



**YOUNG MEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE IN GBV PREVENTION AND  
RESPONSE**

**A POLICY BRIEF**

June 2022

## Key facts

- Programmes that sought to transform gender roles and promote more gender-equitable relationships between men and women are more effective as compared to programmes that are merely gender-sensitive or gender-neutral.
- In the 2020/2021 financial year, there were 8 326 cases against women, with 5 238 arrests, but only 734 of those were found guilty.
- 75% of men have perpetrated GBV while one in three women have experienced GBV in their lifetime.
- At present, 1 in 3 women will be physically or sexually abused in her lifetime, 1 in 5 women will experience some form of abuse before they reach the age of 18.
- South Africa's youth comprise 37% of the population – a large percentage of these perpetrate GBV.
- Despite the growing body of evidence that engaging young men in gender transformative interventions can change their attitudes and practices, most of these interventions are under-resourced, small-scale, short-term and many have failed to reach significant numbers of young men.
- engaging young men and boys to end gender-based violence requires attention to the ways that boys and men experience and witness violence as children and in other settings, and to identify ways that primary prevention can break cycles of violence.

## Synopsis

Despite tremendous progress towards preventing and responding to GBV, particularly with women at the forefront, much progress remains to be made. Engaging young men to fight GBV remains an understated feature across the country. While there are men's programmes and policies that have been successfully piloted by non-governmental organisations across the country, there is a need to scale up. Various programmes have been shown to promote important and positive change in men's gender-related attitudes and practices, including in reducing men's use of violence against women. There is a lot of work with young men around GBV and this field has become more complex, ambitious, and visible, generating important synergies and successes, and some resistance.

This policy brief outlines GBV in the context of Mpumalanga and notes the key findings from policy dialogue conducted by Masiphephe Network across the province. The brief highlights the relationship between notions of masculinities and men's gender-related practices. The brief also documents the programmes that have been effective in engaging men as agents of change in GBV prevention and response. The brief further identifies laws and policies in place as well as emerging strategies and also proposes key next steps to increase the scale, impact, and sustainability of gender-transformative work with men and boys.

## Background

Patriarchy, rigid gender norms and harmful perceptions of what it means to be a man, or a woman still exist in South Africa,<sup>1</sup> particularly in Mpumalanga, the focus province in this brief. These gender norms often encourage young men to engage in high-risk behaviour that contribute to GBV.<sup>2</sup> Evidence from Mpumalanga police as well as Masiphephe Network's grey literature shows a growing concern about GBV in Mpumalanga with higher rates of violence being perpetrated by young men.<sup>3</sup> A rapid assessment from Masiphephe shows that factors associated with young men's use of violence in Mpumalanga are rigid gender attitudes, the enactment of harmful masculinities, unemployment, work stress, experiences of violence in childhood, as well as alcohol and drug abuse.

While there are some programmes that respond to GBV in Mpumalanga, young men's limited participation continues to be a major barrier in fighting GBV. The policy dialogues conducted in Mpumalanga contribute to a growing literature showing the important role of gender norms in the prevalence and patterns of GBV in the province. The deliberations revealed that GBV incidents are often more common in settings where social norms condone or ignore young men's sexually coercive or aggressive behaviour. For example, most young men tend to blame victims, rather than hold perpetrators accountable. Such power structures and practices tacitly support perpetrators and their crimes which make it difficult for most young men to deal with their own behaviour at an individual level. Anecdotal evidence collected during the policy dialogues notes that many young men who perpetrate GBV start in their teenage years. A key challenge in primary GBV prevention, therefore, is to intervene before the first perpetration occurs and to reach boys and young men when their attitudes and beliefs about gender stereotypes and sexuality are developing.

The key take away from Masiphephe Network's policy dialogues is that engaging young men and boys to end gender-based violence requires attention to the ways that boys and men experience and witness violence as children and in other settings, and to identify ways that primary prevention can break cycles of violence. The dialogues also highlight that there is a need for inter-generational dialogue between young men and older men to curb gender-based violence. Similarly, young men need to work closely with young women as concerns grow of increasing violence amongst the youth. The dialogues also called to action a need for Masiphephe to work at the township or community levels with groups such as Brothers for Life in order to understand the drivers of GBV perpetrated by young men.

