

**INTERSECTION  
BETWEEN  
VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN  
AND CHILDREN  
FROM THE  
PERSPECTIVE OF  
PARENTS  
CONVICTED OF  
CHILD  
HOMICIDE**



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## BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

- South Africa has an exceptionally **high rate** of Violence Against Women (VAW) and Violence Against Children (VAC).
- VAW and VAC **overlap in the same household**, yet little research attention has been dedicated to this overlap within South Africa.
- **PhD study:** Study this intersection amongst parents convicted of killing their children.

# METHODS

- Research Aim: Explore how parents (defined as **biological and step parents**) convicted of child homicide experience intersecting violence
- Sampling and recruitment:
- **Five correctional centers/prisons** in the Western Cape Province of South Africa
- Interviews: Minimum of **2 interviews** per participant.

- Participant Information:
- **22 participants**/parents incarcerated for death of a child - responsible for **death of 25 children**
- Two participants (one father & one stepfather) killed more than 1 child (three and two children respectively) - remaining participants **killed one child each.**
- **8 Men and 14 women:** 4 fathers, 10 mothers, 3 stepfathers, 3 stepmothers and 2 caregivers.
- Participants' age range: **20 - 53 years old.**
- Victims' age range: **newborn - 16 years old.**

- Participant Information:
- **Abusive parent-child relationships**
- **Abandoned and rejected** by parents – sequence of caregivers
- **Violence affecting loved ones** (e.g. father murdered)
- Men joined **gangs** from young ages (e.g. 13 years old) – witnessed & perpetrated violence
- **Violent neighborhoods**
- **Drug and alcohol misuse** from young ages

# FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

- **Men's Narratives of Abuse:**

- **Control and punishment** of spouses' perceived wrongdoings - ended in murder of a child to **enact revenge**.
- Zolu's then girlfriend and mother of his child had laid a **charge of rape** against him. He disagreed & said it was consensual. His reaction was to first **physically abuse her** & then proceeded to **kill their 2 year old son to enact revenge**.
- *"I was angry inside... My aim to do that, I wanted to make her heart sore...I wanted her to feel the pain.... I didn't want to kill her because then she won't suffer and she must suffer...I thought when she die, she won't feel any pain. I wanted her to feel a pain, that's why I did what I did. She love that child...You reap what you sow. You must reap, you don't just do things without like a consequence for what you doing"*.

