

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is widely recognised as occurring within individual, social, economic, cultural and political contexts. Most interventions seek to protect women – usually after the fact of violence – through rights, policies and laws that seek to protect women either through punishment of offenders or prevention of re-abuse through interdicts. To a large extent this necessary and urgent work addresses the effects rather than the causes of violence. Programmes that seek to work with men remain limited and are of relatively recent origin in South Africa. Unlike the great majority of work on gender-based violence, these programmes have a broadly preventive aim: stopping men from engaging in gender-based violence. International experience suggests that this is a contested area of work, not only in the competition for resources that such programmes generate, but also in the likelihood that these programmes can and do transform attitudes and behaviour at individual, community and societal levels. As a result, the most contentious aspect of working with men, perpetrator programmes, is examined in some detail in this report.

The objectives of this research were threefold:

- To understand the social, economic and/or cultural factors contributing to violence against women.
- To reflect on the current practices of 'men against violence against women' organisations for their impact and the extent to which the strategies of such organisations are bearing fruit.
- To identify successful approaches and strategies in the light of the information on the above factors and the extent to which they could contribute to reducing/eradicating violence against women.

A research report was submitted that presented fairly detailed information on the policy and legislative framework of violence against women and on the work of the few organisations that target men.¹ What was perhaps lacking in this report is an overall framework within which to assess 'working with men', both generally and within local organisations. This report seeks primarily to address that gap by drawing on international debates as well as local experiences to assess the possibilities and constraints of working with men in South Africa. It also seeks to locate 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 violence against women.

