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For further information, please contact:

MICROCON: A Micro Level Analysis of Violent Conflict, Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE

Tel: +44 (0) 01273 915706

Email: info@microconflict.eu

Web: www.microconflict.eu



Norms about intimate partner violence among urban South Africans: A quantitative and qualitative vignette analysis

Kai Thaler¹

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Abstract: South Africa has one of the highest rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) in the world. In order to combat this violence, it has been suggested that changes in social norms are needed to avoid acceptance of or complacency about IPV. Little is known, though, about variation in norms of acceptance of IPV across gender, race, and different situations. Using survey data from a panel study of young people in Cape Town and qualitative interviews with African township residents, this paper examines variation in acceptance of IPV between African and coloured men and women, as well as the background factors that influence acceptance or rejection of IPV in given situations. Vignette scenarios about IPV perpetration were presented to survey respondents and interviewees who were asked whether or not they agreed with the use of violence in the situation discussed. Acceptance of IPV is found to be highest among African women, with African respondents generally more accepting of violence than coloured respondents. The levels of normative endorsement of violence are lower than those found by studies in other African countries, but higher than those found in a previous national study in South Africa. Exposure to violence as a victim or perpetrator is the most universal correlate of acceptance of IPV, supporting a social learning theory of violence and violent norms. As exposure to violence normalizes it, and may then lead to future perpetration or victimization, shifting norms to convince people of the unacceptability of IPV is a necessary step in breaking the cycle of violence.

¹ Kai Thaler is a Researcher in the Social Surveys Unit of the Centre for Social Science Research and an Affiliated Researcher of the Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Security (IPRIS). A version of this paper formed one of the chapters of his MSocSc dissertation in Sociology, completed in April 2011. He would like to thank Jeremy Seekings and Gregory Thaler for helpful comments.

Introduction

Violence, whether directly experienced or simply feared, is a fact of everyday life in contemporary South Africa. Much of this violence takes place between spouses or non-married intimate partners. Women's victimization is of special concern, as South Africa reportedly has the world's highest rate of intimate partner homicide against women (Mathews et al. 2004), a very high rate of reported rape, and a female intimate partner violence victimization rate of 25-40% (see Jewkes, Sikwewiya, Morrell, and Dunkle 2009: 6). Young people in South Africa are frequently exposed to violence within their own families, with 26% of urban youths exposed to violent family disputes, almost 40% of which involved weapons (Leoschut and Burton 2006: 30-31).

With so much exposure to violence during childhood and adolescence, especially exposure to violence between parents, young people may be desensitized to violence, creating a sense of violence as a normal means of resolving disputes and predisposing them to commit intimate partner violence (IPV) later in life (see e.g. Boonzaier 2008: 195; Dawes et al. 2006: 231). Norms of acceptance of violence have been highlighted as a driver of IPV perpetration and victimization both in South Africa (Abrahams et al. 2006; Campbell 1992; Kim and Motsei 2002; Strebel et al. 2006; Wood, Maforah, and Jewkes 1998) and more generally (e.g. Andersson, Ho-Foster, Mitchell, Scheepers and Goldstein 2007; Faramarzi, Esmailzadeh, and Mosavi 2005; Heise, Ellsberg, and Gottemoeller 1999; WHO 2010). However, despite these findings of the significant contribution of norms to IPV perpetration and victimization, research on IPV acceptance norms and their predictors has been lacking in South Africa, with the exception of two studies comparing gender differences in attitudes toward IPV among nurses in the Northern Cape (Kim and Motsei 2002) and a national sample of doctors (Peltzer et al. 2003). Given the contribution of norms to the persistence of IPV, this paper examines who believes IPV is acceptable and in which situations it is seen as such, as well as what background factors may increase or decrease normative acceptance of IPV.

While cross-nationally men have been found to have higher rates of acceptance of IPV (see Nayak, Byrne, Martin, and Abraham 2003²; Simon et al. 2001), previous studies in African

² This study included India, Japan, Kuwait, and the United States. A review of studies from around the world found nearly identical rates of approval of IPV among men and women in

countries have counter-intuitively found strong norms of acceptance of IPV among women. In a study in rural Uganda, more women than men agreed with the use of violence by a man against his female partner in all the situations with which they were presented (Koenig et al. 2003). In nationally representative surveys of women aged 15 to 49, a vast majority of women (85%) in Zambia (Lawoko 2006) and over half (53%) of women in Zimbabwe (Hindin 2003) agreed with the perpetration of IPV by a man against a woman in at least one hypothetical situation, while over half of Nigerian women aged 10 to 49 agreed that men are justified in hitting their wives (Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe 2005). Andersson et al. (2007) conducted a survey in eight Southern African countries,³ and while only Malawi had higher female rates of acceptance of IPV against women, the male and female acceptance rates were close in the other countries. Meanwhile in South Africa, some women may view beating as an essential part of a relationship and an “expression of love” (Wood and Jewkes 1997: 42-43; see also Kim and Motsei 2002: 1246). Thus I predict that acceptance of IPV will be significantly higher among African women than among other demographic groups.⁴ Based on previous survey findings about acceptance of IPV in South Africa (CASE 1998), I further predict that African respondents as a group will be more likely than coloured and white respondents to approve of IPV.

Findings from previous studies provide us with additional socioeconomic factors we may hypothesize are associated with acceptance of IPV: [1] perpetration of violence (Cauffman, Feldman, Jensen, and Arnett 2000; Andersson et al. 2007), [2] being hit by parents as a child (Widom 1989; Brengden, Vitaro, Tremblay, and Wanner 2002; Ozcakir, Bayram, Ergin, Selimoglu, and Bilgel 2008), [3] IPV victimization (Faramarzi et al. 2005), [4] low household wealth (Hindin 2003; Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe 2005), [5] community social disorganization (Miles-Doan 1998; Taylor and Sorenson 2005; Koenig, Stephenson, Ahmed, Jejeebhoy, and Campbell 2006; Gracia and Herrero 2007), [6] peer violence and attitudes (DeKeseredy 1988;

several Latin American cities for the reason of suspected female adultery, with slightly more women than men approving of IPV in Santiago, Chile and San Salvador, El Salvador (Heise et al. 1999: 6).

³ Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

⁴ Apartheid-era racial categories are of continuing social and political importance in South Africa, and thus are used in this paper. ‘African’ refers to black Africans and ‘white’ to those of Caucasian descent. ‘Coloured’ is a complex category which was defined under apartheid as people who were not white, black, or Asian, but may have come from a Khoi, San, Malay, or mixed racial background; over time, however, ‘coloureds’ have developed a distinctive identity as such.

Smit 1991; Brengden et al. 2002; Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz, Linkenbach, and Stark 2003), [7] lower levels of education (Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe 2005; Lawoko 2006), and [8] alcohol abuse (Ozcakir et al. 2008).⁵

Given the contribution of norms to the persistence of IPV, this paper examines who among young South Africans believes IPV is acceptable and in which situations IPV perpetration is seen as legitimate. Socioeconomic and behavioral factors that may increase or decrease normative acceptance of IPV are tested, with special attention paid to gender and, due to the continuing salience of apartheid-era racial categories in South Africa (see Seekings 2008, 2011), racial differences in norms. After a discussion of the data and methods used, a mixed-methods quantitative and qualitative analysis is conducted to determine factors associated with acceptance of IPV. The findings are then considered in the context of their implications for policy measures to reduce IPV in South Africa and possibilities for further study.

Data and Methods

This paper uses a mixed methods⁶ approach to examine norms about the acceptability of IPV in both quantitative and qualitative perspective. Quantitative data come from the Cape Area Panel Study (CAPS), a longitudinal study of a panel of young people in Cape Town, South Africa. The first wave of CAPS was conducted in 2002 when respondents were ages 14 to 22. The most recent wave of CAPS, the fifth, was conducted in 2009 among approximately 3,000 respondents. Since 2002, there has been attrition in the sample, especially among older respondents, so the sample is no longer representative of the young population of Cape Town (see Lam et al. 2010). However, CAPS remains the best source of data on the lives of young people in Cape Town or anywhere in South Africa.

The fifth wave of CAPS included a set of vignettes asking respondents whether or not they agreed with the use of violence in a given situation. Vignettes are “short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited

⁵ Unfortunately, we do not have a very good measure for economic and power inequalities within relationships, a risk factor suggested by several studies (Dangor, Hoff, and Scott 1998; Boonzaier and de la Rey 2004; Strebel et al. 2006).

⁶ For more on mixed methods research, see e.g. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998, 2003).

to respond” (Finch 1987: 105). For one of the survey questions, respondents were asked if they agreed with the use of violence amongst intimate partners in one of six hypothetical scenarios (each respondent was randomly assigned one of the six scenarios). Respondents could answer yes; maybe/it depends; no, it is wrong; or don’t know. For the purposes of this paper, answers of ‘yes’ or ‘maybe/it depends’ are coded as agreeing that IPV is acceptable in a given scenario. Four of the scenarios involved a husband hitting his wife: 1) for suspecting that she has been having sex with another man; 2) for finding out definitively that she has been having sex with another man; 3) for preparing food he does not like; or 4) for disobeying him. These vignettes outline scenarios that have been used in different international studies (Hindin 2003; Nayak et al. 2003; Koenig et al. 2003; Gage 2005; Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe 2005; Lawoko 2006), have been highlighted in qualitative studies in South Africa (e.g. Campbell 1992; Wood and Jewkes 1997; Kim and Motsei 2002; Strebel et al. 2006), and accord with triggers of IPV against women mentioned by our qualitative interviewees (see below). The other two scenarios involved a woman asking her brother to assault her boyfriend to “teach him a lesson” because she (5) suspects him of having sex with another woman or (6) finds out definitively that he has been having sex with another woman.⁷ Respondents filled out the survey questionnaires by hand and were assured of confidentiality.

Qualitative data comes from a set of 45 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2009 with adult African residents of Khayelitsha and Delft, townships in the impoverished Cape Flats area with high rates of violence. Interviewees were both men and women between the ages of 21 and 54. After two pilot interviews (one of which involved two interviewees, a man and a woman), interviews were conducted with 26 randomly selected respondents from the 2005 Cape Area Study and a further convenience sample of 17 interviewees. There were 16 male and 30 females interviewees. The interviews are denoted by numbers preceded by a ‘V’, followed by the interviewee’s gender and age. Living in neighborhoods where violence is an everyday occurrence and concern, the interviewees are expected to have intimate knowledge of the dynamics of violence in their communities, and thus well-formed opinions about whether or not there are situations in which IPV might be considered acceptable. Interviewees were presented

⁷ The scenarios are not congruent, as in the male victim scenarios, he is not directly assaulted by the girlfriend; however, in both the male and female the vignettes involving sexual infidelity, the reason for resorting to violence is the same.

with four vignettes about violence, two of which were about IPV, and were asked for their responses.

Vignettes are especially useful in the examination of norms because, as Hughes (1998:384) writes, “Vignettes highlight selected parts of the real world that can help unpackage individuals’ perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes to a wide range of social issues. The relative distance between the vignette and the respondent can facilitate this.” Vignettes are also particularly useful in studies of norms about intimate relationships, “to which it is difficult to gain access in empirical study” (Finch 1987:107; i.e. respondents may be reluctant to discuss norms in the context of their own relationships). Violence is often situational (Collins 2008), and vignettes simulate situational differences, allowing us to examine the acceptability same types of violence in different situational settings. The situational nature of violence itself also means that for many types of violence, “Values and norms legitimizing [sic] or encouraging violence are situationally specific” (Bernburg and Thorlindsson 2005:460). The inclusion of vignettes in the CAPS survey, while not allowing us to examine how one individual’s norms might vary between situations, permits us to systematically analyze who possesses norms accepting of IPV and in what situations IPV might be considered more justifiable. In contrast, the interview vignettes allow for open ended responses, providing a more nuanced view of norms about IPV in the interviewees’ communities. Through this combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, we should gain a more complete understanding of norms about IPV in Cape Town.

