Article

Constructing housework as abuse: African men and intimate partner violence in South Africa

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Abstract: The connection between the gendered division of housework and intimate partner violence (IPV) is a complex reality and context-dependent. In this article, I explore the perceptions of gender norms among African men and how these perceptions intersect with their experiences of housework and IPV. Employing a qualitative approach, the article examines the viewpoints of 25 African men who have encountered IPV in Johannesburg, South Africa. The findings reveal a spectrum of attitudes towards gender norms among these men, ranging from more traditional patriarchal views to less patriarchal and egalitarian perspectives. The analysis indicates that men who adhere to both more and less patriarchal expressions of gender norms tend to view being forced to perform housework as a form of abuse within the context of controlling behaviour in intimate partner relationships. Conversely, men who lean towards egalitarianism perceive the expectation of women to solely manage housework as a form of abuse. However, many of the men express resistance towards gender equality discourses in South Africa, perceiving them as disruptors of traditional gender roles and enablers of women's refusal to solely perform domestic housework. These findings deepen our understanding of the complexities and tensions within intimate relationships amidst evolving gender norms in South Africa.

Keywords: gendered norms; housework; SDG 5-gender equality; intimate partner violence; African men; South Africa

1. Introduction

In South Africa, the intersection of gender norms, housework, and intimate partner violence (IPV) among men and women presents a complex and pressing social problem (Helman and Ratele, 2016; Strebel et al., 2006). The understanding of housework within intimate relationships serves as a critical lens through which to examine power dynamics, gender roles, and manifestations of abuse (Connell and Pearse, 2015; Mulumeoderhwa, 2021; Van den Berg et al., 2013). Despite significant strides towards gender equality in many spheres (Albertyn, 2011; Alonso Ciccia and Lombardo, 2023), traditional patriarchal ideologies continue to influence perceptions and behaviours within intimate partnerships, often exacerbating tensions and contributing to instances of IPV (Helman and Ratele, 2016; Strebel et al., 2006; Walby, 2023).

The construct of housework, typically assigned as women's responsibility within heterosexual relationships, not only encompasses physical tasks such as cooking, cleaning and childcare but also carries symbolic weight, reflecting broader societal norms and expectations regarding gender roles and power dynamics (Chesters, 2012; Conway-Long, 2006). In South Africa's evolving gender landscape, where traditional values intersect with modern aspirations, the negotiation and division of household

chores, alongside men's productive work and women's relegation to reproductive tasks, often become arenas for conflicting ideologies and power struggles between partners (Connell and Pearse, 2015; Helman and Ratele, 2016; Walby, 2023). Despite a noticeable shift in the past two decades towards women assuming breadwinning roles traditionally held by men (Kocabıçak, 2022; Mackett, 2021; Morrell and Jewkes, 2011), some men who remain unemployed at home still strive to maintain their status as family heads and often seeking control over the resources women bring home (Igbanoi, 2018; Moghadam, 2023). Consequently, women frequently bear the dual burden of wage-earning and domestic responsibilities (Chesters, 2012; Zoeller, 2023). This imbalance not only exacerbates tensions but also underscores deeper-rooted inequalities and power dynamics in housework practices within heterosexual relationships. For instance, Strebel et al.'s (2006) study of two black communities in the Western Cape revealed how power dynamics among intimate partners manifest through housework practices and how men's adherence to traditional gender roles influences tensions within the relationship. Helman and Ratele (2016) demonstrate a connection between the unequal construction of housework and power struggles across more patriarchal/less egalitarian and less patriarchal/more egalitarian family dynamics in South Africa. However, existing research primarily examines how gender roles in housework are constructed in relation to the subjugation of women and children without fully exploring the actualities of tensions and hostilities experienced by men within the changing gender dynamics unique to the South African context. Against this backdrop, this article explores intimate partner housework contestations and tensions experienced by African men, examining how their perceptions of gender norms and IPV experiences contribute to their understanding of housework distribution as a form of abuse.

The following analysis draws insight from Connell's (2021) framework on the social construction of gender roles to explore the lived experience and perspectives of 25 Africans regarding gender norms, housework, and IPV. By examining the relationship between gendered norms, household dynamics, and manifestations of abuse, this article aims to shed light on housework as a foundational mechanism that contributes to inequality, power struggles and IPV globally, and South Africa in particular.

1.1. The social construction of gender norms, housework and IPV

The concept of social construction suggests that gendered norms, housework, and IPV are socially constructed and maintained within prevailing systems and discourses around the world (Connell, 2021). Patriarchal discourses, rooted in systems of male privilege and control, heavily influence the construction and perpetuation of these norms, shaping societal expectations and behaviours related to gender roles, power dynamics, and housework responsibilities (Connell and Pearse, 2015; Hearn and Ratele, 2022). Within this understanding, Connell's (2021) exploration of power, economic, and emotional relations highlights how patriarchal structures perpetuate inequalities and hierarchies, contributing to the manifestation of tensions and conflicts between intimate partners. The unequal distribution of power, emotional commitment, and economic dependence within intimate partnerships are all interconnected facets of

patriarchy that can exacerbate the cycles of abuse (Connell, 2021; Hearn and Ratele, 2022). While patriarchy fosters violence against women by perpetuating unequal power dynamics and reinforcing traditional gender roles that often prioritize male dominance (Hearn and Ratele, 2022; WHO, 2013; Zoeller, 2023), it's important to acknowledge that men can also be victims of abuse by women (Hesselink and Dastile, 2015; Rowlands, 2022; Rowlands 2021). The unequal distribution of power within the relationship can be skewed towards the woman, particularly in scenarios of women assuming primary breadwinner roles (Bach, 2019; Chesters, 2012), men becoming economically dependent (Bach, 2019; Igbanoi, 2018), and men demonstrating greater emotional commitment (Dutton and Painter, 1993; Morgan and Wells 2016), thus, challenging patriarchal notions of male dominance (Kocabıçak, 2022; Zoeller, 2023).