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<sup>1</sup> PEACOCK, D. & BARKER, G. (2014) "Working with Men and Boys to Prevent Gender-based Violence: Principles, Lessons Learned, and Ways Forward", *Sage Journal*, (17)5.

<sup>2</sup> SISONKE GENDER JUSTICE (2022) – this needs more details for the reference – e.g. url link? Name of report?

<sup>3</sup> NEWS 24. (2020) Mpumalanga cops condemn increasing violence against women. Available at: <https://www.news24.com/southafrica/news/mpumalanga-cops-condemn-increasing-violence-against-women-20200517> [Accessed March 28 2023]

## Engaging young men as agents of change

The rate of men's violence against women is enormous and its impact is devastating in South Africa at large. In recent years, women's rights organisations have succeeded in getting the government to enact laws and policies to criminalize GBV. With such applaudable efforts, these organisations also have an extensive set of commitments and corresponding policy architecture to engage young men and boys as potential allies and proponents for gender transformation.

Masiphephe's deliberations with groups of young men show that they have strong motivations and are willing to be part of the solution to prevent and respond to GBV. A growing body of research increasingly shows that well-designed programmes can bring about significant changes in men's gender-related attitudes and practices resulting in their willingness to prevent and respond to GBV.<sup>4</sup> Masiphephe Network's review of interventions with men in the areas of GBV have brought about important changes in men's attitudes and behaviour.

In the Stepping Stones initiative, male participants reported having fewer partners, higher condom use, less transactional sex, less substance abuse, and less perpetration of GBV.<sup>5</sup> Also, in Brothers For Life Clubs (a safe platform for healthy and safe engagement of boys, adolescent and adult men in schools, workplaces and in the community) men promote positive masculinities while denouncing toxic masculinities by:

- redefining the identity of men;
- creating strong brotherhood with positive role models in communities through mentorship programmes;
- using mass media platforms to spark community-level conversation around HIV, GBV, RSHR and positive parenting.<sup>6</sup>

Sonke Gender Justice's One Man Can Campaign has demonstrated a significant positive impact in which about 50% of participants reported taking action to address acts of gender-based violence in their community.<sup>7</sup>

These programmes are "gender transformative" - they sought to transform gender roles and promote more gender-equitable relationships between men and women. They are more effective than programmes that are merely "gender sensitive" or "gender neutral".<sup>8</sup> Engaging men and boys in well-designed programmes, that include men, women, girls, and boys as partners as well as beneficiaries, can be effective in

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<sup>5</sup> JEWKES, R., WOOD, K. & DUUVURY, N. (2010) "I Woke up after I Joined Stepping Stones': Meanings of an HIV Behavioral Intervention in Rural South African Young People's Lives." *Health Education Research* (25), 1074–84. doi:10.1093/her/cyq062.

<sup>6</sup> MASIPHEPHE NETWORK. (May 2022) Men as change agents in GBV prevention and response, a Thematic Paper.

<sup>7</sup> COLVIN, C., PEACOCK, D. & HUMAN, O. (2009) *Report on Formative Research Conducted for Sonke Gender Justice Network's One-Man Can Campaign*. Cape Town, South Africa: Sonke Gender Justice Network

<sup>8</sup> WHO (World Health Organization) (2007) *Engaging Men and Boys in Changing Gender based Inequity in Health Evidence from Programme Interventions*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.

[https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/43679/9789241595490\\_eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/43679/9789241595490_eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) [Accessed March 28 2023]

GBV prevention and response. Numerous organisations in different countries are beginning to include young men and boys as target audiences or participants in their GBV-prevention interventions. In Brazil, for example, Promundo's intervention with young men promoting healthy relationships and HIV/sexually transmitted infection (STI) prevention showed significant positive shifts in gender norms at both six months and twelve months.<sup>9</sup>

### **An urgent need to scale-up**

Despite the growing body of evidence that engaging young men in gender-transformative interventions can change their attitudes and practices, the majority of these interventions are under-resourced, small scale, short-term and many have failed to reach significant numbers of young men. Government initiatives have often been *ad hoc*, poorly conceptualised, and events-driven such as the 16 days of activism which is usually when they do activities. Masiphephe Network with its implementing partner Centre for Communications Impact have been involved in a range of efforts to increase the scale, impact, and sustainability of GBV work with men. These efforts have taken several forms, including thematic and policy development and integration, advocacy and community mobilisation, the use of mass media and reaching out to sector-wide partners (e.g., police, human rights organisations, relevant government departments and schools) to collaborate in implementing activities or change policies. Although these efforts provide useful ideas about engaging young men in GBV interventions, there is a need to significantly increase the impact with a focus on men as agents of change in GBV prevention and response.