Norms About IPV in the CAPS Sample

From Wave 5 of CAPS we have data on the situational norms about IPV of slightly under 3,000 young people. The sample is 54% female and 46% male, and when broken down by racial group is 44% African, 49% coloured, and 7% white. As the white sample is so small, it is included in a pooled multivariate analysis of approval of IPV in any of the situations, but is excluded from multivariate analysis of approval of IPV in the individual situations.⁸

An examination of responses to the IPV vignettes involving husband-on-wife violence reveals gender imbalances in the approval of violence, with higher percentages of women

⁸ Violence among white South Africans is an under-studied subject and warrants further investigation.

approving of IPV in all scenarios (see Table 2; all tables are presented after the body text). When the sample is broken down by gender *and* race, however, it becomes clear that the gender imbalance in the approval of IPV against women is driven mainly by African women, as coloured women approve of IPV against women at a lower rate than coloured and African men in all the situations presented. Approval of IPV against women is also higher among African respondents in general than among coloured respondents. Overall, IPV is considered more acceptable when it takes place for reasons of suspected or discovered sexual infidelity than for disobedience or displeasure with food, an intuitive finding which increases my confidence in the validity of the data. The finding of the highest levels of acceptance of IPV being among African respondents is the same as that found in a national survey in 1998, which asked respondents if it was “sometimes necessary for a partner to hit his wife” (CASE 1998). The rate of agreement was “highest among Africans (17%) and coloureds (12%), and lowest among Indians (3%), and whites (2%).” In that survey, however, men (19%) were more likely than women (9%) to agree with the statement (CASE 1998).⁹

Statistical Analysis

Conducting bivariate logistical analysis of the acceptance of IPV against both men and women reveals that acceptance is significantly higher among African women than among any other group, although African men are also significantly more likely than coloured and white men and women to endorse IPV in the event of a man discovering his wife has been having sex with another man (see Table 3).

However, to test our other hypotheses and determine whether or not race and gender are acting as proxies for other factors, it is necessary to conduct multivariate analyses (the variables used in these analyses are defined in Table 1). As mentioned above, these analyses include only African and coloured respondents due to the small white sample size. Table 4 shows models of acceptance of IPV across all situations, in situations with only female victims, and in situations only with male victims, controlling for the vignette version asked of respondents.

⁹ Unfortunately, the CASE study did not report results by gender-race demographic group (e.g. African men, coloured women, etc.).

In the pooled analysis of all situations and in scenarios where a woman had her boyfriend beat up, women were significantly more likely than men to approve of the use of violence. African respondents were most likely to approve of violence across the board, though coloured respondents were also significantly more likely to do so than whites. Exposure to family members who fight violently, an experience of 12% of our sample, significantly increases the likelihood of IPV approval for all scenarios, while being hit or otherwise treated roughly as a child, an experience of 10% of respondents, had a weakly significant association with approval of boyfriend beating. Variables measuring low socioeconomic status (living in a socially disorganized neighborhood with high crime and drug use, unemployment, and a household member having gone without food in the past month) were generally negatively associated with IPV approval. Not having completed a secondary school education, a characteristic of 83% of the sample, had a weakly significant impact on approval of IPV against women, with less educated respondents more likely to approve IPV. Finally, drinking heavily (having seven or more alcoholic drinks on a typical drinking day), was significantly associated with IPV approval generally, and especially approval of IPV against women.

The models in Table 4 do not use gender-race demographic groups as independent variables because the small size of the white sample would greatly increase the margin of error. Conducting such an analysis with a sample of only African and coloured respondents (not shown), African women are significantly more likely than any other group to accept IPV in any scenario, against women or men. African men are significantly more likely than coloured men or women to accept IPV generally or against women. There is no significant difference in the likelihood of IPV acceptance between coloured men and coloured women in any of the analyses.

Examining the odds ratios for the different vignette versions (Table 5, below), which were used as controls for the models in Table 4, it is clear that, as intuition would suggest, normative endorsement of violence is much higher for suspected or discovered sexual infidelity than for non-sexual affronts.

Table 6 (below) examines variation in correlates of approval of IPV for each of the six scenarios about which respondents were asked. There were no significant differences by gender in approval of IPV in most scenarios, though women were more likely to approve of violence in the case of a husband disliking his wife's food and a woman discovering her boyfriend was

cheating on her. African respondents were significantly more likely than coloured respondents to approve of IPV against women in all scenarios, though there was no significant racial difference in the approval of violence against men. Measures of exposure to violence (being beaten as a child, family members acting violently toward one another, having been a victim of assault) were significant mainly for approval of violence against men, while having perpetrated violence against a family member or intimate partner (FIPV) was significantly associated only with approval of violence in the case of a man discovering his wife was cheating on him and having assaulted a stranger was significantly associated only with approval of hitting a wife for suspected cheating. Interestingly, having criminal friends was positively associated with approval of IPV in the food vignette, but living in a neighborhood characterized by criminality and delinquency had a significant negative effect in both the food and female suspected sex scenarios. Unemployment had a significant and negative effect on approval of violence in the discovered female cheating scenario, while lower educational attainment had an inconsistent effect, significantly increasing approval of violence in the suspected female sex scenarios, and decreasing approval in the female disobedience scenario. The largest and only significant effect of binge drinking was increasing the likelihood of approval of IPV in the female disobedience scenario.

As the above analyses have made clear, there are significant gender and racial differences in rates of and factors behind approval of IPV. While racial integration has been improving since the end of apartheid, South Africa has retained high levels of social and spatial segregation (see Seekings 2008, 2011). In the interest of facilitating more effective interventions aimed at changing norms, which often take place at the community level, it is informative to analyze variation in and correlates of approval of IPV for separately for each demographic group (see Table 7, below).

