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Blame It on Alcohol: ‘Passing the Buck’ on Domestic Violence and Addiction

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Blame It on Alcohol: ‘Passing The Buck’ on Domestic Violence and Addiction

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Abstract

Domestic violence against women is a serious health and safety problem facing women around the world. Scholars of domestic violence have identified demographic factors such as age, number of children, family structure, unemployment, substance abuse, stress factors within the family, male partner’s educational attainment and poverty, as closely associated with domestic violence. While these factors have gained scholarly recognition, there is a dominant narrative among victims of domestic violence that “alcohol is responsible” for abusive relationships in Mamelodi, a black township in Pretoria, South Africa. Using the empirical data from Mamelodi, this article probes the narratives of female victims of domestic violence. The paper uses qualitative data in its analysis.

Keywords: domestic violence, township, women, power, control.

La Culpa Es del Alcohol: "Ecurrir el Bulto" en Violencia Doméstica y Adicciones

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Resumen

La violencia doméstica contra las mujeres es un problema de salud y seguridad grave a la que se enfrentan mujeres en todo el mundo. Los estudiosos de la violencia doméstica han identificado factores demográficos tales como la edad, el número de hijos, la estructura familiar, el desempleo, el abuso de sustancias, los factores de estrés en la familia, el nivel educativo de la pareja masculina o la pobreza estrechamente asociados con la violencia doméstica. Si bien estos factores han ganado el reconocimiento académico, hay una narrativa dominante entre las víctimas de la violencia doméstica que "el alcohol es el responsable" en las relaciones abusivas en Mamelodi, un municipio negro de Pretoria, Sudáfrica. Partiendo del uso de datos empíricos recogidos en Mamelodi, este artículo explora las narrativas de las mujeres víctimas de la violencia doméstica. El trabajo utiliza datos cualitativos en su análisis.

Palabras clave: violencia doméstica, municipio, mujer, poder, control.

South Africa has one of the highest alcohol consumption rates in the world. This high consumption rate is seen as a major contributing factor responsible for the high rate of domestic violence (Seedat et al, 2009). It has been estimated that the per capita consumption rate of alcohol in South Africa is between 10.3 and 12.4 litres, and consequently higher than the Southern Africa regional average (Peltzer & Ramlagan, 2009). The history of alcohol abuse in South Africa is inextricably linked to the history of race relations during the apartheid regime (1940s – 1994) (Rataemane, 2006). It should be noted that segregation on the basis of race predates the official institutionalization of apartheid regime in the 20th Century. Hence, there were racial ideas that underlined social constructs of “alcoholism” in the 20th Century. These ideas, which were formed in the past centuries, were rooted in colonialism and race profiling. According to Mager (2004), the robust colonial liquor trade in the nineteenth century gave rise to two sets of belief: firstly, the belief that a strong liquor industry was good for the colonial economy, was necessary for the generation of taxes, profits and jobs. Secondly, African responses to the liquor trade generated a discourse of “the African character” underlined by the abuse of liquor. To those who hold this view, alcoholism is part of a pattern of deviate behaviour of the Bantu (Africans) who already displayed criminal behaviour (Mager 2004). This stereo-typical narrative of the African in the late 19th Century, noted that drunkenness carried a “stigma of disgrace” for the Europeans who used alcohol to moderate their behavioural excesses; while among Africans, it generated “no feeling of shame” (Mager 2004, Umejesi, 2012).

The story of alcoholism in black townships is underlined by the economic deprivations and social alienation black people were subjected to. Faced by ravaging unemployment and poverty, black people living in Mamelodi township resorted to illicit brewing of beer and selling of liquor as an alternative means of economic sustenance (Ralinala, 2002). Apart from the township beer, there was also beer from white towns and cities, often referred by local people as “European beer.” Mamelodi was introduced to European liquor by “mailers”. A mailer was a poor white vendor who earned a living by buying European liquor from licensed liquor stores in White urban areas, and then selling it to *shebeen*¹ owners (Ralinala 2002). In September 1960, the Liquor Act of 1928 was used to battle illicit

trade in alcohol between South African cities and black townships. This attempt failed to stop the liquor traffic mainly because some white individuals were the major drivers of the trade (Ralinala, 2002). Apart from the apparent sabotage by these individuals, it was gratifying among black people in those days to flout laws made by the apartheid state – it was civil disobedience against what they saw as an unjust system. Mager (2004) noted that there was still that real excitement of drinking in *shebeens* and breaking the “white man’s law”.