### **Legal and Policy Approaches to engage young men in GBV response**

South Africa integrates gender work within laws, policies, and national plans. At the global and continental level, South Africa has committed to the following charters that seek to empower youth and eliminate GBV:

- African Youth Charter which defines youth as those from ages 14–35 years.
- Africa's Agenda 2063 which focuses on harnessing the demographic dividend
- Sustainable Development Goals that include Goal five on gender equality expiring in 2030.
- The Beijing Platform for Action
- The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

The National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence & Femicide has strong commitments to engage young men to address GBV. Building on this, the MenEngage Alliance has worked closely with UN partners to provide training and support on how to incorporate gender-based violence and masculinities work. Various NGOs including the work of Masiphephe Network have been involved in direct dialogue with the government departments such as the police department and the department of social

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<sup>9</sup> PULERWITZ, J., BARKER, G. & SEGUNDO, M. (2004) *Promoting Healthy Relationships and HIV/STI Prevention for Young Men: Positive Findings from an Intervention Study in Brazil*. Horizons Research Update. Washington, DC: Population Council. Accessed October 30, 2014. <http://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/horizons/brgndrnmsru.pdf>.



development, to make violence prevention with men and boys part of the national agenda. The Integrated Youth Crime Prevention Strategy approved in December 2020 is another national strategy aimed at involving men in GBV initiatives. The purpose of the Strategy is to empower and support the youth to become self-sufficient and become involved in crime-fighting initiatives.<sup>10</sup> Through this strategy, young people, particularly young men, are encouraged to partake in GBV activities to curb the scourge.

The National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) is based on the National Youth Development Agency Act 54 of 2008. It seeks to empower youth including young men on challenges faced by South African youth such as unemployment and poverty which are also factors driving GBV in communities. The NYDA empowers young people through its various initiatives including supporting them in their business endeavours as well as engaging them to eliminate discrimination of women in all forms. There are various laws and policies that integrate the involvement of men in GBV prevention and response such as the African Youth Charter, Africa's Agenda 2063, Sustainable Development Goals - up to 2030, Integrated Youth Development Strategy, the National Development Plan, Prevention of Family Violence Act 133 of 1993, and the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998.

### **Gaps and challenges**

While improving GBV responses is prerequisite, a major obstacle often lies in the implementation of programmes or initiatives that involve men. They tend to react in complex and uneven ways to national and international legal and policy efforts to advance gender equality. Research conducted by Sonke Gender Justice indicates that some men in South Africa perceive national efforts to advance women's rights with great suspicion and sometimes as an attack on "men's rights".<sup>11</sup> The data from Masiphephe Network show that men's reaction to GBV policies and legislation is often a mix of supportive, superficial, ambivalent, defensive, and resistant. Most men in Mpumalanga do not even understand the overall policies and legislation to fight GBV. These challenges have been a threat to organisations working with young men to implement campaigns that aim to increase men's support for GBV prevention and response and other efforts to advance gender transformation. There is a need to focus on educating men about GBV laws and policies and how they should support them. Some of the challenges and gaps include the following:

- The policy discussion conducted by Masiphephe revealed that young men are often challenged by GBV laws and often feel that their actions and practices are now questioned. This kind of resistance represents a real threat to women's rights and can increase men's use of violence.

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<sup>10</sup> SA POLICE SERVICE. (2022) *Annual Report South African Police Service 2020/2021*.

<sup>11</sup> DWORKIN, S.L., COLVIN, C., HATCHER, A. & PEACOCK, D. (2012) "Men's Perceptions of Women's Rights and Changing Gender Relations in South Africa: Lessons for Working with Men and Boys in HIV and Anti-violence Programs." *Gender & Society* 26(1), 97–120. doi:10.1177/0891243211426425.

