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Men's perceptions, experiences and responses to domestic violence: a comparative study of immigrant and South African men in the Johannesburg inner city

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Abstract

This report presents findings from a comparative qualitative study conducted in the Johannesburg inner city. The study sought to understand immigrant and South African heterosexual men's perceptions, experiences, and responses to domestic violence. Drawing on social constructionist theory, the research investigates whether migration and nationality influenced how heterosexual men perceived, experienced, and responded to domestic violence. The study used qualitative methodology and relied on original empirical research. In total, participants (consisting of six immigrant and six South African men) were identified through purposive and snowballing sampling methods. Semi-structured interview guides were used to collect data, which was then analysed using thematic content analysis. Findings of the study revealed that migration influenced the way in which immigrant men experienced and responded to domestic violence in South Africa. However, migration did not have an impact on how immigrant men perceived domestic violence. This means that the ways in which immigrant men perceived domestic violence was the same as they perceived it in their home countries. However, the ways in which they were experiencing and responding to it in South Africa was different from the ways they used to experience and respond in their home countries (migrant sending countries). The South African participants did not attribute their perceptions, experiences and responses to migration. Instead, they attributed their experiences to the over insistence on rights by women, and the failure of law enforcement agencies to ensure that men who are victims of domestic violence are also heard. Findings also revealed that nationality differences between immigrant men and South African men did not influence the ways in which these two

groups perceived and understood the term ‘domestic violence’. Thus, migrant men and South African men understood the term in the same way.

The definitions of domestic violence that participants reported were different from the traditional definitions and categorizations of domestic violence. Participants defined domestic violence in accordance with their perceptions and experiences, as there was a thin line between perceptions and personal experiences. Further analysis showed that men understood domestic violence as being physical, emotional, and verbal. The findings of the study also revealed that immigrant men believed that their susceptibility to domestic violence was due to migration because of the perception that South African domestic violence legislation favours women. Furthermore, South African men attributed ‘favouritism on terms of the law’ towards women as an issue that made women take advantage of the policy framework to initiate violence towards their intimate partners. These men suggest that women do this in the knowledge that men are generally not believed when they (i.e. men) make reports of domestic violence.