

# Evidence Brief



(Photo Credit: Ruari-Santiago McBride)

## What we know

Violence against women is a leading cause of illness and death and occurs in the lives of one-third of women globally.<sup>1</sup> Prevalence of violence against women in South Africa is alarmingly high, with 32% of men reporting violence towards partners,<sup>2</sup> and 28% having ever raped.<sup>3</sup>

We know that certain beliefs about manhood contribute to men's use of violence. Research suggests that men who equate manhood with toughness, aggression, power over women, heavy alcohol, and many sexual partners are more likely to use violence.<sup>4</sup>

## What we need to learn

Most evidence on violence against women comes from speaking with women. It is crucial to understand how men themselves report using violence against women, and to identify ways to intervene in this human rights challenge.

There is an urgent need to engage men in challenging rigid ideas about manhood (often called 'masculinities') and encourage men to become agents of change in their own communities.

## How we did the research

We spoke with men from a peri-urban community on the outskirts of Johannesburg, where many people live in informal settlements.

Men could volunteer to take part if they lived in one of 18 study areas - called "clusters". Using audio software on tablets, we asked participants to self-report on their lives and use of violence.

Participants signed informed consent and were reimbursed R50 to cover time and transport. The study was approved by the ethics committee of University of Witwatersrand.

## What is an informal settlement?

An informal settlement is where people live in crowded conditions without access to water, sanitation, or secure housing tenure.

Nearly one billion people live in informal settlements and the number will likely double by 2030.<sup>5</sup> In sub-Saharan Africa 56% of the urban population lives in informal settlements.<sup>6</sup>

Informal settlements often share environmental risks like:

- garbage mountains
- stagnant ground water
- overcrowding
- poorly constructed homes
- physical hazards (floods, fires)

They also tend to have ongoing structural problems such as:

- job insecurity
- lack of housing titles
- poor transport networks
- stigmatisation
- underfunding by government

People who live in informal settlements may benefit collectively from interventions, but too little is known about their health and needs at present.<sup>7</sup>



# Research Findings

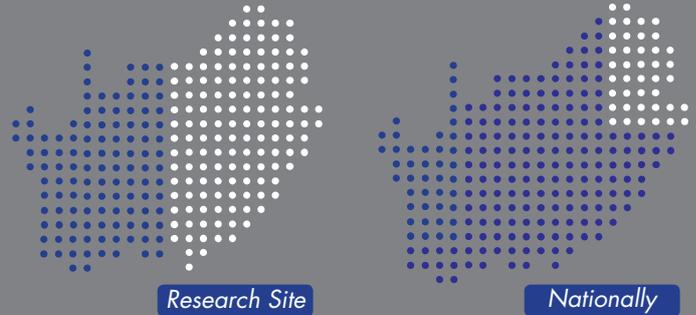
## Who we spoke to

Men taking part were between 18 to 40 years old, with the average participant aged 27. Most men lived in a shack or single room. Men had an average monthly income of R1500 and only half were employed in the past 3 months.

Most participants were from other provinces in South Africa and had been living in this township for an average of eight years. About half finished high school and had regular access to enough food.

## 54% of men enacted violence against women in the past 12 months -

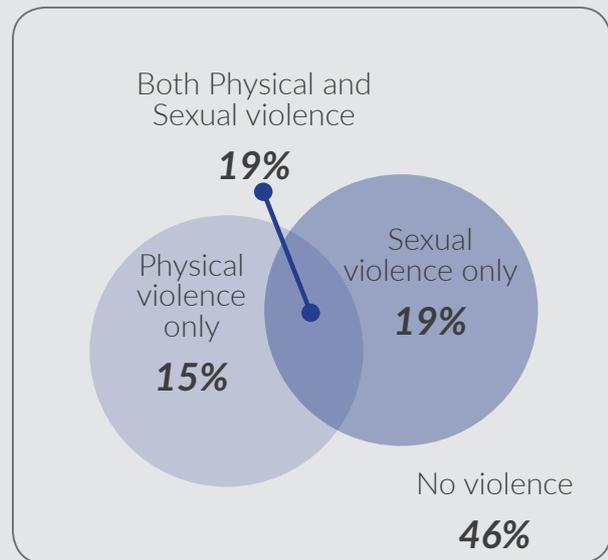
a rate more than double the prevalence in other parts of the country.<sup>8</sup>



## Majority of men used recent VAWG

In the past year, 54% of participants used violence against women. This includes physical or sexual violence towards a partner and sexual violence towards a non-partner.

