

The socio-cultural context of intimate femicide in South Africa: what does this mean for a legislative framework?

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Collaboration –

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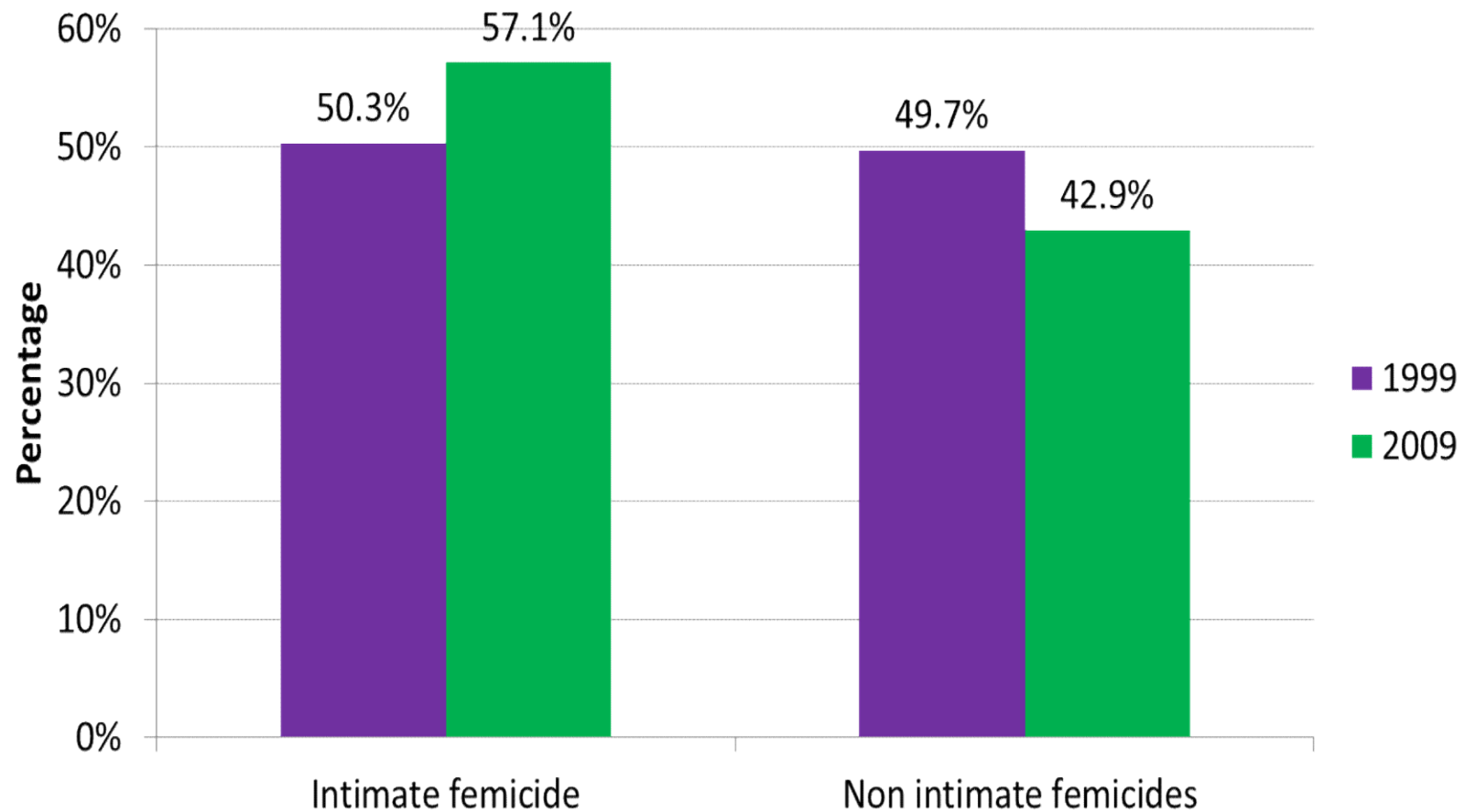
University of Cape Town - Prof Lorna J. Martin