Drawing on Connell's (2021) analysis of patriarchal discourses of gender power relations, collective men are privileged and positioned as the dominant sex over women and children. This establishes privileges for men as heads and authority figures in households while prescribing submissive conformity to gender norms for women Connell, 2021; Connell and Pearse, 2015; Gibbs Sikweyiya and Jewkes, 2014; Kimmel, 2017). This structure allows heterosexual men and women to coexist within intimate relationships while perpetuating a relationship of dominance. However, Connell (2021) notes that more assertive women constantly contest men's power within domestic spaces. The expression of power related to patriarchal discursive privilege has been identified as a driving factor in men's use of IPV against one in three women worldwide (Connell, 2021; WHO, 2013). The social construction of IPV encompasses harmful and destructive behaviours aimed at exerting power and control over an individual by a current or former intimate partner. Such behaviours include physical assault, sexual assault, rape, and economic manipulation. IPV also encompasses the utilization of coercive power dynamics, particularly in relationships where dependency is significantly skewed (Dutton and Goodman, 2005; Molm, 1997). Within such dynamics, the less dependent individual often wields greater power. This imbalance can lead to the weaponization of productive and reproductive gender roles against the more dependent partner. Thus, in South Africa, patriarchal-oriented men have been found to employ IPV to control women's bodies and maintain patriarchal institutions (Fakunmoju and Rasool, 2018; STATS SA; 2020). For example, a Gauteng survey revealed that 80% of men admitted to using physical, emotional, sexual, or economic IPV to exert control over their partners (CSVR, 2016). However, the evidence underscores the significant but often overlooked reality that men can indeed be both vulnerable to and victims of IPV, even within societal contexts that advocate for gender equality in power relations (Gelles and Cornell, 1985; Rowlands, 2021). In the United States, for instance, studies conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reveal a startling statistic: approximately one in four men has encountered IPV perpetrated by their female partners (CDC, 2022). This statistic challenges the conventional narrative that IPV is solely a women's issue and underscores the importance of recognizing men's experiences in the discourse surrounding IPV. Similarly, in patriarchal societies like South Africa, where traditional gender roles and power dynamics often prioritize male dominance, instances of men experiencing IPV have been documented. These cases range from emotional and physical abuse to more severe instances, including fatalities at the hands

of their female partners (Hesselink and Dastile, 2015; Rowlands, 2021; Rowlands, 2022a).

Connell's (2021) exploration of patriarchal discourses of economic relations situates men unequally in gender roles alongside women within domestic settings. Gendered roles play a significant role in constructing masculine and feminine identities, with men typically associated with productive work and women with domestic housework (Connell and Pearse, 2015). The construction of housework encompasses various tasks involved in maintaining a household and its members, including cleaning, cooking, laundry, grocery shopping, childcare, and other domestic responsibilities necessary for daily life and the upkeep of a home. It often entails both physical activities and emotional labour, such as providing care and support to family members (Connell, 2021; Connell and Pearse, 2015; Zoeller, 2023). Housework tends to fall disproportionately on women within heterosexual relationships, reflecting traditional gender norms and expectations of economic relations prevalent across societies, where men's respectable masculine identity is associated with stable income and the ability to provide for their families (Agadjanian, 2002; Connell, 2021; Fielding-Miller et al., 2016; Kapulula, 2015; Odimegwu and Adedini, 2013), while women are often relegated to reproductive work positioned as dependents, and socialized to perform unpaid housework (FAO; 2017; Ratele, 2008). However, it is crucial to recognize that while traditional gender roles may still be prevalent, shifts in societal expectations and economic realities are leading to a more equitable distribution of household responsibilities. Both men and women are taking on a variety of roles such as emotional work, economic dependence, and performing unpaid housework within the home (Chesters, 2012; Igbanoi, 2018; Morgan and Wells, 2016; Zoeller, 2023).

Connell's (2021) exploration of emotional relations illuminates the gendered dynamics inherent in intimate partnerships, emphasizing the prevailing societal expectations dictating caregiving roles. Traditionally, women, particularly mothers, are predominantly associated with nurturing and caring for children, while fathers are expected to prioritize financial provision (Connell and Pearse, 2015; Chodorow, 2023). This dichotomy fosters a culture of emotional detachment among fathers, perpetuating gendered norms within family structures (Connell, 2021). Such entrenched gender roles contribute to the prevalence of emotional abuse within intimate relationships, as individuals may feel pressured to conform to these traditional roles, potentially feelings of neglect, unfairness, and stress in the relationship (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2009; Dutton and Goodman, 2005; Molm, 1997). Emotional IPV operationalized here is characterized by tactics such as neglect, deprivation, manipulation, forced to perform housework responsibilities and using children to facilitate other kinds of abuse can have profound and enduring effects on the self-esteem and mental well-being of intimate partners (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2009; Dutton and Goodman, 2005; Gelles and Cornell, 1985; Raven, 1993). Dutton and Goodman (2005) suggest that vulnerability to coercion often stems from exploitable weaknesses inherent within the relationship dynamic. While "someone with considerable independent financial resources is likely not easily coerced by the threat of withholding money for groceries," those dependent on productive or reproductive work, as well as emotional attachment, maybe more easily be coerced in this way.

Moreover, an imbalance in emotional attachment, often resulting from one partner's extreme emotional dependency, serves as fertile ground for exploitation by a coercive partner (Dutton and Goodman, 2005; Dutton and Painter, 1993). Dutton and Goodman (2005) note that this susceptibility to coercion may develop gradually over time through sustained maltreatment and abuse within the relationship or individuals may enter the relationship already burdened with vulnerabilities, such as an inability to perform certain household tasks like cooking, which can be readily exploited by a coercive partner. Stark (2007) argues that IPV often occurs through emotional coercive control tactics employed by male perpetrators to harm and deprive their partners of their rights. However, this pattern of coercive behaviour has been observed to be used by women to force their partners to self-regulate and facilitate other kinds of abuse (Gurm et al., 2020; Morgan and Wells, 2016). Yet, it is essential to recognize that emotional constituent acts may vary depending on cultural contexts and discourses (Flood and Pease, 2006). Buiten and Naidoo (2020) observe that the prevalence of IPV, including emotional abuse, is influenced by implicitly and explicitly constructed social norms, making it challenging to measure and create diverse interpretations of abusive behaviour based on cultural and personal interpretations. Consequently, IPV as a social construct transcends physical violence to include productive and reproductive power in line with gender, emotional and economic relations discourses manifesting across various contexts.

