

RESTLESS
DEVELOPMENT
THE YOUTH-LED DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

MEN AND BOYS AND SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV)

**Discussions with youth peer educators and staff
at Restless Development South Africa:
challenges and recommendations.**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents findings from research conducted with SPW South Africa Trust (as well known as Restless Development) peer educators and staff members on the issue of men and boys and sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). The research was commissioned and funded by UNFPA. Qualitative and participatory learning and action methods were used to obtain bottom-up perspectives of young people living and working in the rural Eastern Cape. A broad lens was applied to the issue: Questions were asked about how men and boys are affected by SGBV, what role they play in SGBV, and what the possibilities are for addressing SGBV and better involving men and boys.

Key findings included that both women and girls, and men and boys, are affected by SGBV in the Eastern Cape. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to intimate partner violence, which is normalized. Associated with the acceptance of intimate partner violence is the belief that a man has sexual rights to his wife because he has paid 'lobola' – the traditional practice of paying bride-wealth – for her. This means he can never be guilty of raping her, because the understanding is that he essentially owns her. Another societal norm linked to acts of SGBV was that if a man buys a woman a drink, he is entitled to have sex with her.

Men and boys are also vulnerable to SGBV, although this is not spoken about openly. Rape of boys was reported to be a particular problem. Gay men are likely to face discrimination and abuse, due to the prevalence of homophobic attitudes. Boys and men are vulnerable to abuse during the cultural practice of initiation, or traditional circumcision. They are even more likely to be abused if they do not go, because they will be viewed as failed men.

One key point to take away from this study is that it is unhelpful to feed into narratives that portray women as victims and men as perpetrators: We need to understand how SGBV is part of, and driven by, broader inequalities that affect social constructions (commonly held understandings) of what it means to be a man or a woman in society. Such constructions can be "hegemonic" in the sense that they are fixed and dominant, and such attitudes can contribute to social problems such as SGBV in our society.

For example, the understanding that men do not ask for help if they are in pain, and that men are strong, tough and fighters was shown to perpetuate under-reporting of abuse of men and boys. According to youth who participated in the study – boys in particular are often victims of rape and other forms of abuse, but this is not acknowledged to be a reality which means that a) the victim will not receive the assistance he needs and b) there will be little investment in prevention programmes for abuse of men.

Homophobia in society was said to be a major driver of SGBV: A young, gay man is likely to face abuse and discrimination on a number of counts, being gay contradicts the hegemonic or dominant version of masculinity as being heterosexual.

Overall, it was found that men and boys who fail to conform to social acceptable notions of what it means to be a man are vulnerable to physical, emotional and sexual abuse. A particularly difficult and sensitive issue raised by young people was the cultural practice of initiation or traditional circumcision. Various forms of abuse can occur during this ritual, perpetrated against young initiates who are far away from the protective eyes of the community. Those who do not participate in the ritual, or have to be admitted to hospital, are vulnerable to severe forms of social exclusion as well as physical and sexual abuse.

Certain socially acceptable versions of manhood were found to play a role in driving men's violence against women, and to perpetuate gender inequality. Men are expected to be dominant, to take the lead in relationships and in the household, and to make the decisions, over and above women. They are also expected to be the economic providers in relationships and in families. In the Eastern Cape men and boys often fail to attain the socially idealized role of economic provider, experiencing disempowerment and frustration, which was said to lead to aggression and perpetration of intimate partner violence.

Many participants in this study were critical of social constructions of masculinity because they could see how it perpetuates gender inequality and sexual and gender based violence. There was also the sense that the gender norms around what it means to be a man were very rigid, and that it was difficult to be a different or alternative kind of man who might want to have more economic equality in his relationship with his partner, or to play an active role in house-work or looking after the children.

There were several recommendations that emerged from this research. The main points are highlighted here.

1. Firstly, there is a need to conduct educational and social transformation work with youth. This kind of work is about raising critical consciousness with youth about the harmful social norms and attitudes that are associated with sexual and gender based violence. Such work should take place within the formal education system, and also through out of school peer education programmes.
2. Secondly, it is important to acknowledge that men are also exposed to abuse, and especially those men who do not conform to masculine codes of behaviour. Interventions should work to break down social attitudes that prevent men and boys from speaking out against abuse. Such programmes should work at the level of men and boys themselves, and also with service providers who respond to SGBV such as police and health workers.
3. Finally, the fight against gender inequality and SGBV must involve and include men and boys. Embedded in such an approach, which contradicts a common focus on women and girls only, is the understanding that gender inequality affects everyone regardless of

sex or gender, because of its deeply structural nature. Men and boys are positioned by societal expectations of their roles, just as women and girls are. These roles are often gender unequal, and young men as well as women may lack the information, resources or social support networks required to resist them in order to create more gender equitable ways of living.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of this research were to understand more about the issues related to men and boys and SGBV, recommendations for the way forward to address these issues, and on how to better involve men and boys in the fight against SGBV. There were certain hypotheses that underpinned the objectives, research questions and methods for this study, including that there are certain norms around masculinity and femininity which form part of the context for SGBV, that we need to address gender inequality, and that we need to find ways to better involve men and boys in addressing SGBV rather than perceiving them to be the perpetrators, and women as the victims.

