

Women Handling of Domestic Violence in Rural Township of Alice in South Africa

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ABSTRACT A quantitative survey was conducted in Eastern Cape in South Africa to explore the use and effectiveness of strategies used to address domestic violence. Fifty women who lived in Golf Course Community, in Alice town were administered questionnaires. The findings of the study highlighted that the women were aware of several strategies used to address domestic violence which included women's rights organizations, reporting perpetrators to the police and use of the Domestic Violence Act (DVA). Even though reporting to the police was the most strategy used, it was proven to be less effective because the police lacked vigilance and therefore this led to domestic violence cases to be left unreported. Additionally, it emerged that the strategies were to a greater extent less effective. Recommendations are proposed to find the best way of combating domestic violence.

INTRODUCTION

President Jacob Zuma (2013) when addressing the parliament stated that, "South Africa is not a violent country; it is certain people in our country who are violent; by and large, we are not; we are peace-loving people." On the contrary, the global community and media (Perry 2013; Lancaster 2013) have argued that South Africa is a violent country. In a survey conducted by National Victims of Crime in 2012, the findings showed that approximately two-thirds of households confirmed that since 2009 levels of violent crimes had increased or did not change in their areas. The statistics from the survey showed that 49.8 percent of the households feared home robbery, 39.6 percent feared street robbery murder (38.8%), 29.8 percent sexual attacks and 23.6 percent feared assault. This therefore, showed a considerable percentage of South Africans across the demographic spectrum that feared being victims of some kind of violent incident.

The wave of violence against women in the world is major. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated in 2005 that, "one in every five women faces some form of violence during her lifetime, in some cases leading to serious injury or death". Therefore, due to various organizations of women and findings from research, violence against women was made a global apprehension. In September 2000 the Millennium Declaration, it was recognized that violence against

women was a major threat to both social and economic development. The United Nations' General Assembly thus agreed "to combat all forms of the violence against women and to implement the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women." Further, addressing violence against women was seen as fundamental to the achievement of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Number 3 on women's empowerment and gender equality. Ban Ki-Moon highlighted in 2007 that, "Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives, on their families, and on societies as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence – yet the reality is too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned".

Even though, there is no universally acceptable definition of violence against women, the United Nations defines it as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." One of the most common forms of violence against women noted by Watts and Zimmermann (2002) is that which is perpetrated by a husband or other intimate male partner and is referred to as domestic violence. Vetten (2005) described domestic violence as, acts that may include physical, sexual, emotional, verbal and psychological

abuse, intimidation, stalking, damage to property through entry into complainant's abode without consent in situation where the parties do not share the same residence, any controlling or abusive behaviour where such conduct may cause imminent harm to the safety, health or well-being of the complainant". Domestic violence has devastating effects which lead to physical harm, emotional and psychological torture and even death of victims.

As reported by Jewkes (2006), in South Africa, a total five women each week were reported to have been killed by an intimate partner. Regarding the youth, violence was usually associated with a woman having rejected a proposal for a relationship from a man; their actual or suspected infidelity; endeavours to end relationships; resistance to men's attempts to dictate the terms of a relationship; and acts which undermined a boyfriend's success with other women (Wood and Jewkes 2001). Jewkes et al. (2006) argue that, "physical violence is often accompanied by a variety of emotional abuse by men, mainly including deliberate belittling; attempts to control a girlfriend or wife's social interactions and movement; bringing other girlfriends to the shared home; evicting the woman and her children; not providing money for essential items at home when money is available and commonly sexual violence." The South African Medical Research Council (MRC) conducted a household survey in 2013 and it found out that, "40 percent of men had hit their partners and one in four men had raped a woman. Three-quarters of men who admitted to having raped women said they did so first as teenagers and, while a quarter of the country's women had been raped, just 2 percent of those raped by a partner reported the incident to police".

Recuperating status of women has been identified as a priority in the political arena for the South African government. From the time when South Africa gained democracy, the status of women legally has immensely progressed. Notably, Jewkes (2006) highlighted that, "many discriminatory statutes have been removed, equality is enshrined in the Bill of Rights, and women are prominent in all levels of government and civil society". New legislations have been enacted to give women reproductive rights, remarkably the 1996 Choice in Termination of Pregnancy Act, and the Domestic Violence Act (DVA) of 1998 to protect women against domestic violence.

