



POLICY BRIEF

What will it take to prevent interpersonal violence in South Africa?

South African Dialogue Forum

This policy brief presents an analysis of six factors that stand in the way of effectively preventing interpersonal violence in South Africa, and suggests how they might be overcome. It is a product of the Dialogue Forum for evidence-based programmes to prevent violence against women and children. The forum is a multi-sectoral group of researchers, community based organisations delivering evidence-based primary violence prevention interventions, government officials from seven departments and international development partners.

Key findings

The following six factors stand in the way of preventing interpersonal violence:

- ▶ A lack of coherence and agreement about what constitutes violence prevention.
- ▶ A lack of knowledge about existing violence prevention interventions and programmes.
- ▶ A lack of agreement on what interventions should be prioritised for implementation.
- ▶ A workforce in need of healing.
- ▶ Inappropriate resource allocation.
- ▶ A lack of knowledge about how to scale-up interventions that work.

Recommendations

- ▶ A clear articulation of the factors that contribute to violence, and how these can be addressed, must be developed and provided to provincial and local government, and communities, to enable them to develop safety plans as envisaged by the White Paper on Safety and Security.
- ▶ A national audit of violence prevention and response services and programmes delivered by the state and NGOs must be commissioned or undertaken by the Department of Social Development. The audit should identify the types of services delivered in each locality. The database that this produces should be publicly accessible and should be maintained by an appropriate body such as the National Crime and Violence Prevention Centre (described by the White Paper on Safety and Security) or the coordinating structure mentioned in the declaration from the 2018 Presidential Gender-based Violence and Femicide Summit. This database should inform decisions about where services and programmes are required and how resources should be allocated.
- ▶ A multi-sectoral group with diverse knowledge and expertise should work closely with a relevant government structure to identify and develop programmes and services essential for responding to and preventing violence.
- ▶ The essential services will need to be assessed and re-visited at least every five years, to ensure alignment with government's Medium-Term Strategic Framework and with changing contexts in South Africa.
- ▶ Frontline staff delivering health and social services in communities need pre-service, and in-service training and ongoing support to be able to deliver effective trauma-informed care and support.
- ▶ The government ministers and members of parliament who are responsible for approving budgets for the Department of Social Development, Department of Health and Department of Basic Education; and MEC's responsible for provincial budgets, need to understand the importance of funding violence prevention – and what is required. Violence prevention should be a non-negotiable budget item.
- ▶ An institution or body of researchers, possibly through the gender-based violence coordinating structure or National Crime and Violence Prevention Centre as envisaged in the White Paper on Safety and Security, must develop a research agenda that supports policy relevant, priority-driven investment in violence prevention. Credible indicators must be developed that show the severity of the problem and can be used to monitor progress.

Introduction

Breaking deeply entrenched intergenerational cycles of interpersonal violence and preventing further occurrence is a complex and long-term undertaking. This is particularly the case in South Africa where extremely high levels of interpersonal violence, entrenched patriarchal norms, inequality, unemployment and poverty increase the risk factors for physical and emotional violence at an individual and community level.¹

The relationship between poverty and particular forms of violence such as sexual violence and intimate partner violence is complicated,² but there is a wealth of evidence that shows that children from poor households 'are significantly more likely to experience [physical or emotional] violence in some form, as well as eventually perpetrate it'.³ Though poverty alone is often thought to predict violence, decades of international crime and economic data have shown that inequality and exclusion, associated with unequal distribution of economic, political and social resources in urban contexts, intersect with poverty to precipitate violence.⁴

This being the case, if South Africa is to reduce violence in the long term, poverty and inequality must be decreased. But reducing poverty and inequality alone will not be enough to undo the effects of the normalisation of the use of physical and emotional violence in South Africa, nor the long-term harm to generations of families caused by apartheid.⁵ This will require specific actions and focus at all levels: societal, community, family and individual; and an application of the evidence of which kinds of interventions, and in which combinations, can effectively reduce the perpetration of violence and victimisation.