Methods

Understanding gender issues, including gender norms and roles and SGBV to be an issue affecting both men and women, it was decided that the research should include perspectives from both genders. One focus group discussion was conducted with 10 participants (5 female, 5 male), who were national peer educators for SPW South Africa Trust (hereinafter referred to as Restless Development) and one male co-facilitator from the Restless Development staff. The focus group discussion was combined with participatory action research, where the group was divided into two and participants were asked to participate in a story-telling and brainstorming activity. Key informant interviews were conducted with three female and two male national peer educators, and two male Restless Development staff members. There were 17 participants in total.

The focus group discussion and interviews were narrative in style, with open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to give their perspective of the issue and where possible to provide examples in the form of stories. During the participatory action research sessions, participants were given two different tasks: They were asked to collectively narrate and illustrate stories about men and boys and SGBV, and they were to brainstorm on action points for changing the situation related to men and boys and SGBV. After each activity participants were asked to return to the wider group/plenary and discuss with each other. The story-telling activity occurred early on in the focus group discussion, and the brainstorming of action points took place at the end.

Overall questions for the focus group discussion and interviews included:

1. What are the issues at stake in relation to SGBV in South Africa?
2. What are the particular issues pertaining to men and boys and SGBV?
3. What are the societal pressures on men and women in relation to their gender roles? How are these challenging and how are these positive?
4. What is the way forward in changing the situation that we have spoken about, in relation to men and boys and SGBV?
5. How do we better involve men and boys in the fight against SGBV?

Findings

The main forms of sexual and gender based violence

Violence against women in intimate partner relationships

Women were said to be the most affected by sexual and gender-based violence, and intimate partner violence is the main form of gender-based violence against women, according to most participants in this study. Intimate partner violence is seen to be a “normal” part of relationships, and indeed there was said to be an expectation from men and women that men will physically abuse their female partners:

Sometimes it happens, but no-one does anything – they say it is their thing, they don’t get involved. I see this a lot of this in Quigney, and no-one will do anything. I don’t know if it happens so much that to some people it is a normal thing. But I think it is really a big thing, and I see it often. And I don’t know what to do about it. (Male, focus group discussion).

Most of the time we don’t take action. We think that if we open a case, your boyfriend will be arrested, so ... we think that’s normal, when he hits me, he loves me. We are not aware that person is supposed to respect you. (Female, individual interview)

Other forms of abuse affecting women included emotional, physical and economic abuse. In the case of economic abuse, a participant gave an example of how young women will often fall pregnant and will raise the child without the support of the father (female, individual interview).

Male vulnerability to sexual and gender based violence.

A significant finding in this research project was that men are also affected by gender-based violence, physically, emotionally and sexually. This is a taboo issue – especially male-on-male rape – and is not often spoken about. Many participants spoke about how rape of men and boys was a reality that needed to be acknowledged as a serious issue and addressed appropriately.

A few participants also spoke about men being abused by their women intimate partners – including girlfriends and wives. This included emotional abuse – often when a male partner is perceived to not be providing sufficiently for the relationship or the household – physical abuse, and also sexual abuse. One participant stated that he had witnessed a woman physically abusing her husband, because he was cheating on him. This participant said that women can abuse men, and thinks that this is because they are traumatized by past abuse by men, and “have bottled that up” (male, individual interview).

Some participants reported that the traditional practice of initiation into manhood for the isiXhosa people – the practice of male circumcision that happens on the mountain – could be abusive. The practice was said to be abusive when boys are forced to participate in the ritual, when physical and emotional abuse is incurred against initiates at the mountain when they go for circumcision, and also the discrimination done to those who don't participate in the practice, or who end up having to go to the hospital – which included social ostracization, and physical and emotional abuse by other men. This is discussed in more depth in the section below.

It was said that abuse of men in general is not talked about, and it is very difficult for men to seek help because of social constructions of masculinity that state that men are strong and tough and fighters, that men do not feel pain or cry, and therefore cannot be vulnerable to abuse. Reporting to the police was said to be particularly problematic, because police officers will dismiss and/or ridicule the victim.

Men abuse is not being taken seriously. People think that a man cannot be raped or beaten by his wife. People need to be given more knowledge. Boys are being raped outside, and people are not aware that happens, and what to do. (Female, interview)

Talking openly about the various forms of abuse that are linked to the cultural practice of initiation is also very challenging because it is a sensitive and protected practice that is shrouded in silence.

Abuse of young children

A few participants also spoke about how children are vulnerable to being abused sexually, and how this is kept within the family – with mothers unwilling to speak out against the perpetrator who is likely to also be the head of the household.

The challenges/drivers of SGBV

Attitudes towards sexuality and relationships can lead to SGBV

Forced sex within dating relationship or marriage is not perceived as rape

It was widely reported that there is lack of information about sexual and gender based violence, combined with certain beliefs and attitudes that detract from people understanding when an abusive act is taking place. One predominant attitude, for example, was that forced sex within a relationship is not rape. This was linked to the understanding that men are entitled to have sex with their partners when and how they want to. It was reported that many men and women do not consider non-consensual sex within a dating relationship or marriage to be rape.

Most women are not aware of gender-based violence. Most of the time they are in the relationship when they get abused. They are not aware of what they can do if they are raped or abused by men, they are the slaves of sex. They are not aware that women who are married can be raped by her men. (Female, interview)

Men and boys as well as women and girls were reported to uphold the belief that males are entitled to sex with their female intimate partners, without getting their consent or as one participant stated “putting them in that mood to have sex” (male, individual interview). The understanding that men have sexual rights over women was said to be linked to the traditional practice of paying “lobola” (bridewealth) for a wife, which was equated with men having ownership of their female partner and therefore being entitled to sex with her.

