

Women's day, women's month for who? For South African women or South African government and politicians?

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Abstract

Women's day and women's month in South Africa are celebrated based on the role and contributions made by women in the struggle of South African people during the apartheid era. Women's day is celebrated to honor the 20 000 women that marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria on 09 August 1956. The objective of this study was to show the significance of the role played by the women of 1956 and the role of the women of today. The generational mission of women of 1956 has been misused and misinterpreted, the study intends to provide reasons why the celebration of this day and month does not add tangible value to the women of today. The purpose of this article is to show that the celebration of women's month does not speak to how women are socially treated and how they are economically struggling. The study aims to spark a debate on how women of today can be protected and celebrated. The study applied secondary research methodology because the data is available and accessible. The study found that the women of today are experiencing difficult times in all aspects and there is nothing to celebrate. The study concludes that even though the South African government and various stakeholders are trying to stop gender-based violence and empower women, the impact is not widely visible.

Keywords: Women's day, women empowerment, gender-based violence, stakeholders, role players.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa celebrates national women's day every year on the 9 August. The first national women's day was celebrated on 09 August 1995 by the democratically elected government. This was in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the women's march in 1956. Women were fighting against the apartheid government. This led to this day being celebrated annually however, the celebration is significant but has no linkage with what women of today go through. Women's march in 1956 to Pretoria involved more than 20 000 women and had more than 100 000 signatures on the petition that was handed to the Union Buildings. Women were fighting against the Population Registration Act to carry a pass. They were also fighting for equal rights and equal opportunities regardless of gender and race. The generation of 1956 has achieved a lot. What they were fighting for has been realized and enjoyed by the current generation. There are so many laws that were amended and some were enacted to support women. Women's charter was written after the march and deliberations by women (Archary, 2019: 04).

This article is not about women of 1956 and their achievements but it is based on the success and failures of women of today. Women of today still face numerous challenges that require the country to stand together and fight against such challenges. For women, it is not yet Uhuru (independent or free) even though the world celebrates international women's day. The world celebrates political, cultural, social, and economic achievements. This success or achievement is not visible and accordingly, does not require any celebration. There are significant issues that affect women of today and those issues have not been addressed. Issues of domestic violence, unequal pay, schooling for girls, and sexual harassment in the workplace remain high in the country. South Africans and particularly women celebrate women's day to pay reverence to the women of South Africa that fought against laws that affected women in South Africa. This reason has no reconnection with what women of today go through. The fighting spirit of the women of 1956 was informed by the apartheid oppression and the fighting spirit of the women of a democratic government must be informed by social oppression and socioeconomic oppression. Organizations that represent women and children have raised issues about the celebration of women's day. They indicated that the celebration of women's day has no meaning or significance because women of today are still living under difficult conditions. The most important issue raised by these organizations was the availability of sanitary products in women's shelters and schools. They further urged

people to advocate for gender equality, mentor young women in industries, include men in women's discussions, and support women's businesses(Mikel-Arieli, 2022).

The purpose of this article is to provide an overall analysis of the impact of women's day in South Africa. This discussion will include challenges that women in South Africa face today. The social behaviour of women of today particularly young women form part of the discussion. Further, women oppression by their male counterparts on various platforms such as the working environment. The article will also look at how men abuse women despite all the efforts made by the government to embrace South African women. This paper argues that women's day and women's month is widely seen by the public as public holiday and a celebration of women initiated by the government. Women of today do not own this celebration and do not see anything to celebrate. Women still face brutal killings and abuse even during women's month, this suggests that women's month does not mean anything to many people. Critics argue that there is something to celebrate because more women are in the boardrooms and various positions of power. This could be true but a much bigger margin of women is excluded and women are the end recipient of poverty. Women in the majority are left alone to raise their kids as single parents and they are also abused, raped, and killed. These are the challenges that women in South Africa face daily. This article also provides statistics on women that are abused monthly. Based on this, many women in the country do not have a reason to celebrate women's day(Duncan, 2022).

