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Economic Anxiety: How Money Shapes Masculinity and Femininity

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Executive Summary

This report examines how economic anxiety shapes online discussions of masculinity, femininity and intimate relationships in South Africa, and how these discussions reinforce or challenge gender norms relevant to Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Drawing on South African scholarship and selected posts from X and TikTok, it explores how money becomes a measure of personal worth, relationship suitability and power. The analysis does not establish that financial hardship causes violence; it examines the gendered expectations through which hardship, provision and dependence acquire social meaning.

The X conversation comprised approximately 165,290 mentions from 44,950 unique authors, with more than 940,440 reposts. The TikTok dataset contained 738 mentions from 693 unique authors. These figures describe the conversation captured by the research queries.

A central finding is that financial provision remains a powerful standard against which men's desirability and masculine worth are assessed. Financial insecurity is consequently discussed as more than an inability to meet expenses: it can signify inadequacy, shame or exclusion from relationships. These expectations are sustained through both men's and women's accounts. A woman's description of concealing her preferences to protect a financially struggling partner's feelings, alongside a man's framing of being broke as a lesson never to repeat, illustrates how the provider role can remain intact even when its burdens are acknowledged.

Expectations of women are similarly contested. Financial independence is presented as a source of security, but also as a requirement for relationship suitability. Women may be expected to earn their own money while continuing to evaluate men through their capacity to provide. Financial preferences also attract sexualised judgements, revealing how disagreements about money can become forms of humiliation and the policing of femininity.

The clearest GBV-related concern emerges where financial grievance is used to rationalise aggression or redirect responsibility towards women. Selected TikTok comments blame women's alleged pursuit of money or a "soft life", while counter-narratives reject these explanations. Other posts condemn exploitation linked to material need or recognise contributions beyond income.

For CABC and HeCareZA, the findings identify an opportunity to challenge financial measures of human worth, broaden recognition of care and shared responsibility, and contest narratives that turn provision into entitlement or dependence into grounds for blame.

Introduction

Behaviour is shaped partly by the meanings individuals attach to their circumstances. Masculinity remains strongly associated with provision and unemployment or financial insecurity may be experienced not simply as a loss of income but as a perceived failure to meet socially prescribed expectations of manhood. On the flip side, provision and dependence may be manipulated to enhance power in relationships. Similarly, changing expectations around women's financial independence, contribution to household income and material consumption may reshape relationship power. Behavioural relevance, therefore, lies in the interaction between structural economic pressure and the gendered norms through which that pressure is interpreted.

Behavioural interventions are most effective when they address not only the harmful actions but also the narratives, social expectations and perceived peer norms that make those actions acceptable, inevitable or justified. Economic stress may create moments in which harmful gender norms are intensified but it may also create opportunities for those norms to be renegotiated.

By identifying how economic insecurity is translated into expectations, resentment, shame, entitlement, dependency or relationship conflict, the research can assist the programme in locating intervention points as to how harmful behaviour escalates into abuse or violence.

Employment, Provision and Masculine Identity

The association between employment and masculinity in South Africa has historical roots. Ichou (2008), examining unemployed Black men's constructions of masculinity, argues that colonial and apartheid economic systems contributed to the development of masculinities strongly associated with wage labour and men's ability to financially provide for their families. Employment consequently acquired meaning beyond income: earning a wage became one way through which adult masculine status could be established and maintained. Ichou's research is particularly useful because it demonstrates that unemployment does not produce a uniform response. Some participants continued to measure themselves against patriarchal breadwinner expectations, while others rejected these expectations and constructed alternative masculinities around involved fatherhood, shared household responsibility, love and *ubuntu*.¹

¹ Ichou, C. (2008). *A study investigating the construction of unemployed men's masculinity* [Master's thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal]. ResearchSpace. <https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/items/64c20ca5-fe3f-44ae-a08c-aa667459133e>

The provider norm has remained persistent despite significant changes in household structure and women's participation in economic life. Selebano's (2014) research with unemployed Black men in Soweto found that the provider role continued to be strongly connected to ideas of manhood. Men were consequently required to contend simultaneously with a labour market that restricted their ability to obtain employment and social expectations that continued to evaluate them by their capacity to provide. Participants described stigma, psychological strain and difficulty fulfilling an identity which remained socially expected despite the absence of the economic conditions necessary to achieve it. Selebano links this contradiction to adverse psychosocial experiences, including depression, harmful behaviour and diminished hope for the future.²

More recent research suggests that this contradiction persists. Sibanyoni's (2024) study of unemployed young Black men in Mamelodi specifically examined employment and the provider role within constructions of hegemonic masculinity. Participants' unemployment affected how they perceived themselves against social expectations that men should provide and had implications for their psychosocial lives. The research additionally identified restrictions on emotional expression, illustrating how economic expectations can intersect with other masculine norms such as stoicism and emotional restraint (Sibanyoni, 2024).³

Mukona's (2025) research with unemployed Black men in Motsoaledi, Soweto similarly illustrates the broader consequences of the provider expectation. Participants experienced difficulties establishing or maintaining families, poor mental wellbeing and obstacles to creating sustainable livelihoods. Importantly, the study also identifies *ubuntu*, collective support and spiritual beliefs as resources through which men cope with economic marginalisation. This reinforces an important distinction for the present research: financial insecurity may place pressure on masculine identity, but the response to that pressure is socially mediated and may include both harmful and constructive adaptations.⁴

The strength of the provider expectation is evident even amongst employed men. Sikweyiya et al. (2022), researching Black male mineworkers in Marikana, describe financial provision as an "inescapable demand" within participants' understandings of masculinity. For some men, fatherhood became heavily concentrated around material provision, with emotional and caregiving involvement receiving less emphasis. The

² Selebano, N. (2014). *Men's health, masculinities and work: The psychosocial effects of unemployment on Black men from Soweto* [Master's dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand]. WIREDSpace. <https://hdl.handle.net/10539/15399>

³ Sibanyoni, D. N.-B. (2024). *Exploring the constructions of masculinity of unemployed young Black men from Mamelodi* [Master's dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand]. WIREDSpace. <https://hdl.handle.net/10539/42565>

⁴ Mukona, P. (2025). *The lived experiences of unemployed Black men from a low socioeconomic peri-urban Motsoaledi Township in Soweto* [Master's dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand]. WIREDSpace. <https://hdl.handle.net/10539/49494>

authors argue that South Africa's high unemployment and precarious employment conditions make it increasingly difficult for many Black men to achieve socially valued markers of masculine adulthood, including employment, marriage, fatherhood and establishing an independent household.⁵

Money may therefore represent considerably more than purchasing power. It can become part of the performance of masculine identity itself. Eide's (2026) ethnographic study of job-seeking in inner-city Johannesburg provides a particularly striking example. Some unemployed men performed what the author terms "provider masculinity" through the act of work-seeking: leaving home in the morning, dressing for office work and treating the search for employment as a working day. Although not yet economically providing, diligently seeking employment allowed participants to position themselves as providers-in-becoming and distance themselves from the stigma associated with unemployment and economic dependence.⁶

Poverty, economic marginalisation and masculine pressure

The relationship between economic conditions and masculine identity becomes particularly significant where expected gender roles cannot realistically be achieved. Dlamini's (2016) ethnographic research among unemployed young men in Kenneth Gardens, Durban examined masculinity at the intersection of poverty, unemployment and violence. The research identified a dissonance between men's material circumstances and their aspirations, producing constrained opportunities for socially valued masculine performance. This does not establish poverty as a cause of violence; rather, it demonstrates that masculinity is constructed within structural conditions that affect the resources available for different performances of manhood.⁷

This distinction is important within the South African GBV context. Omarjee et al. (2025) locate everyday violence within historically produced gendered, racialised and classed inequalities. Their research in two marginalised South African communities found that patriarchal relations continued to attach normative meaning to identities such as the male breadwinner. The authors caution against individualising structural problems and instead examine how impoverishment and gendered expectations interact. Violence, on this account, cannot adequately be explained as an automatic psychological response

