Chapter 6
Intra-household Dynamics: Power and Control over Resources

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 signals the centrality of households in times of crisis. In an attempt to survive, households have expanded by recruiting vulnerable family members and diversified their limited resources to provide for their extended families. This chapter makes the argument that, the effects of poverty and unemployment strain household resources and relations, pushing households closer to the brink of collapse. While the household is becoming the only sanctuary for the poor and unemployed, its stability is endangered by poverty and unemployment. Resources become scarce and household relations become conflictual. Managing, sharing and allocating resources tend to be highly contested issues within households, based not only on gender but on age as well.

This chapter engages with theories that begin to suggest that households are always harmonious and resources always distributed amicably between equal household members. Unlike classical economics, this chapter adopts Sen’s (1984) and Folbre’s (1994) argument of co-operative conflict, and argues that in times of crisis there is more conflict than co-operation in the poorest households. The unequal use, allocation and distribution of income within households challenge the notion of family and kinship networks working for the benefit of all. Thus, what ties these households together is a common living space and kinship ties. Unequal power dynamics, ignored by the livelihoods’ approach, are explored in this chapter.
While most theories have long discovered the gendered nature of these power dynamics, especially in households, inter-generational dynamics have not been fully explored. The power struggles that often surround the allocation and distribution of disposable income in many household have indeed undermined the potential benefits that family and kinship networks have in reducing individual and household insecurities such as income, housing and food.58

The diversification of livelihood activities59 has come at a cost to communities. It has put further pressure on household dynamics and intergenerational conflict, which go beyond the borders of the household. Alternative and hidden household livelihoods, such as crime, are becoming a common source of conflict within households and in communities. Indeed, not all livelihood activities are sustainable and their benefits vary between individuals and households. Some livelihoods intensify the effects of poverty and unemployment rather than improve the economic and social position of those who are vulnerable, such as women and the elderly.

The chapter argues that, instead of increasing household livelihood activities, there is a growing phenomenon of individual activities within households. The collectiveness of households is seriously undermined by poverty, and what is left are kinship relations. At most, what is shared is just space and not resources such as income. That old saying that defined households as “eating from one pot” is questioned and slowly disappearing.

The chapter explores the effects of lack of assets and resources, poverty, unemployment and inequalities between men and women on households and communities. These are lived experiences and feelings of powerlessness, shame, abuse and inadequacy. Traditional identities are redefined and social relations are

58 Rosenzweig (1986) reaches a similar conclusion is in a research study conducted in India and the Philippines.

59 Livelihood diversification is defined as a process by which “households construct an increasingly diverse portfolio of activities and assets in order to survive and to improve their standard of living” (Ellis, 2000:15, cited in De Haan & Zoomers, 2003:356).
strained or fractured by unemployment and poverty. Men’s traditional roles as heads of household and breadwinners are questioned and undermined. Women’s roles as traditional caregivers become central but more of a burden and not an elevation in their status. For many women, especially older women, their experience of poverty is not simply the struggle of scarce resources, inadequate assets and ill health, but also the experience of domestic violence and abuse (Gurr et al., 1996).

6.2 Re-imagining the Domestic as a Site of Struggle

Significant changes and intensification of household dynamics emerge as poor households struggle to allocate and distribute their limited resources. The outcomes of these struggles have pushed households further into poverty, and the vulnerable – women, children and the aged – become further marginalised.

6.2.1 Shifting gender roles: the “end of patriarchalism”? 

In a context where the rate of unemployment and retrenchments among men is high, their traditional role as breadwinners and heads of households are seriously undermined. Their status and identities in households and society are questioned as they lose their income and are unable to provide for their families. Men’s status has always been linked to their economic position, and the gendered nature of the labour market guaranteed them higher wages than women. This was further entrenched in South Africa during the migrant labour system and the booming mining industry. However, in the post-industrial and post-apartheid era, such social and economic guarantees are diminishing with rising unemployment among men.

In fact, work has always played a major role in defining masculinities (Morrell, 2001). The absence of work has thus led to a crisis in how men define themselves and their responsibilities in their households and communities. Therefore, a redefinition of gender relations in the household is necessitated by their changing
economic position. Hence, feelings of powerlessness and shame have been experienced and expressed by most of the men interviewed. Their economic power has been taken away by retrenchments and unemployment. The social power that they used to command has been undermined by lack of income.