- It is challenging to mobilise men to respond to GBV and it requires an understanding of men's different experiences and subordination, paying close attention to class, ethnicity, race, and attitudes.
- There is occasional resistance to tackle toxic masculinities in the traditional and religious aspects in the name of preserving culture or religion.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

It is without a doubt that well-designed interventions, sometimes mostly focusing on young men can lead to measurable changes in GBV prevention and response. However, these interventions are usually on a small scale and the question that needs an urgent answer is 'how can they serve as a base for achieving society-wide impact?' The lessons learnt from the current initiatives highlight the need to scale-up well-designed programme interventions and integrate these with targeted advocacy that focus on laws and policies as well as the overall implementation. Comprehensive responses by governments and NGOs to GBV must include attention to survivors of violence, which also entails the need to discuss what to do about men who have used violence. Young men should be held accountable for the violence they have carried out and this must be part of comprehensive national strategies to end and prevent GBV.

Finally, there is increasing attention to reaching young men to become agents of change in GBV prevention and response. These efforts are all channelled towards changing gender norms among young men and there is a need for funding and political support for programmes and policies in this area. It is crucial to ensure that these efforts to engage men are rooted in evidence, have a strong theoretical base to them, and are well implemented with all parties involved. Women's organisations should collaborate and partner with NGOs working to reach men for effective approaches rather than work in silos. Some of the recommendations include:

- Engaging young men in GBV prevention and responses has gained momentum in recent years and there is a need to accelerate the momentum of working with youth male champions on GBV in communities.
- Working with key influencers such as celebrities, politicians and business can motivate young men towards positive change.
- There is still a need for men to partake in GBV-response activities. While implementing activities to protect and empower women, most men feel underrepresented.
- There is a need for a multi-stakeholder approach to promote engagement of young men in the implementation of gender-based transformative programmes in Mpumalanga and beyond.
- Increase funding for youth and especially male engagement programmes as they connect young men and create an understanding of the role they can play to change mindsets and strengthen efforts to end violence against women.

- The faith-based and religious sectors need to be involved in GBV-prevention strategies as men largely lead them.
- Consolidation of existing male engagement programmes is essential so that there is a clear division of roles in the male engagement sector.
- Engaging men to prevent and respond to GBV is relatively new and there is a need to address the link between masculinity, sexuality and GBV.
- More multisectoral programmes with a focus on men's roles in preventing and responding to GBV are needed.

## **DISCLAIMER**

*This policy brief is for the “Strengthening Local Governance to Improve Gender Based Violence” Project also known as the “Masiphephe Network” (“Let’s Be Safe”). The project is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), through its Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG) unit, and led by the Centre for Communication Impact (CCI). The Masiphephe Network community-based gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response partners across three provinces in South Africa, believe that GBV is the grave consequence of complex social and structural problems. Our programme encourages inclusive GBV interventions through strategic policy advocacy, community-led collaborative supportive multi-sectoral partnerships, building awareness and promoting behaviour change to shift GBV social norms. Our views are informed by community engagements and recommendations. The contents of this policy brief are the responsibility of CCI and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID.*

**BREAK THE SILENCE, CALL 0800 428 428 (GBV COMMAND CENTRE) TO REPORT AND GET GBV SUPPORT.**



## Masiphephe Network Implementing Partners

ORGANISATION	IMPLEMENTATION SITE/ LOCATION	CONTACT #
CCI	Pretoria, Gauteng	012 366 9300
GHJRU	University of Cape Town	021 406 6023
Agisanang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training (ADAPT)	City of Johannesburg Region E, Gauteng	011 786 6608
Sonke Gender Justice (Sonke)	City of Johannesburg Region D, Gauteng	011 339 3589
Ethembeni Crisis Care Centre (ECCC)	eThekwini West, KwaZulu Natal	031 704 6860
Gugu Dlamini Foundation	eThekwini INK Area, KwaZulu Natal	031 292 2852
Project Support Association Southern Africa (PSASA)	Emalahleni Local Municipality and City of Mbombela	013 752 5624

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