Household poverty may be a key reason that children experience abuse and, in turn, common mental disorders in young adulthood. Structural interventions for food security, employment, and parenting are essential to break the intergenerational nexus of poverty, trauma, and health in peri-urban settings.⁶

To achieve change in harmful patriarchal norms, high levels of trauma and associated poor mental health, and family dysfunction, all of which support and increase the use of

physical violence, will require the combined concerted effort of all levels, departments and agencies of government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international organisations and development partners, donors, business and the research community. No sector can do this alone.

In South Africa we face this challenge in the context of political uncertainty and contestation, and a weak economy that places severe constraints on government spending.

The profound impact of violence on South Africa's growth and development, and on our achievement of both local and global development goals, is not recognised and accepted by all political formations in the country; nor has it successfully translated into political and policy prioritisation or action. It is the intention of the authors of this document to contribute to increasing political and societal commitment to reducing and preventing violence in our country.

Evidence shows that children from poor households are more likely to experience violence

The Dialogue Forum for Evidence-Based Programmes to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children ('the Dialogue Forum') brings together researchers, community-based organisations, government departments and other stakeholders in a long-term process aimed at building relationships across sectors and enabling the use of evidence to inform the scale-up of programmes to prevent violence in South Africa.

The Dialogue Forum has identified six factors that stand in the way of effectively preventing interpersonal violence in South Africa. This policy brief explores these factors and suggests how they might be overcome. In doing so we haven't addressed the critical and essential efforts that focus on reducing unemployment, poverty and inequality. These are the focus of a range of existing policies, actions and interventions in South Africa. Here we are concerned specifically with factors that stand in the way of preventing interpersonal violence. These are:

- A lack of coherence and agreement about what constitutes violence prevention.
- A lack of knowledge about existing violence prevention interventions and programmes.

- A lack of agreement on what interventions should be prioritised for implementation.
- A workforce in need of healing.
- Inappropriate resource allocation.
- A lack of knowledge about how to scale up interventions that work.

We discuss these in more detail below.

What stands in the way of preventing violence in South Africa: problems and solutions

1. A lack of coherence and agreement about what constitutes violence prevention

Violence has many drivers and harmful effects. It manifests in many forms with the most evident being murder, assault, robbery and rape. Some forms of violence prevention, such as preventing intimate partner violence, rape and violence against children, are the focus of organised but disconnected groups, creating 'silos' of action and advocacy.

Primary violence prevention can have positive effects on education, mental and physical health

This may misrepresent the close relationship between the different forms of violence experienced across the life course, and the importance of primary prevention in reducing multiple forms of violence.

Many terms are used to refer to the different forms of violence. These terms include gender-based violence, femicide (an extreme form of gender-based violence), violence against women, violence against children, and so on.

While the police, for example, may refer broadly to 'social crimes' and include in that child abuse and neglect, domestic violence and assault, people in the justice and human rights sector may speak of specific forms of violence against children, such as child sexual exploitation (a term the police do not use at all). Researchers and gender activists will speak about sexual and gender-based violence. This causes confusion.

In addition, different groups do not always agree on what violence is; who to define as 'victim' and 'perpetrator'; or how to respond to each of these.

There isn't agreement across South African society that violence is as important an issue as poverty, unemployment and inequality. The causal links between poverty, inequality and violence are not recognised, nor are they clearly articulated.

As a result, preventing and reducing violence systematically has not been prioritised in public discourse, policy and budgeting processes.⁷

There is also a lack of appreciation and understanding among politicians, within some government departments, and among citizens, that primary prevention interventions such as positive parenting programmes or gender-norm changing programmes can have positive effects – not only on levels of violence, but also on mental and physical health and educational outcomes.

Recommendation: A group such as the Dialogue Forum or an institutionalised coordinating structure (such as the coordinating body mandated by the 2018 Presidential Summit on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide) could bring together representatives from all relevant government departments, the research community and community-based organisations to standardise key definitions and develop a language and vision for a violence-free society.