*I have always been the provider, the husband and head of this family. I was working and had a salary to maintain my family both here and in the rural areas. Things have changed now. I have no money; I am poor and unemployed (Interview 75, 28 October 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).*

The radical change in their economic position, they believe, undermines their manhood. This has resulted in high levels of domestic violence as men attempt to hold on to their power in their households. Interviewed men expressed a deep sense of loss in their status in both the household and the community, as reflected in the following comments:

*Suddenly I was unemployed and became useless for my family and community. I was respected in the community, not to mention even in my household. I was the head of this household. I had a say on everything. I no longer have that power. People do as they please. Come in, as they want. Cook what they want. Make babies when they want (Interview 75, 28 October 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).*

*As a man, I should provide for my family but circumstances do not allow. I cannot buy them bread or even pay their school fees (Interview 15, 10 September, 6 and 22 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).*

Claims based on culture and tradition have actually intensified, with most men wanting to exert their traditional power over women. It was observed that men’s powerlessness and defeat in the workplace because of retrenchments made them want to hold on to their perceived power in the households. Someone’s husband declared:

*I am still the head of this household. I should be consulted on how money is spent in this house. My wife often uses money her way, not my way. I want that to change. It has to change (Interview 15, 10 September, 6 and 22 November, 2002, Mpumalanga Township).*
Most women argued that when their husbands were working “things were better” – their subordination in the household was restricted to how they were taking care of the household and the children, not to how they were spending their money. The following comments by women reflect this position:

*Nowadays, it is not how I am cooking but where I got the money to buy food and where is the rest of the money (Interview 4, 11 and 15 August, 18 September, 29 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).*

*I do not know what got into him. He is forever depressed. He does not talk to us any more. He just complains about this and that. Always declaring and demanding that he paid many cows for me and therefore I should obey and listen to him (Interview 2, 10 and 15 August, 16 September, 29 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).*

The response of men was as follows:

*My wife does not respect me any more. She treats me like dirt. She has also taught my children to treat me as such. She is forever complaining and does not cook for me any more (Interview 84, 1 and 7 October 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).*

*Things have changed. We have forgotten our tradition and culture. As a man, I am told I cannot tell my wife what to do. I am told she has rights in my own house. When she does not cook for me, I am told to just keep quiet and not do anything about it. The police and the magistrate said that (Interview 15, 10 September 2002, 6 and 22 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).*

During the migrant labour system in South Africa, it could be argued that men temporarily lost their status as heads of households because of their absence. Men were able to regain their status when they returned home and could provide for their families. Through remittances, men were able to become “absentee” heads of households. Today, men have lost their status as breadwinners, and thus their household headship seriously undermined. They are only able to regain that status when they gain a stable income or much later when they are pensioners and receive a monthly state grant.
Even though men are no longer breadwinners, they remain, because of their tradition and culture, heads of households. The link between being a breadwinner and head of household is severed. However, this does not mean a role reversal in the household and an “end of patriarchalism” as Castells (1997) suggests, but new and multiple patriarchies (Posel, 1991) emerge in households and societies.

Class or the economic position of men and women it is argued, shapes these relations between men and women. Indeed, these relations are also clearly shaped by culture and the traditional background of men and women. Male domination and female subordination change over time given shifts in class and economic positions of both men and women. A complete end of patriarchy is impossible, but it can be redefined and based less on the economic position of men and women and more on traditional and cultural values. An involution to households (Burawoy, Krotov & Lytkina, 2000, 2001) also means an involution to traditional and cultural norms and values based on patriarchy that previously held households together. However, because of modernisation and gender awareness, old forms of patriarchy are questioned and new ones are formed.

What is rejected is simply the principal-earner fallacy. While men have lost their role as providers for their families because of unemployment, their traditional role as heads of households is maintained. Indeed, the relative economic positions between men and women have affected the balance of decision-making power in the majority of households (Alamgir, 1977; Guyer, 1980). The outcomes of these negotiations and struggles are varied, but often lead to intense domestic violence and abuse.

6.2.2 “De facto” heads of households and breadwinners: the micro-political relations of control

Indeed, men’s status in their households as breadwinners have diminished and their manhood is questioned by more women providing for their households. On the one hand, fatherhood is defined narrowly in economic terms and provisions. This has placed serious limitations on men and their perceived role in the
household. Their identity as men or fathers is challenged by their unemployment and lack of income to provide for their families. A redefinition of their role is necessitated, one which takes into consideration social and not just economic aspects.

