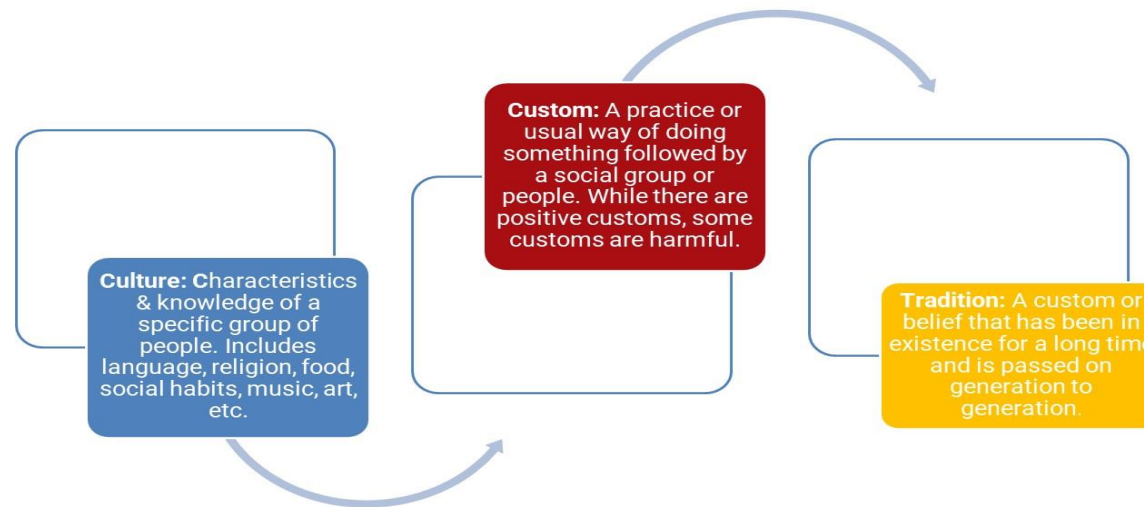


FACT SHEET

HARMFUL SOCIOCULTURAL NORMS, CUSTOMS OR PRACTICES THAT ENABLE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

Definitions

Social norms are “beliefs, held by groups of people, about the way they must act to be accepted members of society. Social norms are the ‘unwritten rules’ that show the values that a society holds dear and that govern how people should behave in a given context or situation” (Gender Development Network [sa]:2). A norm, custom or practice becomes harmful when the individual it is imposed on is hurt/abused and/or a human right(s) of that individual is violated due to the practice (i.e., child marriage, corporal punishment). Even though persons belonging to a cultural, religious or linguistic community may, according to Section 32 of the South African Bill of Rights, not be denied the right to enjoy their culture or enjoy their religion, it is important to note that you should not violate other people’s rights while exercising your rights.



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Gender-based violence (GBV) is violence that is directed at an individual based on their gender identity. GBV includes physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse, threats, coercion, and economic or education deprivation whether occurring in public or private life. The term GBV does not mean woman abuse. Woman abuse is a sub-type of GBV. Therefore, the two concepts should not be used interchangeably because boys, men, and gender minorities, such as members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA+) community, also experience GBV.

Findings

The harmful sociocultural practices highlighted below are based on research conducted in collaboration with the Masiphephe Network through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in three provinces (i.e., Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga) across six communities namely, Alexandra, Soweto (Diepkloof); Inanda, Ntuzuma and KwaMashu (INK); eThekweni Inner-West, Mbombela and Emalahleni. Unless a particular community is specified, the custom/practice is applicable across all the six communities.

1. Harmful practices relating to heterosexual women

1.1 Levirate marriage/Ukungena:

- ✓ A man marries his brother's widow. This was mentioned by the FGD participants from Emalahleni only.
- ✓ Nonetheless, this custom is practiced in many African countries. In South Africa the custom is still practiced in deep rural areas though it is currently less prevalent due to women being aware of their rights.