Facilitator: What are the drivers of GBV?

M1: Culture, each and every time I want to have sex with her – even if I come home drunk - I will force sex on my partner, if she reports – let’s say even to her parents - It won’t be considered a big thing because they will say he has paid lobola for you, he must get sex when he wants..

In fact, according to several participants, the practice of paying lobola is about showing one’s appreciation to the family of the bride, it is not about having ownership or sexual entitlement to her.

Nowadays people using lobola as a way of paying, but traditionally / culturally it was not meant to be like that - you are not paying, it is a way of thanking the parents. (Male, focus group discussion).

Many participants who have conducted educational work on SGBV stated that it was a particular challenge to address the misconception of male entitlement to sex with intimate partners, often held by young men and boys. One participant spoke about how she found it hard to confront the attitudes held by young men and boys in the school she was working:

Sometimes I find it hard working on GBV issues. Like when you are in the classroom, you tell them that a husband cannot rape his wife, or force his wife to have sex with him – that is rape, they will just shout – and you will tell them that forcing to have sex is rape – they will just shout – no, no I have paid labola. And I will tell them that lobola is to appreciate how that girl is has been raised in that family. These boys are 19, some are 18. Some will say a boyfriend cannot rape his girlfriend if he forces her, because this is his girlfriend. (Female, individual interview)

There were other attitudes that were reported to legitimate a man forcing sex on a woman, without labelling it as rape, or blaming the victim for the rape. These revolved around women drinking and accepting drinks from men. A few participants stated that a woman is not expected to drink, so if she is raped it is her fault:

If a woman was drinking and was raped, we think that she is a woman and women are not supposed to be drinking or taking drugs in our communities. They see it as your fault that you have been raped or abused. (Male, focus group discussion).

If a woman accepts a drink from a man, it was stated that there is a myth that he has paid to sleep with her. This societal norm around buying drinks and sex was said to affect men as well as women – “if you buy a drink for a woman and you don’t go and sleep with her, it means she has drained you” (male, focus group discussion).

M2: Every time that a man buys a drink , there is an expectation – because of what people will say – they have drained your money out.

Facilitator: What do other people think?

All in general acknowledgement: Yes.

M5: For a male to rape the women – they will say you must get this and this, so if he is not getting this and this, he will force himself.

M1: And girls will even get beaten up by the guy who bought alcohol if she doesn’t want to come with, she will get a high clap. (Males, focus group discussion).

“If he hits me he loves me”: Normalization of intimate partner violence

Physical violence within a dating relationship or marriage was also considered to be normal and even legitimate. Women, as well as men, were reported to perpetuate the idea that physical violence inflicted by men was acceptable and even desirable, with the oft-cited saying, “if he hits me he loves me”:

M1 Some of the girls also, they want to be beaten, they say you don’t beat me, you don’t love me

Others “it’s true”

M1: I once had a girlfriend who was like that. And I said sorry, I have to leave you because I can’t beat you.

Facilitator: Is that the case?

Everyone agrees

F2 Most of the girls are saying , if the boyfriend doesn’t beat her, it shows that he doesn’t love her.

T: So she will do something wrong...To get some assurance (beating).

Lack of understanding of sexual harassment

Other areas where participants noted that SGBV is not understood or acted upon included lack of knowledge about different sexual offences, for example unwanted touching, which means that people will fail to understand or acknowledge that they have been violated, will dismiss it and fail to report it.

You must know that when a person touches you and you are not comfortable, it is part of molestation. People will think it is a mistake and dismiss it, not report it. (Male, interview)

Male-on-male rape was said to be a form of sexual and gender based violence against men that is not acknowledged or spoken about openly in the communities where young people live. In some cases it was said that this where there is an absence of knowledge or understanding is related to male-on-male rape, which is linked to a taboo around male-on-male or homosexual sexual acts. In a story related about a boy who was raped by a man, the teacher whom he reported to was suggested not to have taken action because “maybe the teacher did not know or believe that such a thing can happen.” (Male, focus group discussion).

Social pressure to conform to gender roles that perpetuate SGBV

During the focus group discussion and interviews, participants reflected on the situations and contexts within which sexual and gender based violence happens. Consideration was given to the drivers of SGBV, including norms around masculinity and femininity and societal pressure on men and women to conform to rigid gender identities.

It was widely reported that there is significant societal pressure on men and women to conform to normative gender roles. Often this pressure was linked to acts of sexual and gender based violence.

Hegemonic masculinities are not gender equitable

Hegemonic masculinity is a concept that explains the dominant social position of men, and the subordinate social position of women. Conceptually, hegemonic masculinity proposes to explain how and why men maintain dominant social roles over women. This research demonstrated that there are certain roles that men are expected to take on in society, in the community, family and relationships that perpetuate gender inequality. Boys, in turn, will be expected to aspire to these ideals of masculinity.

Participants spoke about the typical expectations of a man as being the head of the household, the provider in the relationship, the decision-maker, strong, powerful, unemotional (men do not cry) and a fighter. In the Eastern Cape, a man must also have gone through the cultural practice of initiation (circumcision conducted in the traditional way, at the mountain/bush).