Research Methodology

This study applied secondary research methodology because of the availability of the information. Secondary research methodology relies on news articles, review articles, textbooks, encyclopedias and online material. This method allows authors to draw data from published papers, statistical data, and government documents. This study applied the secondary research method to reach conclusions and findings. This research methodology is also referred to as desktop research. This study reached conclusions and findings based on the data from various materials. The researcher used available data from published datasets, government reports, newspaper reports, websites, libraries, and online news. The available data were analyzed and incorporated to fit the objectives of the study. The received and analyzed data meet the goals and expectations of the study. This research method is advantageous because it allows a researcher to look for patterns across data spanning and trends. Researchers can easily verify the earlier hypothesis in similar studies(Gupta and Gupta, 2022).

The secondary research method is scientific and valid because a researcher has to identify a research topic and the questions a researcher intends to answer. A researcher creates a list of data sources that are aligned to the topic and the study at hand. Thereafter, a researcher collects all relevant data or information that is relevant to the study. After collection, a researcher combines the collected data and compares different data and uses the most relevant data for a study. Finally, the researcher analyzes the available and relevant data for the study. This, therefore, shows that this study is credible and valid based on the data that was collected through this method.

Findings and recommendations

Women's day in south Africa resemble the history of the women that fought against apartheid laws. This does not have any impact today. Women are brutally killed and abused by men and by other women. This article has looked at how women have suffered brutal attacks in the last two years. Recently, in August 2022, women have been brutally raped and killed by illegal miners. The illegal miner's gang raped 8 women during the month of women. Amongst the 8 women are two young ladies that were taking videos and the illegal miners gang raped them both at gunpoint at Krugersdorp, West Village. Police were able to arrest 67 suspects for the crimes. When the police spoke to the victims they explained how they were brutally assaulted by the perpetrators. After the rape, the perpetrators drank wine as a symbol of celebration. The victims said they heard gunshots and later were surrounded by the Lesotho nationals who later raped them. One woman said the perpetrators were picking her amongst other girls even after she was bleeding. She cannot even recall how many men raped her, but more than six at gunpoint. The perpetrators did not rape any white women that were amongst the black women. One of the victims was a virgin and she was also raped and they took her virginity. Victims were also robbed of their belongings and equipment worth over R1.5 million. This incident took more than 12 hours but no one was able to help the victims until they were released by the perpetrators(Malatji and Kgobotlo, 2022: 05).

The Eastern Cape Province of South Africa had a fair share of raped, killed, and abused women. This is happening despite the awareness campaigns about gender-based violence. A case of a man who killed his ex-girlfriend did not only shock the people of the Eastern Cape but was bizarre for the people of the entire country. The victim who was 28 years old at the time of death and an employee of the Textile factory was stabbed and killed by her ex-boyfriend and the father of a seven-month-old baby. Who is in his right mind kills a mother of such a young baby? The perpetrator did not only cause a problem for the nation and the family but also the baby. What becomes more disturbing for this incident is that the victim had already obtained a protection order from the court but this did not stop the perpetrator. This, therefore, means that nothing can stop the perpetrators not even the celebration of women's day. The court has played its role by denying bail for the 33-year-old perpetrator but that does not take away the fact that a woman had died for being a woman at the hand of a man. The victim was walking from work to home and was approached by the perpetrator who later stabbed her in front of many other people who did not help the victim at all. The South African government described this incident as a very dark and brutal women's month (Dayimani, 2021: 03).

While still focusing on the Eastern Cape, a 12-year-old girl was brutally murdered at the village of Mthatha in the Eastern Cape. Her body was found naked next to a kraal which is believed that it was dumped by someone. A 47-year-old herdsman is believed to be responsible for this and the community handed him to the police. He shocked the community and the nation precisely because rural communities are seen as communities that still uphold moral values. The suspect was working for the family of the victim. Community members have also raised a concern about the rise of drug use in the area which exposed young and elderly women to rape and murder. A call has been made to impose harsher sentences for those who are found guilty of raping and killing women. While others suggest that the government and community organizations have to work together in changing the mindset of men toward women and children (Mhleku, 2022: 02). This shows that most women die at the hands of the people they know and trust. A boyfriend in the Eastern Cape was also arrested after he was found with the half-naked body of his girlfriend lying on the floor of her home. The boyfriend was just 25 years old and was found asleep in bloodstained clothing (Govender, 2021: 03).