⁵ Sikweyiya, Y., Nkosi, S., Langa, M., Operario, D., & Lurie, M. N. (2022). "You see this thing is hard... ey, this thing is painful": The burden of the provider role and construction of masculinities amongst Black male mineworkers in Marikana, South Africa. *PLoS ONE*, 17(5), e0268227. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0268227>

⁶ Eide, O. (2026). Making jobseekers amidst joblessness: The proper work of work-seeking in inner-city Johannesburg. *Economy and Society*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2026.2689824>

⁷ Dlamini, M. A. C. (2016). *Exploring constructions of masculinity among young men in the context of poverty: A case study of Kenneth Gardens, Durban* [Master's dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal]. ResearchSpace. <https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/items/efd9e460-1ec0-4808-bd42-5e2b3cd71436>

to unemployment; it must be understood within broader systems of patriarchal power and structural inequality.⁸

Research concerning masculinity-focused GBV interventions reaches a related conclusion. Participants and practitioners studied by Graaff and Heinecken (2017) identified strong expectations that South African men should act as providers and protectors, notwithstanding an economic environment in which many men cannot obtain secure employment. The authors demonstrate how financial success operates alongside other expectations concerning authority, strength and emotional restraint. These norms may become problematic where men's socially expected identity exceeds their material capacity to achieve it. However, gender-transformative interventions can also provide mechanisms through which these norms are questioned and reconstructed.⁹

Money, femininity and intimate relationships

Focusing solely on men, however, risks reproducing the assumption that financial gender norms operate only through masculinity. Economic expectations also shape constructions of femininity and the terms on which intimate relationships are formed and evaluated.¹⁰

The South African “blesser” phenomenon provides a particularly visible expression of this interaction. Moodley and Ebrahim (2019) describe blessed relationships as existing at the intersection of technology, sexuality, economics and consumer culture. The authors caution against reducing these relationships simply to traditional “sugar daddy” arrangements and instead examine how contemporary consumerism and digital environments have produced new ways of publicly negotiating intimacy, lifestyle and economic exchange. Significantly for the present research, the terminology surrounding “blessers” itself emerged and became culturally visible through online discourse.¹¹

George, Maqsood and Sprague (2024) similarly found that the appeal of blessed relationships cannot be understood solely through poverty. Blessers' relative wealth and willingness to provide money and material goods could enhance their desirability as partners, while association with such relationships could provide women with both

⁸ Omarjee, N., Ismail, G., Malherbe, N., Mavundla, B., Ngwenya, N., Richardson, P., & Suffla, S. (2025). The everyday violence of gendered identities in post-apartheid South Africa. *PINS-Psychology in Society*, 67(1), 3–26. <https://doi.org/10.57157/pins2025Vol67iss1a6512>

⁹ Graaff, K., & Heinecken, L. (2017). Masculinities and gender-based violence in South Africa: A study of a masculinities-focused intervention programme. *Development Southern Africa*, 34(5), 622–634. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2017.1334537>

¹⁰ George, G., Maqsood, L., & Sprague, C. (2024). Balancing risk and reward: Exploring women's transactional sexual relationships with Blessers in South Africa. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11, Article 1158. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03629-7>

¹¹ Moodley, P., & Ebrahim, S. (2019). #Blesser: A critical evaluation of conceptual antecedents and the allure of a transactional relationship. *Acta Academica*, 51(2), 21–40. <https://doi.org/10.18820/24150479/aa51i2.2>

material benefits and social status. This complicates simplistic representations of women as economically coerced recipients and highlights the interaction between provision, consumption, gender norms and status.¹²

At the same time, financial exchange can create unequal relational power. Sprague et al. (2022), drawing on qualitative interviews with South African women who had participated in blesser relationships, found that participants frequently recognised emotional and psychological limitations within these arrangements. The research illustrates the need to consider both women's agency and the structural gender inequalities within which economic choices are made. Economic provision may therefore signify care, desirability or status while simultaneously producing dependency or unequal bargaining power.¹³

Transactional relationship research also provides insight into masculine expectations. Jewkes et al. (2012), using data from 1,645 South African men, investigated relationships involving economic provision alongside attitudes towards gender and violence. The research demonstrates that provider relationships cannot automatically be equated with violence or exploitation: men who did not participate in economically transactional sex expressed more gender-equitable and less violent forms of masculinity, while different forms of economic-sexual exchange showed distinct relationships with misogynistic attitudes and violence. The findings consequently reinforce the importance of examining the particular norms attached to provision rather than treating financial provision itself as inherently harmful.¹⁴

Economic power, control and Gender-Based Violence

The distinction between economic hardship, economic dependence and economic abuse is particularly important. The First South African National Gender-Based Violence Study provides national evidence that economic violence forms part of the broader continuum of GBV in South Africa. The study measures physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence alongside controlling behaviours and examines the relationship between gender norms, victimisation and perpetration (Zungu et al., 2024).¹⁵

¹² George, G., Maqsood, L., & Sprague, C. (2024). Balancing risk and reward: Exploring women's transactional sexual relationships with Blessers in South Africa. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11, Article 1158. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03629-7>

¹³ Sprague, C., McMahan, L. D., Maqsood, L., & George, G. (2022). 'Eventually I wanted something more': Sexual self-reflections of South African women engaged in transactional sexual relationships with blessers. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 24(7), 871–885. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2021.1892193>

¹⁴ Jewkes, R., Morrell, R., Sikweyiya, Y., Dunkle, K., & Penn-Kekana, L. (2012). Men, prostitution and the provider role: Understanding the intersections of economic exchange, sex, crime and violence in South Africa. *PLoS ONE*, 7(7), e40821. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0040821>

¹⁵ Zungu, N. P., Petersen, Z., Parker, W., Dukhi, N., Sewpaul, R., Abdelatif, N., Naidoo, I., Moolman, B., Isaacs, D., Makusha, T., Mabaso, M., Reddy, T., Zuma, K., & SANSHEF Team. (2024). *The First South African National Gender-Based Violence Study, 2022: A baseline survey on victimisation and perpetration*. Human Sciences Research Council. <https://doi.org/10.14749/30767999>

Economic abuse concerns the use of financial resources or economic power to limit another person's autonomy, rather than the mere presence of financial stress in a household. This distinction prevents unemployment or poverty from being treated as synonymous with GBV. Money can instead become one mechanism through which pre-existing inequalities in intimate relationships are maintained: through controlling access to resources, restricting earning opportunities or creating conditions of financial dependence.¹⁶

Tyawa's (2017) research into unemployed fathers in Soweto provides another dimension to this power relationship. Participants continued to feel compelled to provide financially for their children despite lacking the means to do so. The strong association between fatherhood and money risked obscuring alternative forms of fatherhood based on caregiving, presence and emotional support. Economic provision can therefore simultaneously operate as an expectation imposed upon men and as a source of authority within gendered household arrangements.¹⁷

Economic anxiety and online gender norms

Collectively, South African scholarship demonstrates that money performs a significant social function in the construction of gender. Employment and provision remain important markers of masculinity, while unemployment can create a contradiction between the material capacity of men and the gender expectations against which they are evaluated. Financial provision also structures intimate relationships, shaping ideas about male desirability, women's economic expectations, consumption, independence and relational power. These norms are neither uniform nor uncontested. Research consistently identifies men and women negotiating, rejecting and reconstructing traditional expectations.¹⁸

Existing scholarship, however, has predominantly relied on interviews, ethnographies, surveys and other forms of offline research. Comparatively less attention has been directed towards how these expectations are publicly negotiated and socially enforced through South African social media. This represents an important research gap. Social

¹⁶ Zungu, N. P., Petersen, Z., Parker, W., Dukhi, N., Sewpaul, R., Abdelatief, N., Naidoo, I., Moolman, B., Isaacs, D., Makusha, T., Mabaso, M., Reddy, T., Zuma, K., & SANSHEF Team. (2024). *The First South African National Gender-Based Violence Study, 2022: A baseline survey on victimisation and perpetration*. Human Sciences Research Council. <https://doi.org/10.14749/30767999>