Viewed from an international perspective, both of these pieces of legislation are amongst the most empowering for women of any in the world.

However, it is quite shocking that although there has been an implementation of the DVA to address domestic violence in women, statistics still indicate that everyday women continue to be beaten, terrorized and murdered with their husbands, boyfriends and ex-husbands (MRC 2013). This continual existence of domestic violence among women has motivated the write up of this paper to examine the strategies being used to deal with domestic violence among rural women specifically in Golf Course community.

Objectives

The following two objectives guided the study:

- ♦ To investigate whether the strategies used to address domestic violence in Golf Course community are being put into practice.
- ♦ To examine the effectiveness of the strategies used to address domestic violence.

Domestic Violence Act (DVA) Number 116 Of 1998

The first legislation that explicitly addressed domestic violence in South Africa was the Prevention of Family Violence Act (PFVA). The provisions of PFVA were criticised by lawyers who argued that men's right to a fair hearing were being violated. Due to this the Department of Justice, Family Advocates, The South African Land Commission (SALC) formed a project committee to review the legislation which consisted of lawyers of feminism and experts in the field of domestic violence. Out of this, in 1998 there was the passig of DVA which came into operation in December 1999.

Domestic Violence Act responds to the high incidence of domestic violence in South Africa and attempts to protect victims by providing the issuing of protection orders. It is recognised by DVA that domestic violence is not a private matter but rather a serious crime against society. The DVA therefore aims to give greater protection to victims by defining domestic violence to include not only married women and children, but unmarried women who are involved in relationships or living together, people in same-sex relationships,

mothers who live in fear of their sons, and people sharing the same living space.

The DVA indicates that, one of the duties of the South African Police is to help the victims. The help comes in variety of forms and these include, finding accommodation that is suitable as well as medical help. Additionally, the victim's right must be explained to him or her (either by handing them a notice in their language of choice or through verbal explanation) and also, explain how to get a protection order. There is a provision in the Act that a peace officer can arrest any person who may have committed an act of domestic violence (without a warrant of arrest) and to seize any weapons from the premises. The police can also make applications for protection orders on behalf of the victim following a written consent, unless the victim is a minor, mentally retarded or unconscious.

Theoretical Framework

The feminist theory and social learning theory guided the study in trying to understand domestic violence against women. These theories are further explained below:

Feminist Theory

Feminists provide the starting point and they justify the existence of domestic violence throughout history. Yollo (2005) explains that the theory posits, "Intimate partner violence grows out of inequality within marriage (and other intimate relationships modelled on marriage) and reinforces male power and female subordinate within the home". The feminist theory argues that domestic violence evolves from a "patriarchal" school system which gives men the responsibility for controlling and managing female partners as put forward by Danis (2003). Dissel and Ngubeni (2003) note that in South Africa domestic violence is viewed as gender based violence that is based on power relations between men and women and is disseminated by culture and tradition that nurture male dominance. According to this theory, Bograd 1990 identified these elements; "men have differential access to material and symbolic resources and women are devalued as secondary and inferior; Intimate partner abuse is a predictable and common dimension of normal family life; women's experiences are often defined as inferior because male domination influences all aspects of life".

Social Learning Theory

Another important theory propounded by theorists is the social learning theory. This theory suggests that people learn to be violent by being immediately rewarded or punished after they commit violent behaviour through what is called reinforcement and by watching the experiences of others, called modelling (Bandura 1971). Wolfe et al. (1997) are also of the same view that domestic violence is learned behaviour that is modelled, rewarded, and supported by families or the broader culture. Wolfe et al. (1997) go on further to say that "the analyses based on this theory focus on the ways children learn that aggression is appropriate to resolve conflicts, especially within the context of intimate relationships models". Sociologists argue that men batter because they learned violence in their families as children and that women seek out abusive men because they saw their mothers being abused. According to Bandura (1971), this was the learned behaviour theory of violence. The social learning theory is still popular in explaining the intergenerational transmission of violence, but one difficulty with this theory is that there is no research that shows girls actually do seek out batterers as adults.