On the other hand, motherhood has always been defined more broadly than merely in economic terms. Hence, changes in their employment did not mean a crisis of identity for women. For most women, unemployment has meant an expansion in their role as caregivers. Their change in status has given new and pronounced meaning to ideas of motherhood, extending them beyond the household into the community. Given their natural roles as caregivers, it is not surprising that, in this context of high unemployment, poverty and AIDS, women assume the role of de facto heads of households and breadwinners in most poor households. As such, women have tended to take on more responsibilities by taking care of households and their communities. The mothers said:

*I am a mother to my children and all the children in this community. I have to take care of them; mothers do that. As a mother, I should not discriminate. There are many AIDS orphans who need my love and care.* (Interview 6, 15 August 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

*I take care of not just my immediate family but also my extended family, both from my side and from my husband’s side. It a heavy load to carry alone but God has given the world mother so that we can take care of everyone* (Interview 2, 10 AND 15 August, 16 September, 29 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

The workload of these women is enormous and made even worse by lack of resources and income. They tend to be the older women in the community, who, because of old age, are not that, healthy. The little money they get from their informal economy activities or state grant is over-stretched to support more than one household. As stated in the following interviews:

*In terms of my health, I am not one hundred per cent well, but I am much better than those young children who are dying every day because of some undisclosed disease. I cannot complain to anyone.*
I am a woman, a mother and community member. All my time in this world has to be spent taking care of others, who are less fortunate than I am (Interview 64, 9, 11 and 12 September, 2, 3 and 5 October, 4, 14 and 15 November 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

The work that I do in my house, the community and church has even increased after I was retrenched. It has also been worse since many people are sick and unemployed. It is actually double the time and energy I spent working at Hebox, my last factory job. The difference here is that I do not get a pay cheque every month. All I get is many sad and hungry faces (Interview 2, 10 and 15 August, 16 September, 29 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

My vegetable garden is not just for me, but also for everyone who wants to eat. I share it with my neighbours and friends. I also encourage them to grow their own vegetables. My grant money is not mine, it is for everyone that I take care of, that is my unemployed sons and daughters and their children (Interview 6, 15 August 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

Unemployment, AIDS and the lack of basic services such as water and electricity have placed another heavy load on women who are already trying to make ends meet in their communities and households. As I was told,

I cannot even begin to tell you how much people are suffering in this community because of unemployment, AIDS and this whole thing of paying for everything, including water. I do not have money to buy the electricity card and so are many houses. We spend months with no electricity and then the municipality cuts our water supply because we owe them a lot of money (Interview 60, 19, 21 and 22 September, 1 and 2 October, 14 and 30 November 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

In the past, we used to raise children and when we get old, they take care of us. Things have changed. We are now taking care of them and their children; either they are unemployed or too sick to go find another job (Interview 9, 28 July, 17 August, 22 September, 15 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

In most households, women are breadwinners, providing for many household members. They earn money in the informal economy and they are household livelihood activities, especially with regard to social reproduction. For example,
one woman said that:

For the first time in this household, everyone relies on me for food, well-being and just general survival. My husband is unemployed and stays at home. There are just too many mouths to feed (Interview 52, 27 August, 16 and 20 September 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

However, women’s elevated status has not resulted in them acquiring status as heads of households. In fact, in most cases their husbands, sons and brothers often dictated how their money should be spent and allocated. Most women argued that their “new” role in the household seemed to be a threat to their husbands or brothers. For example:

I am the only one working in this house. I buy food, pay electricity and sometimes water when there is enough money. The rest of the money, I share with my husband. We fight about how I should spend my money. Mostly he thinks the money should be given to him (Interview 12, 4 August, 18 September, 16 October 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

Nevertheless, women’s tradition and culture keeps them as subordinate to their husbands, brothers and uncles. When women challenge and struggle against their culture and tradition, they are often labelled as the “other” or domestic violence and abuse becomes rife. For example, when young women use their child grant for their own use, they are accused of being selfishness and irresponsible. However, when young men use their money for their own personal use it is not condemned as harshly. The following comments of these young women reflect this argument:

Yes, I have two children and I receive government money for both children but I do not feel the need to use my money for everyone in the house. Why should I do that if my brother is not expected to do the same? He works at the local taxi rank washing taxis and he gets paid more money than I get from government. I do not remember a day when my mother shouts at him for not buying this or that for the house. She shouts at me every day for not being ‘responsible’. When I question her about my brother the response is always the same – I
am a woman, I should be more responsible. It is even worse with household chores. He just wakes up in the morning and does nothing in the house and I am expected to clean, cook and take care of the children (Interview 33, 11 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