¹⁷ Tyawa, G. (2017). *Fatherhood and money: The experiences of unemployed fathers and their navigation of fatherhood in Soweto* [Bachelor of Social Work research report, University of the Witwatersrand]. WIReDSpace. <https://hdl.handle.net/10539/25362>

¹⁸ Ichou, C. (2008). *A study investigating the construction of unemployed men's masculinity* [Master's thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal]. ResearchSpace. <https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/items/64c20ca5-fe3f-44ae-a08c-aa667459133e>
Mukona, P. (2025). *The lived experiences of unemployed Black men from a low socioeconomic peri-urban Motsoaledi Township in Soweto* [Master's dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand]. WIReDSpace. <https://hdl.handle.net/10539/49494>
George, G., Maqsood, L., & Sprague, C. (2024). Balancing risk and reward: Exploring women's transactional sexual relationships with Blessers in South Africa. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11, Article 1158. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03629-7>

media provides an environment in which statements concerning “providers”, “broke men”, financially independent women, “50/50” relationships, girlfriend allowances, “blessers”, maintenance, “soft life”, material expectations and financial responsibility can circulate at considerable scale.¹⁹

The present research therefore does not seek to establish that economic anxiety causes misogyny or Gender-Based Violence. Instead, it examines how economic conditions acquire **gendered meaning** within online discourse: how unemployment, financial pressure and changing economic roles are interpreted through existing ideas about masculinity and femininity; how individuals who comply with or violate these expectations are rewarded, criticised or ridiculed; and which alternative narratives emerge. Understanding this process creates an opportunity to identify not merely harmful gender norms, but also counter-narratives through which provision, care, independence and shared economic responsibility can be reconstructed in healthier and more equitable ways.

Data Analysis

The query returned an overall conversation volume of approximately 165,290 mentions and this was reposted more than 940,440 times. Approximately 44,950 unique authors contributed to the conversation, representing an average of 3 mentions per unique account (See Figure 1 below).

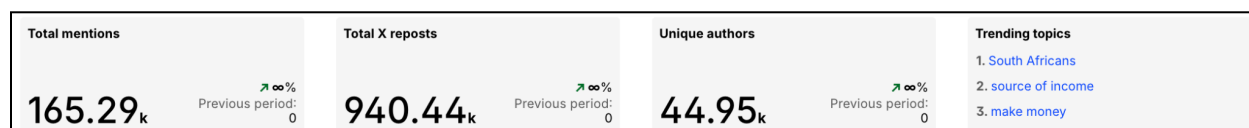
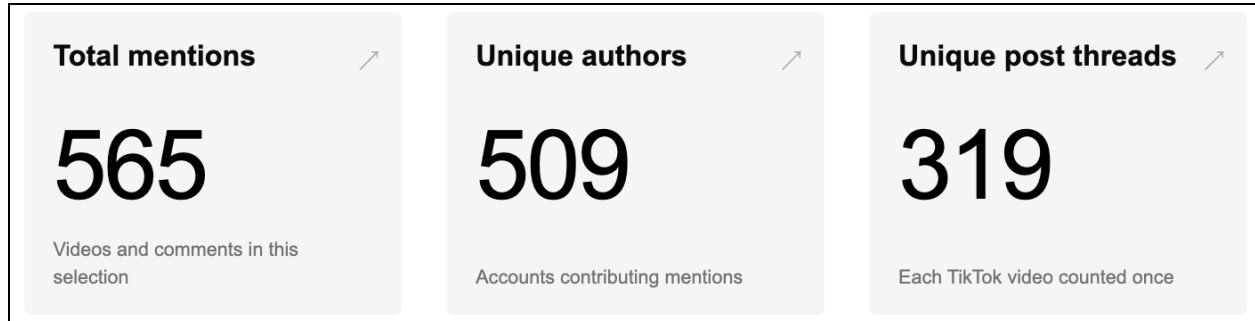


Figure 1: Key Metrics

The analysis of TikTok revealed a total of 565 total mentions across 319 unique post threads/video discussions with 509 unique authors contributing to the conversation, representing an average of 1 mention per unique account (see Figure 2 below). The analytics tool utilised for TikTok does not provide repost information or trending topics.

¹⁹ Moodley, P., & Ebrahim, S. (2019). #Blesser: A critical evaluation of conceptual antecedents and the allure of a transactional relationship. *Acta Academica*, 51(2), 21–40. <https://doi.org/10.18820/24150479/aa51i2.2>



A word cloud of the 50 phrases, keywords and hashtags coloured by volume indicates the most common words used across X and TikTok. For X, these words include people, south and time. For TikTok, the most common words include love, money, expensive, pay and poor.



The trending topics visualisation below showcases phrases, hashtags and keywords which form themes of conversation throughout the time period (see Figure 5 and 6 below). For X, the visualisation shows that the phrases, hashtags and keywords are centred in the middle which indicates that the relevant keywords were used consistently across the conversation through the reporting period.

For TikTok, we see a concentration in the centre with some keywords being used consistently across the reporting period. However, there are several keywords that appear to fade in the conversation as well as care, husband, paid and doctor which gain prominence in the trending area of the graph – which indicates their prevalence in more recent conversations around the focus area.

