

# Men's Use of Violence against Women: Urgent change is needed in Diepsloot

## What we know

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a leading cause of illness and death among one-third of women globally. Prevalence of VAWG is alarmingly high. Large studies among South African men found that 32% used violence towards partners,<sup>1</sup> and 28% of men have ever raped.<sup>2</sup>

We know that some beliefs about manhood contribute to men's harmful health behaviors, including their use of violence. Research suggests that men who equate manhood with toughness, aggression, power over women, heavy use of alcohol, and the pursuit of many sexual partners are more likely to use violence.<sup>3</sup>

## What we need to find out

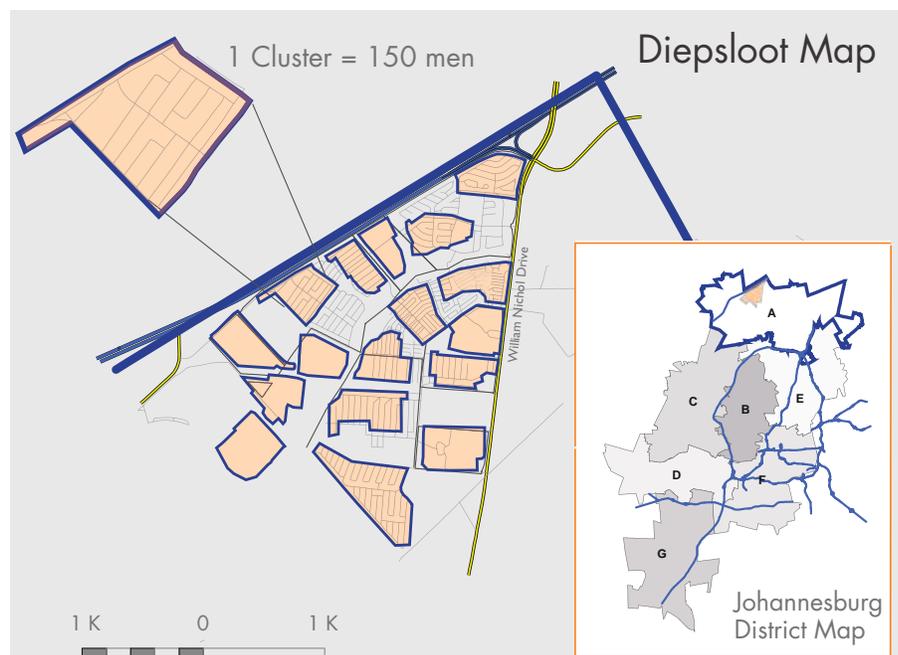
Most of the evidence for understanding violence comes from speaking with women. It is crucial to understand how men themselves report violence against women, and to identify ways to intervene in this human rights challenge.

The evidence base for precisely how interventions can shift masculinities is limited. There is an urgent need to engage men in challenging rigid ideas about manhood and encourage men to become agents of change.

## How we did the research

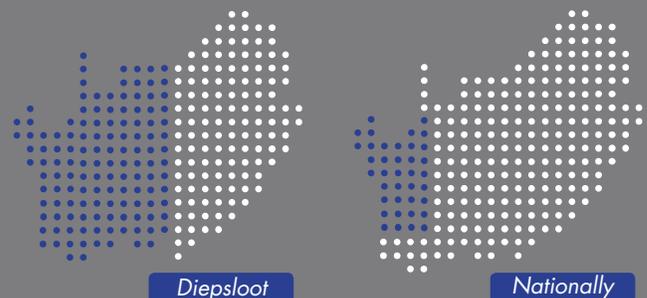
We spoke with 2 600 men from Diepsloot, a peri-urban settlement north of Johannesburg.

Men lived in one of 18 neighbourhoods - called "clusters" - devised through a community mapping process. Using audio software on tablets, we asked men to self-report socio-demographics and use of violence. Men agreed to take part by signing informed consent and were reimbursed R 50 to cover time and transport. The study was approved by the University of Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee.



56% 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>4</sup>



## Who we spoke to

Men were 18 to 40 years old and most lived in a shack or single room. Men had an average monthly income of R1500 and half were employed in the past 3 months. Less than half of men finished matric and just over half were food secure.

Most men were from South Africa (83%), but only one-third were born in Gauteng. Men had been living in Diepsloot for a median of 7 years.

## What we learned: Violence rates are high.

In the past year, 56% of men used violence against women. This included physical or sexual violence with a partner as well as sexual violence towards a non-partner.