According to social learning theory, rewards and punishment can come in many forms. Abusive power and control can in the moment, force someone to do what you want him to do. It can relieve tension from a stressful experience, intimidate a partner to stay in the relationship or transform a feeling of powerlessness into a sense of omnipotence-rewards. But abusive power and control can also challenge a partner to retaliate with greater violence. It can alienate a loved one to the point of leaving the relationship or lead to arrest, jail, restraining orders- punishments. Social learning theory's implication and its value to treatment is this: if domestic violence is learned then it can be unlearned. Abusive people are capable of change: they are capable of learning respectful nonviolent ways of relating (Bowen 2009).

STUDY AREA AND METHODS

The research methodology was utilised for this study was a quantitative method because of its allowance for a broader study involving a greater number of subjects. The population of

the study constituted all women, who experienced and who had not experienced domestic violence, residing in the Golf Course area. The reason to include those who had not experienced domestic violence was that they might have seen those who were affected or had knowledge on domestic violence. Random sampling method was used to select the sample. Fifty participants were selected with ages ranging from 19 years and above.

A structured and anonymous questionnaire which consisted of 26 questions was used to collect data. The questionnaire was anonymous so that data collected could not be linked with any of the respondent, thereby encouraging honesty in completion of the questionnaire. Only closed-ended questions were used. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section gathered demographic information. The second section of the questionnaire focused on respondent's knowledge about strategies that were used to address domestic violence for example, whether women should have to report any case of domestic violence caused by husband/boyfriend or any family members to the police. A five-point, three-directional Likert scale was used in which respondents indicated how their strong agreement or disagreement with a series of questions provided in this section. An option of 'not sure' was included to indicate where applicable. Section three collected data related to the respondents' views on the effectiveness of strategies used to address domestic violence. Respondents had to report by indicating on a true and false rating format what their responses were. The data collected was used to make descriptive analysis. The statistical software used for analysis was Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS

This part of the paper reveals the results of the study starting with the biographical

information of the respondents followed by the strategies used in the community to address the domestic violence against women and the findings on the how effective these strategies were, are given thereafter.

Biographical Information

All the 50 respondents in the study were women categorised in two age groups namely 40 years or younger and 41 years or older. In terms of marital status, 54 percent were single, 24 percent were married and 32 percent were separated. All the respondents were black, most probably because they were settled in a predominantly black township. Twenty-six percent of the respondents reported that they were formally employed, 6 percent were informally employed while the rest (68%) were unemployed.

Strategies Used to Address Domestic Violence

The respondents in the study were asked if domestic violence against women required strong strategies to curb it. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents agreed that domestic violence required strong strategies by the society whilst 42 percent were somewhat in-between and none were against the idea. Notably, among the 58 percent who agreed that domestic violence needed strong strategies respondents aged 40 or younger were 30 percent while the elderly took the remainder of 28 percent. Regarding marital status, single respondents (40%) tended to be for the idea more than either the married or the separated by either divorce or widowed (18%).

Types of Strategies Used to Fight Domestic Violence

Furthermore, the study sought to find out the different types of strategies that were being used to fight domestic violence. Table 1 illustrates

Table 1: Distribution of different strategies used to fight domestic violence

Strategy	Percentage					Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree	
Women joining women's organisations.	0	4	2	14	80	100
Abusers being reported to the police.	12	30	10	32	16	100
Awareness campaigns	0	6	12	30	52	100
Family laws	14	22	10	26	28	100
Use of the Domestic Violence Act	2	12	10	38	38	100

the distribution of respondents in terms of these strategies. As indicated in the table, ninety-four percent of the respondents either just agreed or strongly agreed to the assertion of women's organizations used to fight or reduce domestic violence. Four percent disagreed and two percent were not sure. Using cross-tabulation, the distribution of the responses by age groups was almost identical between those who agreed and those who strongly agreed. The four percent of the respondents who disagreed with the idea were from the elderly age-group (41 years and older). Concerning marital status, of the 94 percent respondents who agreed upon the idea of women's organizations, 52 percent were single while 22 percent were married and 20 percent were separated.