<p>Causes of levirate marriage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patriarchy/deep seated beliefs in male superiority. • Strict reinforcement of gender roles and hierarchy, and punishment of those who transgress. • Association of masculinity with power over women. Women having a low social status, value and power. • Acceptance of men's violence over women in some cultures. 	<p>Reasons for levirate marriage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To keep the woman in the family she married into. • To preserve the lineage and grow the family (i.e., widow will bear children/more children with the husband's brother – especially boy children). • For children to be raised by their father's family and not an outsider. • To keep the wealth/estate of the deceased in the family.
<p>Impact of levirate marriage on the victim</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No consideration for the widow's emotional state during and after the mourning period. • The practice infringes on women's freedom of choice in terms of who she wants to marry or if she wants to re-marry at all after the death of her husband. • Compliance enforced by violence, coercion, pressure, or rejection. If the widow refuses to marry her deceased husband's brother or relative, she's banished from home and loses all her inheritance, sometimes even custody of her children. 	



1.2 Carrying of the kist “yibhokisi” by Nguni brides during a traditional wedding

- ✓ Kist/chest very similar to a coffin/casket carried by Nguni brides on their customary wedding day.
- ✓ Practiced mostly in rural areas. In the context of this research it was said to be practiced mainly in KwaZulu-Natal.

Yibhokisi symbolism	Yibhokisi impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death to the woman’s old identity and family as she becomes united to her husband’s family. • A symbol that the woman is leaving her home in a “box”, and she can only return in a “box” (i.e., in a coffin). • The woman is carrying all her belongings in the <i>yibhokisi</i>/kist to her husband’s family. Therefore, there is nothing left to return to at her parents’ home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women get stuck in abusive marriages and cannot divorce. • Signifies that the woman can only leave her marriage in a coffin, she will not leave her marriage even if her husband is abusive.

2. Harmful practices relating to children

- Incest is common in all six communities, but cases are not reported to the police because of the shame that will be brought on the family by “hanging their dirty laundry in public”. Family members have discussions with perpetrators (who are mostly male members of the family such as fathers, stepfathers, brothers or uncles) and sanctions, usually in the form of money or livestock, are passed on the perpetrator to atone for the crime(s) committed. Due to having the discussions as a family and not reporting to the police, justice is not served to the child victim. Psychosocial support is also not provided to the child. It was said that in Emalahleni, fathers sleep with their virgin daughters as a rite of passage. Families who practice this believe that the father must be the first one to sleep with his daughter.
- *Twasa* (initiation) of underaged/school going children who have ancestral calling to become traditional healers reported in Alexandra, Diepkloof and INK. This practice violates children’s basic right to education. Children are forced to drop out of school to attend to their training as traditional healers. Emphasised was that it is possible to, as a family, plead with the ancestors on behalf of the child to wait for them to only start initiation when they are older. Doing this allows the child to first complete at least their secondary schooling and then attend to the ancestral calling afterwards. Recruiting young people to be initiates, instead of waiting until children have attained their education and are ready to be initiates can result in child abuse and denial of children’s rights. The abuse of power by those who recruit young girls as initiates is further explained in Point 4 (Harmful practices relating to traditional healers - *inyanga* and *izangoma/ogobela*).
- *Ukuthwala* (child marriage)
 - ✓ In the context of this research, *ukuthwala* refers to marriage of girls who are younger than 18 years. It was mentioned that this practice is still taking place in the more rural KZN Pinetown Inner-West communities (i.e., Shongeni and Zwelibovu).
 - ✓ Parents offer their children to older men in exchange for lobola as a solution to their poverty.
 - ✓ Is associated with high levels of poverty (hence a rural phenomenon).
 - ✓ The practice violates children’s human rights. Rights to education, health, survival and the development and dignity of the child are violated.