A man must be a provider

Male participants also spoke about the downsides of certain roles that are expected of men, in particular the provider role whereby men are meant to be earning more than women and to be the main, if not only, financial provider in their relationships and families. If they do not fulfil this role, it was said that men would be subject to ridicule and abuse.

M5: There is more pressure on men to be provider, to earn money, more than women. We are in the process of equality – we are trying to push our women, the main focus is on women being more employable than men. But still in our communities, men are supposed to be the main ones with incomes. Men are under a lot of pressure in our communities. Men get emotionally abused by the community, we get comments such as you are being fed by your wife, what kind of a man are you? (Male, focus group discussion)

According to several participants, when men are unable to fulfil their socially prescribed role as the providers in relationships and families, they will feel disempowered and “useless”, which can in turn lead them to becoming violent towards their partners and children. One participant described in rich detail a scenario whereby men’s inability to fulfil the provider role can lead to aggression and emotional and physical abuse towards their female partners:

Men are expected to provide for families, meant to be there to make sure families are protected. When that is not happening – you feel useless, like you cannot fulfil your role as a man. That can turn into violence. You get frustrated, you get stressed, and then you can be very abusive emotionally. And then when you get home – just a small thing, you become aggressive. And then you are not even interested in having sex, perhaps because you are stressed perhaps from financial reasons – and you just turn away from your wife. And then maybe you are having sex outside of the relationship. I think those are the things that are part of violating the rights of women, and part of GBV. (Male, individual interview).

A man must be successful, head of the household, a leader and decision-maker

The socially normative role for a man is to be a leader and successful in his career. The increasing empowerment of women economically and socially, whereby women are earning more and also taking on leadership positions in society, was reported by a few participants to be perceived a threat by men, to them fulfilling their hegemonic gender identities as leaders in the community, families, and society at large. This had the potential to lead to men perpetrating SGBV because of the insecurity that they experience at being usurped in their socially normative roles. One participant provided an example of how a man might be confronted with a woman in a leadership position, such a female boss, and feel like he is unable to make decisions. This in turn leads to aggression; “because if he’s not able to dominate, he thinks he’s weak”.

When they have female bosses, men feel like it takes power away. A man feels like he must make decisions. As soon as that does not happen, or a man does not have that opportunity to make decisions – that’s when you have those challenges – he will start to become violent. Becomes aggressive, changes behaviour, because of that – because if he’s not able to dominate he thinks he’s weak... I am talking about relationships, and I am talking about work situations. Say there is a ward councillor who is a female, and is in a position of authority – she can make decisions on behalf of the community, including men, and everyone. You will find out that men feel threatened by seeing women in a position of power. So that person will think – that person is dominating us like a man. This will lead to violence. Indirectly it will affect the wife of that man. That man will go back to his

household feeling frustrated that he is being managed by a woman. He will go home and have that frustration and anger, and take out that anger to his wife. That wife did not do anything. Those things are happening in the community. (Male, individual interview).

A man cannot be abused

A prevalent and problematic belief linked to typical conceptions of manhood is the belief that men cannot be abused, physically, sexually or otherwise. This is linked to the idea that men must not express vulnerability or emotion, men are strong and can fight; if they experience pain – they do not show it or talk about it:

Society that we grow up in is that we have been told by our parents that men need to be strong, the man is the provider of the family, men don't cry, if they feel the pain, they cry from inside. (Male, individual interview).

A significant challenging in addressing SGBV against men, including acts of male rape, was said to be the attitude of the police should a male victim report what has happened to him. This dismissive, ridiculing, and highly insensitive and inappropriate response is, according to some participants, because police also believe that a man is powerful, and cannot be vulnerable to abuse.

F2: Most of the police stations, if a male reports a case of rape – they just laugh. I prefer social workers, they help a lot. Police do not take abuse of men seriously.

(Everyone agrees)

M1: If a male goes to report a case of abuse, they will just laugh at me – no-one will take that seriously.

F2: The police think that you cannot be abused as a man, because you are the one who is powerful, the head of the household. (Males and females, focus group discussion)

Female as well as male participants spoke about how abuse of men is not taken seriously, and how there is little knowledge or understanding that men and boys can be abused by women and by other men. This can have severe consequences; not acknowledging or understanding an act of sexual abuse of a male for example can mean that it is un-reported by the victim, and if it is discovered – people do not know how to respond. One participant spoke of a boy of about 10 who had informed her that another, older, boy, told him to touch his genital area – which is a sexual offence. She described how “the

child was laughing at the time, so it shows that these things are not taken seriously.”

While male abuse of female partners was said to be common, a few participants also spoke about the opposite happening – whereby women would be emotionally, physically or sexually abusive to their male partners. This is not taken seriously, according to several participants; “people think that a man cannot be raped or beaten by his wife.” (Female, individual interview).

Men and boys (and women and girls) were also said to be exposed to violence through witnessing their parents in abusive relationships, most often husbands abusing their wives. Children would grow up thinking that this is normal; because they were brought up to believe that wives must submit to their husbands.

Our fathers will hit our mothers, that was happening before we were born – we were raised to think a mother has to respect her husband – she has to be submissive...I think it’s also sends a bad message to the kids, it is abusive to the children. If the parents are fighting, and they are schooling – they will be affected in their education.