The rate of alcohol consumption in post-apartheid² South Africa has not abated. It has, however, been described as “episodic and heavy, occurring primarily during weekends” (Watt et al, 2012). According to Mager (2004), Africans in these townships saw alcohol as an opportunistic source of entertainment. Explaining further, Mager (2004), noted that Africans living in townships “did not have sports clubs, no concerts, no restaurants, no dances, no cinemas and with boredom generated a culture in which drinking was the only way they knew of passing idle, empty hours during weekends” (p.742).

The abuse of alcohol is increasingly being recognized as a key determinant of deviate behaviours, such as abuse of women, and consequently, an indirect contributor to HIV transmission in sub-Saharan Africa (Morojele et al, 2006). Rataemane (2006) noted that drinking to intoxication has been associated with unsafe sexual behaviour. In the same vein, Wojcicki (2002) in a study on alcoholism, sex and violence, had found that women in taverns are at a high risk of violence and HIV/AIDS infection: “[A] woman who accepts beer from a man, is obliged to exchange sex because she has ‘drunk his money’ in the taverns in Soweto³ and Hammanskraal near Pretoria, South Africa” (p.267).

It is this background and the increasing cases of domestic violence in townships, especially in Mamelodi, that has spurred this research. This paper draws on a wider research on the preponderance of domestic violence in South Africa’s poor black neighbourhoods, where abusive relationship is often linked to extraneous factors such as poverty and squalor, but mainly to male addiction to alcohol. The article explores the narrative of “alcohol as the underlying factor” in the escalation of domestic violence in the study community.

Alcohol as a Risk Factor in Women's Health

The abuse of substances (such as alcohol) by men is seen as a major risk factor in family relationship, women's health and the transmission of HIV. According to Jewkes et al (2006), domestic violence and alcohol are important influences on women's health, especially the risk of HIV. The experience of violence against women reinforces gendered power inequalities that impact on women's HIV risk. Dunkle (in Jewkes et al, 2006) demonstrated that women who had less power in their sexual relationship were at elevated risk of having HIV due to their lower likelihood of condom use. Studies from different provinces in South Africa, have often shown that men, who are physically violent to their partners, have more sexual partners and more likely to be infected with HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) (Jewkes et al, 2006, Jewkes et al, 2009).

Kalichman et al's (2007) study was aimed at discovering the place of alcohol in HIV risk behaviours in Cape Town, South Africa. The research found that, for men, the idea that alcohol enhances sexual experiences reduces self-control and increases the risk of HIV infection and transmission. Their findings confirm other studies that suggest women do not expect alcohol to enhance sexual behaviour and experiences but women's risks for STD/HIV are to a great extent determined by their partner's behaviour (Kalichman et al, 2007). In an earlier study conducted by Abrahams et al (2004) in Cape Town, South Africa, findings were that men found it comparatively difficult to engage in intimate and loving sexual relationships, hence there was a possible connection between sexual violence and potential infection with HIV. Dunkle (in Abrahams et al, 2004) noted that an important dimension of the links between overall domestic violence and HIV infection may be that there is an increased likelihood of violent men being infected with HIV because of other associated behaviour.

Dunkle et al (2007), examined what is often referred to as "transactional sex". Transactional sex is whereby women have sex in situations where they might otherwise refrain (Dunkle et al, 2007). In an earlier study Dunkle et al (2004), defined transactional sex as having sex with a non-primary partner which was motivated by material gain. However, Dunkle et

al (2007), later viewed transactional sex among women as often used as a basic survival strategy in order to sustain relationships which provide critical income. Transactional sex is risky because women may agree to sexual encounters they would not have sought otherwise and often do so on men's terms (Norris et al, 2009).