The gender gap in acceptance of IPV is significant only among African respondents, with women significantly more likely than men to approve of IPV. Exposure to family violence significantly increases approval of IPV only among African women, while household food insecurity is likewise only significant among African women, though negatively so. Having perpetrated assault against a stranger and being an assault victim are both significantly associated with IPV acceptance only among African men, though having perpetrated FIPV has a significant and positive effect among coloured men. Results are inconsistent across gender among coloured

respondents, with having criminal friends positively associated with IPV approval among men and negatively associated among women, while the pattern is the opposite for neighborhood social disorganization, which has a negative effect among coloured men and a positive effect among coloured women. Both employed African and employed coloured women were significantly more likely than their unemployed peers to approve of violence. Heavy drinking had a significant and positive effect on IPV acceptance among coloured respondents.

Discussion

That African women are significantly more likely than other demographic groups to approve of IPV supports previous findings from elsewhere in Africa (Koenig et al. 2003; Lawoko 2006). African women, who in our sample are almost exclusively from the Xhosa ethnic group originating from the Eastern Cape, who approve of IPV seem to have internalized patriarchal norms about women's roles and the acceptability of violence in response to transgressions of gender norms (see e.g. Wood et al. 1998). Acceptance of violence among African women also appears to reflect a habituation to violence through exposure to it in their own families. African men are likewise more likely to accept violence due to personal exposure, though their experience of violence has been as either victims of assault or perpetrators of assault against strangers.¹⁰ This points to an internalization of violent norms in keeping with social learning theory, with young people learning that violence is a tool that can be used to resolve disputes or assert dominance, thus creating a cycle of violence (e.g. Bandura 1973; Mihalic and Elliott 1997; Akers 1998; Funk et al. 1999; Slovak et al. 2007).

Among other behavioral and experiential measures, having friends involved in criminal or delinquent activity has a significant positive association with approval of IPV among coloured men, providing some support for a peer socialization effect on norms about violence (DeKeseredy 1988; Smit 1991; Brengden et al. 2002; Fabiano et al. 2003), though this effect was

¹⁰ Assault victimization and perpetration against strangers are correlated at 0.19 among African men, suggesting that a small, but significant group of them may lead a dangerous, 'fast' lifestyle that places them at the perpetrator-victim nexus identified in Thaler (2011b), where violence is common and normalized.

split across gender lines, as coloured women with criminal friends were significantly *less* likely to approve of IPV. Evidence about the effect of neighborhood social disorganization on approval of violence was also inconclusive, though the significant negative effects among African women and coloured men were stronger than the positive effect among coloured women, casting doubt on the generalizability of previous findings of normalization of IPV in disorganized communities (Miles-Doan 1998; Koenig et al. 2006; Gracia and Herrero 2007).

Unemployment and household food insecurity had negative effects on IPV acceptance among African and coloured women, a somewhat surprising finding, as it is often expected that women who are employed and better off are more empowered and less at risk of IPV victimization (e.g. Kim et al. 2007), so one might expect a concurrent shift toward disapproval of violence. Lower educational attainment had a significant (and positive) effect on approval of IPV only among coloured men. With 85% of African and coloured respondents not having completed a secondary school diploma, though, the sources of socialization to or against violence are likely outside the education system. Binge drinking was a significant correlate of IPV approval only among coloured respondents. Alcohol use is high in the Western Cape in comparison with the rest of South Africa, and is especially high among coloureds (Peltzer and Ramlagan 2009). While the causal links are complex, heavy alcohol use tends to be associated with violence (see WHO 2009), and especially with IPV (WHO 2002: ch. 4), so the positive effect of binge drinking on norms of approval of IPV was expected; however, as the percentage of binge drinkers (30%) is higher among coloured men than among any other demographic group, it was not expected that drinking behavior would be a distinguishing factor between those men approving and disapproving of IPV.

Examining variation in approval of IPV across different situations (Table 6), it becomes clear that there is a race effect only for approval of IPV against women, with African respondents more likely than coloureds to accept IPV across all of the female victimization scenarios. This likely reflects a stronger patriarchal structure in the African community, with men's beating of their wives normalized as a means of control within relationships (see e.g. Campbell 1992; Wood and Jewkes 1998). While women overall were more likely than men to approve of IPV, the differences were significant only in the discovered male cheating and disliked food scenarios. The latter result was surprising, as it was expected that displeasure with food would be considered by women to be too trivial a reason for violence; however, women

may believe that as the kitchen is their domain, failure in fulfilling their cooking duties is a serious transgression of gender norms.

Exposure to violence as a victim (childhood violence, family violence, assault) was only significant in increasing approval of violence against a boyfriend for suspected or discovered cheating, though family violence did significantly increase approval of IPV against women in the aggregated analysis (Table 4), so there is support, albeit weak, for the hypothesis that experiences of violence socialize on to violence and instill norms of approval of violence. Having perpetrated violence, against a stranger or a family member or intimate partner, was significant only in scenarios related to female sexual infidelity, reflecting a habituation to violence and norms against women having multiple sexual partners, even though many of the men who perpetrate violence have concurrent partners (Thaler 2011a, 2011b). Binge drinking was significantly associated with approval of violence only in the female disobedience scenario. Alcohol's tendency to decrease tolerance of affronts means that disobedience, which could happen in any situation, would seem particularly confrontational to someone who had been drinking, and both men's and women's drinking increases the risk for IPV (Abrahams et al. 2006). The role of alcohol is explored further in the qualitative analysis.

Qualitative Evidence

Our qualitative interview sample was restricted to African men and women, but in addition to gaining further insights on norms about IPV among this community, we can also bring in information from qualitative studies of IPV in Cape Town using coloured samples. The qualitative findings are discussed in comparison with the results of the statistical analysis.

In the 45 interviews conducted, the interviewees were presented with two vignettes dealing specifically with IPV against women. The first vignette asked about a woman, Nosisana, whose boyfriend has been beating her. A friend tells Nosisana to leave the boyfriend, but she refuses, saying his beating is a sign of love. The second vignette says that a man named Thabo beats his girlfriend because he suspects she is unfaithful to him. Interviewees were asked what they thought of Nosisana and Thabo's situations and their actions. Some responses were lengthy, though in many cases further probing by interviewers was necessary to elicit responses beyond simple agreement or disagreement.