Understanding Intimate Femicide

- In SA intimate femicide is the leading cause of female homicide and double the global rate (Abrahams et al 2013)
- Intimate femicide is the most extreme form and consequence of intimate partner violence
- The killing of an intimate partner is not an isolated event
- Such killings are more likely to occur in a context of gender inequality and a gender hierarchy
- The prevailing social environment and cultural context in SA provides the space for tolerance of men's violence towards women

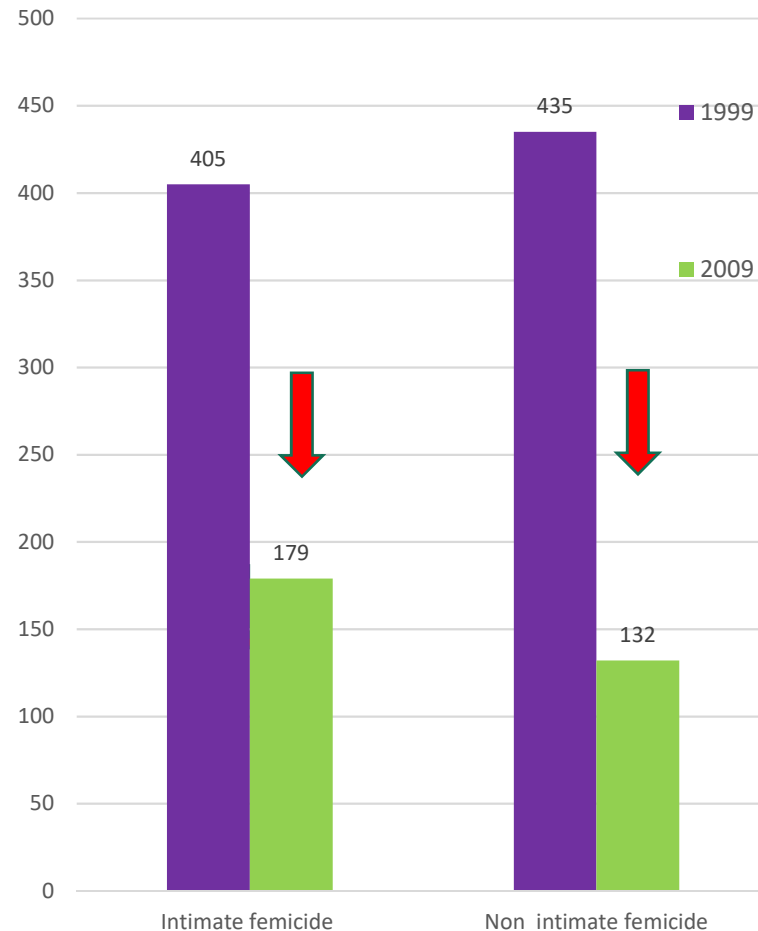
Number of homicide cases: 1999 vs 2009



Abrahams N, **Mathews S**, Martin J, Lombard C, Jewkes R. 2013. Intimate femicide in South Africa: repeat retrospective survey. *PloSmed*. 10(4), e1001412

Guns and intimate femicide

- Significantly lower gun homicide rate for both intimate and non-intimate femicide
- Gun homicide rate of 2.5/100 000 population
- 2/3rd of women who died of a gunshot – single gunshot
- Intimate femicide suicide just over 80% of cases – guns were used



Mathews S, Abrahams N, Jewkes R, Martin LJ, Lombard C & Vetten L. 2008. Intimate Femicide-Suicide in South Africa, *WHO Bulletin*. 86(7).552-558.