- female, individual interview

Initiation school and SGBV against men.

The topic of male circumcision or initiation is a one that is culturally sensitive. For this reason, the facilitator did not raise it directly; instead allowing it to be raised by participants themselves. It is significant that several participants *did* raise the issue, and indeed in direct response to the question “what do we think about when we think about men and boys and gender based violence”. These participants spoke about how the practice itself can be abusive, and also how it can lead to violence between “men” and “boys” because the former will discriminate and commit acts of emotional and physical abuse against the latter, who will be socially ostracized for not being “real” men.

Not all participants raised initiation as an issue, and during the focus group discussion several male participants upheld the practice as a cultural rite of passage to manhood that cannot be held to scrutiny. After a few exchanges between those who were raising criticisms about the practice, and others who were defensive about it, the topic drew to a natural close and the facilitator did not feel like she could continue the discussion further.

“Culture is beating us a lot”: Ostracisation of males who do not go to the mountain.

Several participants, both male and female, were openly critical about the way that the cultural practice of initiation is taking place. One key theme throughout these responses was that of choice and agency, and how many

boys do not have a “choice” as such about going “to the mountain” to participate in the ritual, because if they do not it will be equivalent to social death. As one participant stated “culture is beating us a lot”:

Culture is beating us a lot. If you are wife you have to be a housewife doing all the work for a man. If you are a boy – you are meant to go to the mountain – even if you are not ready, they will say at this age you are meant to be man now. If you reach that age and you are still a boy, they will just criticize you if you do that, you will be ostracized. You will not drink with men, or eat with men. (Female, focus group discussion).

Some male participants also spoke about the lack of “choice” in the absolute sense of the word about going for initiation, because if you do not go you will be treated differently, separately, and will not be seen as a man but as a boy. There did not seem to be a clear difference between being forced physically to go, and the significant social pressure to participate in the ritual, as this participants’ response demonstrates:

When I grew up I heard stories about men going to initiation schools and being forced to do that. One one hand it is a form of abuse if someone is forced to do it. One should feel in themselves that they want to go. If your friends go, you feel like you should go even if you do not want to. You will be treated differently, you will be separated from your friends, you will be seen not as a man but as a boy. (Male, individual interview).

Physical and emotional abuse of males who are admitted to hospital

The consequences of not going to the mountain to participate in the circumcision ritual can be severe. Additionally, if a male who takes part in the practice has a medical problem and has to go to the hospital, he is likely to face discrimination in the form of emotional and physical abuse. According to one participant, he will be labelled as “amalulwane” (a bat) – a derogatory name for a man:

If you don’t go to circumcision school, or if you go to the hospital you are a ‘amalulwane’ [sic]. This is the word to describe those men who are mice, with wings. [Bats] Even if boy is initiated in the forest, if he goes to the hospital for help – you are not the real man. If you are the real man, you would rather die in the forest. (Female, individual interview).

One participant related a devastating story of a young man who committed suicide because he was physically and emotionally abused by a group of males, after he had to be admitted to hospital during the traditional ritual:

Interviewer: Do you think this is a form of abuse?

F3: Yes. Some people end up committing suicide. In 2006, there was a man who went to hospital. They [a group of men] said to this man – you did not feel the pain like us, so they clipped his penis with nail clippers. They were altogether in the initiation school, and that men went to the hospital. They abused him. He committed suicide. (Female, individual interview).

Physical and emotional abuse that takes place during the practice

There were a few participants who spoke about abuse that takes place during the practice of initiation. Some spoke of malpractice that happens during the ritual, when those that are performing the circumcision are “cutting too much” (male, individual interview). Others spoke about deliberate physical and emotional abuse of males who go to the mountain by other men, which appears to be a form of severe bullying that is allowed to happen because the initiates are far away from the community, at the mountain, with no-one to intervene and defend them. One participant told a poignant story about his younger brother who suffered such abuse when he went through the initiation ritual.

It is very upsetting. I had a little brother who was abused at the mountain. When I arrived there I found that he was being beaten. I asked him what happened. He said I didn't answer their questions, they told me that I'm a stupid little boy and I shouldn't have come here. So those things are very nonsensical. So I think we need to think about these things, otherwise afterwards they will regret it. (Male, individual interview).

This participant spoke with empathy and feeling about what happens during the initiation ritual, and how the “boys” who are subject to questioning/interrogation will feel in pain from having been circumcised and not answer – which leads to the interrogator beating them, adding to their existing pain:

When you look down, you feel the pain and you cannot answer those questions So I will take a stick and beat you. And you are in pain because of the circumcision. This is a way of abusing people because it is far away from the community. You know in the mountain there are no people coming, it is just you and initiates – so you will take that chance of abusing them. (Male, individual interview).

Construction of difference between “men” and “boys” leads to violent behaviours

Many participants spoke about the widely held belief that the cultural practice of initiation symbolizes the transition from boyhood to manhood. There seems to be a significant distinction between being classified as a boy and as a man, and with the practice of initiation being considered the main route to manhood, those who have NOT been traditionally circumcised will be socially excluded and vulnerable to abuse – forever being labelled as boys.

