

# Counselling as an intervention strategy for men who use violence in their intimate relationships

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# Intimate Partner Violence

- International statistics consistently prove that the **most prevalent form of violence** that threaten people, regardless of country, culture, religion, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, **take place in intimate relationships**
- Intimate partner violence's (IPV) lifetime prevalence have been reported to vary from 15% to 71% according to a WHO multi-country study
- IPV is recognised as a legitimate human rights, public health and societal concern, necessitating effective interventions

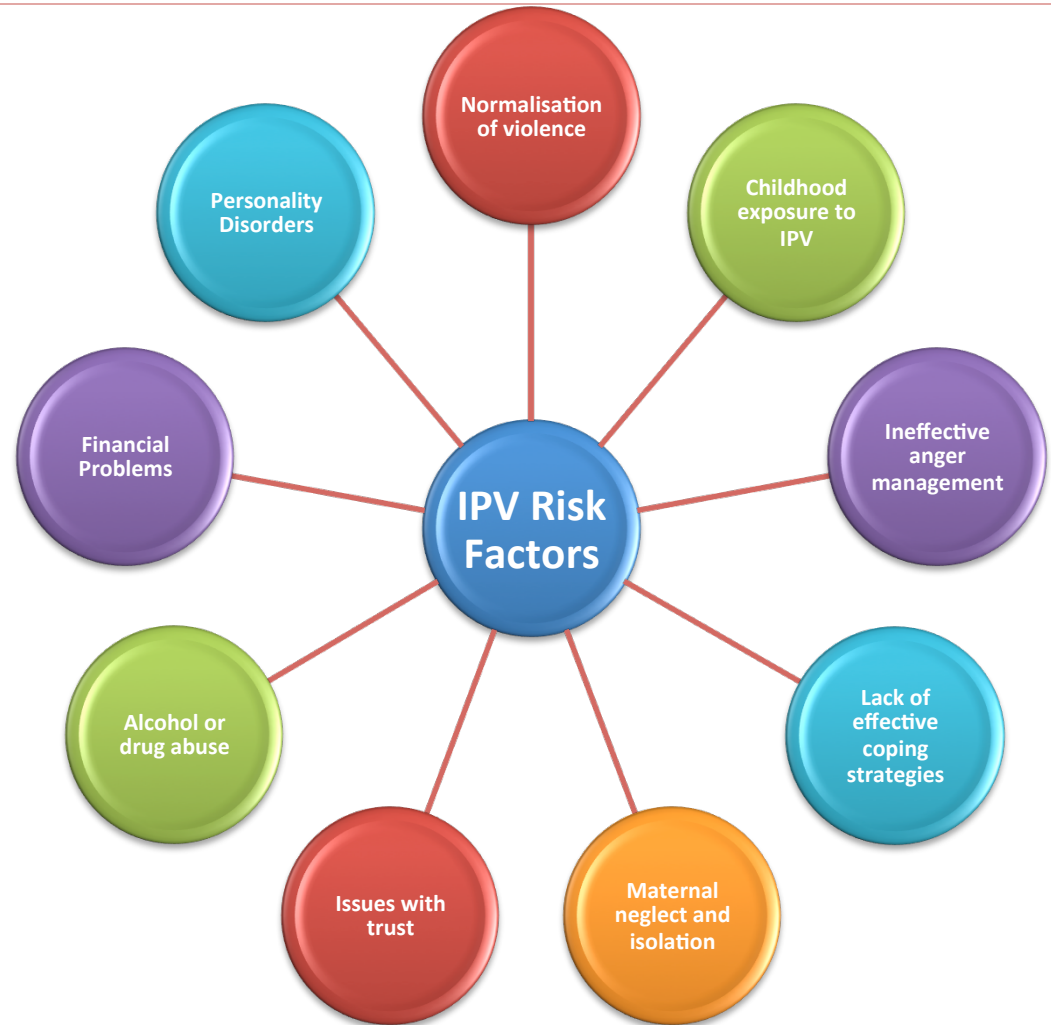
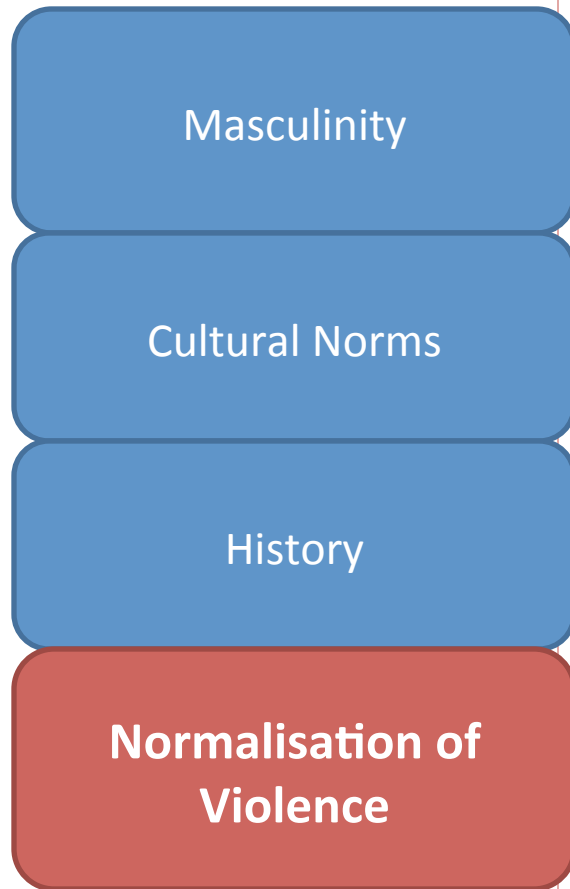




