



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNDERSTANDING MALE INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE

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**CRIME, VIOLENCE AND INJURY
LEAD PROGRAMME**





**CRIME, VIOLENCE AND INJURY LEAD PROGRAMME
MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL/UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

AND

**WEALTH, IDENTITY, PEACE AND EQUALITY PROGRAMME
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY INTO THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR
INVESTIGATING RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS TO MALE
INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE**

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25 September 2008

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This research project¹ focused on identifying the risk and protective factors to male interpersonal violence, for the purposes of developing a firm theoretical and methodological foundation for follow-up studies aimed at developing a prevention intervention framework for male interpersonal violence in South Africa.

The exploratory study had a two-fold aim and therefore two parallel processes. First, it aimed to identify and understand the risk and protective factors to interpersonal violence in youth and adult South African men, and to investigate theoretical and meta-theoretical approaches linked to this focus, based on an analysis of national and international literature and documents. Second, it aimed to determine the feasibility of using various existing data sets in order to determine risk and protective factors to violence in South Africa, using statistical analysis, and to map the results using Geographical Information System (GIS) technology. This Executive Summary provides an overview of the findings linked to the first of the two aims.

The specific objectives of the literature review were to:

- Source information on male interpersonal violence (men as victims and perpetrators) with regards to its general characteristics, and more specifically, risk and protective factors;
- Identify relevant theoretical frameworks for the explanation of interpersonal violence and specifically male interpersonal violence; and
- Identify common threads and perform a critical analysis.

In this study, *violence* refers to interpersonal violence only, and does not including self-inflicted or collective forms of violence. This study investigates male violence, which includes sexual violence and violence between intimate partners (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano, 2002). In this project, male interpersonal violence refers to violence involving youth or adult male victims as well as male perpetrators.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study constituted a *pilot* in the sense that it aimed to explore and guide the development of a clear focus, a relevant conceptual framework, and an appropriate research methodology for follow-up studies. The study constituted a ‘broad sweep’ review of literature and documents from the baseline disciplines relevant to violence: psychology, sociology, criminology and health. The review included an initial focus on interpersonal violence more generally, followed by an examination of the more specific literature on male interpersonal violence.

As a starting point for the literature study, the researchers obtained the most recent global assessment of violence from a public health perspective (WHO Report on Violence and Health: Krug et al., 2002), followed by literature from the Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme (CVI) written over the last decade, as well as from other relevant Medical Research Council structures. This was then followed by an electronic search using relevant keywords identified. A qualitative, thematic content analysis process was then pursued, followed by an initial critical analysis of the findings of the literature review conducted.

¹ The full Research Report (Lazarus, Tonsing, Ratele & Van Niekerk, 2008), providing a detailed analysis of the research findings of this study, will be finalized after the national RoundTable discussion on male interpersonal violence, to be held in October 2008. It is expected that this Report will be available from the Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme (MRC/UNISA) by the end of 2008.

The critical review conducted constitutes a first round of analysis of the findings. The next step is a national RoundTable with relevant key informants, with the express purpose of examining the risk and protective factors for male interpersonal violence at a deeper level, drawing on relevant perspectives and worldviews from South Africa.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings of the desk-top research are presented under the following headings: (a) Theoretical frameworks for male interpersonal violence; (b) risk and protective factors to male interpersonal violence; and (c) violence prevention. Although the latter aspect was not an overt objective of this study, it is included because of its perceived relevance to understanding both risk and protective factors to male interpersonal violence.

Theoretical Frameworks for Male Interpersonal Violence

The theoretical study highlighted three general points. First, it is clear that many meta-theoretical frameworks and specific theories are used to explain violence, and male interpersonal violence in particular. Second, many authors argue for the need to pursue a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of violence in general, including male interpersonal violence. And third, there is a need for the development of integrated frameworks to understand the complex nature of this phenomenon, and to be able to respond comprehensively.

The ecological framework, which includes an analysis of both risk and protective factors at the individual, relationship, community and societal levels, emerged as a dominant perspective informing the research on violence and interpersonal violence more specifically. However, limited use of this framework was evident in studies of *male* violence. The male interpersonal violence literature accessed in this study also made little reference to the public health approach. Using the ecological lens, it is interesting to note that the analyses of male interpersonal violence focused primarily on the individual and relationship levels of analysis, minimizing the community and societal levels.

