

Gender-based violence in South Africa an ongoing and visible epidemic

By Vincent Cruywagen • 14 June 2020

As the nation fights the invisible Covid-19 peril, a highly visible epidemic of gender-based violence continues to affect women and children each day. This scourge continues to sweep through the country, despite President Cyril Ramaphosa declaring femicide a national crisis in September 2019.

Miranda Jordan, of Woman and Men Against Child Abuse (WMACA), has lamented the recent resurgence of violence in South Africa and condemned the brutal murder of several women.

“As an organisation, we but offer lip-service about GBV (gender-based violence) which results in orphaned children who are traumatised for the rest of their lives and that is not okay. We know that abuse, especially murder, is largely perpetrated by people known to the victims.”

Jordan said underlying societal and relational issues that led to GBV had to be explored if we, as a country, hoped to find a solution for the rights, safety and abuse of women in communities.

“Femicide is a rampant disease that is festering in our society,” she said.

The ghastly recent murders include that of 25-year-old Naledi Phangindawo of Mossel Bay who was hacked to death with an axe and knife on 8 June 2020. The accused, 34-year-old, Mloni Ntlangule, is set to appear in the Mossel Bay Magistrate’s court this week on a charge of murder.

News attention around the spate of killings shifted to Khayelitsha where the decomposed body of Sibongiseni Gabada, who had been missing for two weeks, was found in a bag on 29 May. The case against the man charged with her murder was provisionally withdrawn, meaning he is not completely off the hook.

However, regional National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) spokesperson Eric Ntabazalila said on Saturday, 13 June:

“Following the provisional withdrawal, the NPA has decided to review the decision. We have also requested an urgent further investigation to be done on the case.”

Meanwhile, police have made a breakthrough in the murder of 16-year-old Liyabona Mabishi, a lesbian, who was killed on 21 March, Human Rights Day. Mashibi was stabbed 13 times in a hate crime. Five suspects have been arrested and are due back in court on 6 July for a bail application.

On Friday, 12 June, the community of Belhar was shattered when police discovered the bodies of Altecia Kortjie and her seven-year-old daughter Raynechia. The mother had multiple stab wounds while the child was found on the bathroom floor. The pair had been missing since Monday, 8 June. A 28-year-old man, known to the victims, was arrested and will appear in court on Monday, 15 June.

Also on Friday, a woman was murdered in Dobsonville. Her body was found under a tree. This comes a day after Tshegofasto Pule was laid to rest after she was found hanging from a tree in Roodepoort.

Another young woman has been found murdered in Johannesburg. Protesters in Dobsonville found her body under a tree on Friday. The discovery came after Pule's funeral.

The last reported case for a bloody week was that of Cape Town dancer and LBGTQI activist, 28-year-old Kirvan Fortuin, who was stabbed to death in Macassar on Saturday, 13 June. Police said a 14-year-old girl has been arrested in connection with the murder.

Megan Lessing, of the Sex Work Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT), said the GBV pandemic placed women in a position which forced them to be at home with their abusers, as is evidenced by the increased incidents of GBV.

“For sex workers, the threat is triple-fold because it also includes violence by the police who continue to harass and brutalise them. We have seen increased [instances] of profiling of sex workers by police when they are simply running errands or simply because they homeless.”

Moorreesburg activist and advocate Venice Burgins said she had noted in various courts and police stations that there had been a decrease in GBV and other crimes prior to the unbanning of alcohol.

Lessing called for the implementation of the National Strategic Plan, with its recommendations.

“We need the Hate Crimes Bill and we need laws and strategies that [place] women, trans women and GNC (gender non-conforming) persons first,” Lessing said.

Siyabulela Monakali of the NGO Ilitha Labantu reiterated that not enough was being done to radically alter the situation on violence perpetrated against women and children.

She emphasised that in South Africa there were laws and policies in place which sought to protect the rights and dignity of women, children and the most vulnerable. However, these laws were not adequately enforced.

“Violence perpetrated on women and children signifies that there is a problem with men in our society. We need to play a greater role in helping to challenge patriarchy and toxic masculinity.”

The men who abused, violated, discriminated against and murdered women “are our brothers, cousins, uncles, fathers and friends and we appeal to men to take rightful action”.

“The silence of men in light of injustices speaks volumes,” she said.

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Community Safety MEC Albert Fritz said:

“Gender-based violence and homophobia have no place in our society. I condemn these acts in the strongest terms. Each of us has the right to equality, dignity and a duty to stand up and report such transgressions.”

Fritz lauded the arrest of five suspects by the SAPS in connection with the murder of 16-year-old Liyabona Mabishi. **DM**