A few participants spoke about violence that would break out between those who have been for initiation, and those who have not. This fighting between boys and men occurs when “men” return from the mountain, and start to be abusive towards “boys” who have not gone – leading to fights breaking out, which can also involve weapons:

The problem is that we as men, we take the boys downwards, we don't look up to them and say you can learn from us, and we as men can learn from you. So, we violate the boys – we say things that they don't like – and then they end up fighting and maybe stabbing each other. (Male, individual interview).

One participant spoke about how boys would go to the mountain and return with aggressive behaviours, which they would legitimate by stating that they are men now and can do as they please. These would be “good boys” who would come back smoking drugs, and becoming violent in the home – perhaps beating up their mothers and sisters, stating “I am a man...the man of the house’, maybe the father has passed” (male, individual interview).

The reason why I raised it, is that I feel that there is a need to address it in our areas. That we don't have to force the boys to go there. Some of the things that are done there are not nice. Sometimes the boys were good boys and they come back from the bush and become aggressive, pick up habits, in the home starting to say I'm a man – beating mother – saying “I am a man”. So, you just change from the experience you are getting there. It depends on the individual if you want to change to be a good person, or to a person who is doing all the things, smoking etc, beating mother, saying “I am a man, I am man.” Of which, that was not the purpose of it.

Culturally, when you were taken there you were going to experience the difficult times as a man – trying to show that a man is a provider, so you have to sweat to get something. Now it is just a fashion. Even a 14 year old can go to the initiation school and say he is a man. But being a man is being responsible, when you are responsible you can say you are a man. Not just going to the initiation school and thinking you can be a man, but you are just doing boys things. That's why I was raising it.

When you come back from the mountain, the ceremony is done for you. You get all those presents, maybe your parents prepare a

room for you – they say now you are a man. But at the back of their minds they are preparing you to be responsible. Once a boy is from the mountain he will be smoking dagga, he never smoked before, he is aggressive, he is beating everyone up (sisters, mother), maybe when he wants something he is saying I am the man of the house, maybe the father has passed. (Male, individual interview).

Several participants voiced out the challenges surrounding the cultural practice of initiation, including the abuse that happens at the mountain, the various forms of abuse and violence that is incurred against those who do not go, or who end up in hospital, and finally the aggressive acts carried out by new initiates, had several recommendations. Principle among these was the need to promote better forms of choice and agency around the practice, so that boys do not feel forced to go. Associated with this was the idea to re-cast the idea of manhood so that it is more closely associated with ideals of masculinity as being responsible and being a protector, rather than with the focus on being whether you have been to initiation school or not. A few participants stated that they would like to see those who have not been circumcised, or who have been circumcised at the hospital, to also be classified as men. A few participants stated that they would like to see those who are medically circumcised recognized as men, just like those who go to the mountain, because “he is a man according to his culture”:

M3: The best way is to encourage everyone to go to initiation school. You can go to the medical initiation school. We should respect other people’s belief or cultures, whether he want to doctor or not, we must treat them equally. He is a man according to his culture. (Male, focus group discussion).

Passive femininities: Gender roles for women that perpetuate SGBV

In a gender unequal society, the social construction of roles for women and girls are as less than, and on a lower level to, men and boys. In contrast to the normative role for men as providers, leaders and decision-makers in relationships and in the household, participants spoke about roles for women as being submissive, passive and subservient to men’s desires. Additionally, the social construction of women in a relationship context was often reported to be as someone to have power over, or ownership of, which accompanies the idea that men are sexually entitled to their female partners.

When it came to acts of SGBV, women are held responsible or blamed for being raped because of their socially unacceptable behaviours (drinking) or for other reasons such as wearing short skirts. Not surprisingly, these social norms around women’s identities and behaviours form part of the context that condones sexual and gender based violence against women.

Women should be submissive and subservient to men

Some participants spoke about how women are sexually subservient to men, especially in dating relationships and marriage. As one participant put it “they are the slaves of sex” (female, individual interview). Women were said to protect their husband and the marriage at all costs, even if their child is raped “I am not supposed to say that, because I can separate in my marriage” (ibid).

Several participants spoke about women accepting intimate partner violence from their partners, because they have been socialized to think that a woman must submit to her partner/husband. As one participant reflected, they have witnessed their fathers hitting their mothers – so they were raised to think that this is acceptable:

Our fathers will hit our mothers, that was happening before we were born. We were raised to think a mother has to respect her husband – she has to be submissive. (Female, individual interview).

Women who accept drinks are accepting sex, including rape

Several participants spoke about how it is not socially acceptable for women to be seen drinking. If they are raped and they have been drinking, it is seen to be their fault if they are raped or otherwise abused.

Women are not expected to be drinking, so if a woman was drinking and was raped. We think that she is a woman. Women are not supposed to be drinking or taking drugs in our communities. They see it as your fault that you have been raped or abused. (Male, focus group discussion).

Closely associated with this understanding that a woman is at fault if she is raped and she has been drinking is the understanding that a man buys a woman a drink, he has paid to have sex with her. If she refuses, the accepted understanding is that he is entitled to force himself on her. One participant reflected that this should not be the case “women should be given a chance to say I will sleep with you or not.” (Male, focus group discussion).

Reproductive and household roles for women = less freedom than men.

A few participants spoke about the strict and unequal division of roles in the household, growing up in South Africa’s Eastern Cape. Women are expected to do all of the household work, and also to bear the weight of reproductive responsibility.

