

Sunday Times

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He was a family friend . . .

. . . He sang in the same choir as one of her uncles. And when four-year-old Keabetswe Tshabalala went missing, he was one of the community members who led the search

NOW, writes ISAAC MAHLANGU, he has been arrested after leading family members to the child's body. The man — who has already served time for rape — took the girl's mother and grandmother to an abandoned building near a dumping site in Katlehong and showed them Keabetswe's body hanging on the wall. He did this a day after she had gone missing and he had joined a search party that had spent hours looking for her. Keabetswe's mother, Kenelwe Tshabalala, 25, said: "I was walking right behind him as he led us straight into the building, where I faced an image of my daughter that I will never forget. "My daughter had what seemed like shoe laces around her neck and was hanging from a steel hook on the wall."

The man, 37, was released from prison two years ago. Locals alleged that he was still under correctional services' supervision when the child was raped and murdered, but this could not be verified. Nobody suspected him because he often visited the Tshabalala family — he was in the same choir as one of the toddler's uncles. On the day Keabetswe disappeared, he had visited the family, who live just one street away from him. He had watched a movie with the girl and her six-year-old brother, Karabo, played nearby.



TRAUMA: Diketso Radebe and Kenelwe Tshabalala relive the rape and murder of their four-year-old daughter, Keabetswe Tshabalala. Picture: SIMON MATHEBULA

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The visibly distraught mother has not been taken for counselling since the tragedy, even though she keeps getting sudden panic attacks. The image of her daughter's body hanging on the wall still haunts her. "I don't know if I will ever find closure," she said. Keabetswe's older brother is also traumatised. He was very close to his sister and keeps on asking about her. Their father said: "They were like twins. They were always together. He now asks about her all the time. When we were eating two days ago, he asked: 'Is Keabetswe also eating where she is?'"

She said: "Mommy, may I take my toys outside?" Those were her last words to me. The toys were later found behind the family's outside toilet

Sadly, the only memento the family has of Keabetswe is a photo taken with a group of friends. But her mother will always remember the final conversation with her child. "She said: 'Mommy, may I take my toys outside?'" Those were her last words to me. The toys were later found behind the family's outside toilet. Radebe said: "I just hope the law will take its course so that we can find closure." On Thursday, the suspect will appear in the Palm Ridge Magistrate's Court on charges of raping and murdering the little girl.



MEMORIES: The only memento that Keabetswe Tshabalala's parents have is this picture taken with a group of friends. 'Bana ba Rakgadl' means 'My aunt's children'

Unseen sex offenders

SABELO SKITI

DESPITE the high number of reported rapes against children and the disabled, South Africa's National Register for Sex Offenders is shockingly incomplete. In the past two financial years, the National Prosecuting Authority has finalised more than 8 000 rape cases, yet there are only 3 733 names of sexual offenders on its list. The registry, which has the names of all the people who have been convicted of a sexual offence against a child or a mentally disabled person, was started in June 2009. It is meant to be used by

prospective employers such as schools, crèches and hospitals, because people on the list are not allowed to work with children. Convicted offenders are also not allowed to apply for foster care or adoption. The implementation of the registry, which was established by an act of parliament in 2007, has been plagued by administrative and financial problems, said Justice and Constitutional Development Department spokesperson Mhuzi Mhaga. One problem was the lack of resources at the office of the registrar, which has only four data captureurs uploading the case information of convictions before June 2009.

We're failing our children



A PARLIAMENTARY discussion earlier this year focusing on violence against children found that South Africa's young people were being failed on many levels. Participating institutions such as the University of Cape Town's Children's Institute found:

- Limited specialised counselling services for children and that they had long waiting periods;
- A lack of accessible services for children, which had an impact on psychological healing and recovery;
- Insufficient budget for organisations offering legal services to children; and
- Insufficient funding to support the full implementation of critical laws affecting children, including the Children's Act.