miller-Perrin, and Perrin (2005) outline what the victim needs to do in order to leave the abusive relationship. This includes the victim acknowledging that the relationship is unhealthy by recognizing the negative impact the abuse has on his life. However, findings from this research were able to establish that there are times when victims of domestic violence are aware of the effects in their lives but it is interesting that they choose to remain in those relationships. One of the reasons why some men stay in an abusive relationship is as follows;

> '*My kids…you know I grew up as a gangster, doing bad things such as stealing cars. They way it is I love my kids so much I don't want them to follow my steps, if I were to leave their lives would be a mess*' (Participant 5).

One of the findings in relation to this man's response is that all the men in the study have been in conflict with the law, either their wives getting them arrested or on separate accounts. One of the main reasons found from this study is that they are not the only ones affected by the abuse; the main concern is the children. These men seem to be more concerned for their children than themselves. However, this is common as children are defenceless victims in all this. What is also evident in this is that these men might be holding the belief that for children to grow and develop properly they need the presence of both parents, especially for identity and moral development; and parents should do anything to ensure that. However, children's exposure to domestic violence has negative impact on their development. Lastly, it also seems as though the men think that in most cases where there is separation, the mothers are given first priority to the custody of children.

What was also found is this research is that most of these men were taking the role of primary caregiver's in their children's lives. They are the ones who ensure that they eat; they are dressed, prepared for school etc. As a result, if they were to

leave they worry about who will do those things for the children since the mothers are failing to do so in their presence. How much more so in their absence?

Regardless of the reasons why men stay in abusive relationships, the consequences of staying in such relationships are negative. Abuse has been reported to have dire effects on victims (Gorde et al., 2004). This research was able to establish various consequences of abuse on men. These include psycho-emotional impact, leaving the men feeling less of himself, and professional and personal development as they feel they could not pursue their studies due to the abuse. Male victims of domestic violence often have feelings of guilt and shame and they often feel embarrassed and humiliated (Dienye & Gbeneol, 2008; Wykes & Welsh, 2009; Mulroney & Chen, 2005). One man reported that he feels ashamed and humiliated when he has to do laundry for the children as well as cleaning windows. It is such feelings that make it hard to report and openly talk about it. However, what was found in this research is that they are indeed accompanied by such feelings when they have to talk about the experiences of abuse, but nonetheless they have the desire for and need of a platform to openly talk about it and make people aware.

Feelings of shame and humiliation are often accompanied by feelings of helplessness and worthlessness. Their sense of worth was challenged when their wives called them useless and when they refused them sex.

> *'I worked very hard, I sent her to school, now the whole things started changing ah…when she was educated. I was not even done with Matric as we had planned that we will go back to school together. She upgraded herself, she became an HOD…she's a lecturer, now that she's there…'* (Participant 3).

However, not all of the men in the study experienced this as they feel they are adequately fulfilling their roles as husbands and fathers. In addition, the people that the men go to in a family to get help, they reinforce such feelings, feelings of being less of a man. This is unfortunate because when he goes to these people, he goes with hope of getting help on how to deal with the situation, not to be made to feel worse and responsible for the abuse. It is important for people to understand that no one chooses to be in such a situation and it is never a victims fault.

In addition, the impact it has on the victim's physical health may be quite severe that the victim ends up in hospital or dead, with chronic pain.

> *'…I have tried to commit suicide and I have been in a coma for one month…'* (Participant 1).

With regard to health effects, Participant 4 reported of being beaten to the point that his spinal cord was almost damaged. This would have left him living with an acquired disability, for the rest of his life. Lastly, lack of professional and personal development was found to be a consequence of abuse. All of the men in the study felt that the abuse prevented them from pursuing their studies. They further expressed that because of the abuse they could not achieve their goals in life.

> *'Yoh…it has really affected my life. you see a lot of my things are now behind. You see I don't have a child and I'm old and people get surprised and like are like at your age. I told myself that I will continue studying. There were other things that I was doing and I used to love church a lot I was even close to being a pastor'* (Participant 4).

