

**GENDER BASED VIOLENCE  
& THE PRIVATE SECTOR**



**THE NATIONAL BUSINESS INITIATIVE (NBI) AND SHARED  
VALUE AFRICA INITIATIVE (SVAI):  
JOINT GBVF DIALOGUE REPORT  
MAY 2020**

*This report was compiled by Shireen Motara and Xena Scullard of Tara Transform*

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## 1. DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Gender** refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context.

**Gender Non-Conforming Person** refers to a person whose behaviour or appearance does not conform to prevailing cultural and social expectations of gender. Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Trans-sexual and queer identities (LGBTQI+) are all examples of gender non-conformity.

**Gender-Based Violence (GBVF)** is described as physical, sexual, emotional, financial or structural violence perpetrated against women and gender non-conforming persons. GBVF can be perpetrated by intimate partners, acquaintances, strangers and institutions. GBVF can happen in the private or public sphere, in kitchens and bedrooms to streets and in boardrooms, anywhere.

**Structural Violence** refers to a form of violence wherein some social structure or social institution may harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. Inequality and the gender pay gap may be examples of structural violence perpetrated against women and gender non-conforming persons by institutions such as business and government.

**Drivers of GBVF** refers to the factors in society that normalise and give rise to GBVF. There is no single cause of violence in South Africa. Rather, several risk factors come together in different ways, depending on context, to enable violence. The most significant risk factors include social and economic inequality, poverty, frustrated masculinity, lack of social cohesion, lack of social and economic mobility particularly for women and other vulnerable groups of people.

**Gender Equality** is the state of equal ease of access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender, including economic participation and decision-making; and the state of valuing different behaviours, aspirations and needs equally, regardless of gender.

## 2 MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERS

“Business and society are interdependent; we cannot operate a successful business without a healthy society.”



**Tiekie Barnard – CEO, Shared Value Africa Initiative**

We need to re-examine policies and programmes that centre around Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) in society, the workplace and our everyday lives. We have a National Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Strategic Plan that can be used as a great starting point for any private sector organisation to align with and engage around. No longer can we keep quiet, turn a blind eye or ignore the shame that we carry as a country. We as a collective have the responsibility and power to do something. I want to urge our CEOs to address the prevention of GBVF and create strong internal policies as part of the overall organisational strategy. A willingness to fight GBVF must reverberate throughout our boardrooms.

“It is important for business to contribute to socio-economic development and empower those who are marginalised through our networks.”



**Joanne Yawitch – CEO, National Business Initiative**

The National Business Initiative (NBI) was established 25 years ago with the purpose of finding ways for business and society to engage in a responsible manner. It is imperative that we work together to ensure positive outcomes for South Africa. Gender-Based Violence requires us to examine how leadership at every level is responding to this issue as well as how we employ a zero-tolerance stance to address this topic more broadly in society.

### 3 INTRODUCTION

“There is a definite need to work toward solution-based initiatives in response to GBVF and inequality.”  
- Tiekie Barnard

South Africa holds the shameful distinction of being one of the most unsafe countries in the world to be a woman or gender non-conforming person. We have amongst the highest rates of intimate partner violence, rape and sexual violence—suggesting this pervasive issue is hyperendemic. COVID-19 has further exacerbated these violent realities through lockdown measures implemented by the South African Government. Now more than ever, businesses are forced to take stock of how GBVF impacts their bottom line and the wellness of their employees within broader society.