This should be shared across sectors, and used to advocate for systematic (not programmatic) approaches to preventing and reducing violence. This should include offering a language and terms for violence prevention and safety that enable people and organisations outside of the 'violence prevention sector' to understand the role they can play in preventing violence in communities.

A simple and clear articulation of the factors that contribute to different forms of violence, and how these can be addressed, is essential for provincial and local government and communities to be able to develop safety plans that address the risk factors for violence, such as is envisaged by the White Paper on Safety and Security.⁸

2. A lack of knowledge about existing violence prevention interventions and programmes

It is essential to document, and acknowledge, the work that has already been done, and the services and

programmes that already exist in South Africa to prevent and respond to violence. This knowledge and experience provides a basis from which to scale up, or alter and review, approaches where needed.

Evaluation and verification of what is already being done, by whom, where and how, and ongoing assessments of whether these are working and why they work or have failed, is critical. If this is not done there is a risk that efforts will be duplicated and limited resources wasted.

Context matters – not all communities face the same levels of violence or have the same needs

There is no comprehensive national, provincial or local database or assessment of existing services, systems and structures to prevent and respond to violence. There are also no methodologies for comparing their relative effectiveness, nor simple measures and indicators, that can be shared by government departments and NGOs against which to measure the impact of policies and interventions. And there is no up-to-date, publicly accessible national database of NGOs that clearly defines the nature and effectiveness of services provided.

This makes it difficult to assess where there are services that could be strengthened, or where there are gaps. This is particularly important because NGOs (also called non-profit organisations or community-based organisations) 'are responsible for running more than 98 per cent of the social welfare facilities available in the country and attending to more than 71 per cent of clients'.⁹

Recommendation: A national audit of violence prevention and response services and programmes delivered both by the state and NGOs should be commissioned or undertaken by the Department of Social Development. The resulting database should identify the types of services and programmes delivered by government and NGOs in each locality. It should identify indicators of impact, and detail who the beneficiaries are.

The database should be publicly accessible and should be maintained by an appropriate body such as the National Crime [and Violence] Prevention Centre described by the White Paper on Safety and Security¹⁰ or the coordinating structure mentioned in the declaration

from the Presidential Summit on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide.¹¹ This database should inform decisions about where services and programmes are required and how resources should be allocated.

3. A lack of agreement on what interventions should be prioritised for implementation

There is no clearly articulated agreement across sectors about what combination of evidence-based programmes and services, systems and structures are needed to respond to and prevent violence.

There is also no common understanding or agreement about what constitutes sufficient evidence of effect; or which types of programmes and interventions are best suited for implementation by government or by NGOs. In addition, there is limited data on the costs and resources needed to deliver these services at scale.¹² Further, not all communities face the same levels of violence or have the same needs.

A methodology or set of criteria for determining the basket of services essential for responding to and preventing violence in different settings is required. Further, as indicated in the report assessing the costs of implementing the Nawongo judgment,¹³ there is a need to ensure that the services funded by the government are clearly and consistently named and identified (with norms and standards for delivery) in national and provincial budgets. These must align with the services that are identified as essential to preventing violence (including child abuse and neglect, domestic violence and sexual violence).

Recommendation: A multi-sectoral group with diverse knowledge and expertise needs to work closely with a relevant government structure to develop and identify at first a small number of multi-faceted programmes and services essential to responding to and preventing violence (see the case study below). The coordinating structure mandated by the declaration from the Presidential Summit on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide¹⁴ or the National Crime [and Violence] Prevention Centre may be appropriate bodies (once established) to take this work further. The essential services identified will need to be assessed and revisited at least every five years to ensure alignment with government's Medium Term Strategic Framework and with changing contexts in South Africa.

