ADDRESSING THE VULNERABILITY OF MEN IN SOUTH AFRICAN VIOLENCE PREVENTION POLICY: A CALL TO MAKE MALES VISIBLE IN POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES TACKLING VIOLENCE

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BACKGROUND

South Africa has a significant violence problem. Violence is endemic among women and girls, with a significant proportion of traumatic events linked to sexual violence, which is grossly underreported (1). However, although the rate of female homicide involving intimate partners is alarmingly high, at six times the global rate (2), the exposure of men to violence – especially to severe and homicidal forms – is even more disproportionate, with male homicide rates eight times the global average (3). Sexual violence towards boys and men is also notable, with 3-4% of young men reporting having been raped (4) and high rates of rape being reported in prisons (5). The homicide rate for boys, at 6.9 per 100,000, is nearly double that of girls, at 3.9 per 100,000 (6).

In light of these high rates of violence, the South African government has prioritised the prevention of violence through a range of intersectoral initiatives. The recently formulated National Development Plan (NDP) aims to reduce violence by half by 2030 (7) with collaborative prevention efforts involving the health, justice and police sectors through national government stewardship. The South African government's response is aligned to the resolutions made at the Sixty-Seventh World Health Assembly (8), with a focus on strengthening health systems to address violence, especially against women, girls, and children. Despite evidence of men's vulnerability to violence, governmental policies remain predominantly focused on women and children (8). While this focus is essential, it appears that in order to strengthen violence prevention efforts there is also a need to recognise the widespread vulnerability of men. In order to investigate the extent of this gap, a study was conducted to examine the definition and delineation of violence and its typology, vulnerable populations, and prevention in selected South African legislative instruments. Emerging from this study , this policy brief draws key insights and recommendations for effective responses to violence within the South African context.

METHODS

The study focused on key legislative documents that deal with violence prevention. Documents from a range of government departments, that were established to hold a violence prevention mandate, were searched for the keywords: violence, injury, and safety. The final document pool focused only on acts/amendments, as well as policy and developing legislation (53 documents). These types of documents were considered most relevant to the study in that acts/amendment acts are the highest ranking form of policy, that is, enforceable by law. This pool was then reduced by selecting only those documents with at least eight keyword hits for any one (or more) of the keywords, in order to focus on those documents with the greatest likelihood of yielding relevant information. The final document pool included 20 documents (see box 2 for examples of documents).

The documents were analysed deductively, using directed content analysis, comprising the examination of documents and identification of relevant themes (9, 10).

FINDINGS

NATIONAL PRIORITIZATION OF VIOLENCE

Most of the selected legislative documents recognised violence as a national priority, focusing on specific violence-related behavior and emphasizing enforcement. Government's Programmes of Action, the Presidency's 12 Key Outcomes, NDP, and several ministries all emphasise high levels of violence and call for the reduction of risk factors. For instance, South Africa's violence problem is even viewed as an obstacle to the mainstreaming of alternative modes of transport, including walking and cycling. The Draft National Non-Motorised Transport Policy links its transport mandate to violence prevention:

> Street lights invite more and more people to walk because they indicate safety, and to the extent that they are always lit […] they provide necessary levels of surveillance and pedestrians being seen by others who can help in the event of difficulties and insecurity (11:p. 38).

VULNERABILITY: WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Despite the recognition of violence as a primary national concern, the analysed documents offered little consideration of men as a vulnerable group. The documents revealed a clear emphasis on the vulnerability of selected groups, especially women and children and particularly black women and children, as the most affected by violence, while also highlighting the overrepresentation of vulnerability amongst poor and rural populations and their associated needs for care and development. The Children's Act identifies women and children as being at higher risk for violence and the related social and economic harm than any other population, prioritising the alleviation of factors that increase these groups' vulnerability:

> State Parties shall strengthen measures, including through bilateral or multilateral cooperation, to alleviate the factors that make persons, especially women and children, vulnerable to trafficking, such as poverty, underdevelopment and lack of equal opportunity (12: p. 135).

Gender inequality is recognized as a key factor which shapes violence in the South African context:

> Gender inequality (inequality in terms of the power relations between men and women), in terms of popular attitudes and beliefs in favour of male domination, and the inadequate services offered by the criminal justice system to women, contributes to the high levels of violence perpetrated against women (13: p.51).

This focus is consistent with the national governmental and non-governmental drive to draw public attention to and strengthen the organised collective responses to violence against women and children (4, 6). However, what is not included is consideration of the vulnerability of men.

INVISIBILITY OF MEN

The South African legislative documents in the study leave an impression that men are unaffected by violence, despite the fact that men are overrepresented in South African reports of homicide and other severe forms of interpersonal violence (4,14,15). There are exceptions, e.g. the recognition of male police officers as frequent victims of violent crime:

> Many police officers have become victims of violent crimes. It must be acknowledged that police officers in South Africa have a much greater chance of being victimized by violence than do citizens. However, some of us have lost sight of the commitment and huge sacrifices being made by thousands of police men and women. (16: p.4).