I was tired of taking care of my children while my boyfriend was not doing anything for them. So one day I decided to take my children to his house. I left them there. It’s been a year now. I wanted him to raise the children and feel the pain that I was feeling. I thought that my own mother will support me but instead she became one of those people who called me names. They say that the only reason I abandoned my children was that I want to be young again and free for all men to see me ... unondidwa [isiZulu word that means a whore] (Interview 85, 2 October 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

Women’s powerlessness is always different from that experienced by men. While they are key in the survival of their households and communities because of their traditional role as caregivers, their status in their households remains the same or even deteriorates, as men feel more and more powerless. Their primary role of social reproduction is often the only thing that keeps households and communities from breaking up completely. This was because men defined themselves around a job or a factory but women were defined around the home as agents of social reproduction. Therefore, in a context where factories are literally disappearing in communities such as Mpumalanga Township, so too is the power of men. Women still hold on to their power in the household, but that is undermined and challenged by men who now feel powerless. A few women calmly explained to me:

*When he was employed, I was happy and he was happy. He went to work in the morning and came back in the evening. Weekends he would go to his friends and drink there. Today he is unemployed and always at home telling me how to do my work. He tells me how to cook, how to clean and take care of the children* (Interview 49, 18 and 19 September 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

*You know, you cannot do your work when they are around. They want to be directors as if they know what they are talking about. I wish he would get a job and stop interfering with mine here at home* (Interview 25, 16 September 2002, Mpumalanga Township).
However, while such conflicts in the household have always existed, they have intensified over the years as men lost their jobs. This has led to tensions in the household that often resulted in violence and abuse.

6.3 Fractured Social Relations I: Income and Time Conflict

The allocation of time and income in all households is based on gender and age. Traditional gender roles and divisions are maintained and intensified, especially when there are limited resources such as income. Older women, as natural caregivers, tend to spend their income on their household and on others rather than on themselves. Men tend to use their income on alcohol and personal use. This has given rise to much conflict in households, where men are questioned about how they spend their income (Gwagwa, 1998).

The Zwane family reflects some of these dynamics. Both Mr and Mrs Zwane are pensioners and receive a monthly state grant, but their income is used in different ways. Mrs. Zwane had this to say:

*I always use my government money for the whole family. I buy food and electricity. I pay for school fees and buy school clothes. I also make sure that the children have pocket money or lunch box every day when they go to school. My money does not always cover everything. Then you have other people in the house who use their money for other things but expect a plate of food every day. The price of maize meal has gone up and a loaf of bread is just excessively expensive. I do not get a cent from anyone. When I ask about how they spend their money, I am always told I am a woman* (Interview 63, 25 November 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

Mr. Zwane had this to say about how he used his money:

*Firstly, I am not supposed to discuss matters of my household with you, especially since you are a woman and so young. However, I will make an exception. Secondly, as a man and head of this household, I will not be told what to do. I will not be questioned by my wife of where I have been and how I use my money. It is unheard
of in my culture for a woman to raise her voice against her husband. Finally, I expect to find a clean house and a cooked meal every day (Interview 14, 12 October 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

Tradition is often used as a scapegoat by men such as Mr Zwane, who do not want to spend their money on their households. In the majority of households, income conflict has “always been there” and was mainly sparked by retrenchment packages. Often women would want to know how their husbands, sons or brothers spent their money. Men, like Mr Zwane, refused to answer these questions, citing cultural reasons and the traditional position of women in their households. Some men often stated that they did not receive their packages when they were retrenched. As this was a common phenomenon, the issue was never raised again.