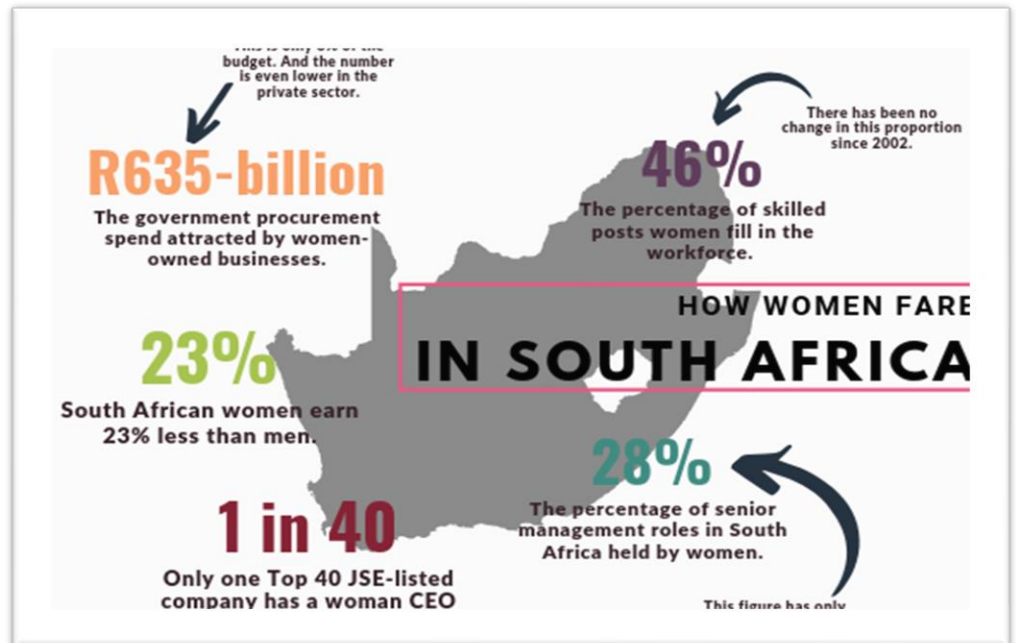
In response to these national realities, the NBI and the SVAI have partnered in a joint effort, to encourage more meaningful institutional responses from the private sector and its leadership. This research partnership is founded upon three objectives:

- To understand the levels of awareness held within businesses around issues linked to GBVF.
- To engage in conversation with business leaders to establish what responses there are institutionally, focused on broader society in relation to GBVF.
- To fund baseline research in order to build and generate private sector responses to GBVF in the face of COVID-19.

With the intension of expanding on this shared vision, the partnership between NBI and SVAI was formed to undertake a baseline study with business leaders, between April and June 2020. Data gathered from an online survey and a series of webinars, which were conducted with private sector leaders, has culminated in a set of findings and recommendations. The SVAI and the NBI present the following report to share the findings and recommendations of this project.

## 4. WHY IS GBVF OUR BUSINESS?

The evidence and numbers are staggering when it comes to the impact of Gender-Based Violence & Femicide on the economy and businesses themselves.



- A 2014 study by KPMG estimated that GBVF, and in particular violence against women, cost the South African economy a minimum of between R28.4 billion and R42.4 billion, or between 0.9% and 1.3% of gross domestic product (GDP) in the year 2012/2013.
- According to the UCT Graduate School of Business, GBVF contributes to absenteeism and low productivity, from a corporate financial risk perspective. In addition, female victims of domestic violence have significantly lower propensities to be punctual for work or even retain employment.
- GBVF impairs employees' physical and mental health and well-being, leading to stress, anxiety, loss of self-esteem, motivation, and ultimately job loss.

## 5. FINDINGS

“Private sector needs to engage with civil society and philanthropic organisations to support our understanding and interventions on GBVF, its drivers and root causes.”  
– Webinar participant

This report incorporates the findings of the online survey and observations from discussions held during three webinars, focusing on GBVF and the private sector. The survey targeted respondents in South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya and had 29 responses from private sector organisations. Across the three webinars, there were 51 participants overall from the corporate sector in South Africa.

The survey questions are attached as Annexure A and the webinar focused on the following points of discussion:

- How can companies be supported to address GBVF and be seen to contribute to a positive social narrative in the country?
- What specific challenges do companies face in responding to GBVF?
- How can companies leverage existing HR and sustainability policies and practices to strengthen their response to GBVF?
- How can companies be supported in addressing GBVF and be seen to contribute to a positive social narrative in the country?
- What specific challenges do companies face in responding to GBVF?
- Considering the broader perception of a system that is not built to support GBVF victims and those affected by it – how does that affect responses to GBVF, as well as business engagement, for example with the GBVF Task Team initiated by Government?
- What are the capacity issues when it comes to possible solutions to supporting staff through GBVF or similar threats?
- How important is it for business to be invested in what some might see as employees’ “private lives”?

### Overview of Findings

Some noteworthy quotes from the webinars and findings from the survey are reflected below:

“It is important for every organisation to look after their biggest assets which are their people, that should be the starting point.” – Webinar participant

“Outside of the regulatory or HR system, GBVF needs to be raised by leadership, the CEO, board and investors, who should support and push for these issues.” – Webinar participant



“GBVF and wellness are usually grouped together, with few organisations highlighting GBVF separately in key communications such as newsletters or updates from the CEO. Few people feel confident to stand up and say zero tolerance to GBVF. If they do, they are making a statement to the company and create awareness that the problem exists.” – Webinar participant