The foregoing highlights how patriarchal discourse and practices perpetuate gendered norms and power imbalances within intimate partnerships, contributing to the construction of IPV against men and women. These dynamics intersect with cultural and societal expectations, influencing the uneven construction of housework across contexts (Connell and Pearse, 2015; Hearn and Ratele, 2022). Addressing these constructions requires challenging entrenched gender norms and promoting gender equality discourses that recognise the agency and rights of all intimate actors.

1.2. Gender equality discourses, and housework tensions

Gender inequality and housework tension are important research focuses and interests of theorists (Connell and Pearse, 2015; Helman and Ratele, 2016; Van den Berg et al., 2013). Gender equality in housework aims to create more equitable and inclusive family dynamics, where individuals have the freedom and opportunity to contribute to housework responsibilities (such as cleaning, cooking, laundry, and childcare) based on their abilities and preferences rather than rigid gender role expectations (Connell, 2021; Kimmel, 2017; Xia and Li, 2023). Research has focused on how men with patriarchal orientations often grapple with the equal distribution of housework within an environment promoting gender equality practices and discourses (Hernández-Albújar Sáez and Garrido-Macías, 2023; Zoeller, 2023). For instance, Mungai and Pease's (2009) study in Australia highlighted migrant African men's struggles in adapting to egalitarian gender relations as they attempt to maintain patriarchal views of relationships. These men interpret relationship tensions as a result of their Australian partners' expectations for equality in housework responsibilities. However, the general trends of gender attitudes and housework over time in Australia indicate that while the time women spend doing housework has declined dramatically,

the housework hours of men have not increased (Chesters, 2012). In Europe, Bach (2019) examines the narratives of three men partnered with career-driven women within the Danish welfare state, exploring their construction of non-dominant masculinity around housework practices. The study highlights the complexities of navigating power dynamics and housework tensions, through the narrative of choice, commitment to involved fatherhood, and aspirations for gender equality. A mixed-method study by Garrido-Macías (2023) and Hernández-Albújar Sáez, conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy and Spain, examined the impact of gendered roles in housework on couples' perceptions of inequality and marital problems. The findings revealed that increased time spent on housework during the lockdown heightened women's perception of inequality and led to relationship conflicts. In contrast, the men's higher involvement in housework did not result in perceived inequity. In another context, Conway-Long's (2006) study in Morocco revealed that many men exhibited ambivalence toward social changes, perceiving shifts in power relations as a form of oppression that stifles masculine expressions in domestic and public places. Similarly, Igbanoi's (2018) study in South Africa observed a sense of masculine liminality and eroded respectability among migrant Africans within intimate spaces. The men in the study expressed dissatisfaction and unease with gender equality discourse and practices, perceiving them as empowering their partners while promoting domestic housework contestations.

Moreover, research conducted within two black communities in the Western Cape (Strebel et al., 2006) and among South African families (Helman and Ratele, 2016) has illuminated the profound impact of men's adherence to traditional gender roles on intimate partner tensions. These studies underscore the enduring influence of patriarchal or less egalitarian gender norms, which perpetuate gender inequality and power struggles within domestic housework dynamics. However, amidst these challenges, there are also instances of men engaging in reflexive practices within the South African family unit, providing evidence of some men's commitment to fostering gender equity in housework distribution (Montgomery et al., 2006; Ratele et al., 2012; Van den Berg et al., 2013). Yet, Mackett (2021) observes that women's disproportionate involvement in unpaid housework continues to drive inequality and affect the quality of work in productive spaces. These findings underscore the complexity of gender dynamics within South African households and highlight the ongoing need for transformative action to address entrenched inequalities and promote a more equitable distribution of housework.

Efforts to promote gender equality in South Africa are evident in government discourses, policy constructs, legal instruments, and actions aimed at addressing women's socioeconomic rights and curbing gender inequality practices. These efforts have led to notable reforms in socioeconomic opportunities, legal protections, and occupational advancements for women (Albertyn, 2011; Hamber, 2010; Rustin, 2018). Consequently, men's identities and patriarchal structures of inequity face significant pressures as more women gain access to education, the labour market, and the ability to assert their rights (Robins, 2008). The changing gender landscape presents challenges and uncertainties for some men who strongly adhere to patriarchal beliefs (Walker, 2005). As a result, the shifting gender dynamics, with women assuming roles traditionally reserved for men, such as being providers for their families, have led to a

transformation in domestic gender relations toward more significant gender equity in South Africa. This shift has created tensions, contestations, and power struggles between men and women, with housework arrangements and intimate relationships becoming critical sites for renegotiating gender power, including instances where men become recipients of IPV (Buiten and Naidoo, 2020; Helman and Ratele, 2016; Rowlands, 2021).

In this article, I shed light on a new dimension of the complexities of housework interaction in intimate relationships among African heterosexual men in South Africa. This analysis reveals how these men perceive housework as abuse, offering a unique perspective that adds to the existing discourses. I examine the trajectories of their gendered housework expectations and explore the evolving dynamics of domestic equity amid the discourse and actions surrounding gender equality in South Africa. The findings demonstrate that these black African men navigate between traditional and egalitarian ideological lines in their housework practices, highlighting the intricate nature of their experiences.