One-third of men we spoke to used both physical and sexual violence against women. A majority (60%) enacted violence multiple times.

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

Holds sexually entitled views **76%**

Control woman's clothes, friends, or movements **70%**

7+ partners in past year **27%**

Paid for sex in past year **46%**

## Gender beliefs & behaviours

### Childhood abuse & trauma are common.

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

- The majority of men experienced at least one type of physical or sexual childhood abuse.
- 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.

### Mental health & drinking problems are high.

*"As the four of us went down the street, the guy approached us. It was payday.. I was also drunk...all I heard was 'hands-up!' and there was a gun pointed to my head. The guy told me he would shoot me, I told him to do so and to my surprise, he did. He shot me on the chest twice. I fell into the river."*  
- Participant, 29 years old, unemployed

Mental health among men is at markedly poor levels:

- Half of men have probable depression, as measured by a brief screener of depressive symptoms.
- Probable post-traumatic stress disorder was reported by half of men.
- Three-quarters of men report problem drinking – high alcohol use that interferes with daily lives.

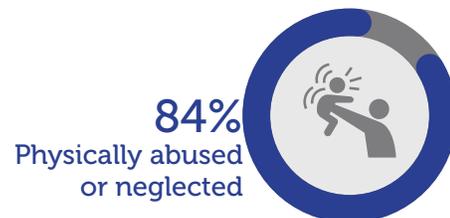
### Inequitable gender views are the norm.

There are strong beliefs among some men that women are less deserving of respect and decision-making power:

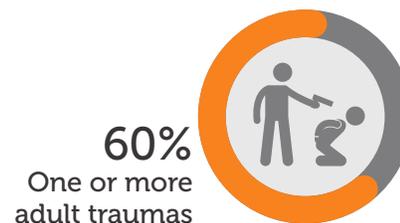
- One-third of men believe that wives should not be able to refuse sex.
- More than half expect their partner to agree to sex when the man wants it.
- A majority of men control the clothes a woman wears, the friends she sees, or where she goes.
- One-fifth of men had sex with a sex worker in the past year. Nearly half had transactional sex in the past year.

Men reporting recent violence against women

## Exposure to childhood abuse



## Exposure to trauma as adults



74.7%



Problem drinking

49.8%



Probable depression

50.3%



Probable PTSD

## Mental Health

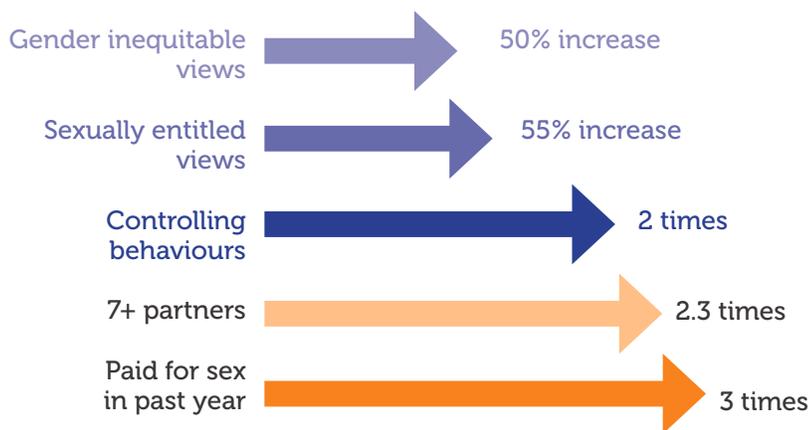
*Rates of mental health & alcohol problems triple the national average.<sup>5</sup>*

## Sociodemographics & violence

were more likely to live in crowded households and live apart from their partner. They were less likely to hold matric and were slightly younger. Having food security reduced odds of recent violence by 40%. South Africans and non-nationals used similar rates of violence against women. Income did not seem to predict violence use.



## Gender attitudes, behaviours & violence



## How gender norms drive violence against women

Men with views like “women are unequal” and “men should make the decisions” have higher odds of violence against women. Sexually entitled views (e.g. a married woman cannot refuse sex with her husband) increase odds of violence. Controlling a partner doubles the odds that men used violence.

Men with 7 or more partners in the past year had double the odds of using violence. Paying for sex, (either with a sex worker or with small items like cell phones or food), triples the odds of recent violence.

