



**PARLIAMENT**  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



# 16 Days of Activism for no Violence Against Women and Children 2024

11 November 2024

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**PARLIAMENTARY  
RESEARCH UNIT (PRU)**

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## 1. Introduction

The 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children is an annual international campaign, which takes place from 25 November to 10 December, aimed at raising awareness about gender-based violence and human rights issues. In South Africa, this campaign is of particular significance due to the country's high rates of violence against women and children. Youth and children are both at the centre of the campaign. The campaign highlights the critical role of young people in ending gender-based violence (GBV) and ensuring a safer environment for all, particularly vulnerable groups like women and children.

## 2. Gender-Based Violence Affecting Women, Youth and Children

*“Violence against women is a form of discrimination and a violation of human rights. It causes untold misery, cutting short lives and leaving countless women living in pain and fear in every country of the world. It harms families across the generations, impoverishes communities and reinforces other forms of violence throughout societies. Violence against women stops them from fulfilling their potential, restricts economic growth and undermines development. The scope and extent of violence against women are a reflection of the degree and persistence of discrimination that women continue to face. It can only be eliminated, therefore, by addressing discrimination, promoting women’s equality and empowerment, and ensuring that women’s human rights are fulfilled”.<sup>1</sup>*

The high rates of sexual and domestic violence combine to expose South African women and girls to a highly vulnerable situation. Despite the existence of progressive laws, policies and programmes, the high levels of violence, and in particular sexual violence against women and children, specifically rape, are a serious challenge to South Africa.

The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) notes that “between 25% and 40% of South African women have experienced sexual and/or physical Intimate Partner Violence in their lifetime, while almost 50% of women reported having experienced emotional or economic abuse at the hands of their partners in their lifetime. Prevalence estimates of rape in South Africa range between 12% and 28% of women having reported being raped in their lifetime and resulting in the highest rape incidence in the world and a crisis of endemic portions.”<sup>2</sup> The true scale of the problem remains unknown as under-reporting remains a key feature of gender-based violence.

<sup>1</sup> Gender-Based Violence In Africa: Perspectives from the continent

<sup>2</sup> Resha, G and Potgieter, C, 2024, [Localising the NSP-GBVF - Policy Brief Final GR+CP \(002\).docx \(csvr.org.za\)](#)

The United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women describes GBV as follows: Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

In the context of children and youth, GBV often intersects with issues of power, inequality, and socialization processes, making it a critical issue to address in both prevention and intervention efforts.

According to Save the Children, gender-based violence (GBV) against children is a violation against both girls and boys that “undermines the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims.” These abuses manifest in physical, sexual, psychological, and/or economic forms, aiming to restrict access to resources or services that could help a victim escape the cycle of violence. Violence directed at girls encompasses sexual violence, child marriage, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, trafficking, and sexual exploitation and abuse. The consequences are significant both in the immediate and over the long term, potentially resulting in severe physical injuries, sexually transmitted infections like HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, and an increased risk of maternal mortality.<sup>3</sup>

Boys can also be victims of trafficking as well as gender-related sexual violence and exploitation, yet due to social stigma, these cases remain significantly underreported. Young males aged 10 and older are especially at risk of detention since they are seen as security risks due to their or their family's supposed links to armed groups or gangs.<sup>4</sup> Children are abused, kept with older children or young adults, not provided proper legal support, or live in conditions that are against international standards for juvenile justice.

**Table 1: Types of Gender-Based Violence Affecting Youth and Children**







Type	Description
<b>Physical violence</b>	This includes hitting, slapping, and other forms of physical assault, often occurring within families, schools, or communities.
<b>Sexual violence</b>	This includes sexual abuse, harassment, exploitation, and trafficking. It affects both girls and boys but often disproportionately impacts girls.
<b>Emotional/psychological abuse</b>	This can involve manipulation, intimidation, and verbal abuse that diminishes a child’s self-worth.

<sup>3</sup> Save the Children (2024). Gender-Based Violence Creates an Unequal World for Children

<sup>4</sup> Save the Children (2024). Gender-Based Violence Creates an Unequal World for Children

### 3. An Overview of Key Statistics

Table 2: Reported Crimes Against Women and Children (January – June 2024)<sup>5</sup>

