

# A man without broken hands in the home

*Most men do not do housework. This is seen as women's work. Oupa Mmotsa, an activist, does not agree. He speaks about his views on housework.*

Oupa is married to Ouma. They have two children, a son Tshelnolo who is 11 years old and a daughter, Masetshaba who is one year old. They live in a garage at Oupa's mother's home in Mohlakeng, near Randfontein. At home, Oupa does some cooking, cleaning, washing up and makes the bed.

## Father a big influence

How did Oupa get to be one of those few men who believes that men should do housework? His late father had a big influence on his life. He did housework and that was way back in the 1960's.

"My father saw himself as a father with children to bring up properly and he couldn't expect my mother to do it alone," says Oupa.

"My younger kid brother was born in 1966 and my mother became ill. My father didn't believe that he had to fetch someone to come and help out. He believed he could do it himself. I used to see my father washing napkins."

Oupa's father cooked, cleaned and washed clothes. Oupa also took on responsibilities in the home.

"I'd do things like washing dishes, preparing uniforms for my kid brothers and helped my father to do some cooking and cleaning before I went to school."



Oupa's father was different from other men in the community in the way he treated his wife. He cared for her very much and he never laid a violent hand on her.

## Childcare should also be shared

Oupa wants to be close to his children. He wants to enjoy being part of bringing them up and he wants them to grow up believing that housework must be shared. He hopes his son will take after him.

Oupa's daughter is still a baby and wakes often during the night. He and his wife have a shared arrangement to care for the baby. He explains: "We take turns when she wakes up and cries."

## Democracy at home

Oupa believes that male comrades should set an example by bringing democracy into their homes. But he finds most of them very disappointing when it comes to practising what they preach in their own homes. Men use tradition as a weapon to fight having to give up their male privilege in the home. They want to be kings in their homes.

He said: "I have been to homes of many comrades who plainly refuse to do housework. It becomes a big argument. They refuse to do those jobs. They bring tradition into the whole thing."

## Change is not easy

Oupa admits that change is not easy. But he firmly believes the problem of sharing housework is a two way thing. He says women feel threatened by the idea.

He says: "Most of our women won't let us do these things. In a way, if you start doing these things they feel threatened. They wonder what you are up to. You have to show your partner that you love her and that you appreciate her . . . little gestures can contribute to phasing out what she suspects is a plot against her. But I think from their side too, some contribution has to be made . . . They may think 'this guy, okay, he could be trying to topple me but at the same time he could be trying something positive'."



**Women are also to blame**

Oupa believes women are also to blame for the fact that men don't do housework. Ouma appreciates his help - but only with housework inside the house. She does not want him to do housework outside in the yard where people can see him.

Says Oupa: "The problem comes when I do washing outside. Like washing napkins, my own clothes or maybe Ouma's clothes, especially underwears and sweeping the yard."

He says Ouma feels ashamed that he should be seen doing these things in the yard. She feels the community will blame her for not being a proper wife. And they will also laugh at Oupa and see him as weak or cowardly and controlled by his wife. Oupa feels these worries are shared by most women.

There are some jobs that Ouma will only let Oupa do when they are alone. "She won't allow me to change the kid's napkin when other people are around. But when they are not around, I can do it. Women are looked at as wives and mothers. They have that role to play and they are accepted in the society if they do it well.

**Changing roles will take time**

Changing roles for men and women are important, says Oupa, but it will take time to be accepted.

"It's not something that will be achieved overnight, unless more people do it openly," he believes. "You've got to get to the point where your wife won't feel ashamed if the man next door is laughing at you for washing napkins and underwear," says Oupa. Oupa believes both men and women need to be educated.

The problem is that change happens slowly. How can it be speeded up so women aren't tied to the kitchen in the new South Africa?

"I think it will largely depend on people who claim to be activists," said Oupa. He believes that women and men should both be encouraged to do other than traditional tasks both at home and in the community.

"Instead of women doing traditional women's jobs, let us men do them or let us do them together. Women can do things like marshalling and trying to keep order . . . . Activists who are conservative will start looking at it from a different light and women who are activists won't feel threatened. Another thing is when people preach equality on stage they must be seen putting them into practise.

**Message as a male activist**

Oupa is positive about the future. He says: "If we can give each other a chance to prove that we can perform duties across the sex line and approach it in a positive attitude, it could build happiness - that little spark of happiness that is not there in the household.

"If my son grows up with the idea of sharing the housework I think his family will benefit a lot in future and he won't in time of need, look back and feel sorry for himself. He will know that he has hands which are not broken. My wife will gain the satisfaction of knowing that even when she is not there she need not worry about her children. That there is actually a mother and a father in me. I gain the trust and confidence of my family.

"And that's not bad!" smiles Oupa. "Maybe that is what a good marriage is all about. Trying to make a good relationship and not working towards a divorce."

Forward to more men taking Oupa's advice!

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