



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

**A THEMATIC PAPER**

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## SYNOPSIS

While Gender-based violence (GBV) is a worldwide phenomenon, it continues to be a social ill with far-reaching repercussions in South Africa at large. GBV is widely perpetrated by men as well as community members and individuals who tolerate negative masculine practices and control over women. A study on GBV prevalence conducted by Gender Links (2012) revealed that 75% of men have perpetrated GBV while one in three women have experienced GBV in Gauteng alone. There have been a number of deliberate efforts to prevent and respond to this issue on which women have been at the forefront. In reflection, women-only initiatives have not been fruitful in curbing the GBV scourge. Gender transformative programmes involving men and boys to end patriarchal norms and gender inequality as a means to fight GBV have increased in recent years, albeit at a minimum scale. Scaling up young men's participation in GBV issues is critical to comprehensively redress systemic forms of violence.

This thematic paper draws from published and grey literature on GBV prevention and engagement strategies that target adult and younger men. The paper focuses on young men as change agents of GBV prevention, response, and reviews some of the initiatives that are specifically designed for men to address GBV issues. Progress, gaps and key challenges experienced are also highlighted. This thematic paper is targeted at different actors, including the government, civil society, policy makers, the private sector, funders, as well as community members, who work with men to find ways to prevent and respond to GBV.

## BACKGROUND

In this thematic paper, Mpumalanga is focused on given the worrying low conviction rate of those arrested for GBV, yet majority of alleged perpetrators are men with a substantial percentage being even younger men.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> A rapid assessment by Masiphephe Network revealed that Mpumalanga is still a patriarchal society with low economic status. In such societies, GBV is omnipresent and normalised as observed through the dominant public discourse. Women and children who are subjected to GBV are often silenced resulting in low cases being reported or making it to conviction.

Discussions held during Masiphephe Network policy dialogues show that gender inequality and women's dependency on men are some of the factors fuelling GBV in Mpumalanga. This calls for an urgent response to ensure the safety of women and girls. To be effective, "strategies must not only empower women, but also should engage men and bring about significant changes in men's attitudes and practices which are often discouraged by negative notions of masculinity."<sup>3</sup>

There are various structured interventions and initiatives and that engage men in GBV prevention and response in Mpumalanga. Stepping Stones, Creating Futures, One man Can and the Men's forums, have proven that working with young men to challenge toxic masculinity and gender inequality has a positive impact in preventing GBV and improving responses.<sup>4</sup> These programmes and initiatives engage young men through a community-based approach to change their mindsets, attitudes and behaviour while encouraging them to be at the forefront in challenging GBV.

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<sup>1</sup> 013 News Mpumalanga (05 August 2021) Mpumalanga has the lowest GBV conviction rate. Available at <https://013.co.za/2021/08/05/mpumalanga-lowest-gbv-conviction-rate/>. Accessed on 01 October 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Annual Report South African Police Service 2020/2021

<sup>3</sup> Muunguja, Maliki (18 September 2018) Men and Boys Must Take Action to End Gender-Based Violence. Available at <https://genderjustice.org.za/news-item/men-and-boys-must-take-action-to-end-gender-based-violence/>. Accessed on 01 October 2022.

<sup>4</sup> What works to prevent violence. <https://www.whatworks.co.za/about/global-programme/global-programme-projects>

Young men's programmes are crucial in examining the root causes of GBV, socialisation of men, power and patriarchy, masculinities, gender inequalities and other links that cause GBV. In these programmes the target men such as the major perpetrators, holders of the social norms and influencers are educated about various issues including gender equality, positive parenting models, relationships, as well as protecting and supporting women and girls.

## WHY INVOLVE MEN IN THE GBV FIGHT

The call to formally involve men in GBV discussions started when the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) highlighted the need to encourage men to take an active role with regard to housework and child-rearing. According to Sonke Gender Justice, GBV that is directed at women and girls by men, results in large part from women's subordinate status in the society, due to traditional and cultural norms (patriarchal societies), as well as their low economic status (poverty), and serves to perpetuate male power and control over women.