2. Methods

The present analysis utilized data from a more extensive qualitative study that explored the impact of intimate partner violence on African men's masculine identities in Johannesburg. Twenty-five African men hailing from a variety of nations, including South Africa, Zimbabwe, Congo, Nigeria, Mozambique, Malawi, and Eswatini, living in Johannesburg were recruited for this study. Utilizing a non-probability convenience sampling method, participants were chosen during their visits to the Referral Medical Facility (RMF) in Johannesburg. The study specifically targeted heterosexual men aged 18 and above who had identified themselves as victims of IPV and sought medical assistance at the RHF following instances of abuse. The RHF offers comprehensive medico-legal services to survivors of both domestic and sexual violence. The decision to focus on individuals aged 18 and above was based on legal standards recognizing males as adults at this threshold (ACPF, 2013; CFRN, 1999; CRSA, 1996). Additionally, individuals in this age group are more likely to be involved in heterosexual relationships, making them better suited to provide insights into intimate relationship dynamics and their roles within cultural constructs of masculinity. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 58 years and were engaged in various types of heterosexual relationships, including marital, cohabiting, and dating, with durations spanning from eight months to 10 years.

Semi-structured, in-depth narrative interviews were conducted to collect the data, following established guidelines for qualitative research (Bless Higson-Smith and Sithole, 2013; Maree and Pietersen, 2010). Prioritizing empathy and rapport building, I engaged in face-to-face interviews with the 25 men who volunteered to participate in the study (Donalek and Solwish, 2004; Elemesky, 2005; Rowlands, 2022b). Reflexivity heightened my awareness of bias and positionality; it enabled me to collect the data in an unbiased manner. The researcher conducted the interviews in English. This offered an excellent opportunity for many participants to speak freely without encountering language barriers (Creswell, 2013). During these interviews, participants were asked questions related to their perspectives on intimate unions and their

experiences of tensions and abuse within their relationships, a key objective of the study. This line of questioning aimed to explore the sources and manifestations of tensions, as well as the direct or indirect links to abuse by female partners. The interviews also provided insights into the lived experiences of physical and emotional IPV among the African men (Rowlands, 2021).

The analysis presented in this article focuses on a specific sub-theme within the broader study, centred on men's perspectives on housekeeping and the tensions they experienced in relation to housework with their intimate partners. The goal was to examine the diverse views of African men on gender relations in South Africa, particularly emphasizing the trajectories of gendered expectations within this context (Hearn and Morrell, 2012). Participants in the study ranged in age from 23 to 58 and were all survivors of abuse, involved in marital, cohabiting, or dating heterosexual relationships. Of these men, seventeen had South African partners, while six had Zimbabwean partners, reflecting the transnational nature of their relationships and the resulting gender role tensions.

The participants were engaged in various economic activities, with many being self-employed and a few working as employees in different organizations. Many of their partners lacked formal education and were unemployed. Additionally, several participants had children from their relationships, with some acting as caregivers to their partners' children from previous relationships. Moreover, two participants reported that their partners were pregnant. This socioeconomic context sheds light on some of the challenges faced by these men in their intimate relationships (Bless Higson-Smith and Sithole, 2013). Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step thematic analysis process, enabling me, the researcher, to focus on identifying common themes in the data and presenting key elements from the participants' accounts (Babbie and Mouton, 2011; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Hearn and Morrell, 2012).

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Johannesburg and the Johannesburg Health District's District Research Committee. Before participating, all participants were provided with a comprehensive ethical information sheet outlining the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. They had to read and understand this information before signing an informed consent agreement, indicating their voluntary participation and interest in the study (Babbie and Mouton, 2011; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2013). All interviews were conducted in the social worker's office at the Referral Health facility, where participants had access to psychosocial support services. Interviews adopted for use in the analysis were those that lasted for about 30 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes and with sufficient responses that helped address the research question. All interviews were audiotaped, and the researcher transcribed and manually coded the verbal data in a single-blind manner to maintain familiarity with the data while minimizing potential bias (Babbie and Mouton, 2011; Braun and Clarke, 2006). To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' identities (Ellsberg and Heise, 2002).

3. Results

This section examines the participants' attitudes toward gender roles, highlighting how men construct housework as a form of abuse and revealing their lived experiences of tensions and abuse. The section is structured to first explore participants' varying degrees of patriarchal and egalitarian perceptions of housework, followed by an analysis of their reactions to household tensions, abuse, and responses to gender equality discourses in South Africa.

3.1. Construction of more patriarchal, less patriarchal, and egalitarian views on housework

The participants in the study endorse a range of gender norms, from more patriarchal to less patriarchal to egalitarian orientations in relation to housework practices. A subset of the participants adheres to more patriarchal beliefs regarding housework, viewing it primarily as the woman's normative responsibility within the household. As evidenced by Ndlovu's remarks:

> "A man's role is to support the family. And the woman's role is to be responsible for everything in the house such as cleaning, cooking, washing."

Ndlovu is firmly supported by men like Lukah, Kathu, Jabulani, and Kaloba in their traditional beliefs about gendered roles in relation to housework practices and norms. They expect a woman to be dependent, focusing primarily on domestic housework responsibilities (Connell and Pearse, 2015; Fakunmoju and Rasool, 2018). For these men, typically, women exist for reproduction and personal conveniences for productive male individuals (Chodorow, 2023). These men emphasize the dependence of women on domestic tasks and construct women's refusal to perform housework as a form of abuse and neglect. These perspectives reinforce the persistence of patriarchal gender norms and the role expectations of women's subordination in various African contexts, such as South Africa and Zimbabwe (Gibbs Sikweyiya and Jewkes, 2014; FAO, 2017).

Another subset of participants in the study embraces less patriarchal ideals, indicating their readiness to participate by choice in household chores. For example, Obinna is of the view that:

> "If she is asking you nicely, you have to do it because she needs your help, and she is not controlling, she is asking for help."

The view of Obinna resonates with men like Gwagwa, Simba, Chucks, Obinna, Thembani, Sfiso, Makwakwa, Andile, Langa, Tinyinka, and Mandla. In these men's minds, although housework is a gender role reserved for a woman, the man can sometimes perform housework roles by choice and when she requests them appropriately. These men emphasize that housework should not be rigidly scheduled or assigned to men but rather a shared responsibility based on the circumstances. Their perspective reflects a considerably flexible approach to housework that aligns with viewpoints from previous research by Morrell and Jewkes (2011) and Van den Berg et al. (2013), which highlight some men's willingness to participate in housework and acknowledge the importance of mutual support and understanding within the context of their relationships.