'Beating up is not love'

There was near complete agreement among all interviewees that Nosisana should leave her boyfriend, as “beating up is not love, I don’t think there’s love in beating” (V2, male, 46). Another affirmed that “It’s wrong once a person beats you up; that in itself just means he does not love you, someone who loves you would not beat you” (V8, female, 36). IPV was asserted to have become less acceptable in recent times,¹¹ as well as being a vestige of the rural heritage of the many Capetonians who have migrated from the Northern and Eastern Cape: “This story about the one beaten by her boyfriend, it was fine in the olden days but not anymore now. If the person is beating you in nowadays you must leave him because he does not want you; it was then when our mothers were ruled by sticks in rural areas but not anymore, no woman is beaten in these days because beating is not right” (V22, female, 36).

One interviewee stated, in accordance with our statistical findings and other studies, that acceptance of violence emerges from earlier exposure to violence:

“You see this goes back to how Nosisana was raised at home. She grew up seeing her mother being beaten up by her father and her mother would say her father loves her regardless of how much the father beats her up. So Nosisana learnt that someone who loves you can beat you up. There’s no such. You can’t beat up someone to show your affection. When you beat someone you leave wounds and that hurts” (V6, female, 43).

Another suggested that Nosisana herself must have been victimized, saying “I think Nosisana has been abused a lot. She’s probably been abused mentally too – because there is no love that requires hitting. If there’s a problem you sit down and resolve it” (V43, female, 34). It was also proposed that women’s acceptance of IPV is based in problems of self-esteem: “It goes back to self esteem and she does not love herself either, she is actually weak, which shows that her partner uses beating as a way of dominating in their relationship, due to her lack of self esteem, she feels without this person no one can love her” (V15, female, 24).

¹¹ Awareness and study of IPV and family violence in South Africa has been growing since the end of apartheid, especially since the passage of the new Domestic Violence Act in 1998.

One interviewee thought that Nosisana might be a drunk, which is why she accepts being beaten (V16, male, 43). In the bivariate analysis, binge drinking did make coloured respondents more likely to accept IPV against women, though this was not the case among Africans.¹² In interviews with coloured women both on wine farms in the Western Cape and in the Lavender Hill township of Cape Town, Gibson (2004) found that women who drank heavily accepted falling into a cycle of IPV in which they would both beat and be beaten by their male partners.

Two interviewees believed the violence of Nosisana's boyfriend to be acceptable. The first said that beating is a normal and acceptable part of a relationship—up to a point: “when you are dating someone...there are some days in which he will probably get to hit you, but you cannot tolerate someone who breaks your arms and bruises you. That isn't love” (V39, female, 54). The second interviewee was unequivocal, agreeing with Nosisana that “To show you that he loves you [a boyfriend] must beat you” (V41, female, 37).

Despite their personal disavowal of Nosisana's position and her boyfriend's violence, every interviewee agreed that there are people who think, like Nosisana, that beating is a manner of expressing love. One young woman said that “There are some people in our age group; if someone's boyfriend doesn't beat her up then she will think that her boyfriend is weak. Or maybe she even becomes the one who start the fight, wanting the boyfriend to beat her up, that happens” (V13, female, 26). Another agreed, saying “Those types of people [like Nosisana] still live in a box. Do you know that other girls challenge the man asking for a beating thinking that when the man beats her it means that he loves her” (V30, female, 42). A male interviewee argued that the attitudes of women like Nosisana make them complicit in their victimization:

“Nosisana is also encouraging a violent person like her boyfriend. So it means in her situation that both the perpetrator and the victim are co-operating with one another for this violence to occur. Because this happens to a lot of people and it seems like Nosisana is allowing this violence. At times it can be both the victim and perpetrators fault. So Nosisana might even deliberately enrage her boyfriend who in turn beats her. And then Nosisana will misinterpret that for love. So she will be happy when beaten because it shows that she is loved” (V38, male, 41).

¹² There is some evidence, though, from Gauteng province that binge drinking African women may be more accepting of abuse (see Morojele et al. 2006).

This echoes Wood and Jewkes's (1997: 43) young female interviewee in Cape Town saying that "I fell in love with him because he beat me up" and Kim and Motsei's (2002: 1246) findings in rural South Africa that men believe that "women enjoy punishment." That some women equate violence with love is also a problem in the coloured community. Elaine Salo, conducting ethnographic research in the Manenberg area of Cape Town was told by a girl discussing the beatings she received from her boyfriend that "He's demonstrating that he cares about me, Elaine. He's beating in his care and love" (Salo 2004: 252). A woman in Lavender Hill told Diana Gibson that "My boyfriend hit me because he was afraid that some other guy would take me away from him. My friend told me that he hit me because he loved me. My blue eye and split lip is a sign of his love for me" (2004: 15).

'He could be wrong...'

The second vignette, about Thabo beating his girlfriend on suspicion of her sexual infidelity, was also met with unanimous condemnation of the violence from interviewees. Primarily, interviewees said that Thabo was not right "because he does not have a proof about what he is suspecting, so he could be wrong" (V3, female, 32). "He's just assuming. I mean before you take such action you need to have seen or witnessed what you suspect. And then you can decide. You cannot just act based on what you heard via the grapevine" (V7, male, age not given). It was also frequently stated that Thabo should talk to his girlfriend about his suspicions, rather than beating her: "When you have suspicions in a relationships – you would immediately talk to your partner, sit down and talk. So I don't think beating up a person is a solution. Because you can beat up a person, and if they are really cheating they will just continue cheating" (V26, male, age not given).

If Thabo was not able to feel he could trust his girlfriend, interviewees thought he should simply break up with her, rather than resorting to violence. And if she did turn out to be cheating, he should simply leave her: "There's no need to be beating up his partner. Because he can just go out and research or find out more about his girlfriend – to establish the truthfulness of his suspicions. And then he can proceed and take action. And by action I don't mean beating up – he can simply just leave her" (V43, female, 34). This attitude, that breaking off a relationship rather than violence is the best way to resolve discovered sexual infidelity, may help explain why the

percentage differences between acceptance of violence for suspected and discovered sexual infidelity were not very large (see Tables 2 and 3). One interviewee did say, though, that if Thabo discovered that his girlfriend was, in fact, unfaithful, he should beat her up “so that she stops doing what she is doing. She stops cheating” (V41, female, 37). Many others did say, though, that they know of men who think like Thabo, and who would beat their partners on suspicion, rather than proof, of infidelity.