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- ✓ One of the research participants in Diepkloof, who is originally from a rural area in the Eastern Cape, told her personal story about being abducted at the age of 16 and being forced to marry a 27-year-old man.
- In Diepkloof sugar mummies/older girls in school make younger boys perform sexual acts on/with them in exchange for money.
- Boys are abducted for initiation schools (*koma/ingoma*), for traditional circumcision (*ulwaluko/lebollo*) and initiation from boyhood to manhood, without their consent. This practice was discussed during the Diepkloof, Emalahleni and Mbombela FGDs. It was, however, mentioned that parents can report a case of abduction to the police if their child was forcefully taken to the initiation school without their or his consent. Success stories of children who were returned to their parents by the police were shared during the Emalahleni FGD. Also, it was said both in Diepkloof and Mbombela that initiation schools have been hijacked by people who are greedy and lack the knowledge, experience and expertise of how initiation schools are supposed to be run.
- It was shared in Mbombela that girls who go to initiation schools are raped as there is a myth that they are good in bed. This is because one of the practices that take place during *lebollo la basadi* (female initiation) is the stretching/elongation of the labia. It is believed that elongated labia increases sexual pleasure for men. AmaZulu girls and boys do not go to initiation schools therefore these practices are not applicable to the KZN communities.
- Girl children are forced to drop out of school because they are pregnant. The same is not expected of the boys who are the fathers of the babies.
- Pastors sleep with children as a rite of passage.
- The use of corporal punishment to discipline children.
 - ✓ In South Africa all corporal punishment of children is prohibited. Anyone who administers corporal punishment on a child is guilty of a crime.

3. Harmful practices relating to churches

- Churches use scriptures out of context to abuse members of the LGBTQIA+ community.
- Churches use scriptures out of context to GBV against women.
- In Diepkloof, it was mentioned that young girls (referred to as “*Abo Mamncane*”) are, in some churches, being groomed for pastors.

4. Harmful practices relating to traditional healers (*inyanga* and *izangoma/gobela*)

- There are two main types of traditional healers, namely, *inyanga* and *isangoma/gobela*. *Inyanga* is a herbalist and *isangoma* is a diviner.
- Rape committed by traditional healers who convince patients that sexual intercourse is part of the cure. Also mentioned in the INK area was that there are cases of *ogobela* who sleep with their initiates in the pretext of training them. A *gobela* is a *isangoma* or a diviner who performs more than the healing function but has powers and a gift to initiate new traditional healers. Important to note is that not all traditional healers have the gift or capability of being a *gobela*. The commercialisation of the *gobela* role with a focus on financial gains, can lead to the abuse of their powers; and abuse of human and children’s rights which may prevent children from achieving their full potential in life.
- It was emphasised across all six sites that traditional healing has been turned into a business or a money-making scheme and is hijacked by imposters who do not have the ancestral calling. As a result, a lot of harm is caused to community members who seek help from traditional healers because people who do not have the ancestral calling are being trained. Like Western Doctors, traditional healers are also meant to have their areas of specialisation (i.e., diviners/*gobelas*, herbalists, etc.). However, due to greed and hijacking of the “calling” a lot of traditional healers practice outside of their specialisation and this is how illegal activities are committed.



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- Prescription of *idliso* or *korobela*. *Idliso* or *korobela* "...is used by both men and women who want someone to fall in love with them. It is also used to keep a lover that is slipping away. This type of *idliso* is added to food or drinks to make a person fall in love or to strengthen the love bond with them" (Imithi Yesintu, 2022, n.p.). *Idliso* is harmful and can lead to problems such as obsessive love. Extreme obsessive love can be the cause of stalking, rape, and murder, and other destructive behaviours/activities that are criminal.
- Also explained was that the practice of witchcraft was born out of greed. Traditional healers who participated in this research across all six sites emphasised that *inyanga* and *izangoma* are meant to cure illnesses and not to cause any harm.
- Not all traditional healers are registered with the Council of Traditional Health Practitioners of South Africa. However, any crime committed by traditional healers must be reported to the police. If there is a local traditional healers' organisation in your community, reporting should be done there as well.