The perspectives that were emphasized in the more focused review of male interpersonal violence were: A critical approach (including social constructionism), gender perspectives (including feminist and masculinity/masculine identity perspectives), historical and cultural approaches, socialization and social learning theories, as well as intrapsychic and biological perspectives.

The predominant focus on masculine identity was unique to the research on male interpersonal violence, being minimally mentioned in the general violence literature. Masculinity theories that featured in the literature were often directly or indirectly linked to social identity theory. Hegemonic masculinity theory in particular, was often mentioned. There seemed to be some consensus that feminist and masculinity perspectives need to be reconciled, but it is unclear from this limited study whether a 'gender framework' of this nature has been developed.

A focus on culture was also more dominant in studies on male interpersonal violence. This includes general norms and values as well as 'traditional' cultural values and practices. However, although these more local values and practices have been identified in numerous risk assessments for male interpersonal violence, most of the meta- and specific theoretical frameworks used to explain them are mainstream 'western' perspectives. There was very little

evidence in the literature that indigenous and/or community-embedded understandings have been consulted to transform understandings and responses to violence in general, and male interpersonal violence in particular.

Risk and Protective Factors to Male Interpersonal Violence

Risk Factor Analysis

Most risk factor analyses utilize the public health and ecological approaches as their foundation. Many authors argued that performing a risk factor analysis is a complex process that needs to be multi-faceted and comprehensive. There were some debates around the research methodology of risk factor assessments, with an argument to include both qualitative and quantitative methods. A considerable overlap of risks across violence types as well as shared (or interlinked) risks was evident. The importance of considering cultural factors and developmental pathways to violence also came to the fore.

The analysis of risk factors for male interpersonal violence can be categorized into the four ecological levels: Individual, relationship, community and society. It should be noted, however, that identification of a factor at one level is arbitrary in that most of the factors cut across the different ecological levels, revealing a dynamic relationship between the individual and the contexts within which s/he finds her/himself.

On the *individual level* the literature review on male interpersonal violence revealed the following groups of risk factors: Demographic factors, substance abuse and crime, intrapsychic and biological factors, specific emotional needs, competencies and skills, masculine identity challenges, and norms, values and beliefs. Challenges to masculine identity and other factors relating to personal beliefs, values and norms appear to be dominant risk factors. Certain demographic factors, as well as substance abuse related factors, are also key risk factors in this category.

The masculine identity factor relates to identity, power and control needs, loss of the traditional masculine role, inability of the man to fulfil male role expectations (particularly as a breadwinner), and the link between masculine identity and guns. Key factors relating to norms, values and beliefs are men's negative views of women and sexuality, and a normative view of violence. Key demographic factors that were highlighted included: Low socio-economic status (SES), low educational level, and being unskilled. Finally, it is interesting to note that among the intrapsychic or emotional aspects, the two key factors that emerged were anti-social behavioural problems and aggressive tendencies, and feelings of shame and humiliation.

On a *relationship level*, general risk factors to male interpersonal violence that were identified included: Family structure, family and parental relationship dynamics, marital relationship dynamics, violence in the family, peer relations, gender relations and roles, as well as interpersonal and behavioural factors. The two main groups of relationship risk factors that emerged from this study were violence in the family, and gender relations and roles.

With regard to violence in the family, the main risk factors included: Witnessing violence in the family; experiencing abuse or other forms of violence in the family; and, linked to all of the above, inter-generational learning of aggressive and violent behaviour. The latter aspect was only linked to the man's immediate family-of-origin, with minimal reference being made to broader social historical trauma. Specific risk factors relating to gender relations and roles

included: Gender inequities; rigid gender roles or stereotypes; role conflict; a normative view of dominant masculinity; challenges to masculine identity and roles; and family honour, linked to ‘traditional’ cultural expectations of a man. Although not emerging as strongly as the above two sets of factors in this review, risk factors relating to family structure and peer relations were also clearly identified.

At *community level*, the main broad categories of risk factors included: Demographic and socio-economic factors; community safety factors; lack of community support and involvement; and community norms and values. The key socio-economic factors were noted as follows: Poverty; income inequality; low SES; unemployment and lack of job opportunities; dense, urban neighbourhoods; and the link between all of these factors and masculine identity. The main issue relating to the lack of community support and involvement as a set of risk factors was the lack of social support and interaction and resultant social marginalization. It also included the lack of recreational opportunities, non-attendance at school and negative school experiences for youth. Finally, the community safety set of risk factors were also clearly highlighted in the literature. High levels of crime and violence, including the presence of gangs and a resultant culture of violence in the community were identified as key risk factors. Substance abuse and access to fire-arms were also noted as important risk factors, as well as the lack of effective and trustworthy police protection at the community level.