	<p><b>NUMBER OF WOMEN ASSAULTED</b> (Assault GBH) <b>29 455</b></p>
	<p><b>INCIDENTS OF ATTEMPTED MURDER OF WOMEN</b> <b>3 345</b></p>
<p><b>DECEASED</b></p>	<p><b>NUMBER OF WOMEN MURDERED</b> <b>1894</b></p>
<p><b>STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN</b></p> 	<p><b>667 children MURDERED</b> <b>830 children were VICTIMS OF ATTEMPTED MURDER</b> <b>3 834 children were VICTIMS OF ASSAULT GBH</b></p>
<p>While the statistic for sexual offences are not disaggregated by gender, the figures remain alarmingly high, with women historically being disproportionately affected</p>  <p><b>TOTAL INCIDENTS OF REPORTED SEXUAL ASSAULT:</b> <b>25 012</b> <b>Of which RAPE constitutes:</b> <b>19 961</b></p>	
	<p><b>REPORTED CASES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE</b> <b>47 349</b></p>
	<p><b>PLACE OF OCCURRENCE OF RAPE</b> Residences of perpetrator/victim (including residence known by victim/perpetrator e.g. family/friends/neighbours) <b>9 181</b></p>

<sup>5</sup> As extracted from SAPS Q4 of 2023/24 and Q1 of 2024/25: Public Recorded Crime Statistics

“The rate at which women are abused, violated and some killed in South Africa remains worrying and unacceptable; many are killed by the people they know, people they love and trust.”<sup>6</sup>

- The high and increasing numbers of crimes against women requires urgent attention and response. While multiple government initiatives have been developed and implemented of late, much more needs to be done for progress to be seen.
- While it is acknowledged that both women and men can be victims of sexual offences and domestic violence, women remain disproportionately affected.
- The high number of domestic violence cases, as well as the fact that the majority of rape cases occur in private residences, is an indication that women are not safe in private or public spaces.

“Not a day goes by without a story in the newspapers, on television or online about a woman or child that has lost their life or been abused in the most horrendous manner...These horrors defy comprehension. There are really no words for them. They tell a story about our society that is deeply disturbing. It is a story of a nation at war with itself”<sup>7</sup>

**Table 3: Comparison of selected contact crimes against children (April 2023 to June 2024)<sup>8</sup>**

CHILDREN (0-17 years) Murder, Attempted Murder, Assault GBH			
Crime Category	Murder	Attempted Murder	Assault GBH
April 2023 to June 2023	293	354	1 423
April 2024 to June 2024	314	424	1 596
<b>Count Difference<sup>9</sup></b>	<b>21</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>164</b>



Based on the increasing numbers presented by SAPS, violence against children remains a critical challenge facing South African society today, despite tremendous efforts to curb this scourge. The legacy of violence and extreme inequality from South Africa’s past is compounded by high poverty and unemployment in the present. This combination places many children at risk of domestic violence, substance abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. The scale of violence in South Africa alone is deeply worrying. Perhaps more concerning is how violence has become normalised in everyday life; weaving abuse and neglect into the country’s societal fabric.

Violence disproportionately affects the most vulnerable and has taken new forms:

<sup>6</sup> Minister Bheki Cele, Address at the release of the Q2 crime statistics, 23 November 2022

<sup>7</sup> Address by President Cyril Ramaphosa at the second Presidential Summit on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide

<sup>8</sup> South African Police Services (2024). Police Recorded Crime Statistics Republic of South Africa First Quarter of 2024-2025 Financial year (April 2024 to June 2024).

<sup>9</sup> Count difference between April 2023 and June 2024 as per SAPS Police Recorded Crime Statistics Quarter 1 report (2024/2025)

- Given South Africa’s significant HIV crisis, countless children have lost parents and are placed in precarious situations in households led by minors.
- South Africa attracts numerous refugees escaping conflicts, yet their children often experience discrimination and are frequently barred from accessing education and healthcare.
- Gender-based violence is a critical issue in South Africa. Although young boys face various types of violence, there are alarming rates of violence, particularly sexual violence such as rape, directed at girls and young women.
- As children and adolescents drive the digital landscape in South Africa, they are not only exposed to violent content online but also fall victim to cyberbullying.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. Progress and Challenges

##### Under the debate theme of “Marking 30 years of democratic rights for women and fostering national unity to end gender-based violence”, what has been achieved?

Since 1994, South Africa has introduced various legislative measures to address gender-based violence/ violence against women and girls. These include among others:

- **The Domestic Violence Act (Act No. 116, 1998):** The Act established options to victims of domestic violence through identifying obligations on law enforcement bodies and made provision for the application of protection orders.
- **The Criminal Law Amendment Act No. 105 of 1997:** The Act established mandatory minimum sentences for certain rapes.
- **The Criminal Law Second Amendment Act No. 85 of 1997:** The Act allowed for bail conditions to be tightened in rape cases.
- **The Criminal Law Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act (Act No. 32, 2007):** The Act broadened the definition of rape and other sexual offences and introduced new offences that relate to gender-based violence, including digital distribution of pornography.
- **The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment (Act No. 6 of 2012):** The Act was passed to provide for effective prosecution and conviction of offenders.
- **The Protection from Harassment Act (Act No. 17 of 2011):** The Act makes provision for women who are being stalked or harassed by someone they are not in a domestic relationship with to obtain a protection order against the perpetrator.