Another subset of the participants in the study demonstrates an egalitarian

approach to housework, advocating for shared responsibility and rejecting gendered divisions of labour. Thokozani's comments exemplify this perspective as he emphasizes that housework should not be solely the responsibility of the female partner:

> "No, they have to help each other. She can even ask me to sweep the floor and I do that, she can also ask me to clean the toilet, it's not a crime because we both use that toilet."

Thokozani acknowledges that the shared responsibility approach is about partners helping each other rather than assigning tasks based on gendered roles. Similarly, men like Senzo, Kabila, Kgaogelo, Misa, Bafana, Thabo, Thabiso, and Mpho promote shared responsibility in housework. They reject the notion of gendered divisions in household labour and consider it a form of abuse to burden women with the sole responsibility of domestic work. Their perspective aligns with research by Helman and Ratele (2016) and Ratele et al. (2012), highlighting the significance of equitable distribution of housework among intimate partners.

By highlighting these different perspectives, I aim to illustrate how these men subscribe to patriarchal and egalitarian norms regarding housework distribution. The following section will explore how these views shape their perceptions of performing housework as abuse.

3.2. Construction of gender norms, housework tensions, and abuse

The participants in the study construct gender norms, housework tensions, and abuse in both similar and diverse ways, depending on their endorsement of more patriarchal, less patriarchal, and egalitarian constructs of gender norms and orientations.

Lukah: "It is a woman's duty, but I am always forced to do things. Even when I am sick and ask for food, she asks, 'Don't you have hands?'"

In the given excerpt, Lukah, a 37-year-old Congolese man who has been cohabiting with his South African partner for seven years, endorses a more patriarchal orientation of gender norms. Although Lukah recounted an instance of being beaten by his partner and her son, Lukah did not initially link this encounter to housework. Yet in the above instance, he considers housework duties a normative gender expectation for women, thus perceiving being forced to do housework as constituting abuse. Lukah depicts women as solely responsible for housework with phrases like 'It is a woman's duty,' while portraying men as culturally exempted from housework duties with his statement, 'but I am always forced to do things' (Connell and Pearse, 2015). Lukah draws upon essentialised patriarchal discourses that position men collectively in a relationship of control over women and emphasize the masculine order of household tasks that is emphasized in his country of origin Congo DRC (Mulumeoderhwa, 2021). Consequently, organizing household in gendered ways reinforces the home-based power of men like Lukah, who perceive themselves as husbands/fathers/heads/ and breadwinners of the household (Connell and Pearse, 2015; Mulumeoderhwa, 2021; Zoeller, 2023), enabling them to exert control over their wives and children (Connell and Pearse, 2015; Fakunmoju and Rasool, 2018; Kimmel, 2017). Yet, in this instance, Lukah expresses his vulnerability to exercise control and at the

same time his dependence on the reproductive performance of his partner. Thus, Dutton and Goodman (2005) noted that an intimate actor being emotionally attached or dependent on another for certain tasks may be more easily coerced.

The phrase "always forced" portrays an inherent tension around housework that characterizes Lukah's relationship. Lukah's reference to his partner's assertion, "Don't you have hands," suggests his partner is challenging the patriarchal organization of housework. This refusal to perform housework is interpreted by Lukah and men like Kaloba, Ndlovu, Jabulani, Kathu, and Mandla as disruptive to the gendered order and coercive controlling behaviour constituting tensions in their relationships (Connell, 2021; Dutton and Goodman, 2005; Molm, 1997; Walker, 2005). This supports Conway-Long's (2006) claim that when men's authority and power over women are challenged, they perceive their experiences as a form of oppression. The understanding of Lukah's situation implies a perceived sense of oppression and coercive behaviour from his partner stemming from deviations from normative housework roles and his reliance on his partner's housework services. In this scenario, the coercive behaviour of his partner may be indirect and not explicitly focused on specific tasks, but rather on the expected outcomes (Dutton and Goodman, 2005; Raven, 1993). In Lukah's case, this may manifest in feelings of abandonment or worthlessness. Consequently, men may react defensively to maintain their position of privilege in the relationship (Zoeller, 2023). Thus, the construction of opposition reactions to gendered housework from women has important implications for tensions among men who endorse more patriarchal gender norms.

Considering the broader scope of behaviours that constitute emotional abuse, being coerced into doing housework can be implicitly defined as coercive control and controlling behaviour (Dutton and Goodman, 2005; Molm, 1997; Raven, 1993; Stark, 2007). However, as argued earlier, abuse is a concept open to cultural and personal interpretations, suggesting that a wide range of behaviours can be considered abusive or violent (Buiten and Naidoo, 2020; Flood and Pease, 2006). In this case, Lukah resents being "always forced" to do housework because he believes it is his partner's responsibility to provide care when he 'is sick and asks for food,' rather he gets neglected. On the one hand, this discourse reinforces women's domestic roles, depicting them as warm, caring individuals expected to fulfil housework-related emotions (Connell, 2021; Connell and Pearse 2015; Dutton and Painter, 1993). It appears in this instance that Lukah expresses emotional dependence as opposed to patriarchal discourses of stoicism and emotional detachment from house care (Connell, 2021; Dutton and Painter, 1993). Indeed, emotional dependency may serve as fertile ground for exploitation by a coercive partner (Dutton and Goodman, 2005; Molm, 1997). On the other hand, it highlights the power of reproductive work and underscores how some men depend on women's potential for reproductive work and care in domestic spaces (Conway-Long, 2006). In this sense, reproductive power allows some women to deny their dependent partner's essential needs, such as food and care, thereby rebalancing men's productive power and control in domestic settings. It becomes more problematic for men in relationships with women who wield both reproductive and productive power and are prone to use either of these or both coercively (Conway-Long, 2006; Morgan and Wells, 2016; Zoeller, 2023). However, men who engage in housework also have the potential to wield a form of reproductive

power (Bach, 2019; Hernández-Albújar Sáez and Garrido-Macías, 2023). This dynamic challenges Connell's (2021) sentiment regarding patriarchal power, and economic and emotional relations, where men dominate, and women are considered weak within domestic spaces. In effect, reproductive and productive power is relative, dynamic, and a fluid construction among intimate partners.