Community organizations, political parties, interested parties, and community members at large joined hands in supporting the family of the late Namhla Matwa who was brutally killed by her ex-boyfriend. Several marches were held and media statements were made. This behaviour was classified as human cannibalism and was condemned by everyone in society. However, the speeches and marches do not stop the perpetrators. It was reported that the killing was the last stage but she was continuously abused and assaulted by the perpetrator but no action has been taken by the law enforcement agencies against him. How the law enforcement agencies deal with the issue of couples leads to victims losing their lives at the hands of their loved ones (Phooko, 2022: 01). Criminals use different tactics to abuse and kill women. Another abuser decided to hang his girlfriend from a ceiling in North West Province just to make it seem like a suicide. A boyfriend and the owner of the property were arrested for the murder.

In another incident, a man reported his wife missing but the husband was arrested after the body was found buried underneath their bathtub. The court declared this case as premeditated murder and defeating the ends of justice. The husband was only arrested after two years. The case of Nosicelo Ntebeni whose body was found dumped on the street is another horrific case of women abuse in the Eastern Cape. She also died at the hands of her loved one and the person she trusted (Maphanga, 2021: 01). The government is fully aware of this and leaders only react when there is an incident of women abuse, rape or murder. The government does arrest perpetrators but this does not bring back the lives of the victims. The government make an arrest and keep the statistics. In the first three months of 2022, about 13,799 cases of sexual offences were reported in South Africa. The statistics are evidence that women are still vulnerable to gender-based violence. 10,818 were specifically cases of rape that were reported to the South African Police Services. The statistics might not be a true reflection of women that has been abused because some cases are not reported to the police. Many women continue to suffer from extreme forms of abuse and violence in silence. Society is not playing its role in dealing with issues of gender-based violence and women abuse. The public does not have any form of urgency when issues of gender-based violence are reported. What becomes more confusing is that more than 13 300 cases of assault took place in the residences of the perpetrators. This shows that victims know their abusers.

An organization called Crimes Against Women in South Africa (CASA) reported that one in every five women in South Africa (21%) had experienced physical violence by a partner. This is mainly caused by several factors. Wealthy men feel like they are owning their partners and believe that they can do whatever they want to do to their partners. In many cases, women and their families rely on their boyfriends for financial support. In such cases, the boyfriend becomes more powerful and enjoys protection from the family of the victim. Some women are abused and the perpetrators buy gifts and present for them as a token of regret. Women then give their partners more chances thinking that they will change but change doesn't happen. Most women who have been murdered by their partners saw the signs but decided to ignore the signs. The anger that men show against women should be enough for a woman to permanently leave a man. Women as victims are also not doing enough to apprehend

this situation. One assault should be one into many and should be enough for a woman to leave a relationship. An abusive man who cannot deal with anger issues cannot be changed by a partner but require professional help.

The study conducted by the Medical Research Council shows that at least 150 cases of rape are reported daily in the South African Police Service. This however is not seen as a true reflection because some cases are not reported. The study found that only one in nine cases are reported and if all cases could be reported that could be closer to 1500 cases. The successful rate of prosecution of the perpetrators shows that only about 30 of the reported cases end in court and only 10 result in sentencing. This data shows that the police and the prosecuting authority in South Africa have failed the victims of gender-based violence. The government has tried to stop gender-based violence by introducing new laws but the abuse rate goes up (Mutizira, 2022: 01).

Gender-based violence cases make headlines constantly after every incident there is always a backlash from society. There are always calls to action by different stakeholders which includes the government and community organizations. All of them condemn the abuse and call for concrete actions against perpetrators by the government authorities. Regardless of all these condemnations and calls for the government to harshly act against perpetrators, these incidents keep happening. Some people believe that societal ills play a major role in gender-based violence. Some reported cases do not get finalized because families and society protect the perpetrators. Some serious gender-based violence cases are withdrawn because families of the victims reach some form of agreement with the families of the perpetrators. This, therefore, suggests that society has a much bigger role to play because the law enforcement agencies and the government cannot stop this alone (Hunnicut, 2021: 709).

Women's day and women's month has no impact on the fight against gender-based violence. Gender-based violence is not something new and cases are going up every year. The study conducted in 2016 provided an analysis of the type of abuse that women went through. Physical violence had a higher percentage. This is further supported by the following figure 1 below.

