

# Complex interwoven drivers of intimate partner violence experience amongst forced migrant Somali women in South Africa

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## Background

- There are an estimated 103 million (as of mid 2022) forced migrants globally, and this number is likely to increase<sup>1</sup>.
- Most forced migrants (approximately 74%) live in low- and middle-income countries<sup>1-3</sup> with sub-Saharan Africa being home to around one-third of the world's refugee population<sup>3</sup>.
- South Africa hosts the majority of refugees in sub-Saharan Africa; ~250,250<sup>4</sup>.
- Globally, 26% of ever partnered women aged 15 and older have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime<sup>5</sup>.
- Studies globally suggest forced migrants are at a higher risk of experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) owing to overlapping issues of experiencing multiple forms of violence, high levels of trauma, fragmented social networks and support systems, poverty and gender inequitable attitudes<sup>6,7</sup>; which overlap and reinforce one another, creating a complex cycle of violence and poverty amongst forced migrants. Yet little research has sought to describe **how** experiences of migration (pre, during and after), as well as experiences of poverty, trauma, and gender inequalities<sup>6,7</sup>, shape IPV experiences in this population.
- The **aim** of this study was to understand the drivers of IPV amongst forced migrant women in South Africa, and how the experience of war compounds these drivers.

## Methods

- We conducted semi structured in-depth qualitative interviews with forced migrant women from Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.
- Participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling until data saturation was obtained.
- Eligibility criteria included:
  - Self-identifying as a forced migrant,
  - Being a resident of Eastern Cape Province
  - Aged between 18-50 years
  - Communicates in English, Kiswahili or Somali.
  - Having the ability to provide informed consent
  - Willing to take part in the interviews.
- All interviews were recorded electronically and then transcribed in English verbatim. Data were analysed using thematic network analysis which presents data in a web-like map<sup>8</sup>.

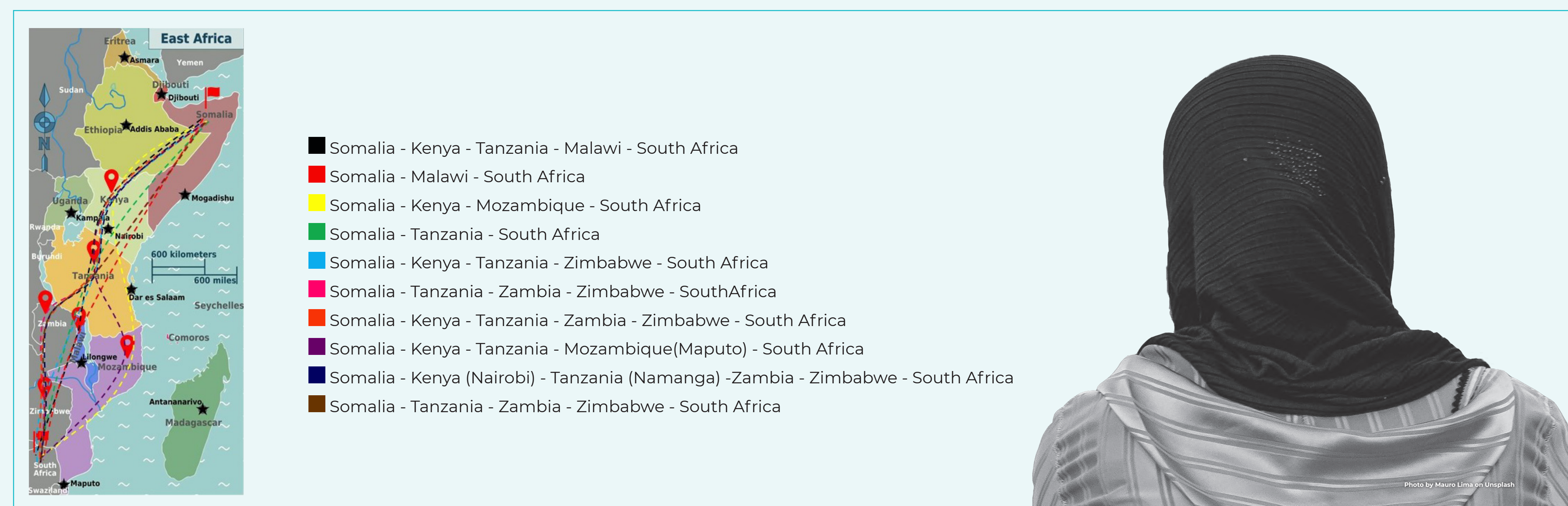
## Findings

Ten of the eleven women reported experiencing violence from their husband (or ex-husband). All six women who were divorced had experienced IPV in their dissolved relationship, and four out of the five who were currently married were experiencing IPV. All those who had been married as a child had experienced IPV.