Thabo himself was suspected by interviewees to have been unfaithful to his girlfriend:

“Well the reason for him to beat her up in the first place, is because he too is untrustworthy. A thief does not want to be robbed. So Thabo beats her up because he is also a thief. He beats her up because he is doing the same thievery too. Thabo is a thief and he doesn’t want to be robbed, even though he robs Nosipho his girl. Every time she comes back he suspects her even though she did nothings. And that’s because the person who knows the road is the one who has travelled it. You can’t have experience in something you do not know!” (V39, female, 54).

Another interviewee also used the saying that ‘the one who knows the road is the one who has travelled it,’ and said that Thabo “needs to sit down and talk to her. If he wants her to inform him about her whereabouts – that’s fine – they can talk about that. But he must also come clean and put his cards on the table as well. Because he is probably the mischievous one” (V14, female, age not given). This suggests that social norms may be behind Thaler’s (2011a) finding that men who engage in concurrent partnerships are more likely to perpetrate violence against family members and intimate partners.

Conclusions

Norms accepting of intimate partner violence may contribute to the increased perpetration of IPV and to a failure to provide necessary support for victims. IPV is a deadly serious problem in South Africa, and thus it is important to examine what norms people hold about IPV and what may shape these norms. Through the use of a mixed-methods vignette analysis, this paper has looked systematically at variations in the acceptance of violence across gender and racial groups, as well as in different situations. Qualitative interview data has

provided a ground-level view of norms about IPV among people living in high-violence communities.

Acceptance of IPV is highest by far among African women, matching up with previous findings of high rates of IPV acceptance among women in Uganda (Koenig et al. 2003) Zambia (Lawoko 2006) and Zimbabwe (Hindin 2003). Levels of support for IPV being higher among women than among men appears to be particular to Africa, as cross-national studies elsewhere in the world have found men to be more accepting of IPV than women (see Nayak et al. 2003). Neighborhood social disorganization appears to have a negative effect on IPV approval across all scenarios, which is puzzling. One would expect neighborhoods characterized by criminality and delinquency to be more tolerant of IPV, but there may be unwritten norms that operate behind the scenes to control and structure violence (see Salo 2004; Jensen 2008). Socioeconomic status is generally unimportant in shaping norms about IPV. Individual behavioral variables have different effects depending on the demographic group. Coloured men and women who binge drink are more likely to be accepting of violence than their more sober counterparts. African men who engage in concurrent sexual partnerships are especially likely to accept IPV. The most consistent predictor of norms accepting IPV, however, is past experience with violence as a victim, witness, or perpetrator. Experiences of violence, especially at a young age, can make violence seem acceptable and increase the likelihood of future perpetration and victimization.

While the CAPS data are currently the best available on norms about violence among young people in South Africa, they also leave much to be desired. Since CAPS was not designed specifically to examine IPV, respondents were only asked one of the IPV vignette questions, splitting the sample into smaller groups. The white subsamples for each vignette were too small to be included in a disaggregated multivariate analysis and the smaller sample sizes increased the margin of error in the analyses that were conducted. Future studies should either employ a larger total sample, or ask respondents multiple vignette questions, though with care to randomize the order in which vignettes are presented. There also appears to be a social desirability bias with the interview data, as nearly all interviewees said violence was unacceptable, but that “others” thought it would be. Since large percentages of CAPS respondents, and especially African respondents, did say violence was acceptable, it would appear that the face-to-face interaction with the interviewer makes interviewees less comfortable in revealing acceptance of IPV. Further, while this study has tried to employ both quantitative and qualitative vignettes

complementarily, by using the same vignettes on both a survey and in interviews, one could gain a much richer picture of the norms underlying the quantitative data.

It is especially disheartening that more than a decade after the passage of South Africa’s 1998 Domestic Violence Act, norms of acceptance of IPV are in fact higher in Cape Town than they were in a national survey at the time of the act’s passage (CASE 1998). While the samples of the two studies were different, the high levels of violence in South Africa have not subsided. Norms accepting of violence are both a product of and an input to a cycle of violence in Cape Town and elsewhere (e.g. WHO 2010). Experiences of violence lead to an internalization of violent norms. To combat this cycle, educational and social marketing programs are needed to shift norms and strongly establish the unacceptability of violence. A microfinance intervention to change norms and reduce IPV victimization among women in South Africa has been successful on a small scale (see Pronyk et al. 2006), but larger structural interventions are needed as well (Hatcher et al. 2010). Interventions to change norms about IPV are most necessary in the African community, and especially among women. Women who are victims of IPV are not to be blamed for their victimization; however, when women accept the perpetration of IPV, whether against themselves or other women, this permits the perpetuation of a culture of violent masculinity. Empowering women and making IPV unacceptable in homes and broader communities can help break the cycle of violence.

Tables

Table 1. Independent and Dependent Variables Used

Variable Name	CAPS Question	Definition
Disobedience	I23.7 [I23.8 = 6](Wave 5)	Yes or maybe it is right for a

