



PsySSA Position on Sexual - and Gender-Based Violence

The Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA) expresses its complete dismay at the incidence of sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV) that has pervaded our country. We join the call to take back our country from this type of lawless and inhumane behaviour. As a discipline that is concerned with social justice, human behaviour, trauma and emotional suffering, we believe that this form of criminal behaviour requires urgent attention.

Recognising (i) that SGBV is associated with gender-based power inequalities which disproportionately affect women, girls, transgender and gender non-conforming (GNC) people (ii) the complex social context of violence, dehumanization, poverty and discrimination inherited from the institutionalised abuses of apartheid and colonialism (iii) deeply held patriarchal attitudes towards masculinity and femininity and hegemonic sexual identity (iv) that SGBV can also affect men and boys and that (v) SGBV represents a serious impediment to the realization of the prescripts of the Constitution, PsySSA believes that there is much to be done in terms of prevention. We offer some of the following recommendations where we believe that government, corporate entities and civil society can play significant roles in advancing the objective of increasing respect for women, girls, transgender and GNC people in our communities:

1. **Schools** – This is perhaps the most important arena to develop a healthy respect for others. Boys must learn at a very early age that girls are their equals, whom they must respect; girls do not exist for the pleasure or gratification of boys. From the earliest possible age, boys need to understand that hurting girls, boys, transgender or GNC people in ways that satisfy their own needs is unacceptable and criminal. Boys can be encouraged to be agents of change in working towards altering traditional norms relating to gender relations and masculinity. Girls need to learn that they are on an equal footing with boys and that they have the right to refuse boys advances. Children need to learn to recognize and value the inherent humanity and equity in their relationships with their peers. We believe that this content must be formally incorporated into the school curriculum, beginning in primary school. Education authorities must view this aspect of learning as a critical feature in a child's education and, therefore, place it squarely into the child's learning context, in order to improve gender equality and the transformation of gender norms.
2. **Family** – There is no doubt that the requisite learning of respect for others must begin within the nuclear and extended family. Parents and/ or guardians must be the primary transmitters of these key lessons and must also display such respectful behaviour themselves. In this regard, the development and reinforcement of appropriate values can be regenerated within community groups and programmes.
3. **Work** – The work context is another appropriate place to ensure that adults incorporate into their lives the values of respect for others and especially women, children, transgender and GNC people. Formal continuing education programmes in all spheres of work should include focus on relationships, respect, anger management, and identifying problems in these areas with a view to accessing help.
4. **Economic empowerment** -Entrepreneurship and employment opportunities as well as equal access to education enhances economic empowerment in women, transgender and GNC people, thus increasing their ability and agency to access support and resources and to participate fully in their communities.
5. **Response services & legal frameworks**- Much can be done to improve the services rendered and resources available to survivors of SGBV within the health and social services sectors and the criminal justice system. A more responsive approach to the provision of psychosocial services within the health and social services sectors (including medical interventions and psychological support, as well as shelters and safe spaces) would assist survivors of SGBV. Similarly, a more sensitive, empathic and responsive approach in the criminal justice system is likely to assist in addressing gaps in the implementation of the law for survivors of SGBV.

As Psychology professionals in South Africa, we are well placed to assist in all of the above-mentioned areas through the provision of services (both reactive and preventative) through teaching and training and through the development of programmes and policy frameworks. We call on government to take SGBV seriously and utilize all available avenues to address and prevent this problem. PsySSA offers its expertise to assist government in developing programmes in this direction so that we may make our country a safe place for all, especially for our women, children, transgender and GNC people.

Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA)

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