



children's
institute

child rights in focus
Research • Advocacy • Education

46 Sawkins Road
Rondebosch 7700
Cape Town
South Africa

Tel: +27 21 650 1473
Fax: +27 21 650 1460
Email: info@ci.org.za
www.ci.uct.ac.za

5 September 2019

His Excellency, President Cyril Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa

Sent by email to: media@presidency.gov.za and presidentrsa@presidency.gov.za

CC: Hon. Maite Emily Nkoana-Mashabane, Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities
Hon. Claudia Nonhlanhla Ndaba, Chair of the PC on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities
Hon. Lindiwe Daphne Zulu, Minister for Social Development
Hon. Mondli Gungubele, Chair of the PC on Social Development
Hon. Ronald Ozzy Lamola, Minister of Justice
Hon. Gratitude Magwanishe, Chair of the PC on Justice
Hon. Dr Zwelini Lawrence Mkhize, Minister of Health
Hon. Sibongiseni Maxwell Dhlomo, Chair of the PC on Health

Dear President Cyril Ramaphosa,

Ending violence against women and children requires stronger prevention not just punishment

This morning you spoke to protestors outside Parliament and promised to address the nation later today with a plan to end violence against women and children. Your focus was predominantly a criminal justice response stronger policing, specialised courts, bail prohibitions, harsher sentences, and parole restrictions. Whilst this is welcome, evidence shows that this does little to reduce violence on its own. **We call for an integrated plan that addresses both prevention and response, to stop violence from occurring in the first place.**

In June, the Children's Institute, as part of a group of concerned academics and civil society leaders wrote to you urging you to make violence against women and violence against children in ALL it's forms a top priority for his new cabinet. Below is a summary of the evidence we cited and the recommendations.

During the Presidential Summit on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide in November 2018, President Ramaphosa recognised gender-based violence as “a crisis that is tearing our society apart”. However, a government review of the effectiveness of programmes and institutions to address violence against women and children has revealed systemic failings and a lack of political will to stop the growing tide of violence. South Africa’s Cabinet must recognise that violence against women and children are deeply linked and make ending violence against both a top priority.

Widespread violence against women and children drives an inter-generational cycle

There is clear evidence of the strong links between childhood experience of abuse and perpetration or experience of violence against women, and that this cycle is driven by gender inequality and social norms supporting the use of violence in communities. There is an urgent need to change attitudes regarding violence in the home and society, promote positive parenting practices and tackling inequality that normalise violence and power over women and children.

The frequency and severity of violence against pregnant women appears to increase as pregnancy progresses. Aside from the physical risks to maternal and foetal physical health, the devastating psychological impact on the mother makes domestic violence a top risk factor for the extremely high rates of maternal depression and anxiety in our country. This, in turn, impacts bonding and impairs the mother’s ability to protect her children against violence. Violence against women and children is widespread. Several South African studies point to the saturation of violence in the everyday lives of children. The Birth to Twenty Plus study found that 99% of children had experienced or witnessed some form of violence, and more than 40% had multiple experiences of violence in their homes, schools and communities.

All forms of violence affect children of both genders. Evidence shows that larger numbers of boys experience sexual abuse than previously believed. Both boys and girls similarly experience physical abuse, but emotional violence is poorly understood. At the same time, almost half of South African women experience intimate partner violence during their lifetime and nearly 40% of women reported physical abuse during pregnancy in a study from KwaZulu-Natal.

Violence against women and children are inextricably linked. They occur in the same households and share the same drivers. Shared risk factors include family conflict; poverty; alcohol and substance abuse; patriarchy within the family and in society at large; and social norms that tolerate violence towards women and children.

The interaction of social and personal factors contributes to a never-ending cycle of violence and abuse where victims are at increased risk of revictimisation, or even becoming perpetrators themselves. For example, women who experience violence at the hands of their intimate partner are more likely to use corporal punishment, as are women who experienced trauma in their own childhood. Support for parents can, however, break this cycle and increase protection for children.

Impact of violence on individuals, and the cost to the economy

Violence is associated with short- and long-term effects on children’s health and development. Starting during pregnancy, the latest research suggests that intimate partner violence has a negative impact on the unborn child increasing the risk of neurodevelopmental disorders, lower intellectual functioning and poor parent-child bonding.

Children who are abused learn to tolerate violence and are at increased risk of poor mental health (e.g., anxiety and depression), drug and alcohol abuse, risky sexual behaviours and HIV, externalising

behaviour problems (e.g., aggression, delinquency) and poor social functioning. In the Birth to Twenty Plus study, violent behaviour was reported by more than 65% of primary school children, rising to 89% of adolescents.

A recent study investigated the social burden and economic impact of violence against children in South Africa. Researchers found that preventing children from experiencing and witnessing violence reduces multiple social problems. For example, self-harm could be reduced by 23% in the population if children did not experience physical violence. Other population wide benefits include reducing HIV infection, substance (drug and alcohol) abuse, and interpersonal violence.

The study also shows that violence has a substantial impact on the economy. The team calculated that the long-term cost of violence against children in 2015/16 stood at R238 billion or nearly 5% of the country's gross domestic product.

Time for a more radical approach

South Africa's response to both violence against women and children has, until now, been happening in silos. Going forward, we need an integrated, evidence-based approach to address both problems.

Successful programmes to address violence against women and children target multiple stakeholders, challenging social norms about gender relations and the use of violence. At the same time, such programmes also support greater communication and shared decision-making among family members. These need investment to be taken to scale in communities through a social compact between the government, academia and non-profit organisations – working towards a shared goal.

South Africa is a pathfinder country in the United Nations' Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children. This means that across the continent our neighbours are looking to South Africa for examples of "*what works*" to reduce violence against women and children. If we make it a top priority and invest in a joint approach we can break the cycle of inter-generational violence and help spread peace and prosperity throughout Africa.

We call on you to announce

- An integrated approach to address violence against women and children based on the WHO's INSPIRE strategies;
- A plan to scale-up programmes that have been shown to work including targeted programmes for adolescents;
- Dedicated funding for evidenced based prevention and early intervention services; and
- More social service professionals, and mental health professionals.

Yours faithfully,



Prof Shanaaz Mathews

Director

Children's Institute, University of Cape Town



Dr Usang Maria Assim

Senior Researcher/Lecturer

Dullah Omah Institute for Constitutional Law,



Governance and Human Rights, Faculty of Law,
University of the Western Cape



CENTRE FOR
CHILD LAW



Karabo Orzah

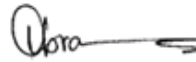
Director

Centre for Child Law



Prof Naeemah Abrahams

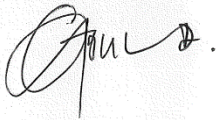
Gender and Health Research Unit, South African
Medical Research Council



Dr Chandré Gould

Senior Research Fellow

Justice and Violence Prevention Programme,
Institute for Security Studies



Caring for mothers.
Caring for the future.
www.pmhproject.org

Assoc Prof Simone Honikman

Director

Perinatal Mental Health Project