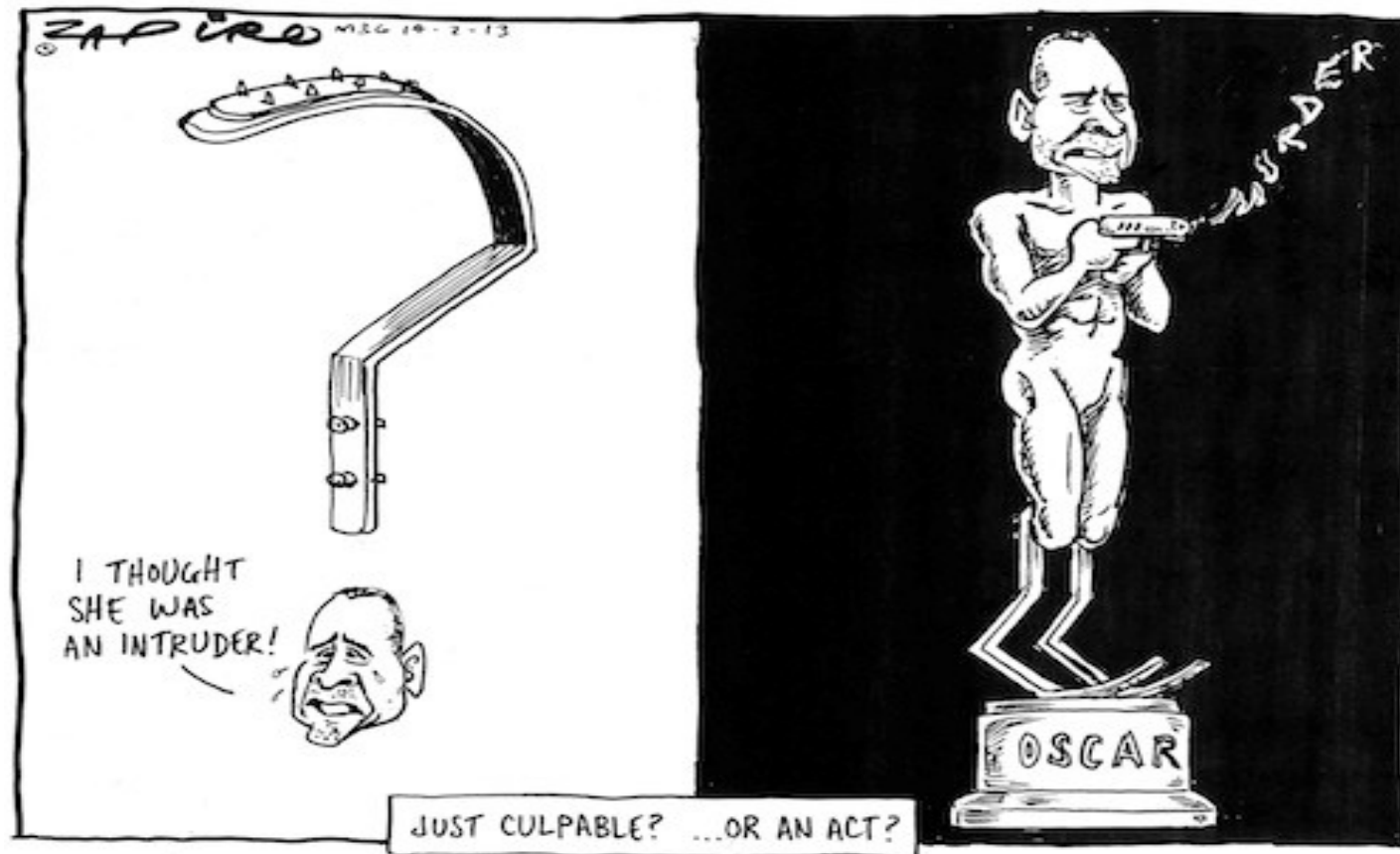
Abrahams N, Jewkes R, Mathews S. 2010. Guns and gender-based violence in South Africa. *SAMJ*. 100: 586-588.