However, the inability to provide for their families and themselves has brought a lot of shame and resentment to both women and men. They argued that it was embarrassing for them when they could not afford to take their children to school or to better schools. Therefore, most women and men expressed feelings of defeat and inadequacy in fulfilling their roles as mothers and fathers. However, women were in a much better position than men were, given that they were able to contribute in ways other than in monetary terms. As these women commented:

*I do not have money to help my neighbours, but I am able to help in other ways. I do not go to sick people carrying money. I carry my sympathy, emotional support, prayers and sometimes cooked food. I offer everything else except money (Interview 2, 10 and 15 August, 16 September, 29 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).*

*People appreciate the little things you offer them. They appreciate the fact that you came to visit them during their times of need (Interview 36, 22 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).*

*Money is not an issue any more. I am able to grow vegetables in my own yard and feed my family. I do not have to have money to feed them (Interview 56, 20 September 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).*

Household conflict was also sparked by unequal time use and allocation. Once again, older women spent more of their time on the survival of households. Childcare, cooking, cleaning and the vegetable garden took most of their time.
average day’s work for most women was eight to ten hours a day. Men, on the other hand, were accused of spending most of their time doing nothing in the household or of spending time in local shebeens. This is confirmed by South African statistics – the System of National Accounts (SNA) production (paid work) and non-SNA production (unpaid work). SNA statistics show that women spent twice the time – 235 minutes a day compared to 117 minutes a day – on non-productive activities such as housework, community service and looking after children, the sick, the elderly and disabled members of the household (see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Productive and non-productive activities and mean minutes for men and women, South Africa, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minutes</td>
<td>Number of men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNA production</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>6 036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-SNA production</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>8 495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-productive</td>
<td>1 165</td>
<td>12 018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistics South Africa (2001b)

In all age groups, men spent more time on productive activities such as wage employment. However, younger women tend to spend less time on non-productive activities than older women. In all age groups, women spend less time than men on non-productive activities such as learning, social and cultural activities, and personal care (Stats SA, 2001b).

The gendered nature of social reproduction places women at the centre of household survival, but they are often over-worked with no time to take care of themselves. The challenges placed on households to create their own livelihoods have resulted in more work for women and not for men. Therefore, as Sullivan (1997:237) states, “Women’s time is not only more pressured in terms of intensity

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60 The international System of National Accounts (SNA), from which macro-economic descriptors such as the gross domestic product (GDP) are calculated, takes certain productive activities into account, but not non-productive activities.
of domestic tasks, but the more enjoyable aspects of time, such as leisure time, tend to be more fragmented than those of men.” Such “gender differentials in time use continue to have strong implications for the quality of women’s lives, relating in particular to stress induced by ‘the pressure of time’.”

Older women in the study embraced the enormous responsibility placed on them by poverty, but young women challenged the gender division of labour in the household and made demands for an equal share of the social reproduction in their households. Young women who received child grants on behalf of their children even refused to share their money with others in the households. They were accused of spending this money on cell phones, clothes, and frequently visiting the salon to change their hairstyles. A parent and community leader said:

*My daughter has a two-year-old son. I forced her to go and apply for the child grant, as I was unable to take care of both of them and my other children. She now receives the grant but does not give it to me as arranged. She recently bought herself a cell phone. I have tried talking to her but she would not listen (Interview 52, 27 August, 16 and 20 September 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).*

*Mbeki has created such a problem for us parents by giving these young girls these child grants. They do not use the grants for their children. I have four girls in this house; they all receive grants but I still have to buy food for their children and them as well. My pension money is used for everyone in the house but their money is used for new hairstyles and maintaining their cell phones (Interview 60, 19-22 September, 1 and 2 October, 14 and 30 November 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).*

Household bargaining takes place between parents and children. Children’s bargaining powers are increased by their economic independence or decreased by their dependence. The inequality within the family reflects inequality in individual power related to age and gender (Folbre, 1994:23). It is not surprising, therefore, that young girls with access to a regular income through child grants or otherwise tend to challenge their parents on household resource allocation. This has put another strain on household relations between parents and children. It also challenges the notion that household members pool resources for the benefit of
Interviewees often cited the problem of alcohol abuse and the depletion of income in households. Men who were considered to be “heads of households” and key decision makers on how household incomes would be allocated tended to be the main culprits. A woman said that:

*My husband returns home every day drunk. There is a shebeen a few houses away from our house. That is where he spent his entire retrenchment package* (Interview 12, 4 August, 18 September, 16 October 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

Drug and alcohol abuse was also rife among young men and women, who were unemployed and spent most of their time in shebeens. For interviewees, there was a causal link was made between unemployment and alcohol and drug abuse. Another person said:

*I would say that unemployment plays a big part in alcohol and drug abuse, most of the youth is addicted. The other reason might be that we lack good infrastructure in the community, such as sports facilities and other things that may keep them busy* (Interview 89, 18 and 19 November 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

Parents and community leaders blamed shebeens for what could be called a “moral degeneration”. Some of their comments were:

*There is a shebeen in every street in this community where men spend their wages and pension money. Young girls also go there in search of men who will give them money. The things that happen in those houses are despicable* (Interview 9, 28 July, 17 August, 22 September, 15 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

*Those shebeens should be closed down. They are breaking so many homes and this community. Fathers and daughters are seen drinking in the same shebeens. The moral fibre of this community is*
slowly diminishing (Interview 61, 9 September, 2 October, 4 and 15 November 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

Those who owned these shebeens often said that selling alcohol was their livelihood, but that it was unfortunate that young men and women were resorting to easing their frustration of unemployment by abusing alcohol. One shebeen owner stated that:

*If people want me to stop what I am doing, then they should give me a job. This is my job. I do not have a choice but make a living. I do not force people to come here and buy alcohol from me. I will also not chase them away when they come* (Interview 43, 22 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

Linked to alcohol and drug abuse is escalating crime among the youth. Many people interviewed – ordinary citizens and politicians – expressed deep concerns about crime in townships.

*Crime has increased in the township. Our children are not working and they resort to crime and drugs. Their fathers are drinking excessively and beating their wives. Young girls are having babies just to get a grant from government. This is what has become of our community* (Interview 61, 9 September, 2 October, 4 and 15 November 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

*The youth is unemployed and just loitering in the streets. Their best option is often robbing people of their bags and cell phones. They also take advantage of their grandparents and often take their pension money* (Interview 13, 18 August 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

Alcohol abuse, the increasing number of shebeens and rising unemployment among young women are also linked to the booming “sexual economy” in the community. It was also well known that these young women went to shebeens to attract men who would give them money in exchange for sexual favours. Therefore, not only were these women “trying to forget their problems of unemployment by drinking”, they were also using shebeens to get money from
Young girls go to these shebeens to meet men who have money. They do not care whether the person is married or not. They also do not care whether this was criminal money. All they are interested in is men who have money. In turn, they offer these men their bodies (Interview 1, 17 September, 30 and 31 October, 8 and 29 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

What is happening in these shebeens is close to prostitution but these women do not see it as that. For them it is just fun and making a living. They sell their bodies to almost anyone and everyone who has money (Interview 61, 9 September, 2 October 2003, 4 and 15 November 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

Many community members and parents said, “these places are responsible for killing our sons and daughters”. The spread of HIV among young people was linked to these shebeens, as expressed by this comment:

The level of alcohol abuse is very bad. Some children are qualified at tertiary institutions but not working. So, you will find them drinking the whole day and even their mothers and fathers are drinking. When everyone is drunk, they engage in unsafe sex (Interview 88, 18 and 19 November 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

Therefore, emerging in the two townships are various “hidden livelihoods” such as illegal shebeens and the “sexual economy”. Individuals with no other option pursue these livelihoods. However, these livelihoods are branded as bad and immoral by most. A young woman said,

There are double standards in this community. Women are the only ones who are branded whores but not men who provide the money and encourage the behaviour. Besides, some women do it because they see nothing wrong with it but most know that it is wrong but have no choice as there is no employment (Interview 33, 11 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).
Regardless of the explanation and the seeming gender bias of the community about these hidden livelihoods, there are serious implications to be considered. In a context where HIV and AIDS are so rife, livelihoods that encourage promiscuity are dangerous and deadly.

6.5 Fractured Social Relations II: Domestic Violence

Alcohol and drug abuse, feelings of powerlessness and shame influence and contribute to the escalating incidence of domestic abuse and violence in most households. Such household conflicts limit the potential that households have as sources of livelihood for most vulnerable people, the majority of them women and children. A retrenched mother of four echoed the effects of such household relations:

*I was retrenched in 1998, the same year that my husband passed away. My children and I then moved back to my family’s house because of problems at my in-laws’ house. I was accused of killing my own husband. However, things were also not easy for me at my mother’s house. My brother was always drunk and often beat me up and chased me out of the house. I then decided to move out but leave my children behind. I am renting this house now with the help of my mother’s pension money (Interview 2, 10 and 15 August, 16 September, 29 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).*

While in most households domestic violence and abuse is not a new phenomenon, most women said that the situation was getting worse, with more women reporting being physically, emotional and economically abused by their husbands, sons and brothers. Most women linked the abuse to unemployment, lack of income and lack of accountability on the part of men in their households. An elder woman, who works in the community, reflected on these issues:

*For most married women, it was a privilege to have a husband. That was years ago, when the men were working and brought home a share of their wages. They provided for their families. These women were happy then. Now that their husbands are not working, the tables have turned. The women are coming to me complaining about the abuse that is happening in their homes. The matter has*
gotten out of hand and no one seems to be taking notice. All I can do is listen and be supportive. I cannot tell these men and women what to do (Interview 7, 13, 26, 27 and 29 August, 4 and 16 September, 23 and 30 October 2002, 7 and 23 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

Another woman echoed this statement:

All we [women] talk about nowadays is the abuse and violence that happens in our homes. It is a sad situation. It is amazing what lack of money can do in many homes. Unemployment has broken and is breaking many home and families. Many women are leaving their children and husband because they cannot take it any more (Interview 12, 4 August, 18 September, 16 October 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

The majority of men interviewed did not refute the link between unemployment or lack of income to domestic abuse and violence. They made this link and argued that “with unemployment came disrespect.” An older man said this:

We [men] are losing the battle at home. We are not respected as heads of households. Our children no longer consult us on major issues. They go to their mothers, and their mothers are happy to replace us, even when we are available. Their mothers take decision on our behalf and they expect us to keep quite. Well, we will not be quiet. There is no control, discipline and respect any more. Our ancestors are turning in their graves. It is our duty to make things right (Interview 82, 3 and 4 October 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

However, other men, especially the younger generation, who themselves had been victims of abuse in their families, argued that unemployment had been “used as a scapegoat and justification” by men who abused women. A young man refuted the statement above:

Not all men are abusers but there are those who do it to vent their frustrations. It has nothing to do with respect because if it did, these men would also be respecting their wives and not beating them or calling them names. It also has nothing to do with our isiZulu culture; just because a man is a head of household, does not
necessarily mean they have to beat up their wives and children. They have to protect and nurture them (Interview 35, 14 October 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

This also reflects the emerging general inter-generational conflict between men (an issue discussed in the next section). Unfortunately for most women, few young men only believe the above statement.

6.6 Inter-generational Conflict

The critical role of older people, women in particular, in providing for their households and communities are undisputed. Their role also signals the emergence of a second role-reversal, as older people are required to take care of (financially, socially and physically) their children, grandchildren and extended families. AIDS orphans often live with and/or are taken care of by older women. Hence, the death or absence of older women has devastating effects on the survival of households, the community and indeed the entire society as it struggles to reproduce itself. Their role as primary economic providers in the majority of households and communities has not meant the elevation of their status as suggested in the case of Russia (Burawoy, Krotov & Lytkina, 2000).

Their social position is seriously undermined by domestic violence, abuse and conflict within their households. This abuse is not because of the economic dependence of parents on their children, as previously argued (Griffin & Williams, 1992). In fact, the abuse is often because of children’s dependence on their parents, both emotionally and financially, and their need to control their parents’ income (Godkin, Wolf & Pillemar, 1989; Pillemer & Finkelhor, 1991). Several old women confirmed this:

Sometimes I wish I did not receive this money. Maybe then there wouldn’t be any reason for such problems in my house. This one wants R100 and that one demands R400, but when there is no food in the house, they get angry (Interview 13, 18 August 2002, Mpumalanga Township).
They all demand my money. They wait the whole month for it. They don’t even try to look for work. I don’t give them a cent. They will have to wait until they are 60 or 65 to receive their grant. By then I will be dead (Interview 50, 1 and 2 October 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

Hence, the biggest challenge facing older people and their critical role in households and communities does not come as expected from ill health and death, but rather from domestic violence and abuse – emotionally, financially and psychologically. Sadly, this has been mainly by children and grandchildren as they make demands on older people’s pension money. A political leader in the community stated:

My only concern is that the youth does not respect adults and their parents. I have seen and witnessed this. I have been to meetings at the township and I can tell you all the other townships experience the same problem (Interview 87, 12 November 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

In fact, even though older women are critical for the survival of households and communities, they feel let down by their children, community and government.

Our children are no longer an investment. They die young and leave their children behind. They do not respect us any more (Interview 6, 15 August 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

Some of my friends also complain of being abused by their own children. Come pension day, they wait for them and take the little money the government gives them (Interview 64, 9, 11 and 12 September, 2, 3 and 5 October, 4, 14 and 15 November 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

Other people also expressed concern about the way young people treated older people, especially women:

Our grandmothers and mothers are central to our survival. Yet, we take them for granted. We forcefully take their pension money and do not help them around the house (Interview 68, 27 November
Our mothers and sisters hold this community together. They are providers in their households and communities. They play a crucial role in our society. However, young people like me do not realise this. We treat our mothers poorly and do not listen to them (Interview 27, 10 November 2002, Mpumalanga Township).