Dunkle et al (2004), had previously referred to this relationship as a “roll-on”. In South Africa, a “roll-on” (*umakhwapheni* in Zulu language) is a secret sexual partnership which by definition is concurrent with, and hidden from a primary relationship, or having a “once off” sex as a “thank you” for the alcohol bought in a *shebeen* (township bar) (Dunkle et al, 2004, p.1582). Norris et al (2009), captures this act of recompense thus: “There is nothing to do here except drink and have sex” (p. 1170). It is therefore important to consider transactional sex within the context of alcohol abuse and the risk of HIV in domestic violent relationships.

According to Townsend et al (2011), a South African national household survey which was conducted in 2008, identified black men in South Africa aged 25-49 years as a most-at-risk population, engaging in behaviours that put them at higher risk for HIV. These behaviours include having multiple sexual partners, inconsistent condom use, alcohol abuse and engaging in transactional sex. The inconsistent condom use is linked to the idea that condom is the prerogative of male partners (Jewkes et al, 2010). The men in fact forcefully impose their preferences on their sexual partners. It was found that the men in this study have never thought that their female partners may have other sexual partners who could have been exposed to HIV/STIs (Townsend et al, 2011).

This paper examines women's narrative on alcohol consumption as the cause of domestic violence in relationships. Often, the common view of different female victims of domestic violence is to blame alcohol for their ordeal rather than their alcohol addicted partners for perpetrating domestic violence. This article argues that by shifting focus from the perpetrator to alcohol, domestic violence is indirectly reinforced by its very victims. The paper focuses on Mamelodi Township, a low income black neighbourhood in Pretoria, South Africa.

Learned Helplessness Theory: A Conceptual Framework

In Walker's (2009) analysis, women in abusive relationships are not helpless; rather they are extremely successful in staying alive in the relationship. Walker (2009) posits that in order to maintain their core "self", women in abusive relationships must give up the belief that they can escape from the abuser, and they must develop sophisticated coping strategies. According to LaViolette and Barnett (2000), women's identity is consistently defined in terms of the contexts of social relationships and for most women, connection with others is a primary given of their lives. To a certain extent a woman's sense of well-being depends on her marital relationship with her adult partner, because women tend to learn that to obtain the prized possession of a harmonious relationship, it is important to be nice and have the desire to please. The need to develop and retain heterosexual relationships forces women to abandon some of their selfhood, to actually stifle their own ambitions and personality. LaViolette and Barnett (2000) call the socialisation process used to accomplish this goal the "silence of the self." According to LaViolette & Barnett (2000) this is:

When girls learn to value themselves as they are esteemed by others, and they first become defined as daughters by their relationships with their parents. Daughterhood is a common bond for all women and a beginning step for knowing and learning what it means to be feminine, to be a wife and to be a mother. The only change in adulthood is that the most important source of esteem is no longer the girl's parents but her romantic partner (p.17).

For Abel (2001) the symptoms of learned helplessness that have been noted in women victims of domestic violence are low self-esteem, apathy and problem-solving difficulties. Abel (2001) states that:

The Learned helplessness perspective predicts that women victims of domestic violence will become passive and feel as if they can do nothing to end the violence. The Learned helplessness framework helps to explain why many women victims of domestic violence stay with their abusive partners. It further predicts that women victims of domestic violence experiencing learned helplessness will

not be likely to initiate an attack against the abusive partner (p. 404).

The learned helplessness theory explains how women stop believing that their actions will have a predictable outcome. For Walker (2009), if a woman is to escape such a relationship, she must overcome the tendency to “learned helplessness survival techniques” by adopting active rather than passive behaviour, and taking a more realistic aversive course rather than improving the domestic violence relationship.