“Companies have critical mass and they have power to influence GBVF. How many women since working from home have experienced difficulties because they have to look after kids and do the cooking on top of still being highly functional in terms of work deliverables. This is something that needs to be taken into account when we as the private sector are dealing with gender equality.” – Webinar participant

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**41%**

**INDICATED THAT THEIR COMPANIES DO NOT HAVE INTERNAL POLICIES RELATING TO SUPPORTING VICTIMS OR POTENTIAL VICTIMS OF GBVF**

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**72%**

**INDICATED THAT THEIR COMPANIES DO NOT HAVE ACTIVE VICTIM SUPPORT PROGRAMMES IN PLACE**

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**51.72%**

**INDICATED THAT THEIR COMPANIES DO NOT PROVIDE VICTIM SUPPORT TO GBVF SURVIVORS DURING COVID-19 LOCK DOWN.**

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## 6. GBVF SURVEY FINDINGS

“While there may be willingness from leadership to tackle GBVF and inequality, there might be challenges that organisations experience which hinder their ability to respond.” – Webinar participant

The survey was completed by 29 private sector respondents who are part of the SVAI and NBI communities. While this low response rate it is not representative, it does provide some indication of what measures the private sector is putting in place to address GBVF.

### **INTERNAL POLICIES**

Less than half (41%) of the respondents indicated that their companies do not have internal policies relating to supporting victims or potential victims of GBVF.

### **GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORTING SURVIVORS OF GBVF**

Almost half (48%) of respondents indicated that their companies do have guidelines on GBVF to support survivors or those potentially affected by GBVF.

### **ACTIVE GBVF SUPPORT PROGRAMMES, CAMPAIGNS OR ACTIVITIES**

The vast majority (72%) of respondents do not have any active GBVF programmes, activities or campaigns within their companies. Of the 28% who are running programmes, 75% of respondents' programmes have been active for more than 12 months. The majority of respondents were also unsure of whether their companies were planning any future activities.

### **FEMALE EMPLOYEES AFFECTED BY GBVF**

Most respondents (83%) were not aware of any female employee who have been affected by GBVF in their company. Similarly, the majority of respondents (83%) were also not aware of any absenteeism and impact on productivity due to GBVF.

### **GBVF SUPPORT DURING COVID-19**

While 51% of respondents confirmed that their companies do not have any GBVF support initiatives during COVID-19; just under one third were unsure if their companies offered any support.

## 7. WEBINAR SERIES FINDINGS

Key themes from the webinar discussions provide a glimpse into the gaps within responses and capacity of institutions, but also reveal the measures needed for the private sector to meaningfully and structurally respond to GBVF.

### LEADERSHIP

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Leadership revealed itself as a central theme across the webinar discussions. According to participants, leadership is a core quality needed in creating a zero-tolerance culture within companies, especially when it comes to any form of violence, whether domestic violence or sexual harassment.

Leadership is seen as a key focal area in terms of the dual issue of violence and gender inequality both inside companies through policies, practices and organisational culture, but also externally in company advertising, messaging and supply chains.

“Leadership is a critical success factor, leaders must create an understanding of the true extent of the issue of gender equality. They must take a stand by stating that this is an important issue and interrogate what organisations can do now that will contribute toward critical change.” – Webinar participant

“Do they understand and acknowledge GBVF at the Exco level? If those levels are not committed and it is not woven into your strategy, then we won’t make any meaningful progress.” – Webinar participant

### UNDERSTANDING GENDER & INEQUALITY

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Gender is not bound to only male and female but also includes other sexual orientations and gender identities. Some participants acknowledged that this narrow understanding of gender needs to be challenged in order for the private sector to adequately respond to GBVF. Inequality was raised during discussions, as a key driver of violence both inside companies and within broader society. Investing in deeper understandings of how gender and inequality intersect each other are necessary actions in responses from the private sector.

“The real challenge is addressing the underlying causes of GBVF, therefore going beyond support for victims to a preventative approach. This requires a deep understanding of our social context, inequality and social norms.”  
– Webinar participant

“There is also a need for education, as addressing GBVF requires a mindset shift. Organisations need to create safe spaces to educate and challenge these issues so that we build shared understandings of this complex issue.”  
– Webinar participant

## **CHANGING SOCIAL NORMS AND NARRATIVES**

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Discussions revealed the power of the private sector to be able to challenge norms and change narratives around GBVF and more broadly the inequalities that drive violence and discrimination. Participants referred to the critical mass that can be achieved by the private sector through action on issues like addressing the gender pay gap. Such actions from the private sector and its leadership were noted as being powerful tools to shift norms and challenge narratives around violence, gender and inequality.