Alcohol & intimate femicide

- A different pattern of alcohol use prior to their murder emerged for women in SA compared to other countries
- Overall median BAC – 0.11g/100ml
 - Intimate femicide victims - 0.20 g/100ml
 - Non-intimate victims - 0.03 g /100ml
- This fits with an overall pattern of high alcohol consumption and interpersonal violence in SA
- Two distinct group of women emerged –
 - Sober women killed by guns
 - High levels of intoxication by women who are killed by sharp or blunt force
- Importantly an association between intimate partner killings and high BAC
- This appears to be mediated by the women's employment status
- Pointing to the increased vulnerability of unemployed women in violent relationships

Mathews S, Abrahams N, Jewkes R, Martin LJ, Lombard C.2009: Alcohol use and its role in female homicides in the Western Cape, South Africa. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*. 70(3). pp321-327.

Pathways to violent masculinities



Childhood adversities

- Men in their accounts reflect on childhoods that were *“rough”* and *“hard”*
- Their stories present childhoods with limited positive attention by mothers, for some it bordered on abuse and neglect
- Absent fathers or fathers who were emotionally uninvolved had a profound impact on how they view themselves, shaping their identity
- Absent positive male role models, resulted in some men identifying with anti-social and aggressive models of masculinity within the community
- Most men sought affirmation outside the family, for some this lead to involvement in gangs or criminal activities

The making of men who kill

- Poor parenting, absent fathers, neglect and abuse all have a profound effect on identity formation
- Poor parenting practises made these men feel powerless, inferior and unloved acted as a pathway to violence and crime
- A complex interplay of social and emotional factors influence the formation of masculinities
- Men's masculinities shaped their behaviour and define their practises within intimate relationships
- Their violent practises were linked to their emotional vulnerabilities combined with social norms in their community

What do they want in a woman?

- What these men wanted from relationships was rooted in how they saw themselves as men, and their notions of what it means to be a successful man
- Men wanted to be respected and in turn wanted women they could respect
- At the beginning of the relationship – idealised “perfect” woman – as flaws emerged he became disillusioned and saw her as this “flawed” person
- Discourse of betrayal and inability to control women – half the women were leaving or about to leave
- Ultimate betrayal was having an affair – whether this was real or imagined
- Misogynistic “act of killing”, is a desperate act to take back control he perceived he had lost

Parental / home environment

IPV in the home
Young age of mom
Maternal absence
Mental health
(including substance abuse) of mom
Paternal absence
Substance abuse by dad

Childhood Outcomes

Conduct disorder

Physical,
Sexual &
Emotional
Abuse and
Neglect

Poor
school
outcomes

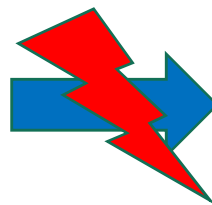
Psychological Outcomes

Low empathy
Limited self -
regulation
Low self –
esteem
Insecure
sense of self
Aggression

Male behaviours

Emphasis toughness
Dominance and control
over women
Male sexual entitlement
Use of violence against
women

Childhood factors



Violent Masculinities

What have we learnt

- We have to tackle gender inequality and the social norms that underpin this
- Childhood adversities play a significant role in the formation of violent masculinities and need to be taken into account in our response and prevention of femicide
- Gun ownership plays a significant role in intimate killings
 - restricting access to guns are vital
- Excessive levels of alcohol consumption in SA influence women's vulnerability to be murdered
- Intimate femicide follow a particular pattern of injury and can assist investigations where perpetrators are unknown

Global policy development

- Countries have to recognize the seriousness of femicide before society can effectively respond
- The establishment of specialized investigation and prosecution units – recommended by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women to address the perceived impunity of femicide
- In Latin America most countries have passed legislation pertaining to femicide or codified femicide as a crime
- Globally, there has also been a move towards the development of national protocols to guide investigations on intimate femicide

What do we need to do

- Align our policy and legislation
 - The NSP GBV-F is driven by the Presidency and need to lay the foundation for policy reform
 - Both gun violence and alcohol requires a policy response
 - The role of SAPS in the investigation of IPV and protection orders require strengthening to prevent IF
 - Consider the implementation of Serious Case Reviews to strengthen our ability to monitor why our current system is failing women and families
- Legal response is important but not enough
- It is imperative to address prevention early to prevent the risks for intimate femicide