Additional theoretical rationales help complete the picture of why women stay in abusive relationships. Gerow (in LaViolette & Barnett 2000) analysed learned helplessness as a condition in which a subject does not attempt to escape from a painful or noxious situation after learning in a previous, similar situation that escape is not possible. Seligman (in LaViolette & Barnett 2000) notes that:

That there are three components to learned helplessness: (a) motivational impairment (passivity), (b) intellectual impairment (poor problem-solving ability), and (c) emotional trauma (increased feelings of helplessness, incompetence, frustration and depression). Women who are experiencing helplessness depend on external forces outside their own control and beyond their control, which they refer to as luck, God, fate, chance, or powerful others (p. 129).

Learned helplessness causes abused women to make causal attributions that tend to keep them trapped in the relationship (LaViolette & Barnett 2000). Walker’s cycle of violence theory describes a recurrent sequence of behaviours in violent relationships: (a) Tension Building: a phase in which minor incidents of violence may occur along with a build-up of anger; (b) Acute or Violent: a phase in which a major violent outburst occurs; and (c) Honeymoon-Respite: a phase in which the abuser woos his wife (LaViolette & Barnett 2000). For many women the honeymoon stage provides reason to hope that her partner will change his abusive behaviour (LaViolette & Barnett 2000).

Both Walker (2009) and LaViolette and Barnett (2000) found that an abused woman is likely to blame herself for the violence as if she has done something to provoke the attacks, a view that a community may reinforce.

Having community programmes that engage residents in neighbourhood planning and decision making, and attempting to increase residents' feelings of belonging to or ownership of the community, may help to build cohesion among residents and understanding domestic violence (Pinchevsky and Wright, 2012). Mesatywa (2009) describes silence as “a typical response that women will resort to when faced with domestic violence, however silence does not stem from acceptance of violence as a cultural norm, but may emanate from shame and fear” (p.13).

Learned Optimism: The Positive Side of Learned Helplessness?

The misinterpretation of the term “learned helplessness” is less important, particularly since the originator of the theory, Martin Seligman, has looked at the less controversial flip side and introduced the concept of ‘learned optimism’ (Walker , 2009). Walker (2009) argues that learning to focus on the positive side of experiences is a strategy which will promote strength, develop feelings of self-efficacy and self-confidence, and help people develop flexibility in solving problems. Walker (2009) concludes that the goal is to learn new ways of appropriate and respectful discipline of children, using other types of consequences and rewarding positive behaviour which helps to reverse the negative impact of living with unpredictable abuse and physical punishment. This is to assist boys and girls in order to learn how to resolve conflicts without using physical force.

However, it all begins with the individual learning to take control of her own life. According to Hundley (2012) people have power, whether they acknowledge it or not, their power shifts in time and place, whether it is gendered power, ethnic power or organisational power, and failing to acknowledge their power brings risks. Hundley (2012) posits that if people dismiss their own power and agency, they may dismiss the opportunity to make positive change, improve social conditions, and help themselves and others.

The learned helplessness theory identifies abusive relationships as indicators of power and control which are derived from gender imbalances and individual material resources. In their argument, the theory identifies its roots from patriarchal families where men are granted power over women partners (LaViolette & Barnett, 2000). According to Walker (2009) the learned helplessness theory makes a flip side and develops a learned

optimism theory, emphasising learning to focus on the positive side by learning one's own strength, feelings of self-efficacy and self-confidence without using physical force. In other words, since the learned helplessness theory regards domestic violence as "learnt behaviour", therefore, what is learnt can be unlearned. This meant, if a woman is to leave an abusive relationship, she must apply the same survival techniques she used in staying in the domestic violence relationship and use it to leave.

The key assumption of learned helplessness is that women in abusive relationships are not helpless; rather they have developed strategies that make them stay in these relationships. In an earlier discussion of learned helplessness theory, it was discovered that women in abusive relationships give up the idea that they will leave their abusive relationships. These women are said to have low self-esteem, and lack empathy and problem solving abilities. In order for these women to leave the abusive relationships they need to adopt active behaviour rather than passive behaviour.