# Defining Intimate Partner Violence

- Victim vs Perpetrator: clearly distinct?
- IPV interventions are predominantly focused on:
  - shelters, medical and counselling services for **women as the victims**
  - protection orders or court-ordered brief treatment programmes for **men as the perpetrators**

# IPV causes



# Effective Interventions



- Reducing IPV necessitates the launch of interventions with both Men and Women
- 11 African countries study: SA ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in GBV prevention involving men
- However, 27.5% of SA men report use of violence in most recent intimate relationship

An increased focus on understanding experiences and motivations of violent men to **tailor interventions** to address men's attitudes, behaviours, identities and relationships

# Research Aims & Methods



1. Men's conceptualisation and meaning of IPV.
2. Cultural and societal challenges to men's help-seeking behaviour in violent relationships.
3. To explore counselling as an intervention for men.

## PARTICIPANTS & DATA COLLECTION

Men exposed to IPV

Individual In depth Interviews

IPV Counselors

Focus Group

Content and Thematic Analysis

# Finding 1: Men's Conceptualisation of IPV



- Narrative throughout the study exposed violence in intimate relationship as an **interplay between personal and relational factors**
- Making the conceptualisation of **perpetrator versus victim**, and the onset of abuse difficult.
- Both counsellors and male clients highlighted the **increasing amount of men being abused by women** and how this is going unnoticed and untreated by relevant stakeholders.

# Finding 1: Men's Conceptualisation of IPV



- Learned behaviour

*“It is a learned behaviour, they are taught: ‘you will see when you grow up my son that a woman cannot listen or understand without the use of a fist upon her’... it’s like a normal thing and the culture allows that.”*

- Counsellors believe that during counselling a focus should be on unlearning negative behaviour learned in childhood and developing a personal value system.

- Some men normalised their behaviour by introducing it as an act of self-defence.

*“...but I just need her to stop pushing me to the point and she knows she is doing it, she knows the outcome and she doesn’t care about the outcome and when it happen then all fingers get pointed at me.”*





## Finding 2: Reasons for IPV

- Male clients described the prompts to violence as being:
  - A perceived loss of control over their relationships,
  - Reminders of abuse from their personal histories,
  - The history of infidelity from their partner
  - The manner in which women verbally responded to them were significant in unsettling participants masculine ideas of being in control making them feel *“disrespected and blamed by dominant women who undermine”* them.

# Finding 2: Reasons for IPV



- Men further shared their experiences of being unable to fully express themselves within an argument which can then lead to them reacting violently.

