

2. Exploring Women's Use of Services in the Aftermath of Domestic Violence: A Case Study of Acornhoek, Mpumalanga

Authors: Lisa Vetten (Corresponding author lisa@tlac.org.za), Francois van Jaarsveld, Phineas Riba and Lufuno Mokwena.

South African women report some of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world. As a body of predominantly-North American research attests, such violence exacts profound emotional, psychological and economic costs upon not only its victims but also their families, communities and broader society as a whole. Yet astonishingly little research has been conducted locally examining women's use of services in the aftermath of violence, as well as the impact of such services. This paper explores some of these questions through findings from a case study of domestic violence in Acornhoek, Mpumalanga. We undertook a census of police records, female out-patient admissions and applications for protection orders for the period 1 January 2006 – 31 July 2007, identifying a total of 942 reported acts of domestic violence. Our findings show that the vast majority of women used only one of these services and that referral systems between these services were under-developed. The absence of a policy guiding healthworkers' response to domestic violence was particularly apparent. This analysis of records also suggested that different groups of women were using these services and that the type of assistance offered was affecting which woman was likely to use what service. Our findings raise challenges around how victim empowerment and notions of integrated service provision are conceptualised, as well as implemented, in relation to domestic violence.