The learned helplessness theory also identifies that women in abusive relationships are likely to blame themselves for the violence, and the community tends to reinforce this view (Pinchevsky & Wright, 2012). The abused women do not blame the abuser; they blame externalities. The theory acknowledges that ultimate power lies with women learning to take control of their own lives: failing to acknowledge their power brings risks of experiencing domestic violence. This article draws on this perspective to explain the passive approach women in abusive relationship adopt vis-à-vis their partners while at the same time blaming the role agents (such as alcohol) play in perpetuating domestic violence.

Research Methodology

This article draws on a wider study on the prevalence of violence against women in the low income black neighbourhood of Mamelodi Township in Pretoria, South Africa. The study is a qualitative research and it utilised in-depth interviews and observation for data collection. In this paper, the interview responses of twenty seven female participants were drawn and analysed thematically. These participants reside in Mamelodi Township. All the participants have experienced various forms of domestic violence in their relationship.

Blame It on Alcohol – A Field Finding

A common view shared by the research participants is that alcohol is to blame for domestic violence. As we shall see, another strand of this narrative suggests that the township environment promotes alcohol abuse which in turn facilitates abusive relationship. In other words, the township set up of Mamelodi – with its squalor makeover and lack of socio-economic infrastructure enhances resort to alcoholism. In this township set up, recreational facilities are either an expensive privilege, or completely absent in certain areas. Hence, the only visible places where adults may socialise are taverns (*shebeens*), churches and shops. It is this background that respondents believe, makes their partners vulnerable to alcohol.

Sophie⁴, a 46 years old teacher and mother of two, explains how alcohol addiction influences behaviour in Mamelodi:

All the women living on our street are complaining and crying about our men. When it is Friday our husbands are drinking the money they should be spending on us, their families. These men spend time and money at this tavern (she points at the tavern). In this area there are taverns in every corner of our streets; now these men are drinking and eating plates of food the whole weekend. They love to eat plenty food, *shisanyama* (barbequed meat) and drink lots of beer. This *shebeen* sells *shisanyama* to attract men. As they spend their time and money, they don't remember their families.

There is a major concern for Sophie's female neighbours – that their husbands too are wasting their money on alcohol when they should be attending to their responsibilities at home. These women see alcohol as the major contributor to domestic violence and have begun planning on how to collectively address the proliferation of taverns in “every corner of our streets”, as Sophie puts it. Speaking on these measures, Sophie explained that she and other women living in the vicinity often, “encourage our husbands to stay at home and avoid going to the *shebeens*; but these men are stubborn and would not listen to our advice. If we can stop our men going there, then these *shebbens* will close up. Continuing, Sophie who is visibly angered by this problem emphasized:

Ask any woman living in this area, we always tell our husbands to stay at home and be responsible to us, but they say they cannot sit in their homes all weekend. According to them, they need to entertain themselves. They tell us that entertainment does not kill anyone. To them drunkenness is entertainment, fun and good time.

To corroborate this view, another interviewee, Lerato, aged 42, noted that whenever her husband is drunk, “He starts fight over any small things and shouts at me and the children as well, rain curses at us, makes noise, switches on the radio to its highest volume at night, even at midnight”.

In the same vein, Nomsa noted that although her husband was unemployed, his addiction to alcohol continued. This addiction, Nomsa noted, affected their relationship badly: “He was unemployed, but would always come home drunk. When I try to caution him, he pours insults and then beats me”. Also for 28 year old Jesse: “My husband beats me whenever he is drunk. He is not always drunk, though. He is a nice person when he is sober”.

Narrating her own experience, Sophie who had once contemplated divorcing her husband because of his drunkenness and abuse stated:

He [her husband] drinks a lot of beer. His drinking is affecting our finances. He drinks his salary and brings less money home. That is where the violence starts. We have children and they need to eat, but he wastes money at *shebeens*. When he is sober, he becomes quiet; he doesn't say anything about his drinking. When he is sober he makes promises that he will give me money when he gets paid, but when that time comes he spends it again at *shebeens*. He just would refuse to talk to you. He won't answer you when you speak to him. I blame alcohol because he is fine when he is not drunk. That is why I am still with him.