Gwagwa: "There are duties I can help out with when I am free, not that you have to be put on a roster that I cook today (laughs). However, if I feel like it, let me help her because she has been working the whole day."

Gwagwa, a 44-year-old Zimbabwean man who has cohabited with his South African partner for three years, narrates his approach to pursuing a less patriarchal approach to housework. Negotiating the influence of patriarchal norms, Gwagwa does not adhere to a strict roster for shared housework duties with his partner. Instead, he positions himself as a secondary contributor, choosing to assist with household tasks at his discretion ("when I am free" or "if I feel like it"). Unlike Lukah, who places the sole responsibility of reproductive gender roles on his partner, Gwagwa commits to assisting with household chores by choice. Gwagwa draws upon his personal feelings and empathy for his partner's workload ('she has been working the whole day') rather than adhering to rigid patriarchal scripts regarding gender roles (Fakunmoju and Rasool, 2018; Kimmel, 2017). In a related narrative, Bach (2019) explores the construction of non-dominant masculinity in the Danish welfare state, examining the narratives of three men partnered with career-driven women. The study reveals how these men navigate power dynamics and redefine masculine roles using narratives of choice, involved fatherhood, and gender equality.

By acknowledging the overwhelming nature of housework on his partner, Gwagwa highlights the pervasive inequality, household tensions, and economic relations in some domestic spaces (Connell 2021; Connell and Pearse, 2015). Hernández-Albújar et al. (2023) note among Italian and Spanish couples, where men typically perform fewer housework tasks, an increase in men's participation during the COVID-19 lockdown was not seen as problematic. Conversely, the overwhelming nature of housework for women led to a heightened sense of inequality and increased relationship tensions. This underscores the understanding that daily household work is exhausting and requires energetic effort to sustain. Thus, men, with their physical capacities, are expected to contribute more to housework, especially in dual-income households. However, Zoeller's (2023) analysis among dual-income couples in the United States suggests that working-class women often shoulder the burden of household chores, while the men may avoid or choose when to contribute. Zoller (2023) noted that men's selective task allocation reflects a strategy of asserting power and control to perpetuate inequality and reinforce the patriarchal gender order.

Similarly, to the group of more patriarchal men, Gwagwa connects his experiences of IPV to tensions surrounding housework. Gwagwa claimed that the pinnacle of emotional and physical abuse in his relationship occurred when:

"She had to leave me with her children while she went out with other men, so I had to cook for the children and bathe them (laughs), and that is when I realized, I was being abused. The things that I am doing are the things I expect a woman to do."

Gwagwa's resentment grew as his partner habitually left him to manage the

housework alone and returned early in the morning. Upon her return, she initiated a fight after feeling ignored due to her unanswered calls and knocks. "She began swearing at me, swearing at me. Then, she started fighting. You see all these bites. You see, this finger, this finger, this finger, then this finger. Then she hit me with a bottle of beer".

Gwagwa perceived his engagement in housework and childcare as a form of coercive abuse: "That is when I realized, I was being abused", before a follow-up of his experiences of physical assault. As a man who embraces less patriarchal gender norms, he believes he has the autonomy to determine which household chores he is willing to undertake and when. Thus, he views it as unfair when his partner unilaterally decides to leave him with the children without prior discussion or mutual agreement. This situation intersects with her actions of socializing "with other men". Gwagwa perceives her behaviour as manipulative, exploiting his feelings of obligation to the children and disregarding his feelings and boundaries to serve her agenda (Dutton and Goodman, 2005; Morgan and Wells, 2016; Molm, 1997; Rowlands, 2023). Although Gwagwa takes on the role of a stepfather to these children, his resentment stems from his reliance on norms and discourse that dictate expectations for women's emotional work and his understanding of men's emotional detachment from housework care (Connell, 2021; Dutton and Painter, 1993). Hence, he views being left to do housework solely as being manipulated and pressured to conform to traditional roles reserved for women "the things I expect a woman to do" (Connell and Pearse, 2015). Furthermore, Gwagwa disclosed an instance wherein he sought to sever ties with his partner following her act of infidelity (Newberry, 2010; Stark, 2007). She pleaded for forgiveness and promised to abstain from repeating her transgressions. However, she ultimately broke her promise. Consequently, his lived experiences allow him to construct performing housework solely as a form of abuse. A similar study by Morgan and Wells (2016) in the UK suggests that female abusers employ similar tactics, albeit different tactics and mechanisms. Although the study did not specifically examine the participants' experiences with household chores, it does suggest that male victims of IPV endure various forms of abuse, including controlling behaviours, such as manipulation involving children and isolation.

The group of Black African men leaning towards egalitarian gender norms recognizes the importance of participating in housework, contrary to the views held by more and less patriarchal men regarding the organization of domestic responsibilities. Men like Kabila and Thabiso express their visibility and active contribution to household duties in their relationships. Senzo, a forty-two-year-old Zimbabwean man in a two-year relationship with a Zimbabwean woman, firmly believes that domestic obligations should be shared equally between partners, even though he grew up and was socialized in patriarchal cultures that associate femininity with housework (FAO, 2017).

> "No, it is not her responsibility alone. But if you leave everything for her, it is like you are abusing her."