In terms of children specifically, these laws have the following special provisions:

Crime	Clause
Acts of consensual sexual penetration with certain children (statutory rape)	Section 15 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 2007 (Act No. 32 of 2007) defines the crime as follows: A person who commits an act of sexual penetration with a child is, despite the consent of the child to the commission of such an act, guilty of the offence of having committed an act of consensual sexual penetration with a child.
Acts of consensual sexual violation with certain children (statutory sexual assault)	Section 16 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 2007 (Act No. 32 of 2007) defines the crime as follows: A person who commits an act of sexual violation of a child is, despite the consent of the child to the

<sup>10</sup> UNICEF (2024). Child protection: UNICEF is committed to ensuring a safe and inclusive environment for every child.

commission of such an act, guilty of the offence of having committed an act of consensual sexual violation with a child.

In 2020, the National Strategic Plan on Gender-based Violence and Femicide was introduced. It is a comprehensive plan that focuses on violence against all women (regardless of age, physical location, disability, sexual orientation, sexual and gender identity, nationality and other identities). The development of this plan forms part of the declaration commitments drafted and agreed to at the first GBVF Summit in 2018.

Its purpose is to provide a multi-sectoral, coherent strategic policy and programming framework to ensure a coordinated national response to the crisis of gender-based violence and femicide by the government of South Africa and the country as a whole.

It is designed around 6 pillars for implementation:



A follow-up summit was held in November 2022 with the aim to provide an opportunity for feedback and accountability for issues raised in the last summit and an assessment of the impact of programmes and how to amplify programmes that are making a difference.

The GBVF Response Fund was launched by President Cyril Ramaphosa together with the International Women’s Forum of South Africa in February 2021 to address the high levels of GBVF in South Africa. Since then, around R162 million has been pledged to the fund by the private and public sector, with 75% of this amount already collected.<sup>11</sup>

In terms of legislative reform, government in 2022 signed into law three pieces of legislation to step up the fight against the scourge of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF). The new laws also form part of government’s implementation of resolutions of the Presidential Summit against GBVF.

The newly enacted laws are: The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 13 of 2022, The Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Act 12 of 2022, and The Domestic Violence Amendment Act 14 of 2022. A recent development includes the enactment of the National Council on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Act in 2024. This Act provides a legislative framework towards the establishment of a statutory body – the National Council on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (NCGBFV), which will be responsible for providing strategic leadership on the elimination of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide in South Africa.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.stateofthenation.gov.za/priorities/making-communities-safer/gender-based-violence>

These laws enhance protection of victims of gender-based violence and make it more difficult for perpetrators to escape justice. They are an affirmation of government's commitment to fight the scourge of GBVF and advance the 365 Days of Activism against the abuse of women and children.

### **While much has been achieved, much more needs to be done.**

The Human Science Resource Council notes that:

*Although there appears to be political will at the national level to address the issue, challenges related to insufficient funding, budgetary limitations, and a lack of collaboration and effective coordination among government departments, have hindered progress in implementing the GBVF-NSP. Training among police and government departments on the legislative changes has been inadequate. Too few GBV desks have been established at police stations and too few rape kits have been provided. Meanwhile, shelters which are supposed to care for survivors of GBV have lacked funding support<sup>12</sup>.*

Resourcing initiatives and commitments towards addressing gender-based violence remains one of the key challenges hampering progress. Without adequate human and financial resources, initiatives, programmes and policy will not reflect change.

In addition, implementation of existing policies and programmes remains slow. The latest available reflective report on the progress of the NSP GBVF indicates that out of 203 indicators across the 6 pillars, as at September 2022, only 44 or 21.6 percent of indicators have been achieved indicating that the rate of progress has been slow.<sup>13</sup>

Reflecting on the high rates of gender-based violence in the country, it is evident that although there is extensive legislation and policy to combat gender-based violence and sexual offences, this is not translating into change in women's lived realities. Advocacy, awareness and education remains imperative.

## **5. Conclusion**

In summation, the 16 Days of Activism is an essential forum for elevating survivors' voices, enlightening communities, and demanding accountability from institutions and governments. The campaign aids in ending the taboo around gender-based violence and advancing efforts to create a world free from inequality, discrimination, and violence by encouraging cooperation between individuals, civil society organizations, and legislators. But in order to bring about long-lasting change and guarantee the safety and empowerment of women and girls everywhere, consistent action beyond the 16-day period is necessary.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://hsrc.ac.za/news/latest-news/a-pandemic-within-a-pandemic-policy-responses-to-gender-based-violence-gbv/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://gbvf.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/REFLECTIVE-REPORT-ON-THE-IMPLEMENTATION-OF-THE-SOUTH-AFRICAN-NATIONAL-STRATEGIC-PLAN-ON-GBVF-29102212noon.pdf>

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