



The Methodist Church of Southern Africa

Tel: +27 (0)11 615 1616
+27 (0)87 0561201
Fax: +27 11 615 1511

Methodist Connexional Office
33 Ernest Oppenheimer Ave
Bruma Office Park, Bruma
Private Bag X11
Garden View 2047

The METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (MCSA)

RESPONSE TOWARDS A SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV) FREE SOCIETY SINCE 1998

The MCSA Conference, has, since 1998, passed a number of resolutions that seek to address SGBV, within our Connexional context. In 1997, Conference noted that *“Church and society continues to treat gender concerns lightly, and because the church is immersed in the problems of violence and economic and political issues, issues affecting women are treated as peripheral, women are often victims of violence, misinformation by media and anti-justice structures, and continue to be under-represented.”*¹

Conference, in 2003, directed, that *“all Circuits and Societies should provide teaching on this appalling social disease and introduce programmes to combat the underlying social attitudes that give rise to these sins.”*² The call made by Conference fell on deaf ears, and again in 2012 Conference, noted the increased levels of rape within the Connexion and reaffirmed its condemnation of sexual violence.³

In 2007 Conference once more recognized the high prevalence of domestic violence within the communities we serve and recommended that synods establish teams which:

1. Will look at the ways of ministering effectively to those who are abused, especially cases of domestic violence.
2. Investigate the establishment of intervention services that are context specific (free lines of counselling centres, safe houses, etc.).
3. That these district [synod] task teams are to report to their District [synod] in 2008.⁴

Through the continued persistence and magnitude of gender-based violence Conference 2014 committed to educate and empower MCSA societies through the following actions and activities:

- By meaningfully participating in the Thursdays in Black Campaign;
- By holding workshops and educational events that empower communities; and
- By purposefully participating in the 16 Days of Activism programme.⁵

Having made all the above-mentioned commitments and introducing the Harassment Policy, MCSA Conference 2017 had to pass another resolution titled “sex-abuse in the MCSA” that sought to establish a

¹ Methodist Church of Southern Africa, *Yearbook 1998*, (1998), 82.

² MCSA, *Yearbook 2004*, (2004), 50.

³ MCSA *Yearbook 2012*, (2012), 93.

⁴ MCSA, *Yearbook 2008* (2008), 76.

⁵ MCSA, *Yearbook 2015* (2015), 85

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confidential mechanism for female clergy to share their stories of abuse without fear, intimidation or jeopardising their ministry.

The persistent, increasing prevalence of SGBV in our communities as evidenced by the conference resolutions over the years indicate that these efforts have yielded very little of the desired or expected results.

The Connexional Executive theme for 2020, *“Guided by God’s Mission: Reimagining Healing and Transformation”* presents the MCSA with an opportune time to call for the Re-imagining of Healing and Transformation pertaining to SGBV and its impact on women and children. The Freedom from Fear Campaign, held in July-August 2020, was not only an impromptu response to the crisis of the COVID-19 lockdown regulations and restrictions, but was also an active attempt at reimagining our efforts and a passionate plea to address SGBV both within the Church and society.

The SGBV state of our Connexion

Globally, 1 in 3 women experience sexual or physical violence in their lifetime, mostly from an intimate partner.⁶ The most recent data from domestic violence helplines across the world suggests that the lockdown restrictions implemented by governments increased the incidents of domestic violence across the world.⁷ The Southern African context, plagued by chronic structural economic inequalities and gender disparities, meant that the brunt of COVID-19 is much more severe on African women and children. The data from the countries of the connexion attest to the negative impact on the efforts that have been implemented to eliminate SGBV.

The Botswana National Relationship Study, (BNRS, 2018) indicates that 37% of women in Botswana experienced some form of GBV in their lifetime and 30% of men reported perpetrating violence. The study also revealed violence against men at 21% and perpetrated by 12% of women. Women reported 36% of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and 18% (half) men reported IPV. Furthermore, it also indicated that Emotional IPV was the most common form of IPV (31%) experienced by women.

The Executive director of the Swazi based NGO, Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse (SWAGAA), Ms Nonhlanhla Dlamini, lamented that among the challenges faced by the Kingdom was the shortage of shelters for victims. Dlamini further notes:

⁶ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19> (Accessed on the 10 November 2020)

⁷ Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, “Violence against women and girls: the shadow pandemic.” 2020. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic> (Accessed on the 10 November 2020)

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We have had quite a number of challenges as a country. We don't have many shelters in the country, particularly for adults. The shelters that we have are mostly meant for children. We have had quite a lot of people calling us to indicate that their life is at risk and we have helped them seek justice through the court."⁸

In Lesotho, concerns were raised about the increase of domestic violence due to the lock down regulations. Within two weeks the country reported 18 cases of sexual assault and these are considered as being gross under reporting.⁹