Table 1: Description of the sample

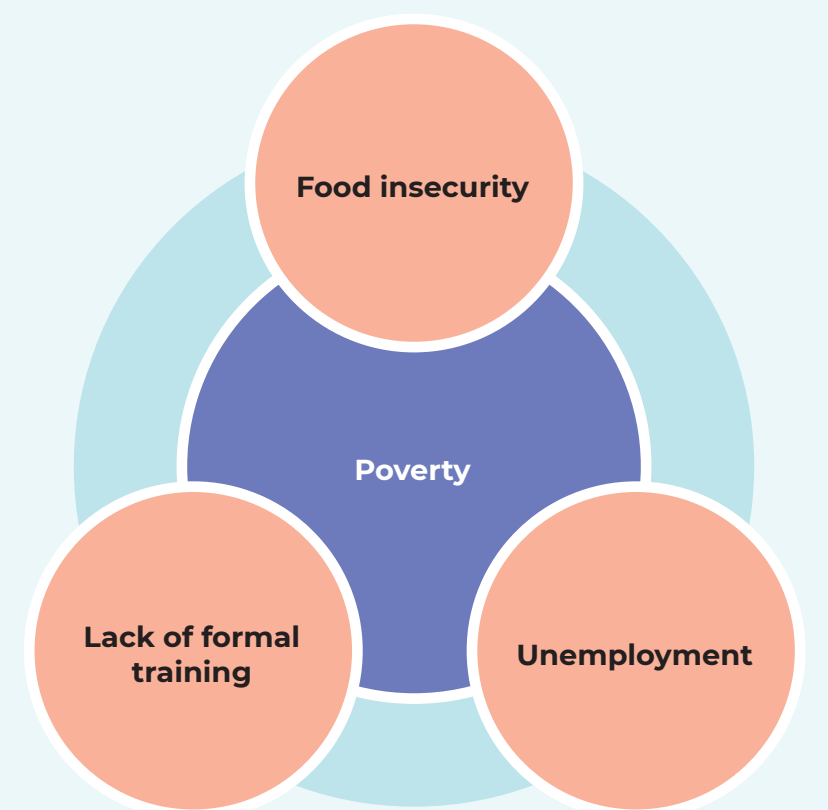
Language spoken	Age	Number of marriages	Current marital status	Married in home country?	Challenges encountered on the way to South Africa	Travelled alone or accompanied	City of entry in SA	Age at entry in SA	Accommodation on arrival in PE	Formal Education	Main source of income	Experience of IPV
Fluent English	30	1	Married	No	Can't remember	Accompanied by relatives	Durban	2	Lived in a mosque	Yes	Formal employment	Yes
Somali only	28	2	Divorced	No	None	Accompanied by mother	Johannesburg	16	Lived with an acquaintance	No	Shop attendant and selling tea	Yes
English.	29	1	Married	Yes	Flight delay in Kenya	Alone	Can't remember	22	Lived with husband	No	Unemployed.	No
Fluent English	26	2	Divorced	No	Can't remember	Accompanied by parent and siblings	Johannesburg	4	Lived with parent	Yes	Unemployed.	Yes
Only Somali	N/A	3	Divorced	Yes, at 14	Lack of food	Alone	Johannesburg	18	With relatives.	No	Selling biscuits and begging on the streets.	Yes
Only Somali	N/A	1	Divorced	No	Fear of being robbed on the way	Alone	Pretoria	20	Found a job and rented a house alone	No	Unemployed. Financial support from friends	Yes
Slight English	31	3	Divorced	No	Lack of food	Alone	Bay bridge	17	Lived with husband.	Yes	Unemployed. Grant money support.	Yes
Somali only	32	2	Married	No	Lack of sense of safety and lack of food.	Alone	Johannesburg	25	Lived with strangers (girls)	No	Unemployed.	Yes
Somali only	45	1	Married	Yes	Walking in difficult terrains	Alone	Pretoria	30	Lived with relatives.	No	Grant money	Yes
Somali only	N/A	2	Married	Yes, at 16	Arrested in Dodoma, lack of food and physical violence at the South African border by South African border patrol	Alone	Johannesburg	20	Lived with husband.	No	Unemployed.	Yes
Swahili and English	N/A	3	Married	Yes, at 17	The driver sought transactional sex.	Alone	Johannesburg	18	Lived with relatives	No	Unemployed.	Yes