Women are expected to do the household work, taking care at home. We are treated differently. Men can do whatever they want; they can be on the streets at nine ten at night. No-one will ask “where are you, what were you doing?” As for girls, you have to

make sure house is clean, by 5 pm you are at home. So that is where things are different. So I was also asking myself, why are we treated differently?

The other thing is if you are the girl and the boy impregnates you – you will be the one who people say is embarrassing the family – it will be like you are a disgrace. The guy can go wherever, and no-body will talk about that. (Female, individual interview).

One participant drew a correlation between the lack of freedom given to girls and women growing up, as compared with boys and men, and acts of SGBV. Girls were expected to be at home after 5 to do household work and to prevent them socializing with males, whereas boys could go and play on the streets. When asked how this is linked to SGBV, the participant responded by saying that “women are not given freedom to express, and men are”:

I had my freedom, they didn't have. I could do what I wanted, while they were told they had a certain time to play and then had to come in and prepare and cook food. They must go and cook and clean and wash dishes, while I can go play, or watch TV...For me in a way I see that as them not really been given the freedom that they were supposed to be given. (Male, individual interview).

HOMOPHOBIA AND SGBV

Discrimination towards lesbian and gay people

Homophobia in society was said to be a major driver of SGBV in the Eastern Cape, according to many participants. This was often one of the first issues that participants spoke about when asked about the major issues associated with SGBV. A young, gay man is likely to face abuse and discrimination on a number of counts, being gay contradicts the hegemonic or dominant version of masculinity as being heterosexual:

There is pressure on young men; if they are gay they can't be open with family. Your parents will chase you out and say it is against our culture. Our culture does not allow males to date males. (Male, individual interview).

From a young age, boys that are identified as being gay will face abuse and discrimination:

In my community gays and lesbians – they discriminate against them, even in our families they do not accept them, they abuse them. For example he is 8 or 9, and he is gay, and every time they shout at him and say you are gay, you can't dance you dance like a woman – stuff like that (Female, focus group discussion).

Taboo around male-on-male sexual acts: Case study of boy who was raped

The taboo around homosexual acts or men who have sex with men was also said to be a significant barrier in addressing male-on-male rape. As mentioned earlier, this is an issue that is very much hidden and damaging precisely because it is not acknowledged or spoken about. In a group activity, participants related a story of a 13-year-old boy who was raped by a man in the forest. He told his school teacher who did not take action. The boy spoke to one of the Restless Development peer educators, and said that he is ashamed of what happened to him and is facing abuse from his peers who accuse him of being gay.

Participants described this as a case of emotional, physical and sexual abuse. The teacher failed to take action, and the family “kept quiet” about the case. The peer educators decided to report the case to the police whereupon the police officers told them the case was old and they were not going to take action. Eventually the perpetrator raped another boy, and he was caught and convicted.

One of the major drivers that were identified here was homophobia, or discrimination towards those who are considered to be gay. Lack of information and ignorance about male on male sexual acts, including rape, was also said to be a major factor in preventing action on the case. Perhaps the teacher was unaware that such acts could take place? It was said that the community “does not accept homosexuality” so such an act would remain hidden and unreported.

Some participants reflected that it was very difficult for the boy to speak out about the rape, because the reaction of the community would only add to his trauma. Firstly, it was said that they would not believe him, even the teacher whom he told did not take it seriously and failed to help him:

M1 – It will be difficult for the boy to act. Knowing the reactions of the community (the perpetrator) that it will be difficult to report. Boy did not tell anyone because he didn't think anyone will believe

F2: There was no-one to support him at home. Didn't tell family, because no-one to support him, grandmother drinking. He only trusted the teacher, but shame for the teacher not to take that boy seriously – it made him lose hope. That the teacher did not take action, as boy told her. (Male and female, focus group discussion).

Another reason for not wanting to report the case was fear of people thinking he is gay if he talks about it (female, focus group discussion).

It was also stated that the perpetrator would have known that it would be difficult for the boy to report the rape, which would have encouraged him to commit the act.

Finally, the response of the police was said to be very disempowering – including to the peer educators who reported the case. It was said that police officers in general will just laugh if a male reports a case of rape.

POOR SERVICE RESPONSE TO SGBV

As has been mentioned at several points in this report, the response of service providers to SGBV – and in particular the police – is often insensitive, inappropriate, and ultimately re-traumatizing for a survivor who chooses to report.

It was said that police officers in particular would fail to understand that SGBV against men is a reality, and this would lead to dismissive and insensitive attitudes towards men and boys who report cases against them. It was often said that that police officers would laugh at survivors who report.

Participants spoke about the poor response to sexual and gender based violence in general, to men and women. One participant described how health workers would respond to a case of intimate partner violence against women by telling the survivor that the abuse is “not new”, and as the participant continued, “even if it is not new, it is not your plan!” (female, focus group discussion).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: WAYS FORWARD FOR ADDRESSING SGBV

There are some key recommendations for the way forward to address the issue of men and boys and sexual and gender based violence. Many of these were embedded in participants’ critical reflection on the issue, and others were made in direct response to the question. Further recommendations are made here, based on an analysis of the findings from the research.

Educational and social transformation work on SGBV

An overall recommendation is for more educational and social transformation work on SGBV. Embedded in this recommendation is the understanding that education is much more than providing information; it is about shifting attitudes and social norms that form the basis for behaviours that are abusive and not gender equitable. Such educational and social transformation work should take place at schools and higher learning institutions, as well as through peer-led informal education campaigns and workshops.