> *'I've wasted a lot of time maybe I could have done a lot of things such as studying, maybe I could be having a PhD now'* (Participant 3).

Abuse also affects one's standard of living. Adams et al., (2008) posit that economic abuse decreases the victim's standards of living especially when they leave. Participant 2 has reached a point where he has left his wife in the big house and moved to a flat in the inner city of Johannesburg. Participant 3 said he has thought of leaving but he thought about losing his assets and having to start afresh and people have told him that it would be foolish.

Intervention strategies

An understanding of the effects of abuse on men necessitates and gives direction to how professionals should respond to the problem. Due to the complexity of the problem, intervention plans should aim at different levels. The steps that the abused men who were interviewed for this research took were of the tertiary intervention nature. At the time of the interviews, all the men in the study had proactively taken certain steps to try ameliorating the problem. One of them is contacting Moshate organization, which is where the researcher recruited study participants. Three of the men have tried intervention by their families whereby they consulted with their uncles for advice about their situation and meeting with their families, and that of their wives but it failed as some were blamed for the abuse.

All participants have tried the police but have failed. This links to what the report Submission Portfolio Committee and Select Committee on Women, Youth, Children, and People with Disabilities (2009) report stated in that police officers lack training in implementing the Domestic Violence Act (1998). It was reported that to the police, abuse of men seems non-existent and as if it is not something that happens in the South African society. In addition, where male victims of abuse approach them, they tend to be astonished and rudely dismiss the victims.

Religious groups have also been tried such as the church for counseling. Organizations such as FAMSA and POWA have been tried in finding help to deal with the abuse, and social workers. These are all organizations aimed at assisting female victims. For a man to end up going to such organizations serves as an outcry for the establishment of such organizations for male victims of abuse as they are minimal. All of the participants felt failed by social workers; whereby social workers blamed them, told them to accept the situation as it is.

'*I will tell you one thing, if something is in you and you grew up with it like abuse and you go and become a social worker it won't work because I will tell you about my situation and you think of your own and you will never work properly. She was also so against me, it is due to the situation she came from. Being a social worker you need to leave your laundry and try work on it so that you can better help other people*' (Participant 2).

It seems like the social worker was biased in that she, at face value, took the side of the woman. This confirms to what was said by one of the participants' earlier that women take priority. Zastrow (2010) state the social worker is required to enhance problem-solving skills, coping and development capacities of clients. The role that the social worker plays here links to primary intervention strategies. The trauma counselor saw no need for social workers when there are no children involved just counselors and psychologist. This in an indication that people are not fully knowledgeable of the roles and functions of social workers. The police officer said:

'It is important for social workers to carefully listen to the victim and attend to what he says. To be professional and not to re-victimize the victim with the questions that they ask.'

Domestic violence victims are victims of trauma. It then becomes essential for helping professions to be ethical in their engagement with them to avoid exposing them to secondary traumatization.

CONCLUSION

For a long period, domestic violence has been thought of as a problem affecting women; it is an issue that has been feminized. However, now it has reached a point where society needs to be aware that domestic violence is no longer only limited to women, but also to men perpetuated by women as reported by this study. However, due to society's ignorance of this issue men suffer in silence with the fear of humiliation and thinking that there is no assistance for them. Men in abusive relationships most of the time do not retaliate because they are scared of being arrested as some of the participants in the study have a history of being in conflict with the law. In addition, they believe that helpful measures for domestic violence victims only favour women and women are aware of that. This further perpetuates the abuse suffered by these men. Society needs to know that domestic violence is not a gender issue but a social issue. Professionals who work in the field of domestic violence need to sensitize themselves to this in order to create space for male victims as well.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

NOLUTHANDO MQAKELANA is a social work graduate from the University of the Witwatersrand. She also holds a Masters (MA) degree in Social Development at the same academic institution which she completed in 2014. Her MA research focused on teenage boys' perceptions of masculinity in the 21st century. She currently practices as a social worker at a Non-Governmental Organisation called Sophiatown Community Psychological Services based in Johannesburg.

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