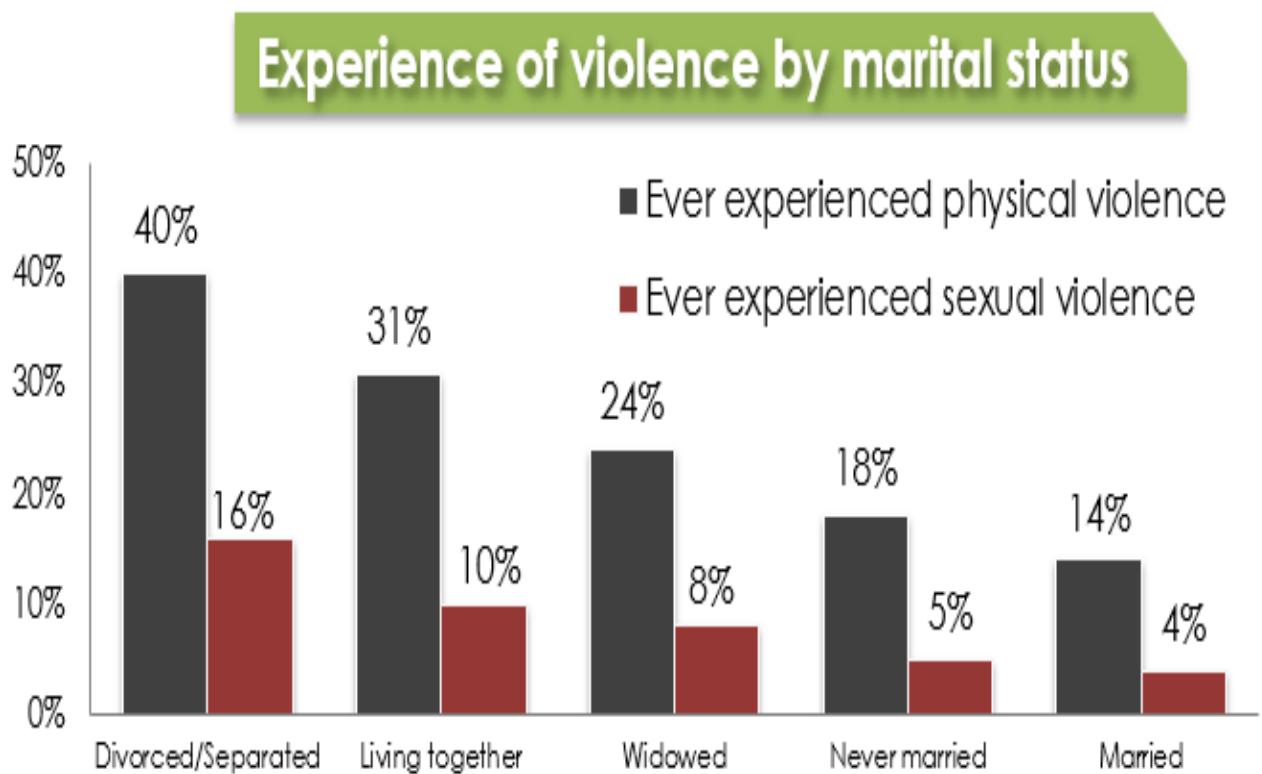


Figure 1: South Africa's 2016 Demographic and Health Survey on physical and sexual violence.

Source: Government Communication and Information Systems, 2016

Available: <https://www.gcis.gov.za/insight-newsletter-issue-28>

The above figure, shows the magnitude of the problem amongst women, especially those divorced or widowed and those not married but living with partners. The statistics show that 40% of reported cases of abuse to those who have divorced and separated. Only 4% of reported cases of abuse for couples that are still together. These statistics of 2016 have changed significantly and today's statistics show high numbers. This report led to the investigation of the causes of gender-based violence. Figure 2 below provides a brief response to the causes of gender-based violence in 2016. It was important for this study to look at the background of what happened 5 to 6 years ago. It was necessary because evaluating the progress can come closer to the solution to ending gender-based violence.



