

PROJECT PORTRAIT

'We're not boys anymore, we need to be courageous': Towards an understanding of what it means to be a man in Lavender Hill
#83 (2012)

What is this project about?

This is a focus study that assessed the socio-cultural construction of manhood and the impact that absent male role models have on the men within the Lavender Hill community. The research focused on interviewees' past and present experiences of gangsterism, domestic violence, substance abuse, unemployment and the common occurrence of men disappearing from their families and communities.

The research was conducted by New World Foundation staff with advice from Dr Adelene Africa from UCT on design and writing up of the study.

The research

The research focused on socio-economically disadvantaged and predominantly 'coloured' men within the Cape Flats community. The research draws on the responses from the life history interviews with 10 men all between the ages of 20 and 50. It aimed to explore what meanings of manhood and masculinity exist among men in Lavender Hill. This research, conducted by the NGO New World Foundation, aims to help the NGO deepen its understanding of the context in which it operates.

New World
Foundation



building a new world of
hope, justice and peace

What you need to know:

In Lavender Hill, a socio-economically disadvantaged and predominantly 'coloured' Cape Flats community, drug abuse, domestic violence and gangsterism are part of daily life. The men from this community are often perceived as either violent gangsters, or neglectful and emotionally 'absent' as fathers, husbands and/or positive role models.

The New World Foundation is an NGO based in Lavender Hill, this research was conducted in order to help inform the practices that the NGO undertakes within the community, specifically with regard to the problem of the 'absent male' within the community.

The research findings

In their interviews, respondents discussed what had forced them into deviant behaviour (e.g. drug abuse, petty crime, gangsterism):

- The unstable family environments in which they were raised, consisting of abuse and neglect;
- The loss of a father, both parents or a significant male role model;
- The larger socio-economic environment led them astray as they had to drop out of school in order to help bring income to the household. Drugs and petty crime seemed the way to make a living.

In the interview process respondents also discussed the embodiments of masculinity in relation to the 'good man' and 'average man' in the Lavender Hill community. It was found that a 'good man' is one that is

employed and takes responsibility for all his actions; he treats women with respect and is a good father to his children. Contrastingly, an 'average man' was found to be a man that is absent, either with other women (adultery), in prison or on-the-go. The 'average man' is irresponsible and often too busy with friends and he neglects his wife and children.

Using the research

The New World Foundation has used this research to deepen their understanding of the community in which they operate and to inform their practices within the Lavender Hill community. The research suggests the need for real communication between families and amongst community members about personal issues. This is something that future interventions aimed at men could target.

This study was completed in [November 2012](#).

Want to know more?

The research was carried out by Marianne Brittijn from the New World Foundation NGO; she was advised by Dr Adelene Africa from UCT.

This summary is based on the *Agenda* article "*We're not boys anymore, we need to be courageous*": *Towards an understanding of what it means to be a man in Lavender Hill*. A link to the article is available on the Co-op website.

Keywords: Socio-cultural construction of manhood, crisis of masculinity, absent male role models, life histories, Cape Flats.

To **reference** this Project Portrait, cite UCT Knowledge Co-op as the author.

Project portraits are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/za/deed.en>

The Knowledge Co-Op at the University of Cape Town

The UCT Knowledge Co-op aims to make it easier for community partners to access UCT's skills, resources and professional expertise. It helps initiate joint projects that benefit both the community partner and the university. The Co-op links community groups with appropriately qualified staff and students at UCT, and supports both partners throughout the project – from initial planning to final product.

know-op@uct.ac.za

www.knowledgeco-op.uct.ac.za

Tel: 021 – 650 4415

