

“Mommy, he used to hit you, why did you hit us?”: Unpacking the intersections of VAC and VAW in two South African communities

Authors: Shanaaz Mathews, Aislinn Delany, Lauren October and Kerryn Rehse

Background

Violence against women (VAW) and violence against children (VAC) are endemic in South Africa, affecting large numbers of women and children. Globally there has been increasing recognition that these forms of violence are linked but evidence on the nature and consequences of VAC and VAW and its relationship across the life course is limited in the Global South.

Aims

This paper aims to examine community perceptions of VAW and VAC, the social norms that underpin these forms of violence, and how families commonly experience these intersecting forms of violence.

Methods

Purposive sampling was used to identify 20 stakeholders for IDI, and four FGDs with adult men, women, and young people (female and male) aged 15-18 years, in two communities in the Western Cape South Africa. FGDs were structured around case vignettes depicting intersecting IPV and VAC in the home. FGDs with young people included participatory techniques to facilitate more candid participation. A framework analysis approach to used to analyse the data using NVIVO software for data coding.

Findings

VAC and VAW were considered by all as part of township life. No single risk factor stands out but a web of interrelated factors contribute to an increased risk for VAC and VAW, including perpetration of violence in the home. Men, women, and young people describe pathways for men to take on violent masculinities and women’s risk to be a victim of violence in the home as starting early. Based on participants experiences we show how social norms regarding gender and power coalesce in the family and drive both forms of violence. Power, control and oppression also shapes the relationship between parents and children with harsh and punitive forms of parenting the norm. This provides the space for experiences of sexual abuse and other forms of violence to remain hidden. Importantly, violence in the home is still considered “private” and affects how families and communities respond.

Conclusion

Understanding the dynamic interplay between VAC and VAW is important to inform the development of interventions that can shift the pattern of these forms of violence in Global South contexts.