



Commission for Gender Equality
A society free from gender oppression and inequality

CGE opinion on the treatment of Men who are subjected to abuse by their partners

It is widely accepted, that in a society rife with abuse and violence, the victims are inevitably women and children. Every day women are murdered, physically and sexually assaulted, threatened and humiliated by their partners in their homes. In spite of progressive legislation, research has revealed that statistically the majority of the perpetrators committing these crimes are men.

As a way of raising awareness and encouraging women to speak out and report abuse, initiatives like "Women's Month" and "16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women & Children" was launched to highlight the need for speedy interventions and access to essential services for women who are subjected to violent abuse. It is generally an oddity, by societal standards and norms, to acknowledge and ultimately accept that men are also on the receiving end of spousal abuse.

With various initiatives aimed at highlighting the plight of women, the focus shifted from incorporating men into the fight against abuse to perpetually treating men as the abusers. Therefore, when being confronted by a man who is being abused, it is hard for society to reconcile this scenario. It must however be highlighted that in order to stop the cycle of violence, we must recognize that men too are victims of abuse.

According to the law, all victims of abuse, regardless of their gender, must be treated the same. Each reported case must be treated fairly, expeditiously and with sensitivity to race, class, gender and culture of the parties involved.

Violence in same-sex relationships are also a cause for concern. Studies have revealed that gay men endure the cycle of abuse as many police officials fail to address their complaints with the required sensitivity. They are often left humiliated at charge offices and sent back home to their abuser. If we truly aspire to eliminate all forms of abuse and violence, we need to accept that violence is a cross-cutting issue affecting both men and women equally regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, culture, religion etc.

When taking into account the full spectrum of services, initiatives, NGO interventions and the implementation of legislation, one certainly has to acknowledge that there are measures in place to assist women readily. However, whether the same could be said about men's access to those very same services is another contentious point of discussion, open to public debate.

Keegan Lakay is a Legal Officer at the Commission for Gender Equality a statutory body created under Chapter 9 of the Constitution of the RSA