Sophie's statement highlights her frustration with her husband and the manner in which he handles his financial responsibilities to their family. He spends his income on alcohol. As it is often with addicts, Sophie's husband repeats the same behaviour over and over again.

From the foregoing analysis, interviewees highlighted that their alcohol addicted husbands spend time away from their families. When these men return home – usually under the influence of alcohol – they did not engage

in affectionate communication with their spouses and children, rather they bullied their families.

According to Lerato:

Yes, my husband's behaviour is influenced by alcohol and I am experiencing domestic violence from my partner. I can safely say I am not being physically abused, only emotionally. But we can always talk and settle any problem. He was not like that from the beginning until his friends took him to *shebeens* regularly.

Lerato's response suggests that she has different perceptions of domestic violence – one is “physical and unsafe”; the other is “emotional and safe”. Perhaps, this bifurcation of domestic violence influences what seems like a cordial relationship between Lerato and her husband. Like Lerato, other interviewees also perceive emotional abuse as “safe enough” to remain in their relationships. The fact that emotional abuses can escalate into physical violence have not occurred to Lerato or to the other participants who share similar view.

This trend in the construction and reconstruction of domestic of violence was commonly observed among different women in Mamelodi. It was common to hear women say of their abusive husbands, “Yes, we fight, but I love him”; “He is my man and the father of my children”; “By the grace of God we shall overcome his drinking habit one day”. This kind of expression, we found, is often cosmetic. It is a way of covering spousal squabbles in public. It is an affirmation of an *acceptable* marital norm in a society that seems to mollify patriarchy. Lerato's neighbour, Nontombi, a single parent of three, disagreed with this common notion which tends to suggest that “all is well” in the neighbourhood. According to Nontombi, “They [other women] will not admit that their husbands abuse them, or are drunkards, but every night we hear them cry, and we see them run out of their matrimonial homes with broken heads”.

A possible factor that may have influenced the participants' decision to discuss only their emotional abuses was their age. A look at the age group of those who acknowledged they were only emotionally abused in their relationships range from 42 to 63 years. This age group may have influenced the victims' perception of what “abusive relationship” really is. By 1998, when the South African government introduced the 1998

Domestic Violence Act 116 – a legislation against domestic violence – this category of participants would have formed their opinion on domestic violence, and how to handle it when faced with it.

On the other hand, those participants who acknowledged they were physically and even sexually abused by their spouses were much younger than those who reported emotional abuse only. The age range of these participants is between 23 and 40. This age group is more conscious of their rights within marriage, and also knowledgeable with the provisions of the 1998 Domestic Violence Act. These participants were exposed to domestic violence in communities where they were brought up. They did not limit domestic violence to “emotional” or “private issue” – rather, they boldly narrated their experiences.

Not Him, It Is the Devil

It is also important to note the direction of the narratives of certain research participants who appeared to be defensive and protective of their husbands. These participants perceive behaviour as external to the individual. To them, domestic violence is driven by unseen external forces, such as, the “devil”. The devil is ascribed with motivating drunkenness and the ensuing violence. The panacea to domestic violence, as they see, lies with defeating the evil motivator. This is the view shared by the following interviewees: Busisiwe, Thembi, Sibongile, Dudu and Mercy. Busisiwe, aged 53, said:

I never argued with him, especially when he is drunk. I know he is not responsible for his actions. Some forces of darkness make him behave that way. I sometimes pretend to be asleep when he comes home very late. I will just sleep with him to avoid noise.

In other words Busisiwe would give in to her husband sexual desires in order to avert conflict at home even when he is drunk. To Busisiwe, “forces of darkness” is responsible for her husband’s misbehaviour.