4. A workforce in need of healing

Government officials at all levels, and front-line staff working for NGOs, are affected by exposure to violence, whether in communities where they work and live or in their own homes and workplaces. This impacts their ability and willingness to provide caring services. It also affects productivity and absenteeism.

Their own inequitable gender norms and normalised views of violence also negatively impact services and decision making at all levels.¹⁵ For example, a study on post-rape care found many service providers displayed symptoms of burnout and compassion fatigue, maintaining a detached, business-like demeanour throughout their consultation with a survivor. This significantly limited compassion and empathy between provider and survivor.¹⁶

Trauma and violence affect the economy, reduce productivity and increase absenteeism

Government officials, including police officers, teachers, nurses, social workers, and those who provide services on behalf of government, such as community-health workers, auxiliary social workers and child- and youth care workers, need to be well-managed and to work in supportive, caring environments. They also need support to address their own traumas. Meaningful reflective supervision provides an opportunity to hear the needs of staff. Such supervision is not purely administrative, and should be trauma-informed.

Violence and trauma also impact the private sector workforce in South Africa. Victims of family violence and crime are unable to work productively, are likely to miss work and their physical and mental health are impacted.

Addressing the need for effective prevention and response should not only be confined to the delivery of services and programmes at community level (which is essential), but should prioritise all working environments. After all, according to the Statistics South Africa quarterly labour force survey from July 2018, an estimated 63.3% of people of working age are employed.¹⁷

Given the critical moment of intervention opportunity afforded by the first 1 000 days of life, specific attention should be paid to service employees who themselves are pregnant or are caregivers of young children, or who are working with pregnant women and caregivers of young children at both facility and community level.

Such front-line staff need empathetic interpersonal experiences themselves to be able to provide emotionally safe and supportive engagements with their clients. The relationship support role of community health worker home visitors within the first 1 000 days is currently grossly undervalued and under-resourced.

NGOs RUN

> 98%

OF SOCIAL WELFARE
SERVICES IN SA

Viewing the private sector and the public sector as mechanisms for scaling up prevention programmes and interventions (such as family violence prevention programmes, parenting programmes and programmes that address trauma) has several possible advantages. People are easier to reach in their working environments than in communities and the positive impact on service delivery and productivity could be enormous.

In addition, the funding for programme delivery could come from existing staff wellness budgets, or alternative sources, which wouldn't place pressure on the already scarce resources available for community-based programmes and services. Workplaces would also offer a good setting for testing such interventions as participant retention is likely to be higher than in community settings.

Recommendation: This work is transformative. Service providers at all levels need tools and programmes to address their own mental health and well-being. They also require support to build awareness of how their own trauma and violence exposure plays out in their lives. This should be built in or facilitated by the employer as a commitment to staff well-being.

Front-line staff delivering health and social services in communities will need pre-service and in-service training and ongoing support to be able to deliver effective trauma-informed care and support. Healing is not a once-off event.

This recommendation will need to be tested and further developed. Doing so will require input from researchers, content experts, practitioners and representatives from the private and public sectors. A sub-committee from the Dialogue Forum could be established to explore this further.

5. Inappropriate resource allocation

Government funding of social services is inadequate to ensure sustainable quality services are available where they are needed. In addition, research by Cornerstone Economic Research has found that there are 'substantial inequalities in [provincial social welfare] spending, with the Western Cape averaging R622 per poor person and Limpopo averaging only R220'.¹⁸

The current government funding model for social welfare services partially funds services, whereas it should cover

the full cost of these services. The status quo assumes that those providing social services have access to additional resources to cover the shortfall of the true cost of the services provided.

This model is very different to the one government uses for infrastructure development and other basic services, where government pays service providers full costs plus profit. This model needs to be reconsidered if South Africa is to deal with inequality, poverty and violence.

NGOs and community-based organisations that deliver services aimed at preventing violence must be funded in a reliable, predictable, consistent and sustainable way. Their constant struggle for survival undermines their effectiveness and their ability to attract and retain good staff members. Most importantly it compromises services to communities that need them.