Of these men, the majority (60%) enacted violence multiple times. One-fifth used both physical and sexual violence against women.



Past year forms of violence

## Gender beliefs & behaviours

Believe that paying lobola means a man "owns" the woman **35%**

Holds sexually entitled views **69%**

Control woman's clothes, friends, or movements **65%**

Used a sex worker in past year **21%**

Transactional sex in past year **47%**

Multiple partners in past year **50%**

## Gender roles are unequal

Some participants held strong beliefs that women are less deserving of respect and decision-making power:

- Two-thirds expect their partner to agree to sex when the man wants it.
- A majority control the clothes a woman wears, the friends she sees, or where she goes.

Men's economic roles led to sexual partnerships that were unequal:

- One in five used a sex worker.
- Transactional sex and multiple partners in the past year were reported by half.

## Past trauma & abuse is common

We learned a number of important things about how men in this informal settlement have been treated by others throughout their lives:

- The majority of men experienced physical childhood abuse or neglect.
- More than one-third had been raped or molested as a child.
- More than half of men experienced one or more traumas as adults such as witnessing a rape or murder or being tortured or robbed at gunpoint.

## Exposure to childhood abuse

84%  
Physically abused  
or neglected



37%  
Sexually abused



## Exposure to trauma as adults

56%  
One or more  
adult traumas



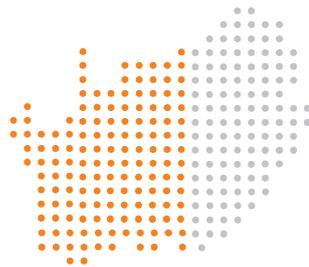
## Drinking & depression are the norm

- Four out of every ten men reported depressive symptoms.
- Nearly two-thirds reported problem drinking - the type of alcohol use that causes health problems.

59%



Problem  
drinking



Research Site

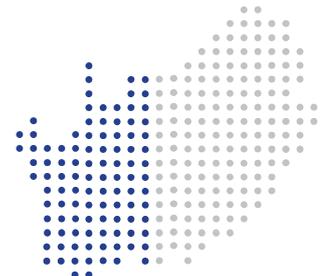


Nationally

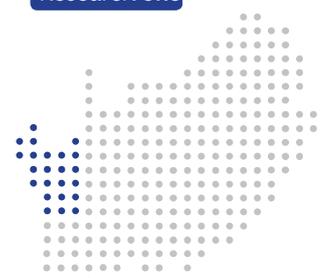
42%



Depressive  
Symptoms



Research Site



Nationally

*Depression and problem drinking rates in this study triple the national average.<sup>9,10</sup>*

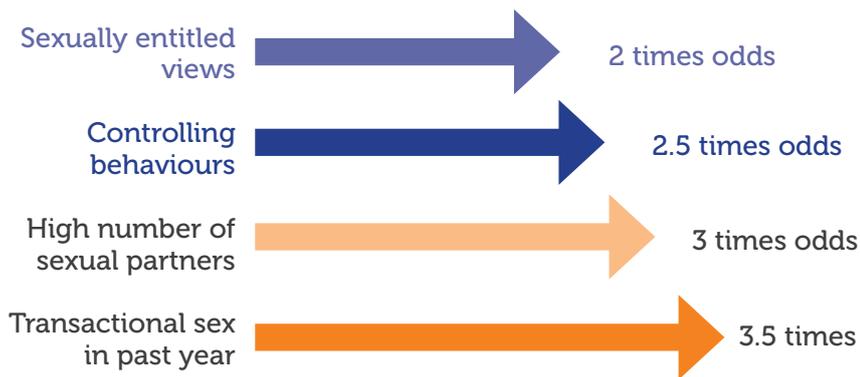
## Personal cost of violence against women



**Queen\*** is a middle-aged woman who lives in an informal settlement. She experiences sexual, physical, emotional and financial forms of violence from her boyfriend, Thabo.\* Thabo has many girlfriends and only contacts Queen when he wants to have sex. Despite having multiple partners, Thabo refuses to wear a condom. However, Queen is scared to refuse Thabo's demands because she fears he will beat and rape her if she does. Queen has not reported Thabo to the police because Thabo threatened that if he was ever sent to prison he would find after release and kill her.