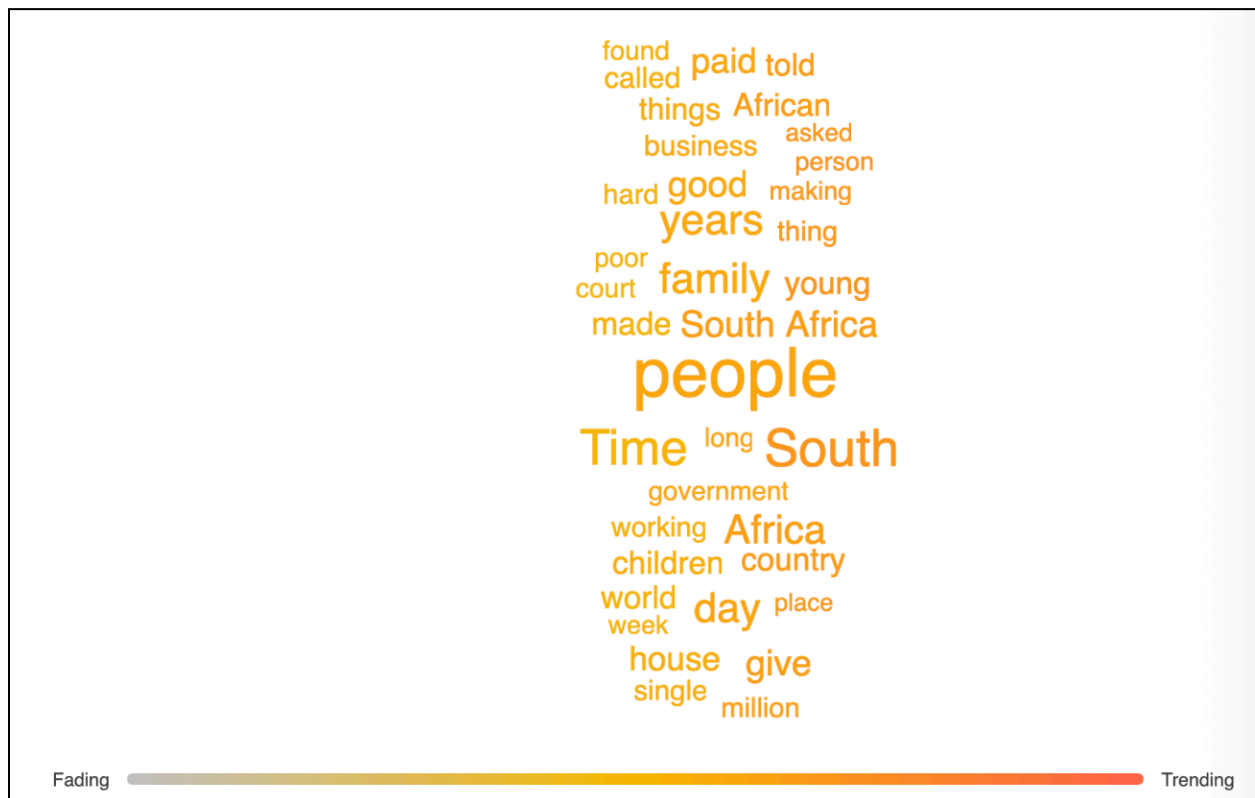


Figure 5: Trending Graph for X

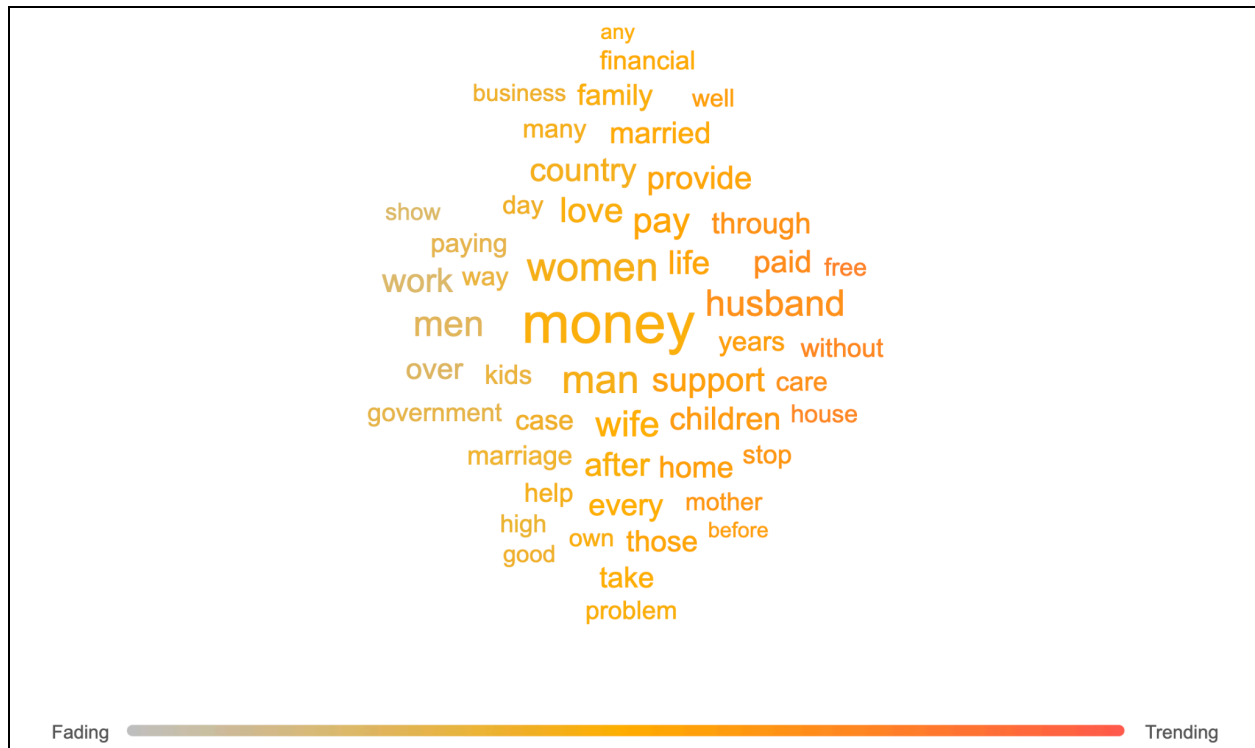


Figure 6: Trending Graph for TikTok

Popular Posts and Topics

In this section, we examine the context and content of highly engaged posts in the conversation.

Financial Provision and Masculine Worth

Financial provision emerged as a recurring expectation within the selected X posts. Several examples positioned a man's suitability for a relationship according to his capacity to maintain or improvise his partner's standard of living. In Figure 7 below, one account questions the purpose of a partner who cannot offer a better life than a woman already provides for herself. A second post advises women against marrying a man unable to maintain the standard established by their parents.



Figure 7: Financial provision as a condition of relationship suitability.

These posts frame provision as a measure of a man's value within a relationship. Women's financial independence does not necessarily displace this expectation; it can serve to establish a higher benchmark against which a prospective partner is assessed. Other examples describe men avoiding relationships because they are broke and young men exhausting their resources by assuming a husband's role prematurely.

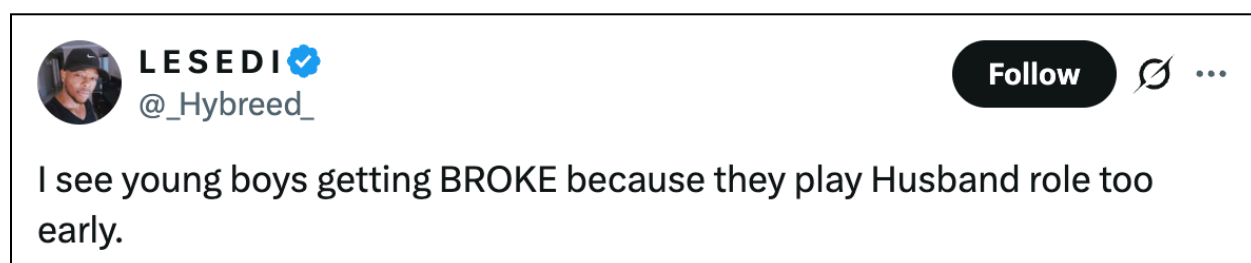




Figure 8: Perceived Consequences of Male Provision in Relationships

Provision as a masculine norm remains sustained through relationship judgements and expectations. In the first post below, an author describes dating a financially struggling man as draining because women end up pretending like they do not like expensive items to protect their feelings. The burden is described as material and emotional. In the second post, the author frames financial hardship as a lesson men must learn and that they will never return to financial hardship thereafter.

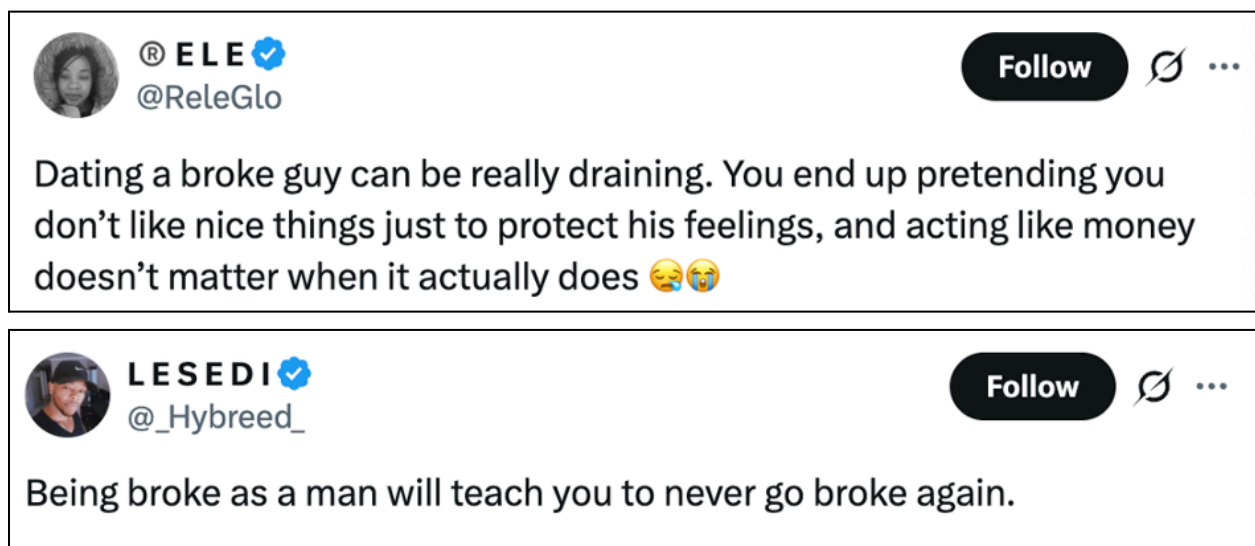


Figure 8A: Pressure to Provide

This framing protects the male provider identity even when a man cannot fulfil it. Rather than a renegotiating of provision, the role is reinforced and failure to adhere to it is treated as a burden and/or with shame. Income, therefore, becomes a condition of being treated as worthy or desirable. The call to avoid being broke responds to that judgment by urging men to escape the stigmatised position. It does not challenge the judgement itself.