Further, with the strategy that any family member, husband, or boyfriend who was abusing them was being reported, 32 percent agreed, 30 percent disagreed, 16 percent strongly agreed, 12 percent strongly disagreed and 10 percent were not sure. Only 6 percent of the respondents could not agree that awareness campaigns were used to reduce domestic violence. The majority, 82 percent were agreeable to the idea of the campaigns. There seemed to be no big difference between what the elderly and the young respondents

thought as 76 percent and 84 percent of the younger and elderly respectively thought that the campaigns were helpful.

Additionally, Table 1 indicates that fifty-four per cent of the respondents agreed that family laws were used to reduce domestic violence while 36 percent thought otherwise. Of the elderly respondents, 72 percent agreed that family laws were used in the reduction of domestic violence while only 36 percent of the younger respondents were of the same opinion. The younger respondents had a higher number of those who were not sure of their opinion (16%) as compared to the elderly respondents (4%). The married and separated respondents (75% and 82% respectively) mainly agreed to the family laws as a means of reducing domestic violence. The single respondents however thought otherwise with a mere 33 percent agreeing and as much as 55 percent disagreeing with family laws as a means of reducing domestic violence.

Of the 50 women who participated, 76 percent agreed that women used Domestic Violence Act (DVA) to act against abuse, 10 percent were not sure while 14 percent disagreed with the assertion (see Table 1). Across the age-groups the elderly respondents reported the more likelihood

Table 2: Cross-tabulation on age vis-a-vis the effectiveness of strategies

Variable	Distribution	Age		Total	
		40-	41+		
<i>Does the perpetrator change after arrest?</i>	Yes	Frequency	9	14	23
		Percentage	18	28	46
	No	Frequency	16	11	27
		Percentage	32	22	54
<i>Does it help to call a family member, an elder or chief to intervene?</i>	Yes	Frequency	14	15	29
		Percentage	28	30	58
	No	Frequency	11	10	21
		Percentage	22	20	42
<i>Does a protection order help to settle disputes in the family?</i>	Yes	Frequency	19	18	37
		Percentage	38	36	74
	No	Frequency	6	7	13
		Percentage	12	14	26
<i>Is the information obtained from awareness campaign helping?</i>	Yes	Frequency	23	21	44
		Percentage	46	42	88
	No	Frequency	2	4	6
		Percentage	4	8	12
<i>Are women's organizations playing a greater role in fighting domestic violence?</i>	Yes	Frequency	23	22	45
		Percentage	46	44	90
	No	Frequency	2	3	5
		Percentage	4	6	10
<i>Do the police take action immediately?</i>	Yes	Frequency	12	11	23
		Percentage	24	22	46
	No	Frequency	13	14	27
		Percentage	26	28	54

of incline to use the DVA than the younger women (84% for the elderly as compared to 68% for the younger women).

Effectiveness of Strategies Used to Fight Domestic Violence

In terms of how effective the strategies used to address domestic violence against women were, Table 2 shows the cross tabulation of the strategies in comparison with the age groups of the women who participated in the study. Forty-six per cent of the respondents believed that the perpetrator would change after being reported to the police whilst 54 percent disagreed that the perpetrator would change. The majority (32%) who were 40 years or younger disagreed whilst only 22 percent of the 41 years or more disagreed.

As the table illustrates, 58 percent of the respondents seem to believe in intervention from a family member, an elder or chief when faced with an abusive marriage. On the other hand, 42 percent did not believe that family members helped in domestic violence. Additionally, the majority of the women (74%) who responded to the questionnaire believed that a protection order helps to settle domestic violence whilst the minority 26 percent denied. Age seemed to have no effect on the idea of the protections. Among those that viewed the protection order as helpful, 38 percent were 40 years or younger and 36 percent constituted the other group. Further, 80 percent of the respondents found the awareness campaigns helpful to their handling of domestic violence. The majority of the respondents (90%) reported that women's organizations were playing a significant role in the fight against domestic violence. among these 46 percent were 40 years or younger and 42 percent were older than 41 years. Only 46 percent of the respondents reported that police treated domestic violence cases with urgency. The remaining 54 percent mentioned that the police did not treat these cases with urgency.

DISCUSSION

The study had a simple aim which was to find out whether the women in the rural area of Golf Course community knew the strategies available for them to handle domestic violence and whether they were using them or not. Strategies such as using the police and Domestic Violence

Act were explicitly investigated. The results showed that only 46 out of the 50 respondents thought that the police did not take domestic violence cases with urgency hence they chose not to report the cases. This therefore indicates that the police are not taking faster action when domestic violence is reported. Research by other scholars such as Newham (2012) pointed out that that ineffective of police is due to high rate of corruption. It is therefore crucial to note that this is one of the reasons why domestic violence is left unreported. In line with this, even Dodd et al. in 2004 noted that only 40.2 percent of real domestic violent crime is recorded to the police. This means that the situation has not changed since several years ago. On the other hand, Culhane (2011) noted that lack of urgency in handling domestic violence cases is also due to the fact that victims withdrew their complaints. So maybe the blame should not be solely on the police as victims might influence the law enforcers' attitudes. Moreover, Hess (2011) also found that, innumerable police constables believed that domestic violence, should be dealt with by other organizations, and thus, became frustrated at being repeatedly called to the same residence, only to have their recommendations overlooked.

Furthermore, the results also showed that the married and separated respondents (75% and 80%) mainly agreed to the family laws as a tool of reducing domestic violence. The single respondents however, think otherwise with a mere 33 percent agreeable and as much as 55 percent disagreeing with family laws as a means of reducing domestic violence. This view of thinking was also discovered by other researchers such as Sievens (2005). The researchers identified that control by a husband over his wife was endorsed, and thus, the overlooking of police involvement in marital confrontations. This is therefore another reason why domestic violence cases are not reported to the police. Shipway (2004) therefore noted that in the last decade in particular, there have been significant improvements to conflicting policy and practice, but much domestic violence still goes unreported.

Additionally, the results show that the younger women were likely to believe that when a domestic violence perpetrator is arrested, he is not likely to change his behaviour thereafter. This line of thinking was supported by Burton (2008) in his research when he found that, "domestic violence is a social issue and it cannot simply be

‘solved’ with the use of legal remedies”. The law unquestionably has a role to play, but the bulk of victims of domestic abuse do not turn to the legal system for help. When victims do consider legal remedies their decisions may be affected by a variety of different factors.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that domestic violence is still rife in the rural communities like Golf Course. Even though South African government enacted the legislations to help and protect women from domestic violence it is clear that the women in rural areas are ill informed about the Acts and how they can protect them hence, they do not apply it to their situations. Many women therefore opt for domestic violence to be solved through family laws. Law indisputably has a responsibility, but the bulk of victims of domestic abuse do not turn to the legal system for help because of the attitudes of law enforcers towards abused women. When victims do consider legal remedies their decisions may be affected by a variety of factors hence they alternate to handle domestic violence in their own ways, family laws. However, when it comes to dealing with domestic violence, the study concludes that young women have different perspectives with older women.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions of this study, below are the recommendations that may help to fight domestic violence in rural areas:

- ♦ Awareness campaigns should be held by professionals such as social workers and try to change the mind set of single ladies to match with those of the attached women so that they can help each other to fight domestic violence. Furthermore, awareness should be held so that women can know more about legislative laws (ACTS) since as much as 24 percent of the respondents indicated that they had no confidence in the DVA.
 - ♦ Conscious awareness campaign should be done also in media such as newspapers; television etc so as to educate people on impacts of domestic violence as well as ways of reducing it.
- The police should take serious actions towards domestic violence. This entitles that

they should take domestic violence serious like any other case reported to the police.

- ♦ Social workers have to play the role of educators to educate women on domestic violence.

LIMITATIONS

The study used quantitative methods to explore on women handling domestic violence. This has limited the study to only get the perceptions of the participants and therefore the in-depth information from the experiences of participants was missed. A qualitative study is therefore suggested for future studies.

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