In Namibia, the former deputy commissioner Edwin Kanguatjivi, in August 2019, reported on an upward trend in the number of rape cases involving minor children. Between 2016 and 2018 over 3000 rape cases were reported across the country, with over 40% of the reported cases involving children.¹⁰

The South African Police Service's Crime Statistics 2019/20 report that of the 21 352 cases of murder reported, 2 695 (13%) murder victims were women, and 2873 (13%) murders were committed by an acquaintance, spouse or ex-boyfriend/girlfriend of the murder victim. According to the SAPS 1482 of those cases, the cause was something domestically related. Another interesting thing to note is that 5522 (26%) of all murders in South Africa took place at the residence of either the perpetrator or the victim.

Of the 332 414 cases of Assault and assault GBH, 134 061 (40%) of the victims were women. In 85 610 (26%) cases of assault and assault GBH, the perpetrator was an acquaintance, spouse, ex-boyfriend/girlfriend of the victim. It is however known that in 119 394 (36%) cases took place at the residence of the victim/perpetrator or in a public place.

Of the 53 293 cases of sexual offences, 31 100 (58%) victims were women and 22 070 (41%) were children. In 26 171 (49%) cases of sexual offences, the incidents were reported to have taken place at a private residence of the victim/perpetrator or some other public space like the ones mentioned above.

These statistics indicate that the most basic unit of social organization, the home, is not only the place where SGBV takes place, but that the perpetrators of SGBV are often known and have some familial relations with a significant number of the victims. SGBV has turned homes into war zones and efforts of addressing it must, be intentional at highlighting "The War at home." Efforts to stem the tide of SGBV calls

⁸ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-04-21-women-and-children-need-more-protection-during-lockdown/> (Accessed on the 11 November 2020)

⁹ <https://lesotho.unfpa.org/en/news/covid-19-lock-down-exacerbates-gender-based-violence-cases-lesotho> (Accessed on the 10 November 2020)

¹⁰ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-02-04-namibian-government-to-tighten-laws-on-gender-based-violence/> (Accessed on the 11th November 2020)

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for a Reimagination of healing and transformation and working towards creating healthy homes and families.

Children are not spared from the wrath of SGBV, as demonstrated by statistics from Namibia, South Africa and other parts of the Connexion. Research suggests that children that are victims of sexual violence, in their childhood, tend to experience other forms of sexual victimization in their adulthood. Furthermore, there is a body of knowledge that identifies a relationship between childhood sexual trauma and perpetration of sexual violence in adulthood.

In our responses to SGBV, of paramount importance is that survivors of SGBV must always be placed at the centre of our prevention efforts. In doing so Methodist people are called to a moment of repentance for our collective sin of SGBV. Centering the stories of survivors entails an acknowledgement that these stories implicate and impact on the Body of Christ.

I wish to encourage MCSA congregations and organisations to continue the work that they are doing in raising awareness and speaking out against SGBV. I also wish to draw attention to the Faith Action to end gender-based violence.

Faith Action to end Gender-based violence

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa is part a group of faith-based organisations, places of worship and gender activists who came together in June 2020 to reflect on what it will take for the faith sector to become a key player in the struggle against Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF). The collective vision is of a society free from gender injustice and gender- based violence of any form.

The Goal of this collaborative initiative is to lead towards transformed faith communities that are actively addressing the underlying drivers of SGBVF internally and in society, through multi-stakeholder messaging and actions to end GBVF. The aim is to be an inclusive collective of faith-based organisations (FBOs) and places of worship from diverse religious persuasions committed to addressing SGBV.

On the 10th December 2020, Faith Action to end Gender-based violence will launch the first session of a 6month leadership training and accompaniment programme for faith-leaders. The main objective of the project is to accompany and equip faith leaders to become change agents in their faith communities, through a 6-month action-learning programme and growing an online Community of Learning.

This project is intentionally designed to build competences for ongoing emergent learning through mentoring and accompanying faith leaders over 6 months. It includes an iterative process, of helping the faith leader participants to build their personal self-awareness of their gendered socialization, addressing theoretical/theological foundations, while accompanying them as they make congregational changes,

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reflect on them, improve on them, and assess their transformative impact to build the Gender- and GBV-competence of their congregations. This process is supported by an interactive online Community of Learning, which grows with each new cohort of participants.

I therefore, encourage Methodist people to utilize opportunity and assist society in ending the scourge of Sexual and Gender-based violence.

For further information please contact MCSA Mission Unit Justice and Service Desk.

Nancy Herron

nancy@mco.org.za

011 615 1616

Siyabulela Tonono

Siyabulela@mco.org.za

087 0561 201

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