Senzo's reference to leaving housework solely to women as 'abusing her' draws upon discourses that recognize such practices as problematic in promoting inequality and the subjugation of women (Hernández-Albújar Sáez and Garrido-Macías, 2023; Mungai and Pease, 2009; Ratele Shefer and Clowes, 2012). This starkly contrasts with

how the group of more and less patriarchal men describe the sharing of housework as a form of abuse against themselves as men. Nonetheless, the shift towards perceiving and practising egalitarian gender norms has been documented in research conducted by Helman and Ratele (2016), Morrell and Jewkes (2011) and Van den Berg et al. (2013), on South African families. For example, Helman and Ratele (2016) have shown evidence of the deconstruction of gender patterns and the adoption of less patriarchal and more egalitarian housework practices within South African families. The perspectives of some Black African men in this article suggest that they are navigating new dynamics in terms of production and reproduction responsibilities. However, these men also feel backlash against the backdrop of evolving gender equality dynamics in South Africa.

3.3. Reactions to gender equality discourses in South Africa

Several of these African men resist change, regardless of whether they belong to the more patriarchal, less patriarchal, or egalitarian groups. They oppose shifts in gender relations and problematize gender equality discourses and actions, perceiving them as consequences of abuse against men. Thabo, a thirty-three-year-old South African man, provides an example of this resistance when he comments:

> "I expect a woman to cook for me when I return from work. It is the equal rights issue that has changed it. Men are now afraid to be in relationships with women who know their rights too much because they end up abusing them."

Thabo's perspective aligns with gender role constructs that separate social interactions into public and private spheres (Xia and Li, 2023). According to this view, men have privileged access to paid work, politics, education, and religion, while women are relegated to the private sphere of unpaid caregiving within the home (Connell, 2021; Kimmel, 2017; Xia and Li, 2023). This discourse and practice are prevalent across many African countries, including Eswatini, Mozambique, Malawi, and Nigeria (Agadjanian, 2002; Fielding-Miller et al., 2016; Kapulula, 2015; Odimegwu and Adedini, 2013). In South Africa, Mackett (2021) notes that unpaid domestic work drives inequality and affects the quality of women's work in productive spaces. However, poverty and unemployment in this context present challenges for men to fulfil their traditional roles as primary providers in the home (Ratele, 2008).

Although Thabo's above comments reflect patriarchal sentiments, earlier on, he claims to hold an egalitarian belief in equality in housework arrangements ("I cook a lot, and I clean a lot"). He hints at why he may have renegotiated his orientation from a patriarchal to an egalitarian standpoint. Thabo argues that women's disregard for housework duties is a complex reality shaped by the gender climate in South Africa ('equal rights issue that has changed it'). The discourse on gender equality in South Africa conceptualizes women not merely in terms of their roles within the household and family but as independent individuals with rights in their person (Rustin, 2018). These rights enable women to participate in politics, receive an education, and seek paid employment to achieve equality (Albertyn, 2011; Hamber, 2010). Men like Thabo, therefore, perceive women who assert their rights and exhibit resistance (women who know their rights too much) as opposing subordination and challenging traditional gender roles, which they view as abusive (Robins, 2008; Rowlands, 2023).

These discourses align with the observation that the evolving gender landscape in South Africa can be perplexing and unsettling for some men who strongly adhere to patriarchal beliefs (Hamber, 2010; Rowlands, 2022c; Walker, 2005).

Thembani "Yes, they pose a threat to men because you can get home and not find her there, or you might find her there, but she has not cooked. A woman who is employed well will have the mentality that she is the leader of the home or family".

Thembani, a twenty-four-year-old Zimbabwean man, considers women who are articulate about their rights and financially empowered as potential threats to men's authority at home (Robins, 2008). He believes such women are likely to renegotiate gender relations within domestic spaces in South Africa (Kimmel, 2017; Walker, 2005). Thembani's thinking resonates with the complicity of men in upholding patriarchal housework arrangements, as evident in his home culture in Zimbabwe, which dictates that women should solely perform domestic, reproductive, and emotional tasks (FAO, 2017). Thembani, along with Thabo and Kaloba, senses that changes are occurring in gender relations and perceives these changes as complicating and promoting contestation and tension in their intimate relationships, particularly concerning housework norms (Helman and Ratele, 2016). Similar perceptions have been observed among African men living in Melbourne, Australia, as documented in the study by Mungai and Pease (Mungai and Pease, 2009). These men find mutual and gender equality practices disempowering. While some of these men adjusted to the culture of equality in Australia, a few returned to their countries of origin, where they felt more valued as men. Impressions were offered that gender equality norms could be associated with family breakdown among migrant African men settling in Australia (Mungai and Pease, 2009). In the present study, the overall impression is that men who adhere to less patriarchal and egalitarian viewpoints perceive the exclusive assignment of housework to either men or women as abusive. Conversely, men who hold more patriarchal views consider engaging in housework as abusive and unmanly.

4. Conclusion

I explored how African men who have experienced IPV construct gender norms around housework within the context of evolving gender relations and tensions in intimate spaces in South Africa. This focus was guided by existing literature highlighting the link between housework inequality, gender norms, and practices of violence against women (Helman and Ratele, 2016; Strebel et al., 2006). While I do not dispute this fact, I believe it is necessary to develop a nuanced understanding of the implications of changes in gender relations in intimate spaces, particularly regarding how gender norms are constructed when African men are victims of IPV.

The findings revealed that these abused African men construct gender norms around housework in diverse yet similar ways within their intimate relationships. They endorse what appears to be more patriarchal, less patriarchal, and egalitarian distribution patterns of housework duties. Although the patriarchal notion of productive and reproductive gender relations profoundly influences the housework views of some of these African men, especially migrant men who grapple with their masculine identities along less patriarchal and egalitarian lines, I argue that these constructs of gender norms have important implications for enhancing gender equality

within African men's (both local and migrant) intimate relationships in South Africa. This analysis draws upon Helman's and Ratele's (2016) categorization of South African family units into more patriarchal/less egalitarian and less patriarchal/more egalitarian gender relationships.