Africa and indeed South Africa has deeply entrenched patriarchy resulting in escalating cases of GBV. GBV is mainly perpetrated by men, as well as by the community members and individuals who tolerate negative masculine practices. The most prevalent form of domestic violence is intimate partner violence. At present, 1 in 3 women will be physically or sexually abused in her lifetime, and 1 in 5 women will experience some form of abuse before she reaches the age of 18. If men, then, are the main perpetrators of GBV, they need to be the solution to the problem. Engaging men in the discussions and efforts to end gender-based violence is a crucial part of all initiatives. This has to go hand in hand with women's empowerment initiatives. It is not fruitful to empower a woman who, at the end of the day, goes back to the same man who still believes violence is central to his masculinity.

Working with men and especially younger men to champion ending gender based violence is key for transformative changes in different communities. South Africa has roots on both traditional and religious systems that are largely led by men. Working with these leaders is key to engaging a critical mass that will contribute to reducing GBV. Cases of GBV have been increasing in schools or tertiary institutions. It is therefore important to work with the Department of Education in engaging male students on the reduction of GBV.

## MALE ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMMES AND INTERVENTIONS

A number of male engagement programmes have been established in South Africa with main stakeholders being civil society organisations and faith-based organisations. Among others, some best practice examples include:

**Brothers for Life (B4L)** - The Centre for Communication Impact (CCI) revived the Brothers for Life clubs in South Africa including in Mpumalanga. Men who graduate from the structured Stepping Stones structured intervention are recruited to participate in the Sonke Change Trial, a specialised male engagement series of participatory trainings. On completion of the Sonke Change Trial training, they are recruited into Brother's for Life Clubs, which are social clubs that provide a safe platform for healthy and safe engagement of boys, adolescent and adult men in schools, workplaces and in the community. Through the Brothers for Life clubs, members undergo a series of participatory training sessions and social mobilisation activities to promote positive masculinities while denouncing toxic masculinities by redefining the identity of men, creating strong brotherhood with positive role models in communities. Integrated mentorship programs for ongoing peer and expert support also include capacity strengthening to better engage mass media platforms to spark community level conversation

around HIV, GBV, Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), positive living, making empowered positive life choices and positive parenting.

**MenEngage** - is a global alliance of organisations who engage men and boys to achieve gender equality, promote health, reduce violence and to address the structural barriers to achieving gender equality<sup>5</sup>. Sonke Gender Justice is part of the MenEngage Alliance as well as part of the Masiphephe Network and Brothers for Life national initiative.

**The One Man Can (OMC) Campaign** - encourages men to become actively involved in advocating for gender equality, preventing gender-based violence (GBV), and responding to HIV and AIDS. Sonke supports men in achieving this by helping them change their belief on gender norms, taking an active stand against domestic and sexual violence, and sustaining these changes in their personal lives – all of which contribute to reducing the rapid spread of HIV.

The OMC Campaign strengthens community mobilisation and conducts public awareness activities to educate communities on prevention and response to GBV and HIV. The campaign aligned with government's Programme of Action, which reflected its strategic plan for the 2014-2019 electoral term, the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF). The MTSF was the first five-year implementation phase of the National Development Plan (NDP). It was structured around 14 priority outcomes which cover the focus areas identified in the NDP and Government's electoral mandate: education, health, safety and security, economic growth and employment, skills development, infrastructure, rural development, human settlements, local government, environment, international relations, public sector, social protection, nation-building and social cohesion. Operation Phakisa was designed to fast-track the implementation of solutions on critical development issues. This is a unique initiative to address issues highlighted in the NDP such as unemployment and poverty<sup>6</sup>. Amongst key issues is social cohesion that included GBV.

**The MenCare Childcare and Protection Programme** - promotes or facilitates the involvement of fathers and father figures in their children's lives. It provides an overview of parenting programmes across the world and the results of the MenCare South Africa Childcare and Protection Programme's evaluation, and finally makes recommendations for policies and programmes to encourage the promotion of responsive, non-violent fathers as caregivers in South Africa. The MenCare programme is part of Sonke Gender Justice programmes<sup>7</sup>.

**The South African National Aids Council (SANAC) Men's Sector** - has provincial plans across provinces concerning their HIV and GBV programmes. The SANAC Men's sector represents organisations and other bodies that work with men and/or run programmes focusing on men in the area of health and social upliftment. The sector supports initiatives that address the role of men in combating the spread of HIV and AIDS, as well mitigating the impact of the disease in communities.