***“I take her emotions in and as soon as I open my mouth then she shouts me down. So that frustrates me big time... somebody does something to me I feel like I need to lash back. My wife is very intelligent and I find it difficult in being able to retaliate verbally.”***

# Finding 3: Societal and Cultural challenges to Men's Help Seeking



- Several themes regarding men's help-seeking behaviour emerged from the results including:
  - the role of masculinity in help-seeking;
  - numerous accounts of missed opportunities;
  - and the critical need of awareness and access to services for men.
- Counsellors reiterated the importance of IPV awareness campaigns in attracting male clients both indirectly when a female partner comes to counselling first and invite her partner to join the process or directly when men make the decision to seek help.

***“Men start to see themselves in the pictures. I once had a pamphlet in my office which read “are you an abuser, do you feel that you are violating other people’s rights” and this man came into my office immediately after reading that and admitted that he was an abuser and he needed help.”***

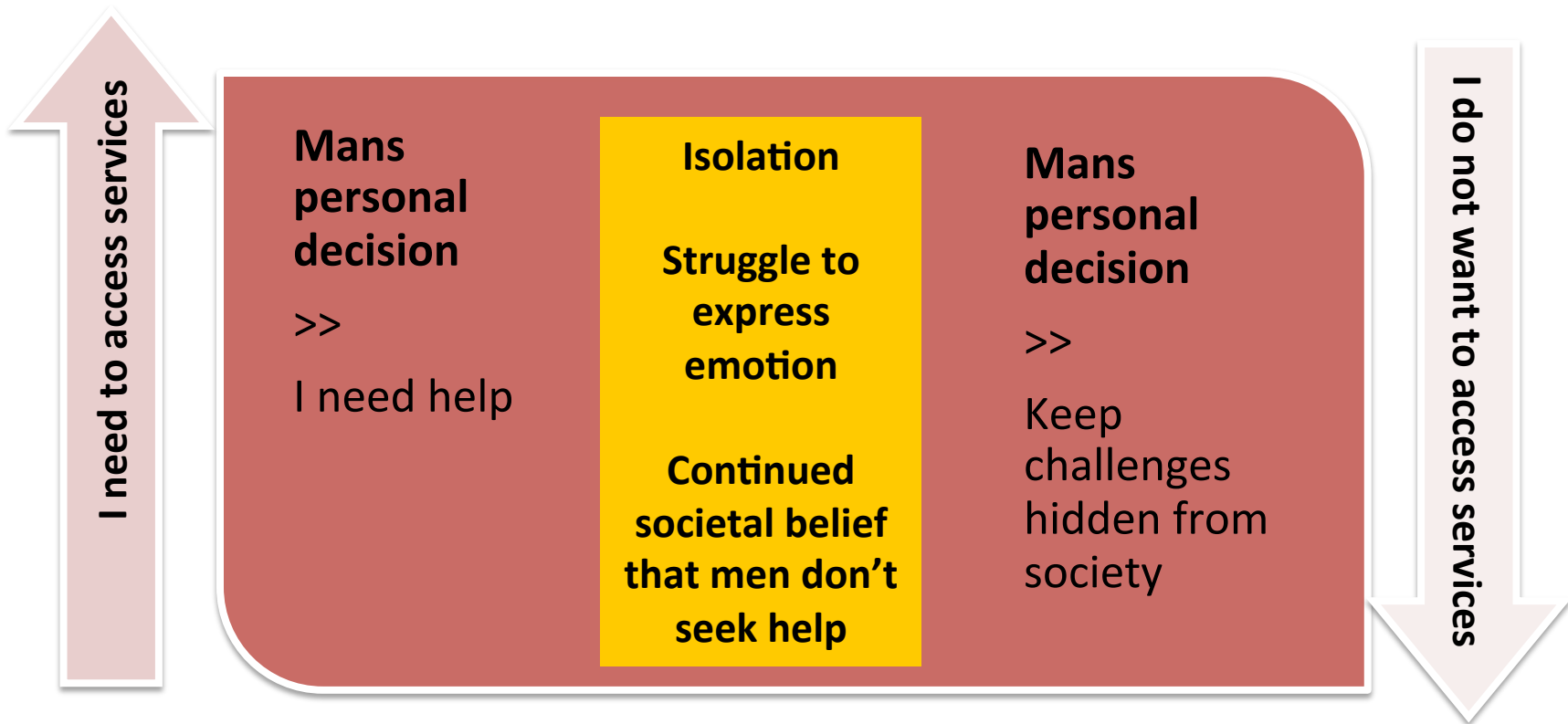
# Finding 3: Societal and Cultural challenges to Men's Help Seeking



