

The effectiveness of the 16 Days of Activism of No Violence Against Women and Children programme in the prevention of gender-based violence in South Africa

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Abstract: The 16 Days of Activism of No Violence Against Women and Children (herein referred to as the 16 Days of Activism) is an international prevention programme for No Violence Against Women and Children, initiated in 1991 and implemented in South Africa in 1998. The annual programme runs from 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) to 10 December (International Human Rights Day), encompassing key observances like World AIDS Day and International Day for People with Disabilities. Gender-based violence is perpetuated by a patriarchal system where men abuse power and positions of authority to control women and children. Despite the ongoing implementation of the 16 Days of Activism programme in South Africa, the results are minimal and therefore ineffective. The question thus becomes, has this programme been evaluated since its inception? The high numbers of gender-based violence cases, especially during COVID-19, from the Gender-Based Violence Command Centre (GBVCC) as well as South African Police Services (SAPS) regarding 30 national hotspots areas released in 2020, confirm the ineffectiveness of the programme. It is against this background that the programme's effectiveness in the prevention of gender-based violence needs to be evaluated.

Keywords: 16 Days of Activism, effectiveness, gender-based violence

Introduction

South Africa is perceived as one of the countries where women and girls are not safe due to gender-based violence. Gender-based violence is defined by Dlamini (2021), Rezwana and Pain (2021) as well as World Health Organization (2021) as violence that is directed against a person on the basis of their sex or gender. The abovementioned authors further stipulate that it affects girls and women's self-esteem and prevents them from realizing their full rights as human beings and as equal citizens. Gender-based violence encompasses all forms of violence that women experience, including physical, sexual, emotional, cultural/spiritual, and financial violence, that are gender-based (Centre for Women's Global Leadership, 2017; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2018). It further includes violence in public or private spaces, as well as institutional settings such as care facilities, prisons, violence and harassment online (UNHCR, 2018; Dhever, 2020). The Centre for Women's Global Leadership (2017) as well as World Health Organisation (2019) stipulate that gender-based violence also includes family violence and intimate partner violence. Despite all the good legislation, including the Constitution (Act 108 of 1996), which emphasises that all people have human rights, violence is on the rise.

After twenty-nine years of freedom, women and children are still unsafe and live under heightened fear in their country. During 2020, when South Africa was struggling with the management of COVID-19, the President of the Republic of South Africa declared gender-based violence as the second pandemic. This announcement was informed by the South African Police Service (SAPS) report on 30 hotspot areas where gender-based violence was the leading crime in the country. The gender-based violence command centre (GBVCC) reports also confirmed the same issue. The Minister of SAPS emphasised that gender-based violence has reached a crisis level in the country. The Minister's concern is also shared by Fraser, Viswanath and MacLean (2017); Richardson and Speedy (2019); Dhever (2020) as well as Ntlama (2020) that violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a serious human rights concern and a major public health problem. Pikoli (2020) and Dhever (2020) highlighted that the 16 Days of Activism programme has been held in South Africa since 1998, but since then, incidents of violence against women and children have continued

to increase. The programme's effectiveness remains unproven, given the absence of measurable outcomes. However, the Minister of SAPS emphasized sustained public awareness campaigns as a key prevention measure, especially in the identified areas of gender-based violence. This paper thus seeks to review the effectiveness of the 16 Days of Activism programme in preventing gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa from 1998 to present, analysing its measurable outcomes and structural limitations.

In emphasising what the abovementioned authors have mentioned, the 16 Days of Activism programme was adopted and implemented in line with chapter two of the Constitution to prevent the scourge of gender-based violence. In other words, the programme cannot be addressed in isolation from the Constitution; hence its prevention protects the human rights of all human beings. The dates for the 16 Days of Activism programme were chosen to link violence against women and human rights as well as to emphasise that gender-based violence against women is a violation of human rights (Centre for Women's Global Leadership, 2017; UNHCR, 2018; Graduate Women International, 2018). Since 1998, the programme has taken place annually from November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, to December 10, International Human Rights Day (UNHCR, 2018; Ntlama, 2020; Poli, 2023). The decision to create a programme running from November 25 (declared International Day against violence against women (VAW) in Latin America) until December 10 (International Human Rights Day) was meant to affirm the link between women's rights and human rights (Centre for Women's Global Leadership, 2017; Graduate Women International, 2018). The above-mentioned statement acknowledges the theory of social development in a sense that constitutionally, women and girls are human beings with human rights. It is viewed that women and girls are not just human beings, but they deserve to be treated as such. This viewpoint also finds expression in Sullivan (2018) that promoting the rights of women is something that should concern everyone, including men. Pikoli (2020) cites that the 16 Days of Activism programme is taking sides and often sends a strong message to women to stand up, but it unfairly places the burden on women only. Men, too, should know that women must be treated with respect and that women cannot be excluded from opportunities simply because they are women (Pikoli, 2020).