## CLOSING THE GAPS BETWEEN LAW/POLICY AND PRACTICE

South Africa has several legislation to prevent, eliminate and empower young women against the scourge of GBV. The most recent and comprehensive specifically targeted at youth is the National Youth Policy (NYP) (2020 - 2030), approved by Cabinet in 2020. This NYP (2030)

<sup>5</sup> Calling male allies for International Safe Abortion Day, MenEngage Alliance, 2022, accessed at <https://menengage.org/>, accessed on 01 October 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Government programmes, projects and campaigns, South African Government, 2014, accessed at <https://www.gov.za/about-government/government-programmes/projects-and-campaigns>, accessed on 25 May 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Engaging South African Fathers, Sonke Gender Justice, 2019, accessed from <https://www.activateleadership.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Engaging-South-African-Fathers.pdf>, accessed on 01 October 2022.

proposes various policy imperatives to strengthen youth development both during and post Covid-19 era. It advocates for the need for key players within the state, namely: government, private and civil society sectors, to intensify their commitment in keeping youth development as a priority. The focus as articulated in the policy is on ensuring responsiveness and illustrating positive outcomes, results and long lasting impacts<sup>8</sup>.

The policy provisions strategies to empower and support the youth to become self-sufficient and become involved in self-empowering initiatives<sup>9</sup>. Young people are encouraged to partake in GBV activities as a means to curb the scourge. While improving GBV responses is prerequisite, a major obstacle often lies in the implementation of programmes or initiatives that involve men. For this reason, emphasis should be on engaging more men to strengthen laws and policies addressing prevention and response to GBV.

## CHALLENGES AND GAPS

- Engaging men in GBV activities is often challenging as most of them always direct the problem to women.
- Managing the tension between appealing to men's interests in adopting positive masculinities at the same time addressing women's interests in their own empowerment.
- Mobilising men to respond to GBV requires an understanding of men's different experiences and subordination, paying close attention to class, ethnicity, race and attitudes.
- 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 in men's roles in preventing and responding to GBV are needed.
- There is occasional resistance to tackle toxic masculinities in the traditional and religious aspects in the name of preserving culture or religion.
- Innovative approaches are needed to attract young men in GBV prevention programmes.

## ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Advocacy efforts by male gender activists have increased over time, primarily unpacking patriarchy and its adversative impact on gender equality. The focus has mainly been on negative masculinities and patriarchal practices that encourage oppressive unequal treatment of women and girls compared to men and boys<sup>10</sup>. The Masiphephe Network's work in Mpumalanga reveals that young men are interested in GBV advocacy and prevention. There are crimes such as incest, young men raping very young girls. All these issues are underreported in Mpumalanga and require both men and women to voice out and expose inadequacies in the judicial system that often result in impunity or sentences for perpetrators that do not reflect the gravity of committed GBV offences.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Engaging young men in GBV prevention and responses has gained momentum in recent years. While implementing activities to protect and empower women, most men feel

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<sup>8</sup> South African Government (2020) National Youth Policy 2020 – 2030, 2020, accessed at [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/202103/nationalyouthpolicy.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202103/nationalyouthpolicy.pdf). Accessed on 10 October 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Annual Report South African Police Service 2020/2021, South African Government, 2021, accessed at <https://www.gov.za/documents/south-african-police-service-annual-report-20202021-4-nov-2021-0000>, accessed on 01 October 2022.

<sup>10</sup> SADC Regional Strategy and Framework of Action for Addressing Gender Based Violence 2018 – 2030, Southern African Development Community, 2018, accessed at [https://www.unodc.org/documents/southernafrica/Stories/2019/SADC\\_Regional\\_Strategy\\_and\\_Framework\\_for\\_Action\\_on\\_GB\\_V\\_-\\_FINAL\\_September\\_2018\\_-\\_ENGLISH\\_VERSION.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/southernafrica/Stories/2019/SADC_Regional_Strategy_and_Framework_for_Action_on_GB_V_-_FINAL_September_2018_-_ENGLISH_VERSION.pdf), accessed on 01 October 2022.

underrepresented. This calls for scaling up men's programmes with careful planning to allow diverse men to participate. 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. Such programmes need to be funded as they connect young men and create an understanding of the role they can play as change mindsets and strengthen efforts to end violence against women and marginalised groups.

It is critical to identify role models through key influencers or patrons of ending GBV from the country's leaders. The faith based and religious sectors need to be involved in GBV prevention strategies as they are largely led by men. Consolidation of existing male engagement programmes is essential so that there is clear division but intersectionality of efforts to empower young men in the male engagement sector.