



Statement: Prevalence of gender-based violence during South Africa's phases of lockdown.

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"When women and girls are 'locked down' in their homes with abusive partners, they are at much greater risk than ever before." – Mohammed. A, UN Deputy Secretary-General, 2020.

On 15 March 2020, the South African government declared a National State of Disaster following the outbreak of the menacing COVID-19 virus in South Africa.

In an attempt to safeguard the citizenry and flatten the curve, President Cyril Ramaphosa imposed regulations that would limit the movement of citizens and the trading of non-essential goods. This led to the restriction of millions of citizens to the confines of their homes: places which are supposed to provide safety and refuge during all times, but more so during a time of crisis. However, the recent stats released by South Africa's Police Minister Bheki Cele have revealed a different story. The lockdown has reportedly exposed over [2,300](#) women, children, gender non-conforming individuals and men to an additional danger: gender-based violence (GBV).

The United Nations (UN), in a [statement](#) released on 6 April 2020, revealed that there had been a rise in incidents of GBV across the world as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions. According to the statement, national helplines have recorded a spike in cases of abuse across East Asia, Europe, South America and Africa.

Last Month Minister Bheki Cele released a [preliminary report](#) comparing the crime statistics over the first week of the national lockdown to the same period in 2019. This report concluded that crime in general had decreased, including cases of murder and rape, assault with the intention to inflict grievous bodily harm as well as car jackings, house robberies and business robberies. Despite these encouraging figures, the report underscored the fact that South Africa remains a hotspot for GBV. In short, during this lockdown, South Africa is divided into several hierarchies of power. GBV perpetrators sit at the top and GBV survivors and victims are at the bottom. The report revealed that over 2,300 calls or complaints relating to gender-based violence were registered between 27 March and 31 March 2020.

Some 148 suspects were charged in response to these complaints. The number of complaints from the beginning of January to the end of March stands at 15,924.

As a Youth Policy Committee (YPC) that envisages a nation devoid of all forms of gender-based violence and all its associated atrocities, we would like to take a moment and ask all those living and/or caring about South Africa if this is truly the type of democratic state and the type of liberation that we fought for? Is this the idealised, united, strong and 'liberated' South Africa that past generations dreamt of?

We urge all GBV perpetrators and the public at large to change the current GBV trajectory in South Africa and call for consistency regarding the response to and addressing of GBV in South Africa. We urge a transition to a 'new normal' that equalises all people in all ways at all times. Simply put, we call for an end to GBV.

[According to the World Health Organisation](#), a third of the global population is under some form of lockdown as a result of COVID-19. School closures have affected more than 1.5 billion children. The restriction of movement of individuals is exacerbated, in some cases, by loss of income, isolation and heightened levels of stress and anxiety. These all increase the susceptibility of children to abuse, including an increase in child labour, child marriage and child trafficking.

Moreover, it is with deep concern and sadness that we note the high volume of child abuse cases reported since the commencement of South Africa's lockdown. We are of the belief that children ought to be safeguarded and provided with adequate care, attention and guidance. Children are perhaps the most vulnerable group of citizens and the gatekeepers of the future, yet they continue to be failed by those responsible for caring for and protecting them.

We strongly condemn any form of violence against children and reiterate the rights of children as stated in [section 28 of the Bill of Rights](#). We envisage a South Africa where children are treated with the respect, dignity and right to safety and security that they deserve. To this end, we applaud the work done by different organisations such as the Teddy Bear Clinic and Child Welfare South Africa, while encouraging greater coordinated efforts between the government, organisations tasked to intervene in cases of child abuse and the general public to address this scourge.

We further urge all to act responsibly and decisively against both the spreading and curating of fake news not just now, but always. We also urge all those exposed to GBV and child abuse to please reach out and contact the relevant stakeholders as soon as possible:

Covid-19 helpline:

Covid-19 24-hour hotline: 0800 029 999 or visit sacoronavirus.co.za

Covid-19 Fake News Hotline: 067 966 4015 or fakenewsalert@dtps.gov.za

Gender-based violence and child abuse helpline

*GBV Command Centre: 0800 428 428 or dial*120*786#*

Childline South Africa: 08000 55555 or childlinesa.org.za

Child Welfare South Africa: 087 822 1516 or national@childwelfare.org.za

This statement was written by the young leaders in the Youth Policy Committee Gender Working group at the South African Institute of International Affairs.