Break the silos, break the cycle: Integrated approaches to end violence against women and children

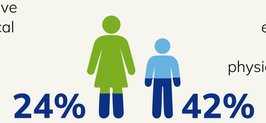
CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE

Understanding the intersections

A heavy burden

24% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence in their intimate relationships

National GBV Prevalence Study, HSRC. 2022

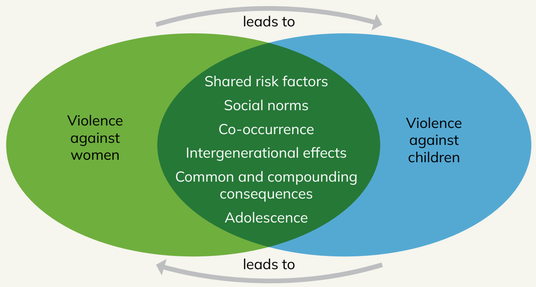


42% of children have experienced some form of maltreatment – including physical, sexual and emotional abuse and/or neglect.

Optimus Child Abuse Study. 2016

Violence against women and children intersect

- They co-occur in the same households, share the same risk factors, and drive an intergenerational cycle of harm.



Source: Fulu E, McCook S & Falb K *What Works Evidence Review: Intersections of violence against women and violence against children*. 2017

Share common drivers

- Violence against women and children are driven by the same risk factors. Poverty, unemployment and overcrowding increase the risk of stress, conflict and violence in the home, which is further fueled by the abuse of alcohol.
- These problems are compounded by harmful social norms that justify men's use of violence to exert power and control, and 'discipline' women and children.

Co-occur in same households

- Intimate partner violence and child maltreatment often occur in the same household, where children who witness domestic violence are also at risk of immediate and long-term harm.

Carry high individual, social and economic costs

- Violence against women and children increases their risk of developing mental health problems, engaging in aggressive, risk-taking behaviour, and struggling to perform at school – in ways that impact on their long-term health, education and employment prospects.
- This places a heavy burden on health, social services and the criminal justice system, and it equates to a huge loss in human potential, social capital and economic productivity that costs South Africa 5% of GDP.

Drive an intergenerational cycle

- The effects of violence against children can last a lifetime and drive an intergenerational cycle of violence as children grow up to repeat what they have seen in their own relationships. Girls are more likely to become victims and boys become perpetrators of violence – and both are more likely to use violence to discipline their own children.

Levers for change

Integrate support for women and children

Adopting an integrated approach is essential to address the needs of women and children who are both affected by violence in the home. This means looking beyond the individual patient or client to support other members of the family affected by violence. For example, when a woman is beaten by her partner, her children also need counselling and support.

Provide a continuum of care

This includes interventions to prevent violence by tackling the social, economic and cultural drivers of violence, and response services to address its impacts through the provision of healthcare, psychosocial support, justice and shelter.

Intervene early

Violence tends to increase in frequency and intensity, so it is important to intervene as early as possible to prevent further harm.

This includes intervening early in the first 1,000 days of life to promote optimal care, health and development.

Health

- Maternal and child health services provide a cost-effective way to intervene early in the life course by identifying and supporting women and children at risk and preventing violence at scale.
- Adolescent- and youth-friendly services also need to take action to prevent violence and support adolescent girls and teen mothers who face high levels of violence, stigma and exclusion.

Social services

- Family-strengthening and parenting programmes can help improve communication and promote non-violent ways of resolving conflict and disciplining children.
- But to be effective they need to challenge harmful gender norms, include men as partners and promote shared caregiving and decision-making.

Education

- Schools can create safe, respectful and caring environments by training teachers to use positive discipline, teaching children about healthy relationships and gender equality, and supporting pregnant learners and teen moms to stay in school.
- Schools can also help identify and support children at risk, by monitoring early warning signs and creating a safe space in which learners can ask for help and access support services.

Communities

- Strong, caring communities help protect women and children from violence.
- We need to engage the whole community – including faith and traditional leaders – to transform the social norms that justify violence against women and children.
- Men and boys are part of the solution and need positive role models and opportunities to explore forms of masculinity based on care and respect .
- Community activists play a central role in mobilising communities to support survivors, advocate for justice and hold services accountable.

Transform gender norms

Gender-transformative programmes challenge harmful beliefs used to justify violence and promote more caring and equitable relationships. For example, by encouraging men to play an active role in caring for their children.

Provide trauma-informed care

Service providers should help survivors of violence feel safe, supported and in control. For example, caregivers of sexually abused children may need extra support as this can trigger memories of their own experiences of violence and abuse.

Centre the voices of women and children

Centring the rights and voices of women and children helps ensure that they are able to speak out and ask for help, and that services are designed to meet their needs.

This poster was conceptualised by Lori Lake and designed by Mandy Lake-Digby. It draws on the key findings of the *South African Child Gauge 2025* which was published by the Children's Institute, University of Cape Town in partnership with the DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Human Development, University of the Witwatersrand; UNICEF South Africa; the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, Standard Bank Tutuwa Community Foundation; The LEGO Foundation; and the Ford Foundation.
For more information about the intersections of violence against women and children see: Jamieson L, Mathews S, Machisa M & Lake L. *South African Child Gauge 2025*. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape town. 2025.

Strengthening the system

Women and children have the right to dignity, equality and protection from violence. South Africa has developed an expansive range of laws and policies to provide a continuum of care from prevention to response services. But, we have failed to put in place the necessary financial and human resources to realise this vision. Instead, services are thinly stretched with recent budget cuts further compromising women and children's access to safety, healing and justice.

In addition, services continue to work in silos. It is therefore vital to review and strengthen our policies, financial and human resources, data systems and coordination mechanisms to uphold the best interests of both women and children.

Policy

Laws and policies need to sharpen their focus on the intersections of violence against women and children to ensure that family members exposed to violence are not excluded from services.

The focus should be on implementation not reform.

Finance

Most funding is allocated to response services, and government urgently needs to increase investment in prevention to break the cycle of violence.

Workforce

Frontline workers need to look beyond the individual client and support other members of the family affected by violence.

They also need training, supervision and support to provide trauma-informed care and prevent burnout.

Data

Strong data systems are essential to plan and monitor services, and to support integrated case management so that both women and children can access a full package of care and support including healthcare, counselling, shelter and justice.

Leadership and coordination

Service providers and planners at local, provincial and national levels for women and children need to work together to align services, clarify roles, streamline referral pathways, and manage cases in ways that uphold the best interests of both women and children.

Speak out and seek help

If you are in an abusive relationship, then you need help to make it stop.

- Tell someone you trust.
- Reach out to organisations in your community or call one of the free helplines below.
  - Childline: 116
  - Lifeline: 0800 012 322
  - SADAG: 0800 567 567
  - GBV Command Centre: 0800 428 428 or SMS *120*7867
- Don't give up. Keep trying until you get the help you need.