

Exploring the Impact of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa:

# A Partnership Between the University of Johannesburg and Mid Sweden University



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By Corné Davis

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In 2021, Prof. Corné Davis, from the Department of Strategic Communication at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), approached KPMG South Africa regarding the publication of an updated research report on the cost of gender-based violence (GBV) to the South African economy, following a frequently quoted report titled 'Too Costly to Ignore – The Economic Impact of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa'. A memorandum of

agreement (MOA) was signed between UJ, Shared Value Africa Initiative, and KPMG South Africa to conduct research and to publish a new GBV report for South Africa. In the 2014 KPMG report, Prof. Koustuv Dalal of Mid Sweden University was cited with reference to the cost estimations he had done during a study in KwaZulu-Natal in 2011. Prof. Davis contacted Prof. Dalal by email to invite him to participate in the study.

On 11 March 2020, President Ramaphosa published the National Strategic Plan to address GBV in South Africa in which he called on the private sector multiple times to address GBV. At that time, no study had been conducted to determine the views of the private sector on GBV. Hence, this new research was conceptualised. The study used three methodologies, which were interviews with leaders in private sector organisations in South Africa (mostly chief executive officers), an employee perception survey, and a secondary data analysis for the estimation of the cost of GBV to the South African economy. At that time, there was little evidence to suggest that GBV was being addressed as an issue that affects employees in the private sector in South Africa (Davis, 2020).

First, interviews were held with leaders in private sector organisations in South Africa to determine: a) their awareness of the prevalence and impact of GBV in South Africa; b) where they would position the issue of GBV within their organisational framework; c) what they thought their employees expected them to do regarding GBV support and intervention; and d) whether they intended to address GBV in some way.

Second, a survey instrument was developed in collaboration with Dr Kuhudzai, an expert statistician at UJ. The survey was distributed among all networks, including the stakeholders of the South African research partners, and was also shared on LinkedIn. The aim of the survey was to determine what employees' knowledge, perceptions, beliefs, and recommendations were

pertaining to GBV and how it should be addressed by private sector organisations in South Africa. The survey ran for 10 months and a total of 2,270 responses were used for analysis. Although this was not a representative study, responses were received from all provinces in South Africa and included all language groups. The number was significant enough to provide some insight into employees' perceptions. Prof. Dalal had previously done research in 52 countries, with many of the studies focused on GBV. He had also been ranked as the top health economist in the world and is familiar with South Africa from his previous research. He used local and global figures to estimate the current cost of GBV to the South African economy with the secondary data obtained from the World Bank and the World Health Organisation. He made a strong recommendation for a study to be conducted among GBV victims to arrive at a more accurate figure, given that most cases of GBV in South Africa are never reported to the police.

#### Release of the research

Prof. Dalal visited South Africa from 8 to 18 August 2022 to attend the release of the research report at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). Prof. Dalal was welcomed at UJ Auckland Park Campus on 10 August 2022 by the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Prof. Kammila Naidoo. Prof. Dalal presented a public lecture that was well attended by enthusiastic students who were keen to learn about some of the successful GBV interventions he had been involved in previously.



**Image 1: Prof. Koustuv Dalal, Prof. Corné Davis and Dr Anesu Kuhudzai (the research team)**

The event at the JSE was attended by various stakeholders, including some of the participating private sector organisations, non-governmental organisations, and other stakeholders. Several interviews were held on television and radio channels and most of the major newspapers in South Africa covered the event. The research report was endorsed by Prof. Mervyn King, who is well known for the King Reports on corporate governance and who authored the foreword, as well as UJ Chancellor Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, who has also been the executive director of UN Women, with a rank of under-secretary-general of the UN.

The report showed that leaders in the private sector were aware that GBV was a problem in South Africa, but their awareness of how it affected their employees was less apparent. It was also apparent from leaders' responses that they were aware that gender inequality persisted in South Africa, and they acknowledged that inequality was a key driver of GBV. Many agreed that addressing GBV should be included in their organisation's strategy as well as organisational policies. Many leaders acknowledged that GBV was an issue that affected employee wellbeing and that it required a more holistic approach as it also affected employees' inner circles. Leaders who did not know much detail about GBV were provided with some statistics, including the fact that intimate partner violence statistics in South Africa are six times higher than the global average, and that most cases of GBV are never reported to the police. They were also informed that a very high number of GBV distress calls received by the TEARS Foundation's Help-at-your-fingertips line were made from affluent areas in South Africa (Davis and Meerkotter, 2017).