Figure 2: CAUSES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Source: Government Communication and Information Systems, 2016

Available: <https://www.gcis.gov.za/insight-newsletter-issue-28>

itis not possible to conclude on one issue as the main and only cause of gender-based violence in South Africa. There are so many factors that contribute to gender-based violence. Another contributing factor is the power battle between males and females and the government should focus more on addressing this issue instead of putting more emphasis on the importance of women's day. The patriarchy inmost south African communities is still rife and contribute to gender-based violence. The upbringing of children both boys and girls catch up with them at a later stage in life. This can be discussed in two folds, a boy child that grew up with a father figure who was abusive to his mother will think that is the normal way of living. Secondly, a boy child that grew up without a father figure relies on external forces to guide him, particularly friends. Some communities see violence against women as something normal. Poverty is also the factor that was mentioned by the people that were part of the survey conducted by the government officials.

The South African government has tried to introduce new policies and programmes that are designed to fight against gender-based violence. All these provisions and policies are meant to protect women and children. These policies only rely on reported cases and cannot act on cases that are not reported to law enforcement agencies. As indicated earlier, some cases are not reported

to law enforcement agencies. South African courts are empowered and equipped with enough skills and knowledge to deal with the perpetrators. Perpetrators that are not reported and those that were able to convince the victims to withdraw the cases are not punished for their actions(Goodmark, 2021).

This study found that domestic violence is not confined to the poor it also affects rich people as well. It also cuts across all genders globally, all classes, cultures and religions. Recent South African statistics show one in every five women isa victim of gender-based violence. These statistics are higher than the prosecution rate for gender-based violence. This means that the people that are perpetrators are not punished for their evil actions. This could be caused by the crime scene and the availability of the evidence. Most of these crimes take place in the homes of the victims and perpetrators. Some contributing factor to gender-based violence is alcohol abuse where perpetrators blame the alcohol consumption for their actions. Some cases are not successfully prosecuted because of the failure of the law enforcement agencies to follow the proper legal procedures when arresting the perpetrators. Some victims do not want to testify against the perpetrators because of the traumatic events they went through during the abuse. They also fear that should the perpetrators not be prosecuted or serve a shorter sentence, they might come back for the victims(Enaifoghe, Dlelana, Durokifa and Dlamini, 2021).

The crime statistics for 2021/2022 show that 902 women and 352 children were killed. Most of these killings were results of domestic violence. These statistics focused on cases in urban areas because of the accessibility of data. Women in rural communities are also victims of gender-based violence but only a few of their cases are being reported. This is caused by the social setting of people living in rural communities who have no access to law enforcement agencies. Politicians are at the forefront of the celebration of women's month. Some are even saying the cases of women abuse have been reduced but experts are saying this is just public relations exercise. This was after the minister of police and a national commissioner declared a decline in the number of cases related to gender-based violence. Marches and public stunt by politicians and government officials is not a solution to end gender-based violence. The government must look into the root cause of the behaviour of both men and women. The contributing factor in the bad behaviour is the consumption of alcohol. South Africa is ranked very high globally in terms of alcohol consumption. Perpetrators of gender-based violence in the main are involved in substance abuse which includes the use of alcohol. Perpetrators who are abusing alcohol are highly involved in dangerous activities and many cases kill the victims. This is caused by a lack of self-control after the excessive consumption of alcohol(Marais, Ndaguba, Mmbadi, Cloete and Lenka, 2022).

Conclusion

Women's day and women's month in South Africa do not symbolize any protection of women against any form of abuse. This day resembles the history of the country and has no reconnection with what women of today are faced with. Women are victims of gender-based violence and no level of intervention by the law can change the situation. The types of abuse have been mentionedand clearly emphasized in this study and possible solutions have been raised. The arguments that are made by women's organizations are misplaced because they focus on gender equality and do not address the root cause of the abuse of women by men. Communities have a role to play but at this point, the communities are struggling to discipline young people who are involved in many unethical activities such as substance abuse. Authorities are guided by the law while the perpetrators are not guided by any form of law. On the other hand, organizations that represent men believe that there must be programmes that train menand educate them at the child level about the attitudes levels of women. This approach has been proven to be ineffective and does not stop gender-based violence. This approach will not be a solution because both genders work in silos. Gender-based violence can be stopped if both genders work together and address the contributing factors that lead to gender-based violence. A dialogue that is open to both men and women is necessary. This study concludes that women's day and women's month do not address the challenges of women and gender-based violence. Women's month and women's day is not a symbol of respect for women of today in South Africa but is attributed to women who fought against the apartheid government. women alone cannot stop gender-based violence but need men to participate and contribute to the fight against gender-based violence.

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