The expectation was explicitly called out in several TikTok comments. The first author below notes that, in Ethiopia, men are providers and that they won't allow women to work for them like South African men. In the second post, the author notes that women reject traditional roles of cleaning and housework yet expect men to provide. For some individuals, men still have an expectation to provide and with that expectation, comes a counter-expectation on women to perform housework.

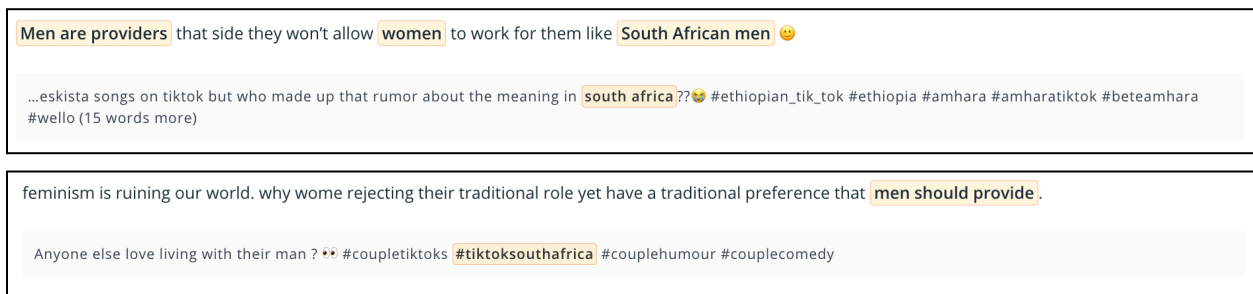


Figure 8a: Expectations to provide.

Together, these narratives frame provision as normative, economic insecurity as a failure of partnership and/or masculinity. They do not, however, establish that financial pressure leads to violence or harmful behaviour.

Expectations and Respectability

Disagreements about financial provision also produced sexualised and demeaning judgements about women. The first post in Figure 9 below equates refusing to date financially struggling men with prostitution. The second uses women's sexual history to question the value of paying bride price and to shame the man marrying her.

These examples move beyond negotiating affordability or expressing a preference for financial reciprocity. They use sexual stigma to undermine women's legitimacy as partners. In the bride-price example, the language presents women as something acquired and evaluates her worth through prior sexual access.



Figure 9: Expectations and Respectability

Respect was also directly linked to provision by the author below where she implies that some women restrict their partners' mothers from visiting their home that they paid for and creates an unfair and toxic environment for their partner potentially leading to violent retribution by their partners.

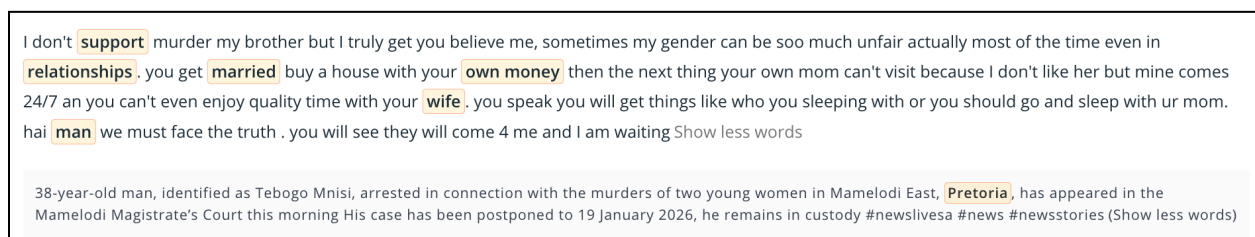


Figure 9a: Respect of man.

The relevant distinction is between financial boundary-setting and the use of financial disagreement to justify violence, humiliation, objectification. The latter reveals how economic expectation can become a means of enforcing restrictive ideas about acceptable femininity.

Independence and Competing Expectations

Women's access to their own money was presented as essential to wellbeing. In Figure 10 below, one post identifies financial dependence as worse than heartbreak. Another advises men not to date unemployed women, making a women's employment a condition of relationship suitability.

These perspectives attach different meanings to women's independence. In the first, personal resources are framed as important to a woman's own security. In the second, employment becomes a criterion through which a partner assesses desirability.



Figure 10: Independence and Competing Expectations

Read alongside Figure 7 above, the posts illustrate competing expectations: women should have their own income, while men should provide a material improvement to their lives. The samples reflect negotiation over the provider role rather than a straightforward move towards either dependence or equal financial contribution.

Care and Contribution Beyond Money

Perspectives also broadened relationship contribution beyond financial provision. The first post in Figure 11 below values practical consideration and assistance without expecting anything in return. The second challenges equal monetary contributions by drawing attention to reproductive labour.

Both examples are critical of narrow financial accounting of relationships. Practical care without expectation of reward offers an alternative perspective to looking at relationships solely through provider / dependent relationship. Recognition of reproductive labour also highlights contributions the lens of financial accounting in relationships may overlook.



Figure 11: Beyond Finances

Nevertheless, both narratives retain elements of traditional gender roles. Defining women's contribution primarily through childbirth narrows the basis on which they are valued as well as characterising the purpose of a relationship as some form of *quid pro quo*. Provision, reproduction, care are consequences of a consensual and healthy relationship which is based on mutual compatibility.

Vulnerability and Exploitation

The most direct connection between material hardship and abuse appears in a post describing an unemployed woman allegedly coerced into a degrading act in exchange for groceries. The account condemns the exploitation of her circumstances and explicitly rejects the framing of the exchange as consent, as shown in Figure 12 below.

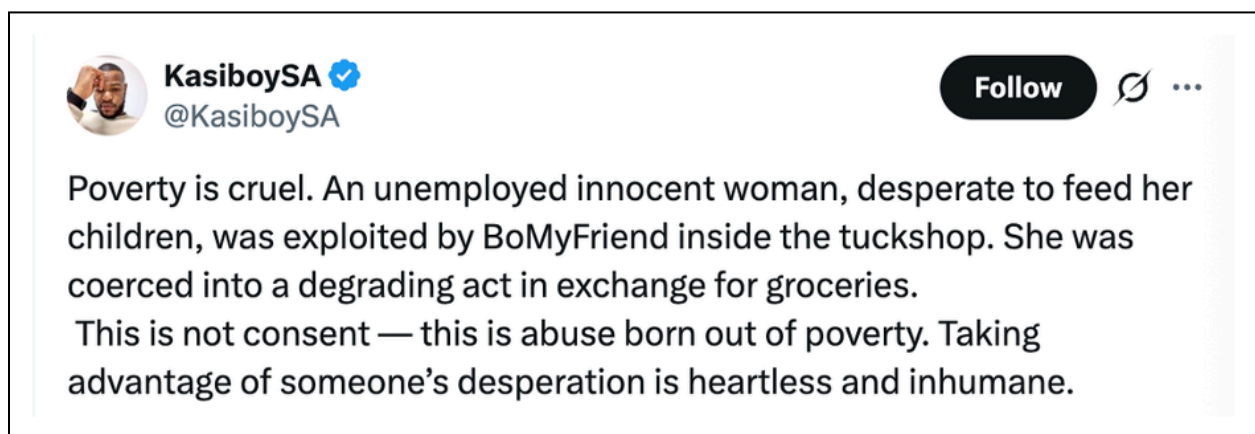


Figure 12: Condemnation of alleged exploitation linked to material need.