At the *societal level*, the main categories of risk factors identified were as follows: Socio-economic and political structure; other political and demographic factors; cultural norms and values in society; gender relations; safety and security; social disorganization; low social capital; and social historical trauma. Of these, socio-economic and political structural factors, cultural norms and values in society, and, related to this, gender relations, were key factors emerging from this analysis. Key socio-political-economic factors emerging included: Globalization; modernization; income inequalities; unemployment; the arms and drug economies; the effects of militarization and war; and rapid social change.

Risk factors relating to cultural norms and values in society included: A culture of violence (norms that promote the acceptance and perpetration of violence); masculinity ideologies (such as male superiority beliefs); ‘traditional’ cultural norms and values that support the acceptance of certain aspects of violence, including how this links to masculinity and social identity factors; as well as the role of the media in supporting all of the above. Relevant to both of the above sets of risk factors was gender inequality, and, linked to this, the low status of women in society.

Safety and security issues at societal level were also commonly referred to in the literature. This included: High levels of crime; lack of law enforcement; and unofficial modes of law enforcement pursued in the absence of trust in the official channels of control.

Although social historical trauma experienced as a result of inter-generational cycles of violence over many generations, particularly within colonial contexts, was not highlighted by many international authors in this study, it is interesting to note that it featured strongly in literature from South Africa, as well as other previously and currently colonized contexts.

Protective Factor Analysis

None of the protective factors listed here occurred in a high frequency in the reviewed literature, due to a limited focus on protective factors in most studies, as well as the limitations of this study. The literature does, however, note the need for a greater focus on protective factors.

On the ***individual level***, the following broad categories were noted: Demographic factors; intra-psychic and emotional factors; behaviours and skills; as well as cultural and religious beliefs and practices. Demographic protective factors included: Higher education level of the man; maturity or higher age; and having employment or being enrolled in school. Intra-psychic and emotional factors included: Individual resilience; self-reflection and insight; a sense of responsibility; strong attachments; a constructive view of masculinity; and learning from the impact of violence. Specific behaviours and skills identified as protective factors included: Conflict management skills; vocational skills; coping skills; and health-seeking behaviour. And, finally, cultural and religious factors included: Having a purpose in life; having some kind of religion or spiritual beliefs; and undergoing rites of passage.

Relationship level protective factors were identified in relation to marital and family dynamics, and peer relations. The protective factors linking to marital and family relations included: Positive family role models; family support; and attachment or connectedness to parents of family-of-origin. Positive family values and norms, the presence of the father in the home, and relationship skills were also identified as important factors. The major set of peer relations factors was belonging to a social group and thereby experiencing social support. This set of factors would be protective for male interpersonal violence if the norms and values dominant in these support systems were non-violent and supported constructive views of masculinity.

On the ***community level***, protective factors included the broad categories of: Social capital or sense of community; community support and networks; community mobilization and empowerment; collective efficacy; and school connectedness. The social capital set of protective factors included: Cultural-community resilience; a sense of community; a safe and stable community; and the development of 'frith' (trust) within the community. Community support and networks, which connect to the concept of social capital, included the following protective factors noted in the analysis: Community activities; recreation opportunities; active community structures; parent support networks; good child-care facilities; support groups; and a sense of belonging as a member of a gang. Community mobilization and empowerment or collective efficacy was also identified as an important group of protective factors. This included: Community mobilization; a sense of agency at community level or collective efficacy; and the development of compassionate solidarity. And finally, for youth in particular, school connectedness was noted as an important protective factor.

At the broad ***societal level*** the categories of protective factors included national policies and legislation, socio-economic factors, and cultural factors. The protective factors relating to policies and legislation included: A human rights framework and policies; a commitment to social justice and equity; citizen participation; and laws to constrain violence. Socio-economic protective factors included: Employment and general economic opportunities; affordable housing; access to health care; and social protection. Cultural protective factors identified included: Non-violence linked to male roles in the media; values and norms that promote gender equality; the promotion of a caring, non-violent and egalitarian view of masculinity; cultural respect; and spiritual values, including compassion.

