Starting young: Intimate partner violence among very young adolescents in Cape Town, South Africa

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Socio-political context of Khayelitsha

• Legacy of forced removals and labour migration

• Material deprivation, un/insecure employment
  – 20% of learners: ‘do not have enough money for food’
  – 30% of learners: ‘enough money for food, but not other basic items e.g. clothes’

• Inadequate resource allocation & service delivery

• State violence normalised, high levels of violent crime, SGBV

• Active citizen participation and mobilisation
  – Khayelitsha Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of Police Inefficiency
  – Service delivery protests
  – Street committees
Survey methodology

• Multi-staged stratified random sampling
  – 662 male and female participants from 10 primary schools
  – Grade 6 & 7 (10 – 13 years)
• 48% have had a romantic partner (‘boyfriend’, ‘girlfriend’)
  – Our analysis focused on these learners’ experiences
• Survey, administered on mobile phones, English & Xhosa
  – Experiences of IPV
    o Experiences of SIPV
    o Reporting of violence
“In the past 12 months...?”

44% of learners report some form of intimate partner violence

- Threatened to use or used a gun, knife, other weapon against you (6%)
- Pushed you or pulled your hair (10%)
- Slapped you or thrown something at you that could hurt you (11%)
- Physically forced you to have sex when you didn’t want to (6%)
- Hit you with their fist / something else that could hurt you (6%)
- Kicked, dragged, beaten up, choked, burnt you on purpose (5%)
- Threatened to hurt you, someone you care about (23%)

*Multiple selection possible*
“In the past 12 months...?”*

42% of learners report some form of sexual violence by a partner

- **20%**
  - Forced to have sex because you were afraid

- **23%**
  - Forced to have sex because your partner made you feel bad

- **23%**
  - Forced to do something sexual that was humiliating or shameful

*Multiple selection possible*
“Did you tell someone?”

- Primary school (10-14y): 42% SIPV, 53% reported
- High school (13-17y): 27% SIPV, 57% reported
“Who did you tell?”*

- My mother (47%)
- My friends (42%)
- Infrequent: other family member, teacher, police, counselor, peer educator

“What happened then?”*

- The person was told to stop (31%)
- I was given medical help (23%)
- Infrequent: given psychological help, reported to police

7/10 learners said that telling someone put an end to the violence

*Multiple selection possible
“Why didn’t you tell someone?”*

What happened wasn’t wrong

- Interpretation of violence: Is it violence? Is it wrong?
- Consequences: Blame, punishment, retribution
- Lack of faith, trust in teachers, adults

37%

Normalisation of violence
Victim-blaming / shaming
Systemic failures

*Multiple selection possible
More questions...

- Meanings of ‘partner’?
  - Teacher-perpetrated and ‘non-partner’ violence high
  - Overlaps?

- Partner / boyfriend / girlfriend characteristics?
  - Age, other disparities linked to power differentials?
  - Reported experiences of IPV seem to correlate with self-reported perpetration among same age group

- Heteronormativity in current research?
  - 20-30% of participants identified as LGB or ‘other’, further analysis needed
Some implications

• Address systemic challenges (e.g. lack of SRGBV policy)
• Role of prohibitive discourses in adult communication?
  - Provokes ‘silence, denial, shame’ (Francis, 2010)
  - Pre-empts relationship education
  - Contributes to low reporting
• Interventions sufficiently nuanced to enable naming?
  - ‘forced to have sex’, ‘threatened’, ‘pushed’
  - ‘raped’, ‘assaulted’
• Clear need for early intervention
  - Relational and affective (how to ‘do’ ethical relating)
  - Pleasurable aspects of sex
  - Active knowers: engage their sexual knowledge
Thank you

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