Materials and Methods

This research followed a case study design and was conducted through document analysis. Mohajan (2019) defines document analysis as a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating printed and electronic documents. In other words, the existing documents about the 16 Days of Activism programme including the ones for social ills became units of analysis for this study. It adopted a qualitative approach, and purposive sampling was used for sampling the relevant material such as government reports, non-government organisations (NGOs) reports and other 16 Days of Activism programme-related documents were reviewed for data collection. These highlighted documents were sampled because the 16 Days of Activism programme is implemented mostly by those organisations. The Social Welfare Policy Analysis Model by Brzuzy and Segal (1997) which is underpinned by the Theory of Social Change was used to analyse and interpret the data. This Model was selected because of its relevance in policy and or programme analysis.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the Theory of Social Development, which is concerned about the promotion of social development, social welfare, and social wellbeing of societies. According to Chavalala (2016) and Midgely (2018), the Social Development theory advocates for the coordination of social and economic goals, hence the promotion of programmes that integrate social and economic development. The abovementioned argument is emphasized by Pavlova (2014), who states that social and economic issues cannot be dealt with separately. Social and economic issues include but not limited to racism, oppression, discrimination, poverty, unemployment and inequality situations created by the apartheid regime. The apartheid system denied South Africans the opportunity to acquire the necessary economic skills and therefore contributed to a fragmented, dysfunctional and unequal system (Alphonsus, 2015). The understanding here is that the population with multiple challenges was inherited from apartheid to freedom. This means that gender-based violence and femicide, as a social issue, cannot be addressed separately from economic challenges.

Results

Taking it from the materials and methods that the Social Welfare Policy Analysis Model is underpinned by Social Change theory, the theory is of the view that societies progress in a linear way (Segal, 2010). The model's basic tenets are social issue/ social problem that gave rise to the policy/ programme, the goal of the policy/ programme, implementation of social welfare programme towards affected populations, the intended impact and actual impact of the policy. Segal (2010) is clear that social welfare policies and programmes are examined within the context of the

social problems they address. This means that the 16 Days of Activism programme, is examined within the gender-based violence and femicide context taking into consideration the root causes of inequality, discrimination, poverty and others.

Social issue/ social problem that gave rise to the policy/ programme

Social issue in this context is the increasing brutal killings of women and children by the people who are supposed to be protecting them. According to Lauer (2016) as well as Aborisade and Oni (2020), the problem is social if and only if it affects a larger percentage of people. Hadji and Osunkunle (2020) acknowledge that gender-based violence is a social challenge because it affects everybody without exception. The abovementioned authors identify urgent social issues such as terrorism, gun violence, rape, and armed robbery. They also emphasize systemic problems like poverty, HIV/AIDS, corruption, and inflation, underscoring their pervasive impact. In this list, the authors mentioned gun violence and rape but did not highlight gender-based violence. The argument here is that lack of respect for human rights and dignity as per the Constitution made gender-based violence a problem that gave rise to this 16 Days of Activism programme. In addition to the human rights and dignity, lack of basic needs due to poverty and unemployment as per Maslow's hierarchy of needs, compromise human dignity and respect. Safety and sense of belonging needs especially for women and children, are at stake due to the perpetrators taking advantage of them. This is not only a South African problem, but global challenge. The global concern is acknowledged by the existing literature (Richardson & Speedy, 2019; Dhever, 2020; Hadji & Osunkunle, 2020). All social problems have a bearing on all the pillars of society – family, economy, polity, education, and religion (Aborisade & Oni, 2020). It is further argued by Aborisade and Oni (2020), that the existence of social issues require urgent attention to save the society, and the people affected, hence the 16 Days of Activism campaign was implemented to prevent gender-based violence.