I observed contrasts and similarities in how the different groups of participants endorse patriarchal and egalitarian gender norms in relation to housework practices, as illustrated by examples such as Lukah, Gwagwa, Mandla, and Senzo. The analysis indicates that these African men's endorsement of gender role orientations shapes their perceptions of housework arrangements. However, instances of how gender norm endorsements shape their construction of housework as abuse were evident among both the more patriarchal and less patriarchal groups of men. While the broader study investigates the impact of IPV on these African men's masculine constructions, it is noteworthy that the analysis in this paper highlights these men's lived experiences and perspectives, suggesting that housework relations are significant sites for intimate partners to reinforce the construction of gender norms, inequality, tension, and IPV (Rowlands, 2021; Rowlands, 2022a). A similar observation of the construction of inequality and power struggles within South African family units has been documented (Helman and Ratele, 2016; Strebel et al., 2006), albeit different from this analysis that focuses on male survivors of IPV from across Africa, some of whom are in transnational relationships in Johannesburg.

Drawing on Connell's (2021) framework of power, economic, and emotional relations, this analysis provides valuable insights into the dynamics between productive and reproductive relations, the causes of housekeeping tensions and the manifestation of coercive power within heterosexual partnerships. Firstly, the analysis posits intimate partners as agentic beings living and acting within a complex field of productive and reproductive power that are determined by their agency, through their actions, they actively reconstruct and enact it (Dutton and Goodman, 2005; Kocabıçak, 2022; Molm, 1997; Zoeller, 2023). For instance, reproductive coercive power is depicted as an oppressive behaviour and control mechanisms exercised by a female partner who neglects her responsibilities in household chores, potentially depriving her partner of essential needs like food and care (Conway-Long, 2006; Dutton and Goodman, 2005; Molm, 1997). Reproductive coercive power can also be understood as women's responses to oppression, manifesting through actions such as challenging, subverting, and resisting normative household structures. In a way, these actions disrupt the concept of patriarchal power relations (Connell, 2021). These experiences support Connell's (2021) assertion that domestic patriarchy and power are 'constantly being contested and softened by the women of the household.' Significant to oppositional power relations is the existence of dual-income households and cases where women are the sole providers of both productive and reproductive labour within the household (Bach, 2019; Hernández-Albújar Sáez and Garrido-Macías, 2023). The standpoint of men in such situations offers insights into the evolving dynamics of societies transitioning away from patriarchal structures, while also highlighting vulnerabilities for men in economic relations (Igbanoi, 2018; Ratele, 2008; Robins, 2008). Hence, I hypothesize that the opposition to gendered housework distribution and the willingness to exert reproductive coercive power in some women may contribute to the manifestations of household tensions in relationships as observed in

this analysis.

Connell's (2021) conception of emotional relations suggests that women are typically attached and committed to housework-related emotions, while men often operate as detached figures in the household. However, the narratives of the men explored in this study challenge this notion, revealing men's capacity for emotional dependence (such as seeking care when sick) and involvement in childcare (particularly in the absence of their partners) (Dutton and Painter, 1993; Dutton and Goodman, 2005; Molm, 1997). Even in circumstances of coercive control, such as neglect or forced housework and childcare duties, these actions become tactics to compel men to contribute to housework tasks and co-parenting, leading to resentment among these men (Morgan and Wells, 2016; Molm, 1997).Consequently, these acts can be considered forms of emotional abuse. Neglect involves failing to provide essential care or attention to someone's needs, which can lead to feelings of abandonment or worthlessness (Dutton and Goodman, 2005; Gurm et al., 2020; Molm, 1997). The act of forcing someone to do housework or childcare against their will can be emotionally manipulative and coercive, causing feelings of powerlessness and resentment (Dutton and Painter, 1993; Morgan and Wells, 2016; Rowlands, 2023; Stark, 2007). Similarly, unilaterally leaving housework and childcare responsibilities without discussion or agreement can create feelings of neglect, unfairness, and stress in the relationship, which can be emotionally damaging over time (Dutton and Goodman, 2005; DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2009). These behaviours undermine the emotional well-being and autonomy of the participants, constituting typical coercive emotional abuse (Dutton and Goodman, 2005; Molm, 1997; Park Bang and Jeon, 2021; Stark, 2007). It is important to observe that the perceptions of being neglected, habitually left, or coerced into performing housework as a form of abuse by the men under examination may be influenced by their endorsement of patriarchal gender norms.

Equally important are the examples of African men who endorse egalitarian gender role orientations and actively participate in household chores within the household. This group of men does not perceive housework as emasculating or detrimental to their relationship status. Their willingness to engage in domestic responsibilities and support their partners contrasts with the dominant conceptions that portray African men, in general, as absent, and negligent in household chores (Fakunmoju and Rasool, 2018; Mungai and Pease, 2009). These African men argue that reserving housework exclusively for women is a form of abuse and exploitation. Their views support notions that solely leaving housework for women promotes inequality and contentions among South African households (Helman and Ratele, 2016; Mackett, 2021; Morrell and Jewkes, 2011; Mulumeoderhwa, 2021). Thus, I contend that the ability of some African men (local or migrant) to strive for gender equality and challenge gender discrimination can be seen in their willingness to reassess housework relations within their relationships. In a way, their views on the reorganisation of housework relations are influenced by their values and the ideals of gender equality discourses that are promoted in the South African context.

However, despite claiming to endorse egalitarian gender role orientations, the data revealed a contradiction as most men still resist discourses and actions promoting gender equality in South Africa. Given their conflicting experiences with IPV, I

acknowledge that these African men's attempts to reform their practices are, admittedly, constrained by well-defined cultural norms (Connell, 2021). I advocate for the view that promoting a culture of gender equality can disrupt entrenched gender norms and lead to a more equitable distribution of housework responsibilities among intimate partners, both globally and in South Africa (Helman and Ratele, 2016). Encouraging more men, (including teenage boys through educational curricula), to participate in housework could be a crucial strategy for challenging the idea that housework is a form of abuse or disrespect when performed by men, while also addressing the gender stereotypes that fuel inequality and IPV in South Africa.

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