Our analysis furthermore revealed a tendency to omit or limit references to the gender of perpetrators or offenders. This is despite evidence which suggests that almost all violence is perpetrated by men (4). In most of the documents offenders are genderless, except where identified as being violent towards women, in which case their maleness is often implied. What does this mean? Men's violence, through either perpetration or victimization, appears not to be consistently considered as a gendered phenomenon. For example, chapter seven of the White Paper on Corrections in South Africa is dedicated to the question 'Who are South Africa's offenders?' and calls for the entrenchment of the legislative rights of all offenders. However, it goes further to single out the rights of women and child victims of male offenders, emphasizing only the correctional sentence plans for the latter, while silent on the rights of the vast numbers of male victims and the need for correctional plans for those male offenders whose victims are not women or children, but other males:

> The issue of Gender will be a crucial element in these Correctional Sentence Plans, particularly in relation to male offenders whose victims were women and children (13: p.31).

The limited engagement with evidence of the vulnerability of men to violence appears to undermine the consideration of boys and men as legitimate recipients of violence prevention interventions, echoing concerns that black males have been inadvertently pathologised in South Africa (17).

KEY INSIGHTS

Despite the complexities of violence prevention and the global call for multisectoral national action plans (18), the South African legislative responses, while recognising violence as a national priority, are in crucial aspects partial and limited in scope. These responses have rightfully placed the accent on women and children, but they have tended to neglect the implications arising from the overconcentration of males in violent victimisation and perpetration.

Since the 1990s, there has been increasing and substantial support for socio-economic rights for children and women, with significant efforts to promote these groups' quality of life through legislation that focuses on violent offences, such as domestic violence, trafficking, and sexual offences. These efforts and the consequent legislation, however, do not consider the widespread vulnerability of men especially to severe forms of violence. Instead these policy and legislative instruments are largely reactive, drawing on criminological perspectives and therefore focusing on tertiary prevention, which includes preventing reoffending, protecting victims, and correcting wrongful behaviour. Recently, there has

been a notable international shift towards primary prevention (17). In South Africa, legislative efforts are only just emerging to redress this oversight and consider multisectoral approaches that prioritise primary prevention alongside traditional secondary and tertiary approaches, but these efforts are essential to further the country's violence

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In the light of persisting high rates of violence, South Africa needs to continue with the prioritisation and intensification of violence prevention. At the same time, there is a clear need for much closer integration of violence prevention policies and programming because violence is a multi-faceted problem which has far reaching consequences in various spheres of social, community, and personal life.

2. Given research and police reports indicating that men's violence is directed to women, children as well as other men it is important to underline the need to continue to develop policies and programmes which focus on women and children as vulnerable to violence victimisation.

3. Policies need to recognize men as a further group vulnerable to violence, and severe forms of violence in particular. At a tertiary level services which cater for male victims of violence need to be developed and implemented.

4. In order to meaningfully reduce rates of violence there is also a need for policies to expand the focus on primary prevention initiatives. For example, there is a need to develop programmes focused on disrupting notions and practices of masculinity which position "demonstrations of toughness, bravery, and defence of honour, which readily translate into risk-taking behaviours and the high status gained by fighting rather than to resolve differences peacefully" (4: p. 1015) in order to reduce rates of violence perpetration, as well as victimization, by men.

5. Programmes focused on disrupting problematic notions of masculinity have to encourage men to access services (at both a primary and tertiary level) designed to offer support for victims (and perpetrators) of violence.

MINISTRY	NAME	REFERENCE
DSD	Children's Act	Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005). [Online]. Available from: http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=67892 [Accessed 9 September 2013].
SAPS	Sexual offences amendment Act	Criminal law (sexual offences and related matters Act (No. 32 of 2007)). [Online]. Available from: http://www.saps.gov.za/docs_publs/legislation/sexual_offences/sexual_offences_act32_2007_eng.pdf [Accessed 9 September 2013].
DCS	White paper 8 on corrections in South Africa	South Africa. Department of Correctional Services. 2005. White paper on corrections in South Africa (8) [Online]. Available from: http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=68870 [Accessed 9 September 2013].
DOH	National Youth Policy	South Africa. Parliament. National Youth Commission. 2009. National youth policy 2009-2014. [Online]. Available from: http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=102384 [Accessed 9 September 2013].
SAPS	White paper on safety and security	South Africa. South African Police Service. 1998. White paper on safety and security. [Online]. Available from: http://www.info.gov.za/whitepapers/1998/safety.htm [Accessed 9 September

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