



POWA'S RESPONSE TO LATEST CRIME STATISTICS

21 February 2021 - On 18 February, Police Minister Bheki Cele released the crime statistics for the third quarter of 2021/22 covering the period October to December 2021. They show that 902 women were murdered, that murder figures continue to rise and that there were 11 315 rapes within this reporting period.

As People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA), we are very disturbed by these latest crime statistics, which illustrate the high levels of violence in communities across our country and that we are dealing with a serious gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) problem and have a long way to go in addressing it. However, it's difficult to believe that these are the only people that were raped and murdered within this reporting period due to the extremely high rates of GBVF in our country and because some crimes are not reported. Police information management systems also need to be improved to capture the accurate number of murders, domestic violence and sexual violence statistics.

Government and civil society organisations have taken bold steps to tackle the scourge of GBVF in various ways such as through the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (NSP on GBVF), which was brought out in 2020. It aims to provide a multi-sectoral, coherent strategic policy and programming framework to strengthen a coordinated national response to the crisis of GBVF by the South African government and the country as a whole. The strategy seeks to address the needs and challenges faced by all, especially women across age, sexual orientation, sexual and gender identities; and specific groups such as elderly women, women who live with disability, migrant women and trans women, affected and impacted by the gender-based violence scourge in South Africa.

President Cyril Ramaphosa recently approved amendments to the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Bill, the Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Bill and the Domestic Violence Amendment Bill.

The laws, among a variety of issues, expand the scope of the National Register for Sex Offenders (NRSO) to include the particulars of all sex offenders and not only sex offenders against children and people who are mentally disabled. They also increase the time that a sex offender's particulars must remain on the NRSO before they can be removed from the register.

The legislation expands the ambit of the crime of incest and introduces a new offence of sexual intimidation. In addition, it tightens bail and minimum sentencing provisions in the context of GBV and further regulates the right of a complainant in a domestic-related offence to participate in parole proceedings.

POWA commends and applauds the NSP on GBVF and the signing into law of these three GBV bills. However, more needs to be done by the police and government to deal with reported incidents of rape and murder of women. There needs to be proper training of police in dealing with GBVF to ensure they are able to write proper statements and do thorough investigations.

We also need to ensure that the criminal justice system provides adequate feedback on the progress of cases, that it carries out proper investigations and that there is no delay on arrest of perpetrators, etc. so that perpetrators of GBV don't feel free to carry out their crimes because they believe they will get away with them. The criminal justice system regularly fails GBV survivors and cases often take long to finalise due to the DNA backlog, which causes more trauma for survivors. Cases are sometimes scratched off the role because of lack of evidence due to lack of proper investigations which means survivors don't receive the justice they deserve.

While the police and government need to amplify their efforts in addressing GBVF, the fight against this scourge lies with us all. There needs to be greater collaboration between the corporate sector and the public sector to provide support to GBV organisations, so they can sustain their programmes. They can also provide GBV survivors with resources such as housing and assist them to become financially independent by providing them with bursaries, employment and skills development opportunities such as for example, entrepreneurial or agricultural skills. In this way, they can generate an income and become economically empowered. In some cases, women end up going back to their abusers because they can't support themselves. Government and the corporate sector also need to better publicise the bursary and skills development opportunities they provide.

Additionally, communities and families of perpetrators need to report perpetrators to the police – rather than hide and protect them – so they are punished and don't go on to hurt other women and girls and to send out the message that GBV is a serious crime with serious consequences.

Issued by:

Thandiwe McCloy

Communications Manager – POWA

Contact Number: 083 696 6597

Email: thandiwe@powa.co.za

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ABOUT POWA

POWA is a feminist, non-profit organisation that was established in 1979. Its vision is a safe and equal society intolerant of all forms of violence against women and girls in all our diversity, where we are treated with respect and dignity and our rights are promoted.

POWA provides advocacy, skills development opportunities, counselling, legal advice, sheltering and court support services to gender-based violence survivors.

Our work is rooted in the belief that change can only be effective when women's lives are directly improved through our interventions. POWA also believes that there is no single route to change, and so constantly seek new and creative approaches in our programming to achieve the change we seek.

