

Disability abuse – the invisible pandemic

Everyday gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) affects millions of people from all parts of society around the world.

With November being National Disability Rights Awareness Month in South Africa, the GBVF Response Fund aims to bring attention to the fact that many people living with disabilities continue to be abused – many, if not most, are unable to defend themselves or speak out.

“When delving into this, the Fund was alarmed at the lack of statistics and figures available both globally, and (even less so) locally, to illustrate the extent of GBVF being perpetrated against persons living with disabilities. This in itself paints a bleak picture of what we, at the Fund, are calling the invisible pandemic,” says Tshepo Sefotlhelo, Executive Head: Marketing & Communication of the GBVF Response Fund.

While there is limited data available in a local context, the Fund urges South Africa to consider the following:

- According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), persons with disabilities make up around 15% of the world's population, and children with disabilities are three times more likely to face violence than non-disabled children.
- A United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)-led initiative states that between 40% and 68% of young women with disabilities experience sexual violence before the age of eighteen.
- Says disabilityjustice.org, when compared to the general population, people with developmental disabilities are at the greatest risk (four to ten times more likely to be abused); and
- Tend to be abused more frequently.
- Are abused for longer periods of time.
- Are less likely to access the justice system.
- Are more likely to be abused by a caregiver or someone they know (often repeatedly).
- Are more likely to remain in abusive situations.

“As a society we should find our way back to the ethos and values of Ubuntu! Today we ask you, South Africa, to check on the people in your life living with disabilities, to make sure that they are not being violated and are being treated fairly. To the abusers we say, being exposed to, or being responsible for the care of persons living with disabilities does not give you permission to take advantage of them, nor does it revoke their rights. They already feel isolated and need to be able to depend on you. Any form of violence is preventable - don't do it,” concludes Sefotlhelo.



Tshepo Sefotlhelo.