Violence Prevention

Although this study did not focus on violence prevention, inclusion of an initial analysis of approaches to prevention of male interpersonal violence was considered appropriate because of its close connection to the concept of protective factors. The literature review revealed a comprehensive approach to violence prevention that includes all four levels of the ecological model, and includes a cultural sensitivity in the development of programmes. Various change strategies are evident, including both ‘person’ and ‘environment’ orientated approaches that focus on ‘changing people’ and their contexts. There is an emphasis on the community level interventions, and a growing focus on health promotion rather than prevention only.

A number of principles relating to prevention programmes that focus specifically on male interpersonal violence were highlighted in this study. While there appears to be a clear move towards males joining together, and sometimes with women, to campaign against violence, this review revealed that the current approach to addressing male interpersonal violence is predominantly negative, with programmes being ‘treatment’ orientated, and aimed at ‘changing’ men. This is in contrast to an emphasis on empowerment of women. One other interesting finding is a movement towards intentionally promoting a more positive and constructive masculinity ideology, thereby promoting a more positive social identity for men, and redefining gender roles and practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Development of a Conceptual Framework for Male Interpersonal Violence

An integrated conceptual framework for male interpersonal violence, that draws on relevant disciplines and worldviews in a coherent manner, needs to be developed. This could incorporate the ecological frame, a critical lens, feminist and masculinity gender perspectives, and other relevant theories were appropriate. A major challenge with masculinity theory is to determine how risk and protective factors relating to masculinity can be operationalized across different levels of the system, and especially at community level. Linked to this is the need to integrate feminist and masculinity theories, in order to move beyond the biases that keep these two perspectives apart, and often at loggerheads. Another important challenge is to engage with the concept of ‘culture’ in an open and critical manner so that community-embedded worldviews and theories can be incorporated and interrogated within the context of a complex analysis of male interpersonal violence.

Further Studies on Male Interpersonal Violence

The following areas of further study have been identified from this exploratory project:

- Further analyses of the theoretical perspectives predominant in studies focusing on male interpersonal violence should be conducted – with a view to comparing perspectives on various aspects of this phenomenon.
- Multi-level analyses (including individual, relationship, community and societal level factors) need to focus on the interactions and dynamics *between* levels, with a particular emphasis on looking at how community and societal factors impact as risk and protective factors.
- There is a need to look at how social identity and ideologies of masculinity express themselves at community and societal levels.
- The critical nature of the conceptual framework used to analyze risk and protective factors to male interpersonal violence, as well as the history of South Africa, suggest that there is

a need to examine the concept and reality of social historical trauma (historical, inter-generational effects of colonization and oppression), within the context of identifying risk factors to male interpersonal violence².

- There is a need to conduct various studies focusing specifically on protective factors to male interpersonal violence.
- The health promotion movement and perspective, which is strongly developed in the South African context, needs to be more intentionally engaged with, particularly for the purposes of uncovering and further exploring and developing health determinants, which are directly related to the concept of protective factors.
- It is important to focus more intentionally on religious assets and spiritual and cultural capital when considering protective factors to male interpersonal violence³.
- The focus on promoting a constructive, non-violent, egalitarian masculinity constitutes an important area of further research⁴
- There is clearly a need for further studies that focus on specific aspects relating to risk and protective factors to male interpersonal violence. This includes the need to interrogate possible differences relating to the type of interpersonal violence involved, whether the men are victims or perpetrators, the context in which the violence occurs, and so on. Such a detailed analysis was not conducted in this study.
- Research that focuses specifically on South African studies that relate to male interpersonal violence should be pursued.
- Evidence-based systematic reviews of both qualitative and quantitative studies that focus on male interpersonal violence should also be conducted.

In the context of all of the above, there is a need to ‘dig deeply’ to understand the risk and protective factors in a radical manner – to understand the root causes of male interpersonal violence for the purposes of identifying and pursuing effective primary prevention programmes in South Africa, and beyond. As one step towards such a radical analysis, it is proposed that a national RoundTable discussion, including relevant expertise and worldviews in South Africa, be convened as a follow-up process to the study.

² This is currently being pursued within the male interpersonal violence project within the Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme (CVI) (MRC/UNISA)

³ This is currently being pursued within the male interpersonal violence project within the Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme (CVI) (MRC/UNISA)

⁴ This area constitutes a focus for a current joint research project, conducted by the CVI and the Gender Programme at the University of the Western Cape

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