Figure 1: Showing routes used by forced migrants to travel to South Africa



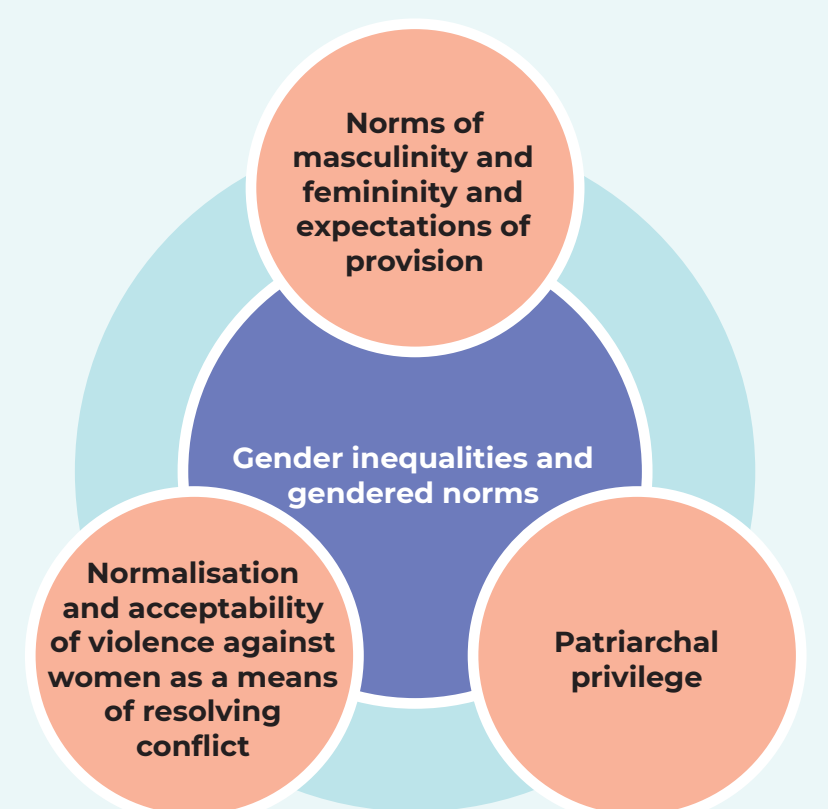
## Poverty

All women reported high levels of poverty connected to their experiences of being refugees who had fled war and gendered norms in the Somali community limiting women's work. Poverty increased IPV as it underpinned much of the of conflict with their husband and maintained IPV as women could not leave violent relationships.



## Gender inequalities and gendered norms

Our findings show that in this community gender inequality was normalised and accepted. This created contexts in which men's authority was unchallenged and women were positioned as inferior. In addition violence, particularly against women, was an acceptable strategy.



## War damaging social support systems and networks

Women described how the impact of war in Somalia had disrupted or totally removed their social support systems and networks, increasing their vulnerability to IPV and leaving them in violent relationships in two ways: i) on arrival in South Africa, women rapidly entered marriage as a survival strategy, ii) women lacked the support to leave violent relationships.



● Global theme ● Organising Theme

“When I came to Johannesburg, I didn't know anyone or anywhere to go. I met a man in Johannesburg. He told me, “I will support you; I will help you, I will do whatever you want.” So I just went with him.....I will stay wherever it is, just to raise my child. I also feel some other pains and problems with him, but I tell myself be patient. Look your child is getting food and shelter. Stay.....” (Wema).

## Discussion and Conclusion

Our study found high rates of IPV driven by complex interwoven factors amongst these forced migrant women. Alongside recognised risk factors for IPV, particularly poverty, gender inequalities and gendered norms, which were often intensified for these forced migrants, women also experienced unique risk factors as forced migrants, most notably the impact of war on destroying social systems.

Forced migration is likely to increase, given the soaring rates of conflict and climate change related natural disasters<sup>1</sup>. Yet, limited research has sought to describe the prevalence and key drivers of IPV, or what may work to prevent IPV, in forced migrant communities. Understanding how these drivers intersect to shape young, forced migrants' experience of IPV is urgent and critical as a platform for starting to understand how to address IPV in this population. Further research is ongoing to ensure forced migrant women are included and central in IPV intervention design, to achieve interventions that reflect forced migrant women's lived realities.

## Acknowledgements

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