

**SHIFTING FOCUS TO COMMUNITY SAFETY
TO RESPOND TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**



Gauteng Province
Alexandra & Diepkloof

SHIFTING FOCUS TO COMMUNITY SAFETY TO RESPOND TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

SYNOPSIS

SOUTH AFRICA HAS RECORDED HIGHEST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE CRIMES EXCEEDING THE INTERNATIONAL AVERAGES. THIS HAS BEEN EXACERBATED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC WHICH SAW AN INCREASE IN GBV CASES ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

In recent years, South Africa has recorded the highest number of gender-based violence cases, exceeding international averages. This has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic which saw an increase in GBV cases across the country. Whilst the country's efforts to respond to this scourge is visible, it is not enough. The focus has mainly been on the law enforcement and the criminal justice system as well as the programming around the issues of GBV.

This is the time to take a step back and review these efforts in order to identify gaps on what else needs to be done to increase safety, particularly at a community level. Unsafe communities create increased fear of victimization, restricted behaviour and movement for women and girls as well as a breakdown of trust and relationships amongst families and community members. Safety is a basic human right and is very crucial for the health and wellbeing of all but particularly women, children, and vulnerable persons.

This thematic paper reviews GBV prevalence in Gauteng province with a special focus in Alexandra and Diepkloof where Masiphephe Network works. It places the drive to broadly understand GBV related crimes, risk factors and drivers. The paper puts an emphasis on placing community safety at the core with a commitment to improving accountability in service delivery. The paper raises an increased responsibility to local government, community role players, civil society, the private sector, and other role players in ensuring safety in communities.

The first part of the paper provides an overview of safety in Alexandra and Diepkloof communities. The second section provides the latest government policy and legislation, and what kinds of structures are needed to have a safe community. The third section looks at Covid-19 in relation to GBV and then ends with some recommendations.

This paper is aimed primarily at local government as well as others involved in community safety such as a Community Police Forum (CPF), Community Safety Forum (CSF) or civil society, and policy makers who could also benefit from this paper.

A look into the safety of communities in Gauteng (Alexandra and Diepkloof)

The latest crime statistics reveal that rapists are on the prowl in Gauteng. In Alexandra alone, the number of sexual offences including rape increased by 94% between January and March 2021. As a result, Alexandra ranked first amongst Gauteng police stations and sixth nationally.

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In Diepkloof sexually offences reduced by approximately 24%. This shows great improvement. However, there were still 324 reported cases related to murder that include femicide, sexual offences, assault with the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm. These numbers exclude other crimes that affect women in their daily lives. While there are notable efforts from the law enforcement, criminal justice as well as the programmes initiated by various role players including the local government, civil society, and relevant departments – this alone is not enough to reduce GBV crimes. The fact that GBV cases continue to take place is a clear indication that there is a need to think strategically, holistically and in a forceful manner to increase safety in communities.

The community safety audits conducted by Masiphephe Network in Alexandra and Diepkloof reveal that children play in the dark streets alone. Some parts of the town are very quiet, and it would be easy for one to be attacked by anyone noticing. This is due to the fact that there is no security or police patrolling the area in the evening. The audits also revealed that communities do not have sufficient service delivery and infrastructure conducive for the safety of communities. The local parks are not well maintained. They have long grass, no streetlights and some are located close to riverbanks with no fencing.

Whilst the local government is mandated to ensure effective and efficient service delivery, the key population must work together with the government to maintain infrastructure and the environment. All relevant parties must adopt a mindset of strengthening collaboration to respond effectively to GBV issues at a community level and create safer places across the province. The city planners need to review some of their plans with a GBV responsive mindset and develop strategies that create conducive environments for women, both indoors and outdoors. Such strategies address

aspects of the physical environment to enhance the safety of women. This might include improving street lighting, the design of parks and public transport facilities as well as the infrastructure which supports these facilities. Community safety initiatives need to be driven based on reliable and relevant data which focuses on the inputs from community safety audits, critically identifying local GBV hotspots, as well as day and night interventions.

The community safety dialogues and a rapid assessment by Masiphephe network highlight a need for the policing department to level-up their duties and become more visible to increase community safety. There is a high level of insecurity particularly amongst women and children and this should be confronted through more visible policing, advice to victims and the development of environments which are no longer vulnerable to victimization. Given this analysis any crime prevention strategy for these places needs to evaluate the successes and failures of community safety initiatives in other cities, provinces as well as other countries in Africa and in the developed countries.

Community safety and the legislative framework

The community safety departments play a crucial role in ensuring safety across the province. Over the years, there have been national crime prevention strategies focusing on the involvement of the community and local governments in crime prevention rather than relying exclusively on the criminal justice. The local government has a mandate to drive community safety, however, it cannot do this alone. The key to community safety also lies in the community members, private sector and the civil society partnering with the local government. These efforts need to be integrated and led by a committed team.

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The local government had a mandate to provide safety stemming from various forms of legislation that emphasize the importance of promoting integrated, spatial, and socio-economic development for all communities, as well as to form partnerships in the field of crime prevention and safety.

The Municipal Systems Act of 2000 (MSA) stipulates that local governments must promote a safe and healthy environment at a community level. The MSA together with the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, (MTEF), require municipalities to develop five-year Integrated Development Plans, (IDPs), which provide a framework for all development activities in the municipality.