Violence prevention programmes need to reach people in the workplace

This is a huge disservice to poor households who rely on NGOs for development and welfare services. It also creates the basis for conflict and tension between the government (particularly the Department of Social Development) and NGOs that subsidise government services. This fraught relationship results in a lack of effective collaboration between the sectors.

NGOs and community-based organisations work with victims and in communities that face multiple adversities (including violence), while at the same time the organisations themselves struggle to survive. As a consequence, NGOs report feeling victimised, devalued and not viewed by other entities as competent, hard-working, skilled organisations that offer high-value services to communities.

Further, due to the limited resources and a lack of perceived value, many NGOs view each other as adversaries or competitors. As a result, opportunities for effective cooperation and collaboration are limited. This stands in the way of efforts to scale up effective interventions and the cooperation necessary between the departments (especially the Department of Social Development and South African Police Service) and NGOs in dealing with individual cases.

NGOs have also not yet identified what are considered core services or core elements of select services that are essential for preventing and responding to violence, and non-core services (or elements of services) that may be necessary, but not critical. This is an important step in the allocation of resources debate.

As the Nawongo judgment emphasised, the government has an obligation to fully fund the reasonable core costs of delivering services so as to enable NGOs to deliver services in accordance with the prescribed norms and standards applicable to the service.

Recommendation: Addressing the funding shortfall and inequalities for prevention services requires effective advocacy to ensure that the ministers and members of parliament who are responsible for approving budgets for the Department of Social Development, Department of Health and Department of Basic Education, and members of the executive council responsible for provincial budgets, understand the importance of funding violence prevention, and what is required.

A focused advocacy campaign should be undertaken by a consortium of NGOs, government officials and researchers to inform members of the executive council and members of parliament. Such a campaign would need to ensure that in the face of a difficult fiscal environment where officials need to weigh up different programmes, funds for violence prevention are not cut or diverted.

Government ministers must understand the importance of funding violence prevention

Prevention programmes are easily cut to fund 'higher' priority areas, because they are less visible and won't be missed in the short term. Recommendations from the Nawongo performance and expenditure review¹⁹ stated the possibility of ring-fencing a fixed percentage of the provincial Department of Social Development budget for violence prevention programmes.

Violence prevention should become a non-negotiable budget item, much like the provision of disinfectant

at a health care facility. Accountability is necessary to ensure that such funds are actually spent on prevention. Advocacy alone is not sufficient. The Government Technical Advisory Centre is in the process of producing a series of reports that assess the impact of the Nawongo judgment and recommending how the requirements of the judgment can be financed.

Researchers and practitioners need to support this process and offer input to inform the recommendations. A sub-committee of the Dialogue Forum could be established to support the process.

6. A lack of knowledge about how to scale up interventions that work

The evidence for what works to reduce risk factors for violence against women and children is growing. South Africa is at the forefront of research on this issue, particularly on what works to prevent violence against women and children. For example, efforts are under way to scale up evidence-based positive parenting programmes that have been developed and rigorously evaluated in South Africa,²⁰ and in other low- and middle-income countries.

Through this, different mechanisms for scale are being tested which will show whether it is possible and effective for state-employed social workers to deliver parenting programmes, and how that's different from when they are delivered by NGOs or child and youth care workers.

A multisectoral group has developed principles for implementation research in South Africa. These could guide research to develop our understanding of how to assess what is needed to effectively respond to contextual differences in the implementation of evidence-based violence prevention programmes.²¹

That said, violence prevention is a nascent field, and South African researchers, government officials and practitioners from the NGO sector will need to work together to learn more about implementing violence prevention programmes in different community contexts. Here the effect of researcher oversight of a programme and its implementation is not as strong as it is in evaluative research such as randomised controlled trials.

Recommendation: An institution or body of researchers, possibly through the national gender-based violence coordinating structure or National Crime [and Violence] Prevention Centre as envisaged in the White Paper on Safety and Security, must develop a research agenda that supports policy-relevant, priority-driven investment in implementation science for violence prevention along with the development of credible indicators.