Many abused mothers and grandmothers often do not report these cases because they are ashamed of what the community will say. They are also scared that their children will go to jail or abuse them again. The level of failing trust between the police and the community also contributes to these women not reporting these cases.

Many of my friends are scared of reporting their children to the police. Wives are also scared of reporting their husbands. They just sit at home and hope for the best (Interview 64, 9, 11 and 12 September, 2, 3 and 5 October, 4, 14 and 15 November 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

The research confirms Wahl and Purdy’s (1991) conclusion about the hesitancy of elders to disclose abuse. Elders often fear retaliation from the abuser, they are dependent on the abuser for care, they are ashamed that a family member is the abuser, and they believe that social organisations will not help them. In addition, there is a general mistrust of the police. Most mothers’ and grandmothers’ demands for respect are linked to their culture and tradition, which values age. Hence, in most cases they would argue that young people have forgotten their tradition, especially that of respecting their elders.

Indeed the times have changed but our tradition has not. Young men and women should respect their elders. What is happening in this modern era is that old people are not important. Young people opt for a foreign culture. This is a lost generation (Interview 60, 19, 21 and 22 September, 1 and 2 October, 14 and 30 November 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

I don’t know what this world is coming to. Maybe it is coming to an end. Maybe God is punishing us. There is no respect any more for
elders. I pray to God every day to show our children the right path (Interview 58, 25 September 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).

The common risk factors of elder abuse are certain dependencies on the part of the abuser. This confirms Godkin, Wolf and Pillemer’s (1989) conclusion that this could be both financial and/or housing dependence (see also Pillemer, 1985, and Ward & Spitze, 1992). This is reflected in most interviews with elders themselves, and with community organisations such as church organisations that deal with old people. A community church leader said:

*That week of pay day seems to be the most times that mainly grandmothers come to the church to ask for my assistance. They want me to accompany them to their homes and talk to their sons and daughters who have turned into violent creatures against their parents. The problem is not pension money, but children and grandchildren who want to control it (Interview 96, 2 and 4 October 2003, Enhlalakahle Township).*

A political leader said:

*It is not the problem of government. The government is trying to help by giving people money, including grandparents. This has been happening for so many years and no problems were reported. The problem is at home where the youth is unemployed and they do not have any income. The government cannot be blamed (Interview 39, 3 March 2003, Mpumalanga Township).*

In addition, a grandmother said:

*This government money seems to be the source of the problem. Not that we do not need it, but because I am the only one who receives it, seems to be a problem for my children (Interview, Matron Gcisa, Enhlalakahle Hospital, 30 October 2003).*

Therefore, there are several contributory factors to the problem. First, there is growing unemployment, especially among the youth, and thus lack of income. Second, there is general income security for elders because of the state pension.
grant. Third, common residence in a house owned by the elder has been the source of the abuse. Therefore, the economic position of elders makes them easy targets of crime and domestic violence.

6.7 Conclusion

The findings in this chapter question the romanticisation of household relations as assets for the poor. Households are not necessarily altruistic entities that serve all household members equally. There are often intense household conflicts and unequal power relations emerging or intensified by poverty and unemployment. Gender and age shape these household changes and relations. They shape opportunities, access, rights and obligations of each household member. This chapter reveals not only conflict between men and women but also between young and old regardless of their gender.

The centrality of households as key sources of livelihoods and survival is seriously undermined by such household conflicts. This conflict also tends to spill over to the community, as crime among the youth is increasing, and young women and men are taking part in the booming “sexual economy” (Hunter, 2001). Nevertheless, regardless of the fragility of the household, it remains the most common beacon of hope for many unemployed, poor, vulnerable and sick.

This chapter and the previous one illustrate how the crises of poverty, unemployment and HIV/AIDS have led many people to retreat to the household. However, because of limited resources, lack of income and household conflict, the crisis has intensified. The people of Mpumalanga and Enhlalakahle Townships have also pursued social resources outside the household to respond to their crises. Such public responses have been in the form of various community organisations, networks and associations, formal and informal. The next chapter outlines the role that these community organisations have played as potential social resources.