

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

CORPORATE SOUTH AFRICA MUST TAKE THE LEAD IN FIGHTING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

LINDI DLAMINI, CEO of the GBVF Response Fund, shares why corporate South Africa must partner with our most vulnerable to fight gender-based violence

The hope of ending gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) in our lifetime will require corporate South Africa to play a bigger role in the fight. The corporate sector can contribute immense financial muscle to help drive initiatives and programmes aimed at supporting victims and survivors, and can make a tangible difference in changing normalised behaviours.

An equally important reason for corporate South Africa to lead the fight is that GBVF affects the functioning of the economy – it hurts the workforce and knocks companies hard on a number of fronts. It makes no sense for companies to stand by and watch as the impact of GBVF on the lives of victims, their families and communities spreads. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), violence and harassment at work take many forms and lead to physical, psychological, sexual and economic harm.

Based on the findings of a KPMG report, *The Costly Impact of Gender-Based Violence (2022)*, and conservative estimates – GBVF costs South Africa R36-billion per year. The research, led by Professor Corné Davis from the University of Johannesburg (UJ) in collaboration with Tiekie Barnard from the Shared Value Africa Initiative (SVAI) was conducted in partnership with Mid Sweden University and supported by KPMG South South Africa. It states that “judicial costs for GBV were R104-million in 2019. Considering the out-of-pocket medical costs for the GBV victims (almost R10-billion), human capital loss (R26-billion) and judicial costs (R104-million), we can conservatively

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estimate that South Africa has lost more than R36-billion in 2019 alone, due to GBV. This is based on the country’s estimated 0.7 per cent loss of 2019 GDP due to GBV induced human capital loss”. In short, GBVF erodes both the inputs and outputs of growth as there is an economic multiplier effect, which means that a rand lost represents more than just that rand.

As a country we need to ensure that the workforce of the future does not come from broken homes. We need to ensure there is enough capacitation and resources to respond to calls on the ground for change so that women and children can be the building blocks of society.

A UNITED EFFORT

Recent work by the ILO to implement the first international treaty on violence and harassment in the world is an important step in helping limit this impact. The ILO’s International Labour Conference adopted the ILO Convention No. 190 (C190), and on 30 November 2021, South Africa became the 10th member state of the ILO to ratify

C190. This means it is no longer just a moral expectation, but an obligation for companies to join this fight.

The C190 aims to eliminate all forms of harassment in the workplace, including virtual workplaces, and advocates for the implementation of inclusive and intersectional policies and procedures that protect workers’ rights to freedom from harassment and violence in the world of work.

A united front between the public and private sectors is needed if we ever hope to eradicate GBVF in our lifetimes.

Funding by forward-thinking corporates is already proving beneficial in our initiatives at the GBVF Response Fund, showing what can be done if the commitment is there. In just over a year, many companies have come forward to support and endorse our work, which aims to drive the implementation of the National Strategic Plan (NSP) on GBVF. This plan is South Africa’s roadmap to ending GBVF. It is strategic, outcomes-based and multidimensional.

The human and economic impact of GBVF in the workplace is too costly to ignore. Improving workplace equity and fighting harassment, especially GBVF, needs to happen now, in every workplace. ■

DID YOU KNOW?

If not addressed, GBV can pose a range of business risks:

- Litigation, compensation claims and reputational damage.
- A decrease in productivity due to absenteeism, poor performance at work, and an increase in staff turnover.
- Reduced access to talent and employee retention as the fear of GBV can affect the decisions people make about where they work and with whom they work.

Source: *The Costly Impact of GBV: Private sector perceptions and realities in South Africa (2022)*.

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