		man to hit a woman who disobeys him
Suspected Sex (Female)	I23.7 [I23.8 = 1] (Wave 5)	Yes or maybe it is right for a husband to hit his wife if he suspects she is having sex with another man
Discovered Sex (Female)	I23.7 [I23.8 = 2] (Wave 5)	Yes or maybe it is right for a husband to hit his wife if he discovers she is having sex with another man
Dislikes Food	I23.7 [I23.8 = 5] (Wave 5)	Yes or maybe it is right for a husband to hit his wife if he is unhappy with the food she cooks
Suspected Sex (Male)	I23.7 [I23.8 = 3] (Wave 5)	Yes or maybe it is right for a woman to ask her brother to assault her boyfriend if she suspects he has been having sex with another woman
Discovered Sex (Male)	I23.7 [I23.8 = 4] (Wave 5)	Yes or maybe it is right for a woman to ask her brother to assault her boyfriend if she discovers he has been having sex with another woman
Childhood Violence		Often or very often physically threatened, shoved, hit, or otherwise violently abused as a child
Family Violence	I25.2 (Wave 5)	Family members hit one another when angry
Perpetrated FIPV	J15 (Wave 5)	Hit or physically assaulted an intimate partner or adult family member in the past three years
Assaulted Stranger	J17 (Wave 5)	Hit or physically assaulted someone he/she does not know well in the past three years
Assault Victim	I29.1 (Wave 5)	Been a victim of physical assault in the past three years
Criminal Friends	G.16.7 (Wave 3)	Has friends who have been in trouble with the police
Neighborhood Social Disorganization	I.26 (Wave 5)	Personally knows people in his/her neighbourhood who deal drugs, steal, or are or have been in jail
Unemployed	D.1 (Wave 5)	Respondent was not working

		at the time of the survey
No Secondary School Diploma	C.7 (Wave 5)	Highest level of education completed was lower than Grade 12/Standard 10/Matric
Household Food Insecurity	D.34 (Wave 5)	Household did not have enough to eat for at least 1 of the last 30 days
Binge Drink	F.11 (Wave 5)	If the respondent drinks alcohol, he/she consumes 7 or more alcoholic drinks on a typical drinking day

Table 2. Percentages Accepting IPV

	Suspected Sex (F)	Discovered Sex (F)	Dislikes Food	Disobedience	Suspected Sex (M)	Discovered Sex (M)
Male	25	26	5	13	17	16
Female	27	31	14	18	24	25
African	35	43	17	27	26	27
Coloured	21	19	4	8	20	19
White	0	6	10	0	3	3
African Men	28	38	2	17	10	18
African Women	42	47	27	35	37	33
Coloured Men	25	20	6	10	25	16
Coloured Women	17	19	2	7	15	21

Table 3. Bivariate Logistic Analysis of IPV Acceptance by Demographic Group

	Suspected Sex (Female)	Discovered Sex (Female)	Dislikes Food	Disobedience	Suspected Sex (Male)	Discovered Sex (Male)
African Man		+	--		--	
African Woman	++	++	++	++	++	++

Coloured Man		-	--			
Coloured Woman	--	--	--	--	--	
+ odds ratio >1 but <2 ++ odds ratio >2 - odds ratio <1 but >0.5 -- odds ratio <0.5 Only results significant at least at the 10% level are reported.						

Table 4. Multivariate Logistic Models of Acceptance of IPV by Type, Controlling for Vignette Version

	Any Situation		IPV Against Women		Proxy Beating of Boyfriend	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Female	1.36**	1.06 – 1.74	1.23	0.91 – 1.67	1.56**	1.04 – 2.33
African†	9.38***	3.70 – 23.78	12.48***	3.76 – 41.39	6.21**	1.43 – 26.97
Coloured†	4.57***	1.79 – 11.66	4.71**	1.41 – 15.76	4.35*	1.00 – 18.92
Childhood Violence	1.06	0.74 – 1.51	0.91	0.56 – 1.45	1.56*	0.93 – 2.61
Family Violence	1.77***	1.30 – 2.40	1.91***	1.30 – 2.79	1.89***	1.18 – 3.04
Perpetrated FIPV	1.16	0.80 – 1.68	1.37	0.88 – 2.13	0.83	0.44 – 1.57
Assaulted Stranger	1.33	0.87 – 2.02	1.30	0.77 – 2.19	1.30	0.66 – 2.56
Assault Victim	1.30	0.91 – 1.85	1.20	0.77 – 1.87	1.52	0.88 – 2.63
Criminal Friends	1.08	0.83 – 1.42	1.09	0.78 – 1.52	1.15	0.76 – 1.76
Neighborhood Social Disorganization	0.71***	0.56 – 0.91	0.66***	0.49 – 0.89	0.91	0.61 – 1.35
Unemployed	0.86	0.66 – 1.11	0.74*	0.54 – 1.03	1.03	0.69 – 1.55
No Secondary School Diploma	1.36*	0.99 – 1.87	1.47*	0.98 – 2.19	1.15	0.71 – 1.86
Household Food Insecurity	0.77*	0.58 – 1.02	0.80	0.57 – 1.13	0.61**	0.38 – 0.98
Binge Drink	1.43**	1.05 – 1.93	1.48**	1.01 – 2.18	1.36	0.85 – 2.17
N	2399		1570		829	
Pseudo r-squared	0.12		0.13		0.05	

All variables dummy variables. Significance: *= $p < 0.10$; **= $p < 0.05$; ***= $p < 0.01$.
†Reference category is white respondents.

Table 5. Vignette Version Results from Multivariate Models of Acceptance of IPV by Type (Table 3)

	Any Situation		Violence Against Women		Proxy Beating of Boyfriend	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Disobedience	1.00		1.00			
Suspected Sex (Female)	11.03***	5.78 – 21.04	3.45***	2.26 – 5.27		
Discovered Sex (Female)	12.81***	6.73 – 24.38	4.11***	2.70 – 6.26		
Dislikes Food	2.59***	1.28 – 5.21	0.79	0.48 – 1.30		
Suspected Sex (Male)	8.04***	4.02 – 15.40			1.00	
Discovered Sex (Male)	7.98***	4.15 – 15.37			1.01	0.71 – 1.43

Significance: ***=p<0.01.
 The 'Disobedience' version of the vignette was the reference category for 'Any Situation' and 'Violence Against Women.' 'Suspected Sex (Male)' was the reference category for 'Proxy Beating of Boyfriend.'