The narrative directs responsibility towards the person allegedly exploiting the unequal situation. In contrast with this perspective, a response on TikTok was critical of women and mothers for pursuing money and a "soft life" and ignoring abusive and harmful behaviour in favour of the financial support that the partner provides. This post was in response to a post reporting the arrest of man in connection with the murders of two women.

is very painful I'm feeling sorry for Tebogo may God help you pull through mothers lets educate our daughters that chassing men andr their **money** for **soft life** that will not end well I'm confused here the mother of those girls stated that her daughter was in an abusive **relationship** why didn't she reprimand her and tell her to breakup with him the answer is no because she was no longer responsible for her **financial** support what happened is painful but if you can see what time was all this happening at midnight as a mother you sleep so peacefully not knowing were your 21 year old daughter is more over in **Mzansi** this time of the year is eish life is hard to boys and men out there be carefu lof those immoral girls that want **soft life** on other people's expense Show less words

38-year-old man, identified as Tebogo Mnisi, arrested in connection with the murders of two young women in Mamelodi East, **Pretoria**, has appeared in the Mamelodi Magistrate's Court this morning His case has been postponed to 19 January 2026, he remains in custody #newslivesa #news #newsstories

Figure 13: Victim blaming

The comment shifts scrutiny towards women's morality, their whereabouts and the mother's parenting. Financial support, therefore, also becomes a response to question the women rather than examine the responsibility of the person accused of violence. This is evidence of a narrative that rationalises violence through financial dependence. Enduring violence, therefore, becomes a choice by women in order to retain financial support.

The post below calls out the expectation that just because the man pays the bills, he can essentially sit back and let his partner take up all the household responsibilities and cleanliness. The post therefore, directly calls out exploitation due to financial dependence in relationships.

your parents really failed bad. shukuthi neskgama ungasiyeka sikutshabule umdidi ngoba you "pay the bills" and you expect you **wife / girlfriend** to wash amasimba wakho?

Anyone else love living with their man ? •• #coupletiktoks #tiktoksouthafrica #couplehumour #couplecomedy

Figure 13a: Post calling out exploitation

Male aggression was also presented, by the below author, as an ever-present threat that should be accommodated and accounted for. Manipulation, extortion or exploitation by women and disrespect is treated as the rationale for aggression and indeed violence.

The term **GBV** emerged largely from feminist ideology, built on the assumption that whenever violence occurs between a man and a woman, the woman is automatically the primary victim. Yet at the same time, the modern world aggressively teaches women that they are equal to men in every sense strength, aggression, behavior, and risk-taking while refusing to acknowledge the consequences of that contradiction. Statistically and practically, most women who are killed by men are not killed by random strangers or rapists. They are killed by their male partners, and the root causes are overwhelmingly cheating, jealousy, betrayal, and **relationship** conflicts. Cases involving rapists are far fewer, and many women are killed in the same ways men are killed by street criminals, gangs, or assassins. These realities are often ignored because they do not fit the feminist narrative. The get-rich-quick mentality, where women target men's pockets through **relationships**, makes many women more vulnerable to deadly outcomes. Extorting **money** through **sex**, manipulating men emotionally, or disappearing after taking **money** frequently escalates into violence. This is one of the major but rarely discussed causes of killings within **relationships**. When men are questioned, many give strikingly similar accounts of being deceived, financially exploited, and disrespected. What is now labeled as "independence" is, in many cases, modernized prostitution luring men into **relationships** with the hidden intention of **financial** extraction. This is not empowerment; it is transactional deception disguised as progress. Feminism has misled women into believing that men think, behave, react, and tolerate disrespect the same way women do. Women fail to understand how men relate to other men how men respect each other's space, **money**, and boundaries. This respect is not rooted in kindness, but in realistic awareness of male aggression and the consequences of provocation. Men restrain themselves because they understand each other's capacity for violence. Show less words

Name Of The Full episode on YouTube is "How to Lower Violence Against Women_ **GBV South**

Figure 14: Financial Grievance and Rationalising Aggression

The narrative that affluent partners and/or extortion extends to violence was countered by one author in Figure 15 below. It is stated that financially struggling men also kill women.

Even **broke men** kill women

38-year-old man, identified as Tebogo Mnisi, arrested in connection with the murders of two young women in Mamelodi East, **Pretoria**, has appeared in the Mamelodi Magistrate's Court this morning His case has been postponed to 19 January 2026, he remains in custody #newslivesa #news #newsstories
(Show less words)

Figure 15: Counter-narrative to financial choice explanations of violence

Within the selection, the post serves as a rebuttal to victim-blaming. A less affluent partner is not protected from violence. This shows that there is contestation around violence rather than a single accepted explanation.

Recommendations

- **Recognise men's contribution beyond financial provision:** Civil society messaging should value caregiving, emotional availability and shared responsibility. Campaigns should acknowledge financial insecurity while challenging the idea that income determines men's worth, desirability or authority.
- **Promote equitable negotiation of money and care:** Relationship education should encourage agreement on expenses, domestic labour, childcare and extended-family support. Responsibilities should reflect partners' circumstances and unpaid contributions rather than a fixed 50/50 formula. Provision should never confer entitlement to obedience, sex or exemption from care.
- **Connect financial empowerment with recognition of economic abuse:** Government and civil society should combine financial literacy and livelihood support with awareness of financial control. Education should distinguish money disagreements from withholding essentials, restricting earnings or obstructing employment, alongside accessible referrals for people financially constrained from leaving harmful relationships.
- **Challenge victim-blaming explanations of violence:** GBV campaigns, journalists and community leaders should challenge narratives blaming women's financial expectations or partner choices for violence. Messaging should affirm that hardship does not excuse abuse and less affluent partners do not guarantee safety, while distinguishing financial preferences and ordinary disagreements from abusive behaviour.

Conclusion

Economic anxiety acquires significance within relationships through the gendered meanings attached to money. Across the selected material, income represents security and purchasing power, but also respect, desirability, obligation and authority. The report therefore highlights the importance of examining how financial circumstances are interpreted, alongside the circumstances themselves.

A central insight is that provider expectations are reinforced through the participation of both men and women. They persist through partner selection, self-judgement and the emotional work of protecting a partner's sense of adequacy. Describing the strain of these expectations does not necessarily challenge them. A man may respond to financial shame by resolving never to be broke again, while a woman may conceal her preferences to protect his feelings. Both responses can preserve the assumption that his value depends on his ability to provide.

Women's financial independence also coexists with continuing expectations of male provision. This complicates any straightforward distinction between traditional dependence and equal partnership. Similarly, recognising care or reproductive labour can broaden understandings of contribution while retaining fixed ideas about what men and women should offer. More equitable relationships require room to negotiate responsibilities without making income, reproduction or conformity to a gender role a condition of dignity.

The distinction between financial pressure and abuse remains essential. Expressing economic distress, setting financial boundaries or choosing a compatible partner is not inherently abusive. The concern arises when these discussions justify degradation, control, exploitation or violence. In particular, narratives that blame women's financial preferences for the violence committed against them shift responsibility away from those who perpetrate harm.

For the CABC, the findings support interventions that acknowledge economic strain while challenging the social expectations that attach shame or entitlement to it. Promoting care, emotional presence and shared responsibility can expand the ways people understand contribution and worth. These efforts should preserve women's autonomy and maintain clear accountability for abuse. The opportunity is to use moments of financial tension to question restrictive roles and strengthen relationships grounded in mutual respect.

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Appendix

Appendix A - Methodology



Using a query designed to capture the broad conversation about interactions between men and women, this report covers February 2023. Stieglitz and colleagues (2018) identified four distinct phases in social media data analysis: (1) discovery, (2) collection, (3) preparation, and (4) analysis. Below, we describe how these phases guided our research project.