- Men perceived counselling as a risky behaviour often stigmatised by society and their peers.
- As a result men usually only access services when there was a greater risk than social acceptance threatening them, for example when they are court mandated to go for counselling.

***“I've been several times to the police station where I went to report that my wife is abusive and she stabbed me and then they would laugh at me and say I'm a ‘moffie’ [slang for a guy who acts like a girl] why don't I hit her back. Then I'd walk away and don't know where to turn to.”***

# Challenges men face in help-seeking



*“...being a man in a community means you don't seek help, you keep quiet, you suffer inside, you don't talk”*

# Finding 4: Counselling as a Strategy



- Men articulated a sense of injustice associated with the lack of interventions for them; along with them believing that they were either also abused or that the violence was a general relational problem that needed intervention with both men and women.
- Counsellors reflected that:  
***“It’s no use trying to help one person and leaving one party out because that person will still continue with his or her abusive ways. Our role is to teach them both that there are other ways of resolving problems without the use of violence.”***

# Finding 4: Counselling as a Strategy



- Counsellors revealed that a principal goal of counselling is to:
  - Get men to tell the truth,
  - Admit to the violence that occurred in their intimate relationships
  - Demonstrate a willingness to change their interactions with their partners.
- Counsellors shared the importance of acknowledging men for this precursor of commitment to change and seriousness of saving his relationship.
- Both male clients and counsellors stated that **men prefer male counsellors** when they commence counselling the first.
- However, the **most essential component in counselling men is the attitude of the counsellor**: to be non-judgemental and non-biased, sensitive towards men's issues, inspire trust and ensure confidentiality, and be able to communicate respectfully towards all cultures.

# Conclusion



- This study was produced as an encouragement for debates on IPV prevention and intervention to not side line some of the real issues of violent relationships such as responsibility assumption for violence, reciprocal partner violence, the prevalence of male victimisation, and gendered access to services.



# Recommendations



- ❖ Men felt that **services available to men have not been made public enough.**
  - More awareness is needed about where men can go for help.
- ❖ Participants raised the perception that primarily women's rights and community-based support services for victims are promoted in South Africa, with the **needs of men remaining unmet.**

***“You need to open up centres where men can have feelings and there would be less abuse... If I could have dealt with this then, then I would not have abused my wife... but nobody is looking at that, nobody is taking into consideration for the man.”***

# Recommendations



- ❖ Meaningful change in intimate violence perpetration will need **interventions that target both males and females**.
  - Ultimately, gender bias should be eliminated from awareness campaigns and from criminal justice policies.
- ❖ **More advertising and awareness** campaigns is needed of services available to men who use or experience violence in their intimate relationships.
  - Men want to feel like they also have rights and the assurance that there is help and support available for them as well.
- ❖ As a result we need **more flexible intervention alternatives** beyond the protection order and legal redress to include intensive individual therapy, couples counselling, structured perpetrators groups, and restorative justice approaches.

# Recommendations



- ❖ It is necessary to further development of treatment programmes that encompass how:
  - individuals and specific societies/cultures understand IPV
  - identify the specific individual treatment needs of participants
  - learn how to deliver programme in a way that is engaging to men, and motivates help-seeking.
- ❖ In addition, strategies need to be developed that can enhance motivation to change, as a **long initial contemplation of change phase was indicated by men.**
- ❖ Training of health professionals and criminal justice agents to be non-judgemental and to understand the interplay involved in IPV relationships.

# Thank you!

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