Table 6. Multivariate Logistic Models of Acceptance of IPV by Situation Among African and Coloured Respondents

	Suspected Sex (Female)		Discovered Sex (Female)		Dislikes Food		Disobedience		Suspected Sex (Male)		Discovered Sex (Male)	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Female	1.08	0.64— 1.83	0.96	0.58— 1.58	3.45**	1.27— 9.36	1.59	0.81— 3.14	1.33	0.77— 2.33	1.98**	1.07— 3.66
African†	2.10**	1.19— 3.70	3.32***	1.90— 5.80	3.27**	1.16— 9.21	3.80***	1.84— 7.84	1.44	0.83	1.55	0.85— 2.82
Childhood Violence	0.90	0.34— 2.39	0.72	0.36— 1.47	1.69	0.49— 5.84	1.59	0.55— 4.59	1.87*	0.95— 3.68	1.18	0.52— 2.68
Family Violence	1.44	0.71— 2.92	1.67	0.86— 3.24	2.11	0.82— 5.38	2.00	0.87— 4.58	1.85*	0.96— 3.56	2.11**	1.03— 4.32
Perpetrated FIPV	1.09	0.50— 2.38	1.89*	0.90— 3.96	1.09	0.24— 4.99	1.50	0.63— 3.59	0.86	0.35— 2.11	0.77	0.29— 2.02
Assaulted Stranger	2.22*	0.91— 5.43	0.72	0.30— 1.74	1.62	0.25— 10.59	1.55	0.60— 4.00	0.92	0.37— 2.29	2.28	0.78— 6.63
Assault Victim	1.50	0.70— 3.22	0.89	0.40— 1.97	1.08	0.29— 4.12	1.47	0.62— 3.50	1.36	0.62— 2.95	2.07*	0.92— 4.66
Criminal Friends	0.81	0.46— 1.43	0.93	0.53— 1.63	2.52*	0.85— 7.45	1.35	0.66— 2.74	1.04	0.59— 1.85	1.38	0.72— 2.63
Neighborhood Social Disorganization	0.66*	0.40— 1.08	0.78	0.47— 1.29	0.27***	0.11— 0.66	0.60	0.31— 1.14	0.91	0.53— 1.56	0.94	0.51— 1.72
Unemployed	0.68	0.39— 1.19	0.62*	0.35— 1.08	0.96	0.39— 2.36	1.60	0.86— 3.01	1.10	0.64— 1.88	0.93	0.49— 1.76
No Secondary School Diploma	3.24***	1.36— 7.70	1.36	0.71— 2.61	0.96	0.34— 2.67	0.46**	0.23— 0.91	1.32	0.65— 2.68	1.06	0.53— 2.12
Household Food Insecurity	0.95	0.53— 1.71	0.91	0.51— 1.63	0.77	0.31— 1.93	0.80	0.40— 1.61	0.60	0.32— 1.14	0.56	0.26— 1.19
Binge Drink	1.61	0.85—	1.17	0.60—	1.06	0.27—	2.37**	1.00—	1.18	0.64—	1.58	0.75—

		3.06		2.31		4.21		5.60		2.19		3.33
N		391		395		390		372		414		375
Pseudo r-squared		0.06		0.07		0.16		0.12		0.04		0.05
All variables dummy variables. Significance: *= $p < 0.10$; **= $p < 0.05$; ***= $p < 0.01$.												
†Coloured respondents are the reference category.												

Table 7. Multivariate Logistic Models of Acceptance of IPV by Demographic Group, Controlling for Vignette Version

	African		Coloured		African Men		African Women		Coloured Men		Coloured Women	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Female	2.12***	1.47 – 3.05	0.82	0.57 – 1.18								
Childhood Violence	0.79	0.44 – 1.43	1.35	0.85 – 2.14	0.90	0.29 – 2.85	0.76	0.38 – 1.54	1.67	0.86 – 3.23	1.01	0.51 – 2.00
Family Violence	1.79***	1.21 – 2.65	1.37	0.80 – 2.33	0.45	0.16 – 1.29	2.38***	1.53 – 3.72	1.56	0.65 – 3.76	1.41	0.69 – 2.86
Perpetrated FIPV	1.10	0.65 – 1.88	1.51	0.88 – 2.59	0.96	0.45 – 2.02	1.26	0.56 – 2.80	2.18**	1.03 – 4.61	1.15	0.49 – 2.71
Assaulted Stranger	1.53	0.83 – 2.83	0.93	0.51 – 1.72	2.79**	1.21 – 6.47	0.67	0.23 – 1.94	1.25	0.61 – 2.54	0.36	0.68 – 1.90
Assault Victim	1.22	0.77 – 1.96	1.35	0.75 – 2.42	3.12***	1.35 – 7.23	0.92	0.49 – 1.74	1.37	0.55 – 3.41	1.44	0.64 – 3.27
Criminal Friends	1.09	0.71 – 1.66	1.02	0.71 – 1.47	1.06	0.59 – 1.92	1.20	0.61 – 2.35	1.67**	1.01 – 2.74	0.55*	0.28 – 1.07
Neighborhood Social Disorganization	0.77	0.56 – 1.07	0.75	0.51 – 1.11	1.67	0.91 – 3.08	0.56***	0.36 – 0.85	0.32***	0.18 – 0.56	1.68*	0.91 – 3.11
Unemployed	0.87	0.63 – 1.22	0.77	0.49 – 1.20	1.14	0.64 – 2.05	0.66*	0.43 – 1.02	1.11	0.62 – 2.01	0.48*	0.23 – 1.04
No Secondary	1.19	0.81 –	1.99**	1.05 –	1.17	0.57 –	1.21	0.74 –	3.24**	1.07 –	1.72	0.76 –

School Diploma		1.77		3.75		2.38		1.98		9.80		3.88
Household Food Insecurity	0.70**	0.51 – 0.97	1.37	0.71 – 2.62	1.01	0.58— 1.79	0.61**	0.40— 0.91	0.89	0.32— 2.48	1.80	0.74— 4.41
Binge Drink	1.33	0.81 – 2.19	1.52**	1.02 – 2.25	1.19	0.64— 2.19	1.38	0.42— 4.52	1.42	0.83— 2.41	1.85*	0.97— 3.51
N	1086		1186		479		607		562		624	
Pseudo r-squared	0.12		0.10		0.21		0.10		0.14		0.13	
All variables dummy variables. Significance: *= $p < 0.10$; **= $p < 0.05$; ***= $p < 0.01$.												

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