

CONCLUSION

The analysis in this paper has attempted to argue for integrated and holistic approaches to working with men and the need for multi-dimensional approaches that target intervention at the level of the individual, institution and society. None of these initiatives should be seen as mutually exclusive but rather complementary and part of a broad-based intervention strategy that attempts to challenge and re-define dominant attitudes and values in society. Unless we tackle head-on the need to transform attitudes and values that perpetuate unequal gender relations, violence against women will continue.

The task is a huge one and must be seen as part of a process to engender fundamental social change. In the context of South Africa the ongoing transformation of our society in terms of race relations is a source of hope and inspiration. Much of the learning around the construction of racial identities can be applied to the debate around gender relations and manifestation of violence against women. The history of oppression in this country has revealed that we need to address both the oppressed (victims of abuse) and the oppressor (perpetrators) if lasting and sustainable change is to be achieved. This implies that working with men to eradicate violence against women is part of the solution.

Narrow approaches based on working with criminal justice reform alone will not address the challenges and complexities inherent in understandings of gender-based violence. While the reform of the criminal justice system is essential in ensuring enhanced safety for women and children, interventions at an institutional level must be complemented by training and awareness-raising for officials working within the sector, including police officers, judges, magistrates, probation officers. International experience of behaviour change programmes among African-American communities

and Australian indigenous communities suggest that past experiences of institutionalised oppression may exacerbate intergenerational trauma and account for high drop-out rates of programme participants. Interventions must therefore be tailored to take account of socio-political factors affecting specific communities, together with an understanding of cultural specificity.

Although the overall picture on the merits of perpetrator programmes is unclear, growing evidence exists of the efficacy and positive impact of well co-ordinated interventions that actually maximise the potential of any associated perpetrator intervention. Perpetrator programmes have to be located within well co-ordinated holistic interventions. The same can be said of victim support programmes. The challenge for South Africa will be to build on local experience whilst designing nationally agreed upon, culturally relevant models of intervention that encompass the main ways of working with men. Once such models are designed, the next challenge will be to pilot them in a way that can be thoroughly evaluated. Effective methodologies of co-ordination and implementation will be required, and all this must occur within the context of scarce resources.

Although challenging, the potential for positive impacts in reducing levels of sexual and gender abuse is real and worth struggling for. The current situation of high levels of domestic violence and gender abuse cannot be ignored. There is an urgent need for a national forum to agree upon key themes and methods for tackling these problems. Just as the democratic revolution cannot be considered complete without economic equity for all, in the same way South Africans, both men and women, cannot consider themselves truly liberated until they have been liberated from the persistent oppressions of violence and abuse against women.

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The ongoing and unrelenting global scourge of violence against women and children remains one of the greatest challenges of our time. Most activities seek to protect women and children - usually after the fact of violence - through rights, policies and laws that seek to protect them, either through punishment of offenders or prevention through legal interdicts. These approaches largely address the effects rather than the causes of violence, and programmes working with men remain limited and are of relatively recent origin in South Africa. International experience suggests that this is a contested area of work, not only in the competition around resources that such programmes generate, but also the extent to which these programmes can and do transform attitudes and behaviour at individual, community and societal levels.

INTERFUND identified the need to understand and develop effective strategies of working with men in South Africa, with the aim of impacting on the eradication of violence against women. The difficult question, however, was what kind of programmes could work in South Africa and, thus, what should INTERFUND and other donors be funding?

Working with men to end gender-based violence explores this question, and attempts to understand the social, economic and/ or cultural factors contributing to violence against women; examine the current practices of 'men against violence against women' organisations and assess their impact; and identify successful approaches and strategies and the extent to which they can contribute to reducing and/or eradicating violence against women.

The report draws on international debates as well as local experiences to assess the possibilities and constraints of working with men in South Africa, and locates the idea of working with men within the broader achievements, challenges and priorities identified by the state and civil society in seeking to address the huge problem of gender-based violence.



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