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GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) EPIDEMIC IN SOUTH AFRICA AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF WOMEN

After the coronavirus pandemic, our President characterised gender-based violence (GBV) in our country as a “second pandemic”. Statistics and police reports are worrying and incomplete as many victims don’t report their abuse. Despite the lack of accurate statistics, it’s evident that the rates are high, both for women and for THE LGBTIQIA+ community.

The campaigns to bring GBV to an end in South Africa have been relentless. However, despite countless attempts, there has been little to no change thus far with SA having been framed as ‘the destination of femicide’, where more than 2,700 women were murdered between 2000 and 2021, a number that has surely increased all as a result of GBV. That’s one woman every three hours. Femicide is defined as sex-based hate crime by the World Health Organisation as “the intentional murder of women because they are women”. It’s the most extreme manifestation of GBV, and is widely prevalent in South Africa, not only with

regards to women, but children and the gendered community.

DEFINING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence refers to any act of: physical, psychological, sexual or economic violence directed against a person or group on the basis of their gender, sex or non-conformity to gender norms and stereotypes. It’s an expression of unequal power relations, underpinned by social norms and beliefs linked to dominance, power and abuse of authority, and formalised through the laws, policies and regulations of social institutions.

GBV can take many forms, including physical, psychological and sexual violence, as well as social violence which cuts survivors off from their communities or social groups, and economic violence, which results in economic deprivation. Further examples of GBV against women include domestic violence, sex-based harassment, female genital mutilation, forced marriages or online violence.

Gender Based Violence is regarded as a human rights violation and a major barrier to achieving gender equality as well as an obstacle to a country’s development. GBV does not discriminate nor does it confine itself to specific communities, socio-economic standing or income level. Any person of any race, age, gender, sexual orientation or religion can be a perpetrator, victim or survivor of GBV.

WHAT ARE THE FACTORS EXACERBATING GBV?

These include:

- Lack of education
- History of exposure to GBV - whether personal experience or witnessing GBV
- An ineffective justice system which does not deter perpetrators from re-offending.

GBV AND MENTAL HEALTH

Girls, women, and gender diverse people experience a wide range of explicit and implicit, nuanced, subtle instances of harassing behaviours,