These include clear measures that show the severity of the problem, and that can be used to monitor progress (i.e. the size of the burden relative to other problems, as indicated by objective measures). This work could be informed by the database of services and programmes recommended above showing

where programmes are being delivered and which require evidence of effect.

Violence impacts mental health, and also increases the likelihood of substance abuse and other risky behaviours

South Africa, through one of the structures mentioned above, should also determine criteria for prioritising where new programmes and interventions should be placed; where existing services should be augmented; and how to effectively and sustainably support the implementation of programmes to prevent violence.

Case study: The intersection between violence against women and children

This is a real case experienced by the Seven Passes Initiative in the past six months.²²

Racial discrimination and extremely high levels of interpersonal violence have had a devastating long-term effect on South African society. The pervasiveness of violence affects everyone, but none more so than those living in conditions of poverty.²³

Domestic violence, intimate partner violence, violence against children, sexual violence and bullying are especially harmful and co-exist. Research shows that children and adults who have experienced one form of violence during the course of their lives are likely to experience other forms of violence later in life.²⁴

Violence not only impacts mental health, but also increases the likelihood of substance abuse and other risky behaviours.²⁵ In this context it is almost impossible to speak about primary prevention as interventions that occur before violence is experienced. As such our prevention and response services have to be in sync.

For example, a parent like Bianca (not her real name) who has a newborn baby and a child of

two is receiving a home visiting programme to promote good attachment to her baby. This is a primary prevention programme. However, Bianca and her two-year-old child are simultaneously experiencing violence at the hand of her partner; and both parents are using drugs and alcohol. A multi-faceted, long-term intervention is required to address this situation.

The home visiting programme will give her support, but if she is unable to leave her abusive partner because he owns the house she lives in and she has nowhere else to go, the infant attachment programme is unlikely to have a strong enough effect to overcome all the other adversities she and her children are facing. It is also unlikely to act as a protective factor for her children, preventing them from using or being the victims of violence as youths (at school) and as adults.

The challenge is that the range of programmes and services that could slowly start making a difference in her life and the lives of her partner and children are not connected or coordinated.

Her complex case is not being managed by a multi-disciplinary team (including social workers, early childhood development teachers, counsellors and doctors), as would be required.

Such a team would need to ensure that either Bianca's partner is removed from the home while solutions are sought, or that Bianca and her children have somewhere safe to go where they will be cared for while she and her partner receive counselling and treatment for substance abuse.

They also need help to develop a plan for when she and the children return home, if her partner has not moved out. When she does return home, ongoing support will be necessary to ensure that

the old patterns of behaviour do not return – or are addressed as soon as they surface.

She and her partner will need to be enrolled in positive parenting programmes to give them the skills they need to raise their children in a warm, loving, communicative way; something they may not have learnt or experienced from their own parents.

The children, in particular the older child who has been beaten by his father and mother, and who has watched his father beat and kick his mother, will himself require counselling, and will need to be enrolled in a good-quality educare facility so that he can be ready for school when he turns six. All this requires extensive, responsive, caring services that are well coordinated and well managed.

Conclusion

This discussion document is not an exhaustive assessment of the challenges and opportunities for preventing violence. Rather it is intended to stimulate further discussion and debate among donors, researchers, government departments at all levels, the private sector and practitioners to define a clear way forward for South Africa that draws and builds on the evidence of the nature and scale of the problem, and effective interventions to prevent violence. Additional factors that need consideration include:

- How to overcome policy fragmentation and incoherence.
- How to address the lack of a clear understanding of the relationship and necessary intersections between violence prevention and response.
- How to engage and incentivise the private sector to contribute to preventing violence, including through staff support and providing access to violence prevention programmes during working hours.
- The need to enable the sharing of knowledge about what is required to prevent violence at provincial and local government level, and in communities.

Notes

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