With regards to content of educational work, an area where information is needed is around what SGBV is and the different forms of SGBV. The fact that many people do not know or understand the different forms of SGBV is a

challenge, because they will fail to understand when an abusive act is taking place and will dismiss it/not report it.

This lack of understanding of SGBV is underpinned by social norms that legitimate non-consensual sex within dating relationships and marriage. Foundational to both preventing and responding to SGBV in intimate partner relationships is the need to address such misconceptions, which means changing people's perceptions of men's and women's roles. Challenging male sexual entitlement is crucial, and this includes addressing the belief that if a man has paid lobola for his wife, he is allowed to have sex with her without her consent. It is also very important to challenge and shift the idea that violence within a relationship is normal and legitimate – addressing the misconception that “if he hits me, he loves me.”

In the area of social transformation, there is a need to address and radically transform gender roles that perpetuate gender inequality and SGBV. Many participants spoke about the challenge of being pressured to conform to such gender roles as young men and women. The role of men as the leaders, decision-makers, heads of households, and providers puts them on a higher standing compared to women who are expected to be passive, submissive to men, to look after the children and to do the housework. Passive femininities will leave acts of SGBV unchallenged, and legitimate abuse within intimate partner relationships, as it is expected that women must submit to men in such contexts.

A key issue that was raised was the pressure on men to be providers and leaders in society, relationships and in the family. Many participants spoke about how men are unable to fulfil this role, because of poor access to economic opportunities, and because women are starting to become more economically and socially empowered. Essentially this means that men experience a loss of power, or emasculation, which can have devastating consequences in the form of violence against women in intimate partner relationships. It was said that a man would try to regain power as “a man” by exerting his power over a woman, physically, sexually and emotionally.

Participants themselves recommended a shift in the traditional understanding that a man should be a provider. It was suggested that this should not be such a key feature of being a man, and that women as well as men can have shared roles economically and materially. Some participants spoke about the need to think deeply about the basis for our relationships, moving away from the emphasis on what we bring materially, to being more about understanding one another. One participant asked if we can move away from this fixed idea of how we are “men” and “women” to understanding ourselves as fundamentally human beings. In this way we can think past our gender and do the right thing for, and towards, each other.

In addition to the point of seeing past gender roles, is the recommendation for thinking of masculinities and femininities that are alternative and that promote a more gender equitable society. Young people are well placed to drive these discussions, as they are in the process of defining themselves and their

identities and can challenge more traditional conceptions of gender identities. Some participants spoke about the possibility of changing gender roles growing up in the household, so that roles traditionally ascribed to women, for example, can be opened up to men – such as cooking, cleaning, and looking after children.

An area where more social transformation work is called for is around the traditional practice of initiation. While this is a very sensitive issue and on the whole a protected cultural practice, many participants raised it as a form of SGBV against men, and spoke about acts of SGBV are committed against those who have not participated in the ceremony or end up having to be admitted to hospital. There was a call for the understanding of what it means to be a man to be extended to include those who have NOT been traditionally circumcised, in order to prevent the social ostracisation and acts of violence towards certain men.

Homophobia was a significant issue raised by most participants. Educational work should engage with lack of information and intolerance of gay and lesbian people, and promote open dialogue and acceptance of sexual minorities.

Male vulnerability to SGBV needs to be acknowledged and addressed. This is essential for men and boys to be able to speak out about, and report, their experiences of SGBV.

Many participants spoke about the importance of having positive male and female role-models. It was said that young men and boys will listen to men of a certain age, and they can have a lot of influence in promoting positive social change messages. It is also important to have positive female role-models; a few participants spoke about the influence of female leaders in the families and communities – for example one participant described his Aunt to be an inspiring matriarch who was on the same level as the man of the house, in the decisions she made and the way she protected the children in her care. Another participant spoke about the importance of having strong female role-models, because otherwise children will grow up thinking that “nothing good can come out of being a woman” (male, individual interview).

Educational work should be led and facilitated by men

Most participants agreed that men should take the lead in the educational work around SGBV. Women should be involved, but in general it was stated that men and boys would listen more to other males, than to women. If women lead such education campaigns, participants said that men would become defensive and unresponsive. It was said that men would think that “women are defending themselves, and saying we must not beat our girlfriends” (male, individual interview).

Having focus group discussions, dialogues, and campaigns with men and boys is one major recommendation from this study – involving a range of men and starting from an early age. Breaking down the barrier between “men” and “boys” is an important goal to achieve for social transformation work, in a society where so much rests on graduating from boyhood to manhood, and which defines this separation through exclusionary practices such as not eating or drinking together.

Sensitisation of service providers

There is a need for a great deal of sensitization work with service providers on the issue of SGBV, especially the police. Promoting a deeper understanding of SGBV, including violence against women that takes place in intimate partner relationships, and acts of SGBV against men, was said to be particularly important. Shifting attitudes of service providers that prevent appropriate action, such as arresting and convicting a perpetrator, and that only seem to re-traumatize the survivor, is essential to the fight against SGBV.

Leadership from government

There is a need for leadership in the fight against SGBV and the quest for gender equality. NGOs like Restless Development are doing significant work with young people around the issue, but without the commitment and leadership from government this can only go so far. Women must be recognized as equal to men at the “top”, by national leaders, in order for society to change.

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