In her account, Thembi, aged 63 noted that:

My husband drank and many times I would provide him with money. I was an old-school [classic] person who never wanted troubles at home. I did everything for him and endured all his

insults. Yet, there were always fights that came with it. I know he was not responsible.

In the same sense, Sibongile, a 59 year old widow said this about her late husband:

I can't speak ill of my husband because he is late now, but that man really drank alcohol. I just don't even remember him sober. I tolerated it because I know it was the devil who used alcohol to mess him up.

It is important to note where Sibongile laid the blame of her husband's behavior – on the devil and alcohol. Another interviewee living in a different street from Sibongile's shared similar view with Sibongile. Dudu, a 58 year old mother of three narrated her experience with her often drunken husband thus: "My salary is not enough, I struggle a lot. He is making things worse by neglecting his responsibilities to us, his family. His heart is sold to the devil". Mercy aged 43 narrated her experience of an abusive husband thus:

I really hate what alcohol does to him. We would fight at home; the next thing he shows up at my school drunk and demands that we talk about our fight right there. He embarrasses me at my workplace. Some people have suggested I take him to church and cast out the demon of alcoholism from him. Let me tell you the truth, my husband will never agree to go to church with me.

Discussion and Conclusion

As already pointed out, the female participants in this study are victims of different forms of domestic violence. Although these women clearly suffer the effects of the abusive actions of their husbands, their narratives focus on the influence of alcohol on their partners. The commonly held notion among the interviewees is that alcohol *drives* the actions of their male partners. To some of the respondents, it is the "devil" that motivates their male partners into drinking and abuse. This view seems to exonerate the addicts from the responsibility of their violent actions at home. What this

narrative has done is to construct two different agencies in the domestic violence discourse. These agencies are, the abusive male partners, who are supposedly *influenced* by another agency – alcohol (perhaps, inspired by the devil). Here, alcohol is personified as the responsible *influencer*, while their male partners are inadvertently constructed as ordinary victims of alcohol.

This prevalent view among the respondents gives the women exceptional staying power in the relationships – after all, their partners are not directly responsible for their actions. Alcohol is responsible. This attitude validates the framework of learned helplessness (Abel, 2001; Walker, 2009). Abel (2001, p.404) noted that the tendency for women in abusive relationship to become “passive and feel as if they can do nothing to end the violence” is symptomatic of learned helplessness. In other words, certain women in abusive relationships have perfected ways of sustaining these relationships instead of confronting those issues that have made the relationship abusive. These coping strategies (learned helplessness) are rooted in certain patriarchal socio-cultural practices which give premium to the male gender at the expense of female welfare (Umejesi, 2014). Inadvertently, therefore, this socially accepted pattern of relationship puts the burden of sustaining relationships and families on the woman, while at the same time it exonerates men from their habits and failures.

In conclusion, the major issue that emerged from the fieldwork is the notion that alcohol rather than the addict is responsible for domestic violence. While literature is replete with studies that point to the effects of alcohol on behaviour and relationships, there is no scientific evidence that suggests that alcohol is solely responsible for domestic violence. This point must be made that although alcohol influences behavior, there are people who drink alcohol, yet they do not abuse their partners.

Having examined scholarly views on domestic violence vis-à-vis the field findings in the study community, this paper contends that alcohol, although linked in certain ways to violent behaviours, does not fully explain the preponderance of troubled relationships in Mamelodi Township. The notion that alcohol is responsible for domestic violence fails to take cognizance of other sources of social strain in relationships, such as high unemployment rate, rising cost of living in the township and the nation in general. The argument is also idiosyncratic, as it is not based on any

verifiable scientific study. It is also a normative protective mechanism that is socially entrenched to sustain relationships that privilege patriarchy.

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Notes

¹Shebeen is a township tavern – usually a shack. These taverns or bars are often owned by women, commonly called “shebeen queens”.

²Post-1994.

³SOWETO – an acronym for “South Western Townships” – is located near the city of Johannesburg. It is the largest township in South Africa.

⁴Sophie is a pseudonym. All names used in the analysis section of this article are pseudonyms.

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