The goal of the programme

Mabaso (2018); Van Baaren (2018) as well as Richardson and Speedy (2019) stipulate that the 16 Days of Activism programme is an annual international programme to communicate the message that gender-based violence is a violation of fundamental human rights. The 16 Days programme is an organising programme for individuals and groups around the world to call for the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence against women and to:

- raise awareness about gender-based violence against women as a human rights issue at the local, national, regional and international levels.
- strengthen local work around gender-based violence against women
- establish a clear link between local and international work to end gender-based violence against women and children
- provide a forum in which organisers can develop and share new and effective strategies
- demonstrate the solidarity of women around the world organising against gender-based violence
- create tools to pressure governments to implement commitments to eliminate gender-based violence against women (World Health Organisation, 2021)

Implementation of social welfare programme towards affected population

Since 2018, beyond the 16-Days period of November 25th to December 10th, the programme has begun to expand its advocacy efforts from 16 to 365 days of the year to emphasise the importance of accountability in the pursuit of a world without violence (Poli, 2023). This strategic shift was inspired by recommendations made by women's rights organisations participating in 16 Days programmes worldwide (World Health Organisation, 2021). Taking into consideration that 16 Days of Activism programme cannot be performed in isolation from other strategies, the National Strategic Plan on Gender-based Violence and Femicide (NSP for GBVF) (2020-2030), was implemented and served as a guiding tool to provide guidance to different role players as far as gender-based violence is concerned. The strategy has six pillars which guide how services should be rendered including the relevant stakeholders. Pillar 1: Accountability, Coordination and Leadership, Pillar 2: Prevention and Rebuilding Social Cohesion, Pillar 3: Protection, Safety and Justice, Pillar 4: Response, Care, Support and Healing, Pillar 5: Economic Power and Pillar 6: Research and Information Systems. The importance of all the pillars is acknowledged, but this discussion zooms specifically into pillar two: Prevention and Rebuilding of Social Cohesion due to its responsibility and relevance in the gender-based violence. At the same time, it is equally important to acknowledge that pillar two cannot be done separately from pillar five. The persistent economic vulnerability of women (Pillar 5 of NSP) aligns with Midgley's (2018) argument that social development requires concurrent economic empowerment, suggesting the programme's limited impact stems from this disconnect.

The Department of Women, Youth, People with Disability (DWYPD) is the lead in pillar two, and the departments of Basic Education (DBE), Higher Education and Training (DHET), Department of Social Development (DSD), Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), Government Communications and Information Systems (GCIS), as well as Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) including Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs), are playing supportive roles. The Department of Social Development is responsible for the coordination of the 365 Programme of Action (POA) to ensure an integrated approach towards fighting gender-based violence. On the other hand, it is argued that the effectiveness of 16 Days of Activism programme depends on the economic empowerment of women, that they are financially independent and can survive on their own. This argument is influenced by the fact that the theory of Social Development emphasises that the well-being of individuals is not complete if their social and economic lives are not addressed comprehensively. Due to economic dependency, women find themselves in situations where they must tolerate abuse from their partners for their financial needs (Obileye & Enapeh, 2018). This means that there is a strong link between pillar two (Prevention and Rebuilding of Social Cohesion) and pillar five (Economic Power). The responsibility of this pillar (five) is with Department of Employment and Labour supported by DWYPD. Pillar five existence is because of the acknowledgement that the impact of apartheid in South Africa manifests itself through high unemployment rate and poverty been transmitted from generation to generation (Manana, 2015). Manana (2015) further emphasises that in South Africa, there are people who have never had an opportunity to work formal work for their entire lives. At the same time, DSD has been tasked with the responsibility of establishing public-private partnerships to facilitate economic opportunities for women leaving abusive relationships. The NSP for GBVF (2020-2030) emphasises that building women's economic power is critical to elevate their status in society.