In 2030, people living in South Africa feel safe and have no fear of crime. They are safe at home, at school, at work and they enjoy an active community life free of fear. Women can walk freely in the streets and children can play safely outside. The police service is a well-resourced professional institution staffed by highly skilled officers who value their work, serve the community, safeguard lives and property without discrimination, protect the peaceful against violence and respect the rights of all to equality and justice.

National Development Plan

Community safety also receives a particular attention in the cities' National Development Plan (NDP). The strategy set out recommendations aimed at improving the functioning of the criminal justice system and at protecting vulnerable communities such as women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

A framework to address the root causes of crime and community safety in a focused and integrated manner is provided in the Integrated Social Crime Prevention Strategy (ISCPS), 2011. The strategy encourages community participation in the development of crime prevention and safety solutions. (Department of Social Development, 2011).

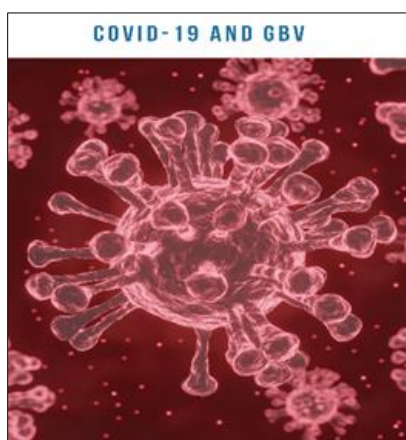
The Draft White Paper on Safety and Security (2016) also supports the approaches adopted in the NDP and ISCPS. The White Paper highlights the need for a holistic approach incorporating the ideas and views from multiple stakeholders including communities, civil society, and all spheres of government. National government is tasked with establishing a functional implementation mechanism that would ensure safety at a community level. Community safety is given priority in the National Strategic Plan (NSP) on Gender Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF). Recognizing the significance of preventing GBV, the NSP also draws from the White Paper on Safety and Security (2016) as the overarching policy framework for safety, crime and violence prevention in the country and builds onto the six themes it has identified.¹

¹ 2016 WHITE PAPER ON POLICING, CIVILIAN SECRETARIAT FOR POLICE, 2016, accessed at , accessed on 1 October 2022.

In South Africa, there are different crime prevention projects and programs which are being implemented in various communities. However, most of these projects have only just started to become GBV responsive. In the dialogues conducted by Masiphephe Networks, the police departments highlighted the need for the community to work hand in hand with the police by providing inputs, ideas, advice, and guidance to ensure the police station is effective in handling cases.

Despite all the strong legal frameworks, policies, efforts, and considerable measures, communities across the Gauteng remain unsafe. With unsafe communities, South Africa's decision to join international commitments to end GBV is ineffective without improving safety in the communities. Community safety can be done in different ways through environmental approaches (including situational crime prevention and urban planning initiatives) and by addressing the social and economic challenges in communities through social crime prevention approaches.

GBV, South Africa's other pandemic



The Covid-19 pandemic escalated GBV against women and girls in South Africa. The pandemic also exacerbated existing structural problems that are regarded as drivers of GBV such as unemployment and poverty. During the first few weeks of the stringent lockdown measures, the country experienced high-profile GBV cases on which Alexandra was recorded as one of the GBV hotspots in Gauteng. Women who suffered GBV, especially during the stringent lockdown measures, struggled to report abuse because of fear of the pandemic.

The relevant service providers were not available at a physical premises due to restriction in movements. Covid-19 raised a sharp focus on the barriers that GBV victims face in regard to accessing criminal justice. The weaknesses in the criminal justice system caused many victims to become reluctant to seek for help from the police.

Homes have become dangerous places where Women and girls are trapped with abusive family members and nowhere to escape and seek protection. In its rapid assessment, The Masiphephe Network found that perpetrators used the lockdown measures to trap their victims at home. There is a need to protect women even behind walls. Community safety does not only mean safety around the streets but also in homes. While there is a huge gap that the law enforcement and

criminal justice need to fill as first responders to the cases of GBV, the community should also participate in ensuring safety in their respective locations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is a need to broadly identify key interventions to address, not just gender-based violence and femicide, but the wider challenges women and children face with regards to safety and security.
- Community safety audits should be GBV responsive and should be conducted timely.
- There is a need to increase community safety forums which include both men and women.
- There is a need to gather accurate information on GBV patterns at a community level in order to address safety issues in those areas.
- With the high rate of GBV in homes, there is a need for targeted interventions that focus on the fear of crime and the feelings of safety that could potentially reduce GBV at homes.
- There is a need to run broad based community safety marches in the community of Diepkloof and Alexandra.
- There is a need to set up “safety corners” and communicate where and how people can report GBV as well as understand the importance of reporting cases.
- Community members should partake in building safer places in their communities, they should work hand in hand with the schools, clinics, SAPS, etc. to ensure the safety of women and children while developing strong programmes for community safety.
- There is a need to implement technology-based safety approaches that would assist in GBV mapping hence improve safety at a local community.
- There is a need to improve policing in the areas that are identified as GBV hotspots across the province.
- There is also a need to strengthen local police through ongoing quality training and capacity building.
- The community members should participate in the planning and delivery of community safety interventions.