## Why men’s life experience matters

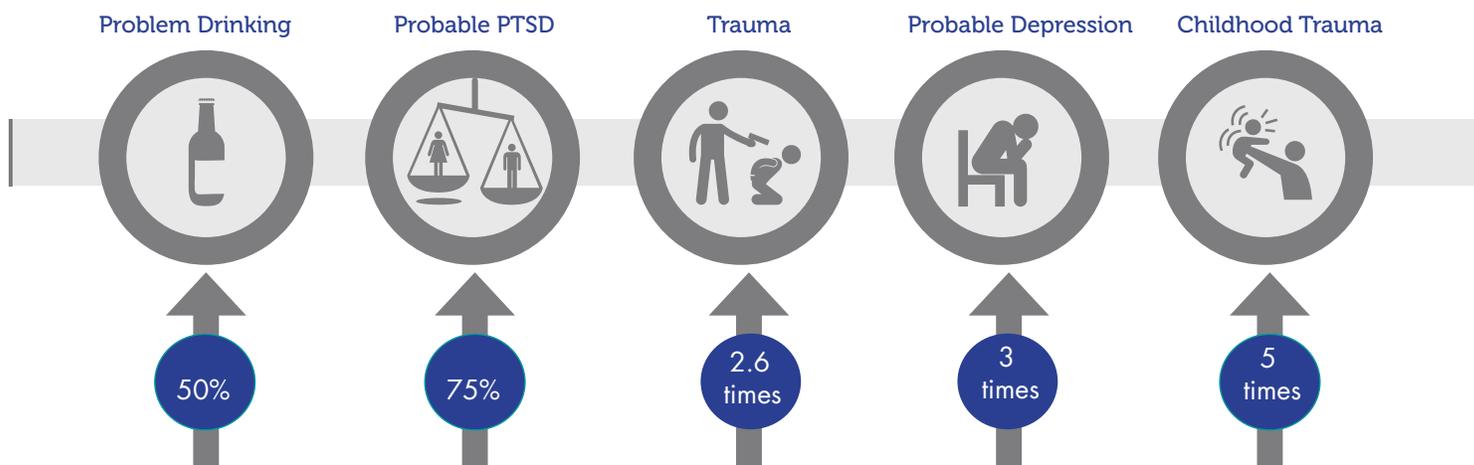
Men experiencing child abuse were 5 times as likely to use recent violence against women. Depressed men were 3 times as likely. Men reporting adult trauma were 2.6 times as likely. Men who reported probable PTSD had 75% higher odds of also reporting recent violence against women.

Even after controlling for socio-demographics,

these strong relationships between life experiences and violence hold.

Problem drinking increased violence odds by 50%. But we learned that alcohol use might not lead to violence on its own, and may instead be a coping mechanism for dealing with past traumatic events and poor mental health.

## Mental health & recent violence



## What do these findings mean?

Prevalence of violence against women is higher in this study than seen elsewhere, with more than half of men reporting recent use of violence. Violence against women costs South Africa R 28.4 billion annually<sup>6</sup> and the potential burden to the health and wellbeing of women in Diepsloot is staggering.

**It is high time to make elimination of violence against women a priority by securing a government strategic plan and targeted funding.**

Many of the challenges raised by this research remain poorly addressed in informal settlements like Diepsloot. For example, there are only two

clinics for a population of a half million and only three NGOs offering mental health care. Taverns are often the only public spaces where men can gather, as assets like soccer fields or community halls are scarce.

Gender inequitable norms and behaviors like controlling a partner or paying for sex need to be curbed. Given high rates of problem drinking, depressive symptoms, childhood abuse, and trauma, it is clear that men's mental health needs to be addressed urgently. Mental health costs the country R 4.6 billion annually - so investment now would pay off.

Social challenges, so clearly a priority for this population, are allotted only 1% of Diepsloot's budget. Urgent change is needed if we are to ensure that women, children, and men themselves attain the human rights guaranteed by South Africa's constitution.



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

This research is part of an ongoing project called Sonke CHANGE Trial, funded by the What Works to Prevent Violence programme and UKAID. We are testing whether 18 months of the Sonke CHANGE intervention can reduce violence against women in Diepsloot. Half of the neighbourhoods will receive the Sonke CHANGE intervention, a community mobilisation and local advocacy approach to shift the social norms around men's violence. Results should be available in late 2018.



A Wits-Sonke Innovation Project • [whatworks.co.za](http://whatworks.co.za)

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