“Advertising is important as a tool to challenge gender and social norms. It is a tool that is used to enter the subconscious of the viewer and can be used as a space to influence negative and harmful stereotypes. For example, why does the car have to be sold with a bikini model on the bonnet?”  
– Webinar participant

“If you experience GBVF in the workplace or are a survivor, management sees this as a mental illness, and you will be discriminated against in the workplace. This silences people in terms of seeking help and being supported by the workplace. Men too are experiencing abuse in the workplace and not speaking up because of embarrassment due to the narrative around GBVF.”  
– Webinar participant

## **A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE IS THE WAY FORWARD**

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Participant responses revealed a need and want for a community of practice. This theme speaks into the need for tools, information and capacity support for private sector leaders in order to tackle GBVF and broader issues of inequality. It was noted across the webinar series that often, leaders and companies do not know where to start, or what to do when it comes to addressing inequality and tackling GBVF.

“There are many different ways that the private sector can become involved, however there is no experience in engaging around gender-based violence and inequality. The private sector would like to do something, but they don’t know how and often the thinking is different from the development sector. A manager of a company needs straight forward thinking, what can I do now with my employees? We need to work on ideas of putting together a catalogue/guide for interventions. We need best practice guidelines to engage the private sector.”

– Webinar participant

“Commitment is needed to engage our peers on transformation and their approaches within their organisations. This is a fundamental lever that we are trying to engage at exco level. Conversation is key to building critical mass and breaking these narratives and practices. To unlock innovations that address equality and transformation.”

– Webinar participant

### **MULTI-SECTORAL COLLABORATION IS CRITICAL**

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Participants made it clear across the webinar series that none of the current actors in society may individually tackle and end GBVF or inequality, but rather a collaborative multi-sectoral approach is needed. The National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide became a tool that participants referred to as a good starting point for private sector engagement with government and NPOs. Discussions revealed the power of the private sector in terms of resources, human capacity, geographical reach and the ability to change behaviour through brand and messaging.

“We also need to link more with our CSO partners who are doing the work and have their finger on the pulse in communities.” – Webinar participant

“One important thing is that we have national direction on GBVF through the NSP. That’s a huge asset to take this issue into the private sector and how we can play our role in it.” – Webinar participant

“We have an NSP on femicide and GBVF around multi-sectoral responses to this crisis. This could be a great entry point for the private sector to engage in this initiative. See it as a tool and roadmap for your company to find a way to address GBVF and inequality.” – Webinar participant

## 8. OBSERVATIONS

There are clear gaps in awareness from the employees' perspective, regarding the existing policies and programmes within companies. This was highlighted in the high rates of "unaware" answers recorded in the data.

- According to the data and responses gathered, there is a lack of systemic and institutional safeguarding policies focused on GBVF within surveyed companies. This is illustrated in the 41% of companies which do not have policies in place focussing on GBVF & victim support, along with the 72% of companies which do not have active programmes and campaigns highlighting GBVF and victim support.
- Responses from companies to GBVF appear to be linked and tied into Human Resources or wellness functions and programmes. There are no clear institutional wide responses or cultures which promote addressing GBVF among the companies surveyed.
- The culture of silence that is pervasive in the broader society in relation to GBVF, is reflected within the private sector through the discrimination and stigmatisation practices experienced by respondents who have reported instances of violence in the workplace and within their homes.
- The low rates of zero-tolerance stances taken by leadership within the private sector indicates the lack of buy-in and attention given to this issue on an institutional level. Calls for executive leadership from the private sector have been documented as a key theme required for meaningful responses to GBVF and inequality.
- A culture of “ticking of boxes” seems to be prevalent when addressing issues of GBVF, sexual harassment and inequality within the workplace. The lack of institutionalised guidelines and interventions is apparent.
- There are high numbers of companies still not aligned with policies and practices or national guidelines such as the ILO conventions, SDGs and the Employment Equity Act. This is reflected in the data and responses received during the webinar series.
- The recorded rates of employees' awareness of instances of GBVF, or its impacts within the workplace, do not reflect the national and regional statistics recorded on GBVF. Statistics gathered from the online survey indicated that only 17.24% of employees are aware of instances of GBVF or its impacts on other employees. This indicates that due to a lack of institutional responses to GBVF, survivors may not be reporting or seeking support from the workplace.
- Despite the spike in cases of GBVF during the COVID-19 lockdown, the private sector has not taken action to ensure support for employees working from home or potentially experiencing violence outside of the workplace. Only 27% of respondents confirmed that their workplace was in fact offering additional support around GBVF, specifically during lockdown.