In addition to the abovementioned issue, Ntlama (2020) emphasises that women should also be empowered and occupy their rightful place and contribute to the advancement of the right to gender equality. The NSP for GBVF (2020-2030) further highlighted that economic empowerment of women is also about recognising them as equal partners and players in the economy. Women should also be able to contribute to the development of the country in jobs and industries that are male dominated (NSP for GBVF, 2020-2030). The impact of gender-based violence also has significant social and economic consequences, negatively affecting academic performance, employment, and participation in public life as well as long lasting consequences for women's health, in particular their sexual and reproductive health and mental health (Kaufman et al., 2019;). It can also lead to suicide (Hadji & Osunkunle, 2020). The continued failure of governments to adequately recognise, reduce and redistribute women's unpaid care and domestic work has put women at a disadvantage in the labour market where they are over-represented in low income, part-time, informal, and precarious jobs (Kring, 2017). Economic vulnerability and poverty increase women's risk of violence and harassment as job seekers and workers (Kring, 2017; Poli, 2023). Peterman and O'Donnell (2020) relate economic vulnerability with COVID-19, and emphasise that economic stressors, low social support, lack of employment, substance use, poor mental health, were experienced mostly by women during COVID-19. This is a confirmation that the 16 Days of Activism programme will never be effective if social and economic aspects of societies are not addressed concurrently and effectively. In other words, the provision of psychosocial support services to the survivors of gender-based violence only without accredited skills development, cannot help the survivors to be self-reliant.

Intended impact

The increased rate of gender-based violence has led to the idea of organising a programme with goals "to build more awareness of gender-based violence, create consciousness of it as a human rights violation, and facilitate greater networking (Richardson & Speedy, 2019; Poli, 2023). The intended impact was to change the negative attitude of communities and particularly, men who uses their power to control and abuse women (patriarchy). The 16 Days of Activism programme seeks to affirm the link between women's rights and human rights. As much as 16 Days of Activism's purpose is to promotes human rights against gender-based violence, the programme will never achieve its success without other social issues be concurrently addressed.

Actual impact of the policy/ programme

It is argued that the development of the NSP for GBVF (2020-2030) was triggered by the 24 demands made by people across the South Africa through nationwide protest marches on 1 August 2018, under the banner of #TheTotalShutdown, indicating that gender-based violence is on the rise. Dhever (2020) and Harvey (2021) are clear that gender-based violence is stubborn and remains one of the world's most pervasive human rights violations. Peterman and O'Donnell (2020) including Harvey (2021) acknowledge the setback since there has been an increase in reported cases of gender-based violence, especially intimate partner violence that has led to loss of lives, injuries, anxiety, emotional distress, and more. COVID-19 perpetuated the violence (Peterman & O'Donnell, 2020; Ntlama, 2020). As much as Nakisitu (2022)

are appreciating the good efforts done by men in the communities to protect the human rights of women and girls, it is unfortunate that the impact is very little and not visible than the harm. However, Nakisitu (2022) emphasises that on the study conducted, titled “The effectiveness of the 16 days of activism campaign in combating gender-based violence in Kamdini, Oyam district”, the programme has promoted equality for both women and men in the society, contributing to a peaceful marriage and education for the girls. Nakisitu (2022) further highlights that forced child marriages and teenage pregnancies were reduced through the programme. Notwithstanding, Richardson and Speedy (2019) stipulate that even though the government is putting efforts by raising awareness regarding gender-based violence, but budget cuts for the implementation of the programme have a negative impact. The budget cuts do not only talk to the 16 Days programme, but to the implementation of other critical strategies to address other social issues contributing to gender-based violence.

The actual impact of the programme is not achieving its intended goals. The 16 Days of Activism programme may be criticised as it does not bring about real change in the face of deeply entrenched structural problems (Pikoli, 2020; Hadji & Osunkunle, 2020). Empirical evidence confirms that financial dependence increases the likelihood of women and girls remaining in abusive environments (Rodrigues, 2021). This means that until the social and economic aspects of communities, particularly for women are addressed holistically, the 16 Days of Activism programme will never be effective.

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Conclusion

The 16 Days of Activism programme has been implemented since 1998, but to date, the results are not yet visible, and gender-based violence continues unabated. The visibility of the 16 Days of Activism programme results is dominated by the opposite side and this point is clearly pointed by (Ntlama, 2020; Nwosu & Oyenubi, 2021). Ntlama (2020) affirms