Step 1: Data Discovery

- The first step in data discovery was to draw up a list of keywords designed to isolate the broad conversation about interactions between men and women in South Africa on social media. The research and dialogue facilitation teams contributed to this list collaboratively through a shared spreadsheet. The research team focuses on quantitative analysis while the dialogue team focuses on qualitative analysis of the conversation(s).
- To create this list, the research team drew on existing knowledge combined with desktop research, a literature review and a quantitative, analytic review of social media.
- Our preliminary keyword list comprised

Step 2: Data Collection

- We “collected” the resulting data using our social media analytics platform.

Step 3: Data Preparation²⁰

- We ‘prepared’ the data for analysis by refining the query. Query refinement entails sifting through the data set while looking for posts that are not relevant to interactions between men and women in South Africa. At this stage we also look at relevant posts that have not been included.

²⁰ New keywords and exclusions are identified both at the query and tag level on an ongoing basis.

- If and when our team finds that some words could be added or removed, they are resolved by introducing additional keywords and/or exclusionary terms to the query.
- With the goal of delivering the most useful insights possible in this report, we created libraries of categories and tags to focus on the parts of online conversation that were most relevant for this project. This development of the categories and tags was based on two factors:
 1. *Prominence* - this is assessed quantitatively, using a dashboard that allows us to visualise data points, and qualitatively, using researchers' expertise, desktop research and dashboard work.
 2. *Relevance* - a qualitative assessment of whether a focus area is important enough to the strategic goals of the heCareZA project to be included. Our team makes this determination based on subject matter expertise in South African social media dynamics and whether or not further research into the focus area is likely to provide valuable information for the ongoing heCareZA Programme.

Step 4: Data analysis

- We built a dashboard in our social media analytics platform to support our data analysis. This tool produces metrics according to volume, trending topics, news stories, and unique authors in relation to the keyword list.
- Thematic analysis involves studying the emerging patterns in the data and exploring how units of meaning connect to form themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can highlight individuals' perspectives, ideas and experiences, and can be used to generate fresh insight into the social dynamics behind human behaviour. Accordingly, we analysed the collected data thematically to interpret the data and to gain insight into dominant themes and trends.
- The goal of this analysis is to better understand what was said during the reporting period. Thematic analysis was conducted both at the query level and the tag (focus area) level.

Appendix B - Query (Twitter/X)

((unemploy* OR jobless OR retrench* OR layoff* OR "laid off" OR "lost my job" OR "lost his job" OR "lost her job" OR "no job" OR "no work" OR "without a job" OR "can't find work" OR "cannot find work" OR "looking for work" OR "cost of living" OR "cost of living crisis" OR "living costs" OR inflation OR "food prices" OR "grocery prices" OR "petrol price*" OR "fuel price*" OR "electricity price*" OR rent OR groceries OR "school fees" OR salary OR salaries OR wage* OR income OR payday OR "month end" OR "month-end" OR broke OR "financial stress" OR "financial pressure" OR "money problems" OR "money problem" OR "money struggles" OR "financial struggle*" OR "financial burden" OR "financial anxiety" OR "money anxiety" OR debt OR indebted OR loan* OR credit OR "can't afford" OR "cannot afford" OR unaffordable OR "make ends meet" OR "black tax" OR Januworry OR "send money home" OR mashonisa*))

NEAR/12 (M?n OR boy* OR male* OR indoda OR amadoda OR mfanA OR gent* OR guy* OR oke OR ou OR bru OR bro OR dude OR husband* OR boyfriend* OR father* OR dad* OR grootman OR Wom?n OR girl* OR female* OR lady OR ladies OR gyal OR mfaz* OR ntomb* OR intombi OR chick* OR hun OR hunnie* OR vrou OR wife OR wives OR girlfriend* OR mother* OR mom* OR mum* OR makoti OR relationship* OR dating OR marriage OR married OR couple* OR partner* OR mjolo OR umjolo)) OR

<<< GENDERED FINANCIAL NORMS >>>

((M?n OR indoda OR amadoda OR husband* OR boyfriend* OR father* OR gent* OR guy*))

NEAR/5 (provide* OR provider OR breadwinner OR "bread winner" OR pay* OR support* OR afford* OR money OR salary OR income)) AND (must OR should OR supposed OR expected OR expectation* OR responsibility OR duty OR role OR "real man" OR moet OR fanele)) OR

<<< DIRECT PROVIDER / RELATIONSHIP MONEY LANGUAGE >>>

("man must provide" OR "men must provide" OR "man should provide" OR "men should provide" OR "man's duty to provide" OR "man's responsibility" OR "real man provides" OR "men are providers" OR "provide and protect" OR "protect and provide" OR "girlfriend allowance" OR "boyfriend allowance" OR "wife allowance" OR "husband allowance" OR "spousal allowance" OR "partner allowance" OR "provider love" OR "provider culture" OR "provider man" OR "provider mindset" OR "provider fetish" OR "50/50" OR "fifty fifty" OR "split bills" OR "split the bills" OR "split expenses" OR "go dutch" OR "men should pay" OR "man should pay" OR "pay for dates" OR "pay for the date" OR "women should contribute" OR "woman should contribute" OR "both should contribute" OR "shared expenses" OR "shared responsibility" OR "what do you bring to the table" OR "bring to the table" OR "his money is our money" OR "my money is my money")OR

<<< SOUTH AFRICAN TRANSACTIONAL / FAMILY ECONOMICS >>>

((mavuso NEAR/10 (money OR sex OR Wom?n OR girl* OR girlfriend* OR relationship*))

OR blesser OR blessers OR blessee OR blessees OR "sugar daddy" OR "sugar daddies" OR "sugar baby" OR "sugar babies" OR lobola OR lobolo OR ilobolo OR magadi OR "bride price" OR "ATM dad" OR

"ATM father" OR "child maintenance" OR "child support" OR "maintenance money" OR papgeld OR
(("baby mama" OR "baby daddy")

NEAR/8 (money OR support OR maintenance OR pay* OR afford*)) OR

<<< ECONOMIC STATUS, DESIRABILITY & SHAMING >>>

("soft life" OR "princess treatment" OR "bare minimum" OR "high value man" OR "high-value man" OR
"low value man" OR "financially stable man" OR "financially secure man" OR "broke man" OR "broke
men" OR "broke guy" OR "broke guys" OR "broke boyfriend" OR "broke husband" OR "dusty man" OR
"dusty men" OR "rich man" OR "wealthy man" OR "successful man" OR "gold digger" OR golddigger OR
"gold digging" OR "money hungry" OR "materialistic woman" OR "materialistic women" OR "high
maintenance woman" OR "high maintenance girlfriend" OR hypergamy OR hypergamous OR "date up"
OR "dating up" OR "marry up" OR "marry rich" OR "struggle love" OR "build with a man" OR "build with
him" OR "hold him down" OR "ride or die" OR "stand by your man" OR "men are only loved when they
have money" OR "men are only loved" OR "men are valued for what they provide" OR "men are loved
conditionally" OR "women don't date broke men" OR "women dont date broke men" OR "women won't
date broke men" OR "no money no respect" OR "men are ATMs" OR "walking ATM" OR "human ATM" OR
"no romance without finance" OR "romance without finance" OR "no money no honey" OR "love doesn't
pay bills" OR "love doesnt pay bills" OR "love don't pay bills") OR

<<< ECONOMIC AGENCY / DEPENDENCE >>>

((Wom?n OR wife OR wives OR girlfriend* OR mother* OR mfaz* OR ntomb* OR intombi OR hun OR
makoti) NEAR/8 ("financial independence" OR "financially independent" OR "own money" OR "own
income" OR "depend on a man" OR "dependent on a man" OR "depend on husband" OR "dependent on
husband" OR "financial dependence" OR "financially dependent")) OR

