



**Who's at home with violence?
What the Covid-19 lockdown can tell us about
the relationship between household
composition and gendered violence**

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Some notes on household composition

- Household composition: All individuals who share the same dwelling (including yard) and share resources enabling the household to function. May comprise family members only, unrelated people, or a combination of the two
- Number of people in household, their relationship to each other, and fluidity of composition contributes to household formation and household dynamics.
- Households are not socially isolated units but exist within broader kin networks and other social ties – important to note movement between these and geographical placement (urban/rural).
- **In 2021 (Statistics South Africa, 2022)**
 - 42.1% households female-headed
 - Nuclear 41.5% and extended 33.6%
 - Double generation 42.1%, single (13.8%) and triple (13.6%)
 - Single person 23.3%



Households, violence and the lockdown

- Shelters' admission records for six shelters in two provinces showed 14% of residents to have sought refuge from family violence (Vetten and Lopes, 2018) while
- Two small scale studies (Vetten et al., 2009; Artz and Jefthas, 2011), found approximately 25% of applicants to have sought protection from family members.
- Changes in household composition, formation and dynamics during the Covid lockdown
- Level 5: Between 5 and 6 million adults (or 15% of those aged 18 years and older), moved into a different household, increasing the number of men living in households with children. Where less than half of men (48%) were recorded as living in a household with at least one child at the end of 2017, this proportion increased to almost two-thirds (61%) during the lockdown (Posel and Casale, 2020).
- Level 4: about one million adults moved again (3%), largely men – not least because they were much more likely to have employment to return to at the end of April (Posel and Casale, 2020).

Key themes: household composition and violence

Ties of blood, belonging and duty – money and care

Labour and dependency – sexual violence

Increased intimacy and proximity (migrant labour associated with mining)

Conclusions: thoughts arising from the lockdown



- A household is a way to constitute and organise gender relations often (but not only) in relation to family.
- The relationship between household composition (as well as formation and dynamics) and gendered forms of violence is under-theorised and under-recognised due to an unspoken assumption that households consist of nuclear families. This is not the case in many post-colonial societies. Standard accounts of gendered violence also draw largely from feminist structural dominance theory which emphasises IPV.
- ‘Family’ also generates multiple gender identities and hierarchies: Mother, son, father, daughter, brother, aunt, sister, uncle. These too are associated with obligations, benefits, constraints, and entitlements which may give rise to violence and victimisation