Conducting remote qualitative interviews on intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown

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Introduction

- The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown limited ability to do conventional face to face interviewing - to ensure safety of researchers and participants
- Presented an opportunity to use remote methods of conducting research
- Lessons are drawn from an exploratory qualitative study on women and men’s experiences of COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, and its impact and links to gender-based violence, mental health and livelihoods
Methods

Recruitment
- 18 men and 19 women, 18 years and older recruited using social media platforms
- Participants indicated interest using WhatsApp message, text or an email
- 1st call to screen for eligibility, go through informed consent process, and scheduling suitable time for IDI

Data collection
- IDIs of 35 - 60 minutes, conducted by research team with extensive experience in conducting IDIs on sensitive topics like sexual gender-based violence
- Reflections are derived from debriefing sessions held during data collection and analysis stage
- Privacy and confidentiality were emphasized during screening and when we started the interview.
Recruitment and establishing rapport

- Recruitment of participants using social media platforms was feasible, but took longer.

- We were able to recruit all age groups (29 - 57 years of age).

- Rapport was difficult to establish, without in-person connection.

- Probing did not yield much effect.
Privacy during interviews

- Ensuring privacy during the interview was difficult. Some participants had a third person present in the room during interviews
  
  “My wife is here right now next to me, andinoyithetha”

- Others had a baby cry and would request to be excused to give the child to someone else around the house

- Presence of another person in the room might have limited responses.
Disclosure of violence experience and perpetration

- Participants openly spoke about affected livelihoods, difficulties of parenting, violence they perpetrated against children, and poor mental health.

- Both male and female participants were hesitant to respond to intimate partner violence (IPV) questions.

- Most women avoided talking about personal experiences, and more openly talked about IPV experiences of others.

- Men understated perpetration of IPV during lockdown (e.g. we had small disagreements, misunderstanding, tension).
“I wouldn’t say its violence, my husband is short-tempered and has anger. My next door neighbour... there was violence between him and the partner there. He is staying with a girlfriend. They are always fighting to an extent that those people break everything in the house...”

“My parents have had episodes of violence during the lockdown I would say. My dad has definitely uhm I think he’s starting to feel very cooped up and cranky, very impatient with my mom, aggressive and I wonder what else happens. We only had disagreements, sometimes very emotionally draining"
“I am working in a food store my wife doesn’t work sometimes when I get home you find there is no food sometimes she would blame me and pressurize me you understand, we end up having a misunderstanding... she was saying you are the father you should make a plan, you understand, she was giving me pressure. Sometimes we used to fight physically and breaking things in the house and sometimes verbally, but it was nothing much”

“Being confined in one space with someone that you are not used to spend much time together - because you were used to wake up in the morning and leave the house for work - that caused so much conflicts. We used to have a lot of small fights

There was tension, mainly caused by her moods, we would have heated exchanges, but I would not touch her.
Key messages

- Conducting remote VAWC research presents with methodological challenges: ensuring participant privacy, establishing rapport, and participant disclosures about violence.

- Highlights the need for the field to deepen knowledge to improve remote data collection methods, to safely conduct remote VAWC research and to optimize participants’ disclosure of IPV experience and perpetration.
Acknowledgements

• This work would not be possible without the men and women who volunteered their time to participate in the research.

• We thank the South African Medical Research Council, and the DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Human Development who funded the research.