- A lack of understanding the key drivers of GBVF may illustrate the lack of support and direct interventions offered by the private sector in response to this scourge.
- A lack of decisive leadership on zero tolerance approaches to violence in any form, reveals itself through the lack of initiatives undertaken in response to GBVF.
- Outside of CSI initiatives, the private sector seems to be ignorant to the business case for focused initiatives advancing equality and eliminating GBVF.
- Higher levels of external support have been recorded during discussions as being needed within the private sector to guide its responses and interventions internally and externally. There may be a desire to take up this issue, but the know how seems to be lacking, as explained by majority of respondents.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish and invest in a community of practice with other stakeholders working to address GBVF.

- Partner with women's rights and other the civil society organisations to train and develop in house capacity of staff to lead on creating institutional responses to GBVF, gender equality practices and monitoring systems to ensure compliance.
- Take a strategic view of GBVF by aligning it to the company's SDG and ESG commitments and include it as a specific area in integrated reports. Ensure that the responsibility for gender and equality is held by an executive leader and features on the board's agenda. Move away from compliance diversity approaches to companywide commitment and action to address discrimination and advance inclusion and equality.
- Become an active partner with government and CS in the implementation of the NSP. Use the NSP as a guide to support company strategy and actions on addressing gender discrimination and GBVF.
- Conduct regular training and conversations led by the board or investors, which focus on inequality, GBVF and other forms of violence aimed at developing tangible actions that the company may take to respond to this issue both internally and externally.
- Understand the company's current reality. Use a diagnostic tool to accurately pinpoint the status of gender equity in your organisation. Engage employees to understand the support required and leverage employee commitment to identify change champions who can drive action at operational level.
- A provision of support services, such as legal assistance, health and social services, should be part of the organisational response to GBVF. Create an environment that enables survivors of violence to ask for help and receive meaningful and appropriate support from the company.
- Provide infrastructural support and assistance to social institutions (such as health, women's shelters and other related organisations) in their provision of services for GBVF survivors. A partnership with these organisations could also ensure that the company has support from these organisations to address GBVF.
- Examine current advertising and sales channels in order to incorporate marketing efforts that challenge gender norms, social norms and communicate the organisations zero-tolerance to GBVF.



## 10. CONCLUSION

“Ultimately, the success of our fight to end gender-based violence will require the involvement and support of our entire society. If we are serious about ending these crimes, we cannot remain silent any longer.”  
– President Cyril Ramaphosa  
(17 June 2020)

There is a clear business case for why GBVF and eradicating inequality should be central within any business strategy and operations. There is still a lot of work that needs to be done to effectively institutionalise zero tolerance practices in the face of GBVF. Equally, there are many opportunities to learn, partner, challenge and lead this necessary shift in thinking and ways of working.

Throughout the webinars, attendees ranged from the private sector, academia as well as civil society and development agencies. These decidedly small groups were a setting for sharing of insights and ideas around opportunities for intervention by all sectors. A direct interest was expressed for the development of information and tools on how employers and employees could act in response to GBVF. (A Resource Document was shared with all attendees as a first step to empowering attendees to address this issue in their respective organisations.) There was a collective appreciation of the gravity of the issue of GBVF and willingness and commitment to participate in its prevention.

It is evident in the baseline research presented here, that there is a need for multi-stakeholder processes if real change on a deeper level is to be delivered.

Businesses are founded and driven by people, the majority of whom are women in most cases. We have begun to see many companies and brands include GBVF and or gender equality campaigns into their marketing and branding efforts. The power that business holds to influence perceptions and behaviours within broader society are underestimated and unexplored. There is so much more that can be done by the private sector in relation to addressing GBVF and inequality both internally and in wider society.

## **Annexure A: GBVF SURVEY QUESTIONS**

1. What Country are you based in?
2. Estimated no of employees in your organisation?
3. Estimated number of female employees?
4. Average age of female employees?
5. Please indicate the sector your organisation represents
6. Does your company have any internal policies relating to supporting victims or potential victims of GBVF?
7. Does your company have guidelines for supporting victims or potential victims of GBVF?
8. Does your company have any active GBVF victim support programmes, activities or campaigns?
9. How long have they been running?
10. Are there any being planned?
11. Are you aware of any employees (male or female) who have been affected by any form of GBVF?
12. Are you aware of any absenteeism or impact on productivity due to GBVF?
13. Did or does your organisation provide any GBVF victim support programmes activities during COVID-19?