

The Weekly

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR FIGHTING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE?

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The magnitude of gender based violence in society is a major cause for concern in the ANC lead government, given the ruling party's world renowned commitment to women's rights as human rights, and gender equality as a pillar of social transformation. But how politically committed are we to really tackling this issue?

How can one not stop and take notice when Gender Links published depressing research findings in 2011, saying, three quarters of all men in Gauteng have at some point or another perpetuated violence against women. The findings also highlight that, half of women in the province have been the victims of one form of violence or another.

In 1993, the landmark United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, defined violence as, "Any act of gender based violence resulting in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

The magnitude of violence against girls and women in society undermines our democracy and the culture of human rights. Delays within our criminal justice system in case management further deny victims justice and dignity through the healing process. Our apparent ineffective gender based violence prevention inevitably allows perpetrators to wreak havoc in every corner of society.

Crime category	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	Different 2012/2011 vs 2009/2010	% Increase/decrease
Murder	2 602	2 544	2 436	2 457	2 594	137	5,6%
Attempted murder	3 362	3 016	2 966	3 008	2 842	-166	-5,5%
All sexual offences		31 328	30 124	36 093	35 820	-237	-0,8%
Common assault	100 390	94 286	91 390	94 176	89 956	-4 220	-4,5%
Assault GBH	69 132	64 084	61 509	62 143	60 630	-1 513	-2,4%
Total	210 302	195 258	188 425	197 877	191 842	-6 035	-3,0%

Crime against children younger than 18 years over the same time period

Crime category	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	Different 2012/2011 vs 2009/2010	% Increase/decrease
Murder	972	1 015	843	965	906	-59	-6,1%
Attempted murder	889	852	782	1 113	786	-327	-29,4%
All sexual offences	25 428	22 124	20 141	27 417	28 128	711	2,6%
Common assault	16 871	16 091	14 544	14 982	13 387	-1 595	-10,6%
Assault GBH	13 947	13 625	12 422	12 062	11 018	-1 044	-8,7%
Total	58 107	53 707	48 732	56 539	54 225	-2 314	-4,1%

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You just need to take a look at the figures in the SAPS statistics released annually to see the gravity of the situation we are dealing with... Crimes against women of 18 years and older over the past few years...Crime against children younger than 18 years over the same time period. Statistics are from the South African Police Service Crime Rate for 2010/2011

What is of great cause for concern is that this social ill barely features on the political agenda, its left as a women's issue for women to deal with. As a result when the KZN Premier Zweli Mkhize launched "Men's Month and the Moral Regeneration Campaign", in KZN, and directly linked gender based violence to the moral decay of our society.

That particular public utterance by the KZN premier went a long way in support of women's advocacy groups' voices on the plight of women who are trapped in the emotionally and physically devastating experience of abuse.

We cannot deny that violence is traumatic, and depending on the person's personality and circumstances, trauma can negatively affect all aspects of a person's life, from schooling to adjustments in society.

A traumatised person does not sleep well, suffers from the intrusion of harmful thoughts, is generally nervous and fearful and frequently harbours feelings of anger and pain, which can perpetuate this cycle of violence in society.

Often the ANC Women's League is criticised by onlookers for not doing enough to eradicate gender-based violence, but the reality of the situation is that while the women's league is politically unambiguous about its responsibility to fight for gender equality, till such time that we all challenge all forms of patriarchy and male domination, whether masked as traditional, or cultural, or religious, at the end of the day it is these socially constructed beliefs and stereotypes which maintains violence against girls and women, mainly by boys and men.

With three quarters of our men perpetuating these crimes, should we not view this as a societal issue and not a women's issue? During the Apartheid era, racism was viewed as the enemy and all South Africans, men and women of every race and social creed came together with a common goal, to dismantle the evil system and to systematically create an equal society.

The negative consequences of gender based violence are no different. We have to enhance our efforts in creating moral capabilities in line with the culture of human rights, thus transforming our society and creating a culture of non-violence.

Tackling gender-based violence should not be seen as a women's issue but rather everyone's issue and that is why I have to acknowledge and congratulate the efforts of comrade Zweli Mkhize. He has taken a brave step and acknowledged that men and male politicians need to play a major role in not only putting this issue on the agenda, but tackling the problem as well.

He has broken the silence of public representatives around gender based violence and pinned down the morality of men as a contributing factor. He is basically saying that gender based violence, at its root, is an immoral act perpetuated by men and something to be ashamed of.

This is the message we need to get through to our men and young boys. Mkhize specifically made reference to the long-term effects of trauma caused by violence. He used the example of how his grandchild now fears police after seeing Tatane murdered and how the trauma of that incident has stuck with the child who is reminded of the trauma every time he encounters a policeman.

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The trauma of rampant gender based violence has long-term consequences and if we don't do more to tackle the crisis head on, the cycle of abuse will continue. The Gender Links research also mentions the SADC protocol of reducing gender-based violence by half by 2013. This will not be possible unless we make gender based violence a high level political tipping point.

The same research which analysed 1956 political speeches noted that only 4.8% specifically mentioned gender based violence and of these only 1% noted gender based violence as an issue. This is shocking considering the rate at which it occurs and indicates we need to elevate the political will to deal decisively with abuse.

Gender based violence is very much on top of the agenda of non-profit organisations and many feel that this is where it should be located, but the issue will not be tackled effectively until it becomes everyone's issue and more specifically the issue of politicians, who should follow on the initiative of the KZN Premier to specifically tackle violence against women and highlight the morality of society and the incapacitating effect of trauma on development.

Politicians also need to continually acknowledge the interdependence of men and women, and of boys and girls in unlocking future possibilities and working towards the eradication of gender based violence.

Mkhize in ANC Women's League Treasurer General and Deputy Minister of Economic Development

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