\*Narrative recounted to fieldworker. Pseudonyms used to protect the identity of participants.

## Odds of VAWG by Gender Views & Behaviours



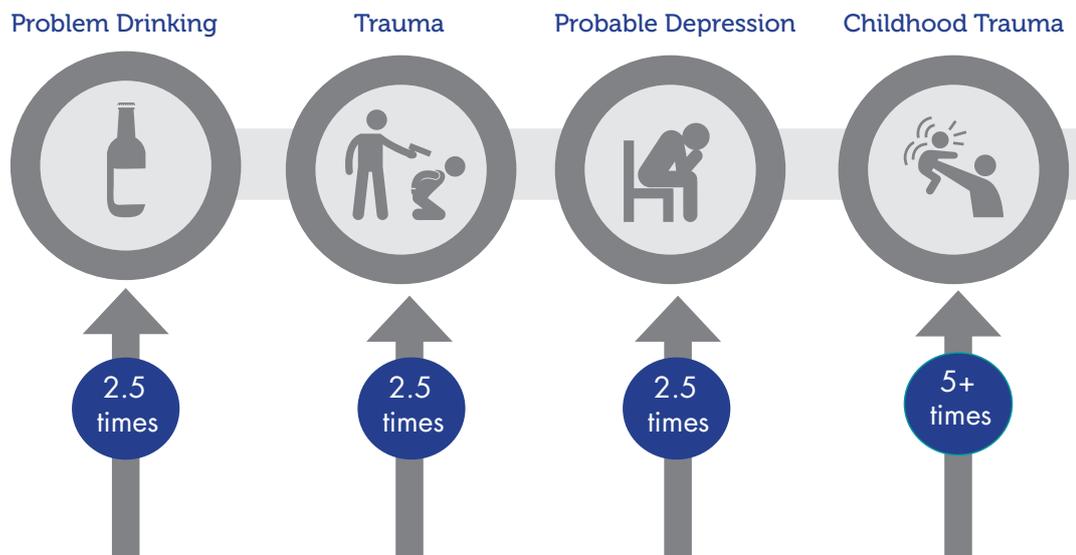
## How gender norms drive violence

Men who hold views like “a married woman cannot refuse sex with her husband” had double the odds of using violence against women. Controlling a partner more than doubles the odds that men used violence.

Men with more than seven partners in the past year had triple the odds of using VAWG. Past year transactional sex (a term for paying for small items like cell phones or food) more than triples odds of recent violence.

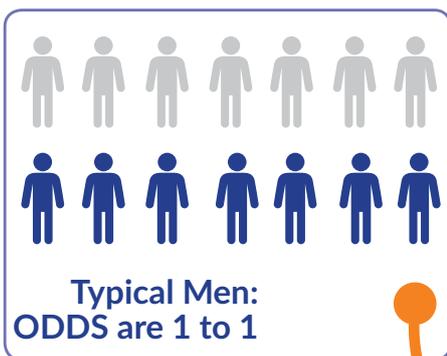
## Why men’s life experience matters

Problem drinking more than doubled the odds that participants used recent violence. Those with depressive symptoms or adult trauma were 2.5 times as likely. Participants experiencing child abuse had more than 5 times the odds of recent violence against women.



## What “odds” of violence against women means

Take 14 typical men in a peri-urban settlement



About half, or 7, would use violence against women

Now imagine that 14 similar men (same income, schooling, housing) have problem drinking



About 10 of these men would use violence against women



## Key findings

More than half of participants reported recent use of violence against women. High rates of violence reflect structural problems of informal settlements, where lack of employment, secure housing, and social services fail to meet resident needs. Urgent change is needed to ensure women, children, and men themselves attain human rights guaranteed by South Africa's constitution.

## What happens now?

This research is part of an ongoing project called Sonke CHANGE Trial, where we are testing ways to reduce violence against women. Half of the neighbourhoods in this informal settlement will receive an intervention that uses community education and advocacy to shift social norms around men's use of violence against women. Results should be available in late 2018.



Men taking part in a Sonke CHANGE workshop that addresses equitable views of manhood and reducing violence. (Photo Credit: Ruari Santiago-McBride)

## References

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