### Findings of the research

The findings from the employee perception study were most insightful. The sample population was skewed towards higher education levels, ranging from diplomas to doctorate qualifications. There were several key findings. First, most of the sample was aware of the prevalence of the different kinds of GBV being perpetrated in South Africa. Most respondents strongly agreed that GBV had to be addressed in the workplace, because of its high prevalence in South Africa. Surprisingly, a significant number of employees felt that perpetrators of GBV also needed

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support, given that children who were exposed to or experienced GBV in their lives were far more likely to become either victims or perpetrators or both. Employees also felt that patriarchy was a key driver of GBV and that it was closely linked to inequality and the subordination of women across cultures, with 77% holding the view that GBV was a main contributor to the lack of career progress for women in South Africa. Several employees expressed their dismay at the South African government's systemic failures, ranging from inadequate police services to the lack of support structures and appalling conviction rates for GBV crimes. They also thought that private sector organisations should include how they were addressing GBV in their annual Economic Social and Governance (ESG) reports to demonstrate their commitment to addressing GBV in South Africa.

The health economy stream of the research revealed concerning findings, showing that among the 789,000 employees in the organisations included in the study, the crude estimate was that approximately 208,000 female employees would have experienced some kind of GBV in their lifetime. It was pointed out that GBV necessarily impacts victims' performance at work and hence the profitability of the company. A figure in the study also shows how the disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) have increased over the past 10 years, based on the secondary data obtained from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Bank. DALYs refer to years of life lost because of exposure to and experience of GBV. The human capital approach was used for the cost estimation of

GBV in South Africa, referring to health, knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic wellbeing (Davis, Kuhudzai and Dalal, 2022). The cost estimation included the out-of-pocket (OOP) expenditure of individuals, as well as loss of productivity, and the DALYs for South Africa in 2019 was estimated at 289,800, while the OOP expenditure for GBV victims was estimated at approximately R10 billion per annum. Also considering other costs, such as medical practitioners and judicial expenditure, a loss of more than R36 billion to GDP in 2019 alone was estimated for South Africa. The report acknowledged that these estimations may not be accurate, and that primary research had to be conducted to arrive at more accurate cost estimations.

The report made a number of recommendations, starting with an appeal to business leaders to speak out against gender inequality in the workplace and to address issues such as gender discrimination, while providing more support to enable women's empowerment. The report reiterated the importance of subscribing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with specific reference to SDG 5, which aims to achieve gender equality. It was also recommended that organisations should enable complaint and response mechanisms that could also help to address the silence that perpetuated GBV. Private sector organisations should act to prevent GBV within the company through strategy, HR-led policies, systems, awareness training, communication and dialogue.

### Further research

Further research was done during Prof. Dalal's visit. The first engagement was in East London in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. A focus group discussion was held with a group of public services representatives and other GBV support service providers to gather their views on why the GBV statistics for South Africa are so high. Interviews were also conducted and conversations held with GBV support service providers in the city of Cape Town in the Western Cape province. Most interviews were held in Umhlanga in KwaZulu-Natal, where participants included GBV activists, a team of medical practitioners, public health officials, and the National Prosecuting Authority. The last set of data was collected from public service providers in Welkom

in the Free State province. These findings will be submitted for publication shortly.

Since Prof. Dalal's visit to South Africa, he has been appointed Distinguished Visiting Professor at UJ, and an MOU between UJ and Mid Sweden University has been signed. Prof. Dalal will visit UJ again in 2023 to continue with our GBV research and, hopefully, to attend the release of our next national GBV research report on victim profiling in collaboration with the TEARS Foundation. The current research will show the number of GBV distress calls that were made to the TEARS helpline, and where these calls were made from. It will also provide very specific information about call patterns, including population parameters for the various cities and suburbs in South Africa. Another data stream in this study will profile GBV victims in terms of their conversations with TEARS support staff. These data sets will also be linked to police records and statistics published by the South African government.

The collaboration so far has been successful, and hopefully the publication of the forthcoming reports will gather support for the funding of GBV intervention programmes that are so critical for South Africa. The impact of the GBV research has been recognised as Prof. Davis won the Faculty of Humanities Dean's award for 2022 and won the Woman of Stature award for women in education, as well as the overall Woman of Stature award for South Africa. Considering the global impact of GBV, further collaboration between South African and Swedish universities to address GBV is recommended.

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