<<< FINANCIAL CONTROL / ECONOMIC ABUSE >>>

("financial abuse" OR "economic abuse" OR "financial control" OR "financial manipulation" OR "financial
coercion" OR "economic coercion" OR "use money to control" OR "money to control" OR "withhold
money" OR "cut her off financially" OR "cut him off financially" OR "can't leave because of money" OR
"cannot leave because of money" OR "staying for money" OR "stay for money" OR "financially
trapped")OR

<<< MASCULINE FAILURE / EMASCULATION >>>

("can't provide" OR "cannot provide" OR "unable to provide" OR "struggling to provide" OR "failed
provider" OR "failure as a man" OR "not a real man" OR "less of a man" OR "man enough" OR "weak
man" OR emasculat*)

NOT(Isreal OR Cuba* OR terrorist OR Portfolio OR album OR emailing OR XRP OR tyrior OR Tambo
OR Aeon OR "Credit Partners" OR "Man utd" OR Manchester OR "Premier League")) AND country:ZAF

Appendix C - Query (TikTok)

(rawText:(("man must provide" OR "men must provide" OR "man should provide" OR "men should provide" OR "men are providers" OR "provider man" OR "male provider" OR "female breadwinner" OR "sole breadwinner" OR "girlfriend allowance" OR "boyfriend allowance" OR "wife allowance" OR "broke boyfriend" OR "broke husband" OR "broke men" OR "broke man" OR "unemployed husband" OR "unemployed boyfriend" OR "date broke" OR "dating broke" OR "marry rich" OR "marrying rich" OR "men with money" OR "man with money" OR "wife with money" OR "women with money" OR "no romance without finance" OR "love does not pay bills" OR "love doesn't pay bills" OR "money buys love" OR "money does buy love" OR "money cannot buy love" OR "money can't buy love" OR "she loves money" OR "she loves him because of money" OR "after his money" OR "after her money" OR "after their money" OR "loved for his money" OR "love you for your money" OR "men are not wallets" OR "depend on a man" OR "dependent on a man" OR "depend on men" OR "dependent on men" OR "financially trapped" OR "cannot afford to leave" OR "can't afford to leave")

OR ((husband OR husbands OR wife OR wives OR boyfriend OR girlfriend OR spouse OR marriage OR married OR marrying OR divorce OR divorced OR dating OR "first date" OR "romantic relationship" OR "my partner" OR "your partner" OR "her partner" OR "his partner" OR "baby daddy" OR "baby mama" OR "baby father" OR "single mother" OR "single father" OR "side chick" OR "side chicks" OR sidechick OR mjolo OR umjolo OR makhwapeni OR makhwepeni) AND (money OR income OR salary OR salaries OR bills OR groceries OR housekeeping OR allowance OR pension OR "provident fund" OR maintenance OR debt OR financial OR financially OR breadwinner OR provider OR providing OR unemployed OR jobless OR retrenched OR "lost my job" OR "lost his job" OR "lost her job" OR "earns more" OR "earn more" OR "earning more" OR "paid for" OR "pays for" OR "pay for" OR "split the bill" OR "split bills" OR "split the bills" OR "own money" OR "my money" OR "his money" OR "her money" OR "our money" OR "bank statement" OR "joint account" OR "financial support" OR "financial security"))

OR ((men OR man OR women OR woman OR masculinity OR femininity OR "gender roles" OR "gender norms") AND (provide OR provides OR providing OR provider OR breadwinner OR "financially stable" OR "financially independent" OR "financial independence" OR "financially dependent" OR "financial dependence" OR "financial worth" OR "earn more" OR "earns more" OR "pay the bills" OR "pays the bills" OR "pay all the bills" OR "pays all the bills" OR "pay for everything" OR "pays for everything" OR "money to offer" OR "nothing to offer"))

OR (("gold digger" OR "gold diggers" OR golddigger OR golddiggers OR "soft life" OR softlife OR "princess treatment" OR "struggle love" OR hypergamy OR tradwife OR housewife OR "stay at home wife" OR "high value man" OR "high value men") AND (money OR rich OR broke OR poor OR income OR salary OR bills OR financial OR financially OR provide OR provider OR husband OR boyfriend OR dating OR marriage))

OR ((lobola OR lobolo OR ilobolo OR magadi OR "bride price") AND (money OR afford OR expensive OR debt OR pay OR paid OR paying OR refund OR unemployed OR "belongs to me" OR "belongs to him" OR "owe me" OR "owes me" OR respect OR obey OR obedience OR control OR consent OR abuse OR chores OR clean OR housework))

OR ((blesser OR blessers OR blessee OR "sugar daddy" OR "sugar baby" OR "transactional

relationship" OR "transactional relationships" OR "transactional sex") AND (money OR gifts OR allowance OR sex OR dating OR relationship OR relationships OR power OR control OR abuse OR violence))

OR (("child support" OR "child maintenance" OR "spousal maintenance" OR "maintenance money" OR paggeld) AND (pay OR paid OR paying OR money OR refuses OR refused OR father OR mother OR parent OR husband OR wife OR unemployed OR afford OR support OR responsibility))

OR (("financial abuse" OR "economic abuse" OR "financial control" OR "financial coercion" OR "withholding money" OR "withhold money" OR "money to control" OR "controls the money" OR "cut her off financially" OR "cut him off financially" OR "stopped providing" OR "refuses to provide") AND (husband OR wife OR boyfriend OR girlfriend OR partner OR marriage OR relationship OR women OR woman OR men OR man OR gbv OR abuse OR "domestic violence"))

OR ((gbv OR femicide OR "gender based violence" OR "gender-based violence" OR "domestic violence" OR "intimate partner violence" OR "abusive husband" OR "abusive boyfriend" OR "abusive partner" OR "kill women" OR "kills women" OR "killing women" OR "killed his wife" OR "killed his girlfriend") AND (money OR rich OR broke OR provider OR breadwinner OR unemployed OR "financial dependence" OR "financially dependent" OR "financial stress" OR "soft life" OR "gold digger" OR lobola))

OR ((chores OR housework OR childcare OR "domestic labour" OR "domestic labor" OR "unpaid work" OR "unpaid care" OR "stay at home dad" OR "stay at home mother" OR "stay at home mom" OR "why must I clean" OR "why should I clean") AND (husband OR wife OR partner OR marriage OR men OR women OR father OR mother) AND (money OR bills OR income OR salary OR pay OR paid OR provider OR breadwinner OR contribution OR contribute OR "50/50" OR "50 50" OR "fifty fifty")))

OR (rawText:("who paid" OR "who pays" OR "why are you paying" OR "why she paid" OR "she paid" OR "she paying" OR "she tapped her phone" OR "paying for her own" OR "get your boyfriend to" OR "save your money" OR "give him cash" OR "give her cash" OR "send money cash" OR "hide the money" OR "loves you" OR "love him" OR "love her") AND rawText:(money OR pay OR paid OR paying OR cash OR bills OR afford OR rich OR broke) AND _all:(dating OR "first date" OR boyfriend OR girlfriend OR husband OR wife OR marriage OR "side chick" OR "side chicks" OR "girlfriend allowance" OR mjolo)))

AND _all:("south africa" OR "south african" OR southafrica* OR mzansi OR mzansitiktok OR johannesburg OR joburg OR jozi OR pretoria OR tshwane OR pitori OR "cape town" OR capetown OR durban OR ethekwinini OR soweto OR gauteng OR kzn OR limpopo OR mpumalanga OR bloemfontein OR gqeberha OR satiktok OR tiktoksa OR tiktoksouthafrica OR "eastern cape" OR "western cape" OR "northern cape" OR "kwazulu natal")

AND NOT rawText:("use my discount code" OR "use my promo code" OR "shop our collection" OR "shop the collection" OR "wholesale prices" OR "nationwide delivery" OR "apply for a loan" OR "instant loan approval" OR "we provide personal and business finance" OR "contact us today if you need urgent finance" OR "UIF application" OR "salary schedule form" OR howtogoviral)