5. Harmful practices relating to traditional leaders

- It was mentioned particularly in Mbombela and EThekweni Inner-West that in their more rural communities *indunas*/traditional leaders interfere with the law by not reporting cases of GBV reported to them by their community members to the South African Police Services (SAPS). Traditional leaders also interfere with the law by not granting police officials access to the communities to investigate cases of GBV (i.e., child abuse, domestic violence, rape, etc.). *Indunas*/traditional leaders must report cases of GBV to the SAPS and should not interfere with the work of the police.
- Traditional councils are mainly made up of men. Women victims appear before men who subject them to secondary victimisation.
- A lot of criminal activities take place in hostels, but the police do not have access to investigate because they are threatened by *inkabi*. This was mentioned in Alexandra, Diepkloof and INK. Kwamashu hostels were reported in the baseline study conducted for Masiphephe as being unsafe (Thobane, Artz, Ngubane, Maksudi & Haji, 2020). Reported in Diepkloof was that young girls are being prostituted inside the Zone 6 hostel. When these girls die inside the hostel the police are prevented from gaining access to investigate; only the deceased's family and the undertakers are allowed to enter the hostel to remove the corpses. Families are warned that there will be trouble if they report to or come with the police. It was emphasised that *inkabi* are very dangerous and that even the police are afraid of them. *Inkabi* is a Zulu term for a person who is hired to kill another person or a group of people; an assassin or a hitman. Even though *inkabi* are not traditional leaders, they are considered leaders within the hostel context.



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Harmful Sociocultural Practices Risk Factors



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Takeaway Message

While there are many causes of GBV, the focus of this research was the role sociocultural norms and practices play in the perpetuation of this crime. Culture plays a significant role in society because it enriches people's quality of life and improves the general welfare of both individuals and the community. There are many positive cultural practices that are socially beneficial and can be used to prevent GBV. These include norms which promote unity and equity in communities. One such practice is the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*, "I am because you/we are."

Even though there are many positive sociocultural norms that can be used to respond to and/or prevent GBV, there are equally numerous harmful practices, some of which are discussed in this factsheet. When practiced, harmful sociocultural norms, violate the rights of others and perpetuate GBV. As much as it is your right to enjoy and practice your culture, it is equally your responsibility to ensure that your cultural practices do not violate the rights of others, even if they are your family. We therefore challenge you to change harmful practices and replace them with new and positive ones that have a positive impact on everyone who is affected. We understand that we cannot change culture, but we can make efforts to change norms and practices that are harmful. A practice like *ukuthwala*/child marriage, for example, has very negative and long-term consequences on the child bride as it denies her the right to education and in turn future prospects of actively participating in the economy. As a result, a child victim of *ukuthwala* will remain poor and perpetuate her family cycle of poverty. Break the cycle, do not pass on negative traditions to your family and children who may, as a result of harmful traditional practices passed on from generation to generation, suffer for many generations to come.

Useful contact details

If you have experienced abuse or have suspicion or knowledge of a child being abused due to harmful sociocultural norms, please report to any of the following duty bearers:

SAPS Emergency Number
National Gender Based Violence Command Centre Toll Free Number

10111 or your Local Police Station
0800 428 428 (0800 GBV GBV)

PROVINCIAL CHILD WELFARE AND DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CONTACT DETAILS			
GAUTENG		KWAZULU-NATAL	
Jo'burg Child Welfare	011 298 8500	Child Welfare Durban and District	031 207 1366
Department of Social Development	011 355 7600/56 011 227 0000	Department of Social Development	031 336 8704



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MPUMALANGA			
<i>Mbombela</i>		<i>Emalahleni</i>	
Child Welfare Nelspruit	013 753 3330	Child Welfare Emalahleni	013 656 2471
Department of Social Development		Department of Social Development	
Kanyamazane Branch Office	013 794 0118	Emalahleni Branch Office	013 658 4100
Nelspruit Branch Office	013 755 4036	Emalahleni Sub-District Office	013 658 4100
Kabokweni Branch Office	013 796 0198		
Msogwaba Branch Office	013 794 6925		
Mbombela Sub-District Office	013 747 2613		

DISCLAIMER

This fact sheet 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 and 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 fact sheet are the responsibility of the University of Cape Town’s, Gender Health and Justice Research Unit and CCI and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID.



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Masiphephe Network Implementing Partners

ORGANISATION	IMPLEMENTATION SITE/ LOCATION	CONTACT #
Centre for Community Impact (CCI)	Pretoria, Gauteng	012 366 9300
Gender Health and Justice Research Unit (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)	eThekweni West, KwaZulu Natal	031 704 6860
Gugu Dlamini Foundation	eThekweni INK Area, KwaZulu Natal	031 292 2852
Project Support Association Southern Africa (PSASA)	Emalahleni Local Municipality and City of Mbombela	013 752 5624

Social Media Platforms



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