## Revenge child homicides are explained as:

Anger directed at spouse, without motive to kill spouse



Instead - motive to kill directed toward child - cause emotional harm to spouse



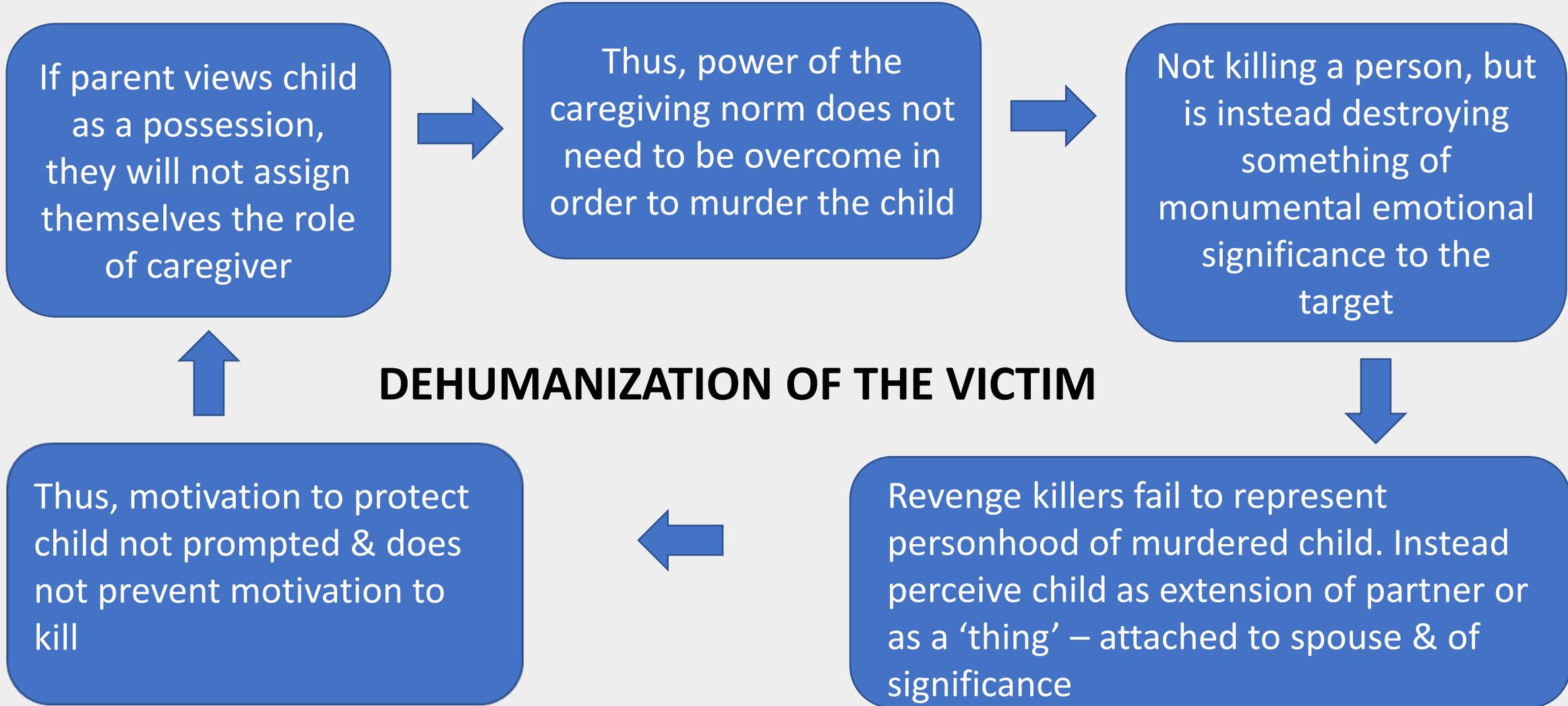
Perpetrator desires to hurt partner: perp emotionally hurting. Thus, wants spouse (person who inflicted pain), to also feel emotional pain



Revenge - form of communication between "victim" & "perpetrator" - you will be punished for what you did (e.g. opening a rape case). Perceived betrayal had to be punished & murder a deliberate and final act to regain control & punish spouse.



Believe killing child will cause this harm - act in a way consistent with this. Murder = anger toward spouse is misdirected and aimed toward child



- **Women's Narratives of Abuse:**

- **Isolation**, coupled with **burden of household/childcare**, with **absence of support** while **enduring abuse** - contributed towards killing of their children.

- **Misplaced anger:**

- Christelle: *“I saw him as, like, this problem in my life, because although there were already financial problems before him as well as abuse, when he arrived the problems just added up more, like the abuse did get worse, so at the back of my mind, I blamed him and I was angry at him. Because if he wasn't there, I wouldn't have struggled going through all that, so I thought it is easier if I kill him”.*

- Women's choices and actions should be understood within the context of **oppression/abuse**. Within this constricted environment, women may violently express their **powerlessness**, or try to consolidate their own power, over children
- Acted as **active agents**
- Occupy **range of subject positions** - victims in relation to partners, while holding position of power in relation to children.
- Discourse of **shifting positions** between powerlessness and agency

## CONCLUSION/FINAL THOUGHTS

- Greater understanding needed of **women's experiences of mothering in the context of Intimate Partner Violence** in South Africa.
- Research needed to **understand differences** between those abused mothers who do and do not kill their children.
- Necessary to explore the **positive strategies** women adopt (e.g. to cope) in these circumstances.



# **THANK YOU**

# **QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION**

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