

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

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WHAT IS INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE?

Intimate partner violence is abuse that takes place between individuals in an intimate relationship. Intimate partners may include boyfriends, girlfriends, and current and former spouses. The abuse can take various forms, such as physical, sexual, emotional and economic abuse. Often the physical violence enacted is accompanied by emotional attacks and threatening and controlling behaviours. Although intimate partner violence may be carried out by women, and individuals in a same-sex relationship, women are more likely to report being victimised in relationships by their male partners.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Research undertaken by the Medical Research Council revealed that one in four women in the general South African population has experienced physical violence at some point in her life [1]. A national study on female homicide further indicated that a woman is killed by her intimate partner every six hours [2]. Studies have found that the risk of intimate partner violence is highest in societies where violence is a socially sanctioned norm [3]. In South Africa, a 'culture of violence' is a pervasive feature of post-apartheid legacy, which forms a backdrop for violence against women. South African studies have identified several factors that are associated with male violence against intimate partners:

RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH MALE-ON-FEMALE INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE	
Demographic variables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having no or minimal formal schooling or post-school training [4-5].
Childhood variables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent physical punishments in childhood [4-5]. • Witnessing familial violence in childhood [4-5].
Behavioural variables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problematic drug and/or alcohol use [4-5]. • Past criminal involvement (e.g. gangsterism, time in jail, previous arrests for violence) [5]. • Involvement in community fights [4-5]. • Having more than one intimate partner [4-5]. • Verbally abusive behaviour [5].
Social variables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income or educational disparities between partners [3]. • Social norms/attitudes that condone violence against women [4-5]. • Patriarchal notions of masculinity related to male control over women, and male sexual entitlement [3-8]. • Perceived challenges to male authority or transgression of gender roles [5]. • Economic inequality in context of poverty [3]. • Intergenerational cycle of violence [3,7]. • Culture of violence in community [3,7].

UNDERSTANDING MALE-ON-FEMALE INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

A number of academic and disciplinary explanations have been provided to understand intimate partner violence. These can be loosely categorised into approaches which focus on *intra-individual* factors, such as biological and psychobiological approaches, *psychological and relational* approaches, namely psychoanalytic, social learning and systems theory, and *socio-cultural* explanations that stress the role of social, political, historical and cultural systems, such as sociological, feminist and socio-political theories. To understand intimate partner violence as situated in a multi-layered context, each theoretical component is considered as having potential value in explaining this pervasive and persistent problem.



WHAT SOUTH AFRICAN STUDIES HAVE FOUND ABOUT MALE PERPETRATORS OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

- Men’s use of violence against their intimate partners is associated with witnessing violence in the family of origin, problematic drug and/or alcohol use, and the involvement in conflicts outside the relationship context [4-5].
- Men are often socialised into violence. Aggressive behaviour may be learned in the family, from peers and in the community or cultural context (e.g. “beating a woman is part of my culture”) [6].
- Men who are violent towards their partners tend to adopt rigid, stereotyped views on how women and men should behave (e.g. a man is the “head of the household”, “a woman must obey her husband”) [8-9].
- Violence is often enacted when their partners or wives are seen to violate these gender norms [3.5].
- Feelings of powerlessness at not being able to meet social expectations of manhood (“successful masculinity”) due to poverty, unemployment or lack of education have often been put forward by men to explain their violence [6.8].
- Violence often contains an emotional component (feeling a “loss of control”), as well as an instrumental purpose (“having control” over another) [9].

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTION [10-11]

Initiatives to prevent intimate partner violence at the individual, psychological/ relational and socio-cultural levels include:

INDIVIDUAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programmes to reduce antisocial and aggressive behaviour in children and adolescents. • Individual counselling, psychotherapy and social-casework with victims and perpetrators of violence. • Treatment and rehabilitation of individuals to prevent re-victimisation (e.g. shelters for victims, anger management for perpetrators).
PSYCHOLOGICAL AND RELATIONAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent and family-based programmes to prevent child maltreatment and to develop positive parenting skills. • Home visitation programmes. • School-based programmes to change gender norms and attitudes and to prevent dating violence. • Life-skills and mentoring programmes.
SOCIO-CULTURAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-based programmes that use participatory methods to change gender norms, participatory training on HIV risk and prevention, self-reliance skills, rape prevention programmes for women (e.g. self-protection skills), targeting of boys and men as vulnerable groups, and utilising men to facilitate change in communities. • Public awareness campaigns to dispel myths about intimate partner violence, influence public opinion, and encourage political will. • Human rights advocacy to foster gender equality and empowerment of women, promote legal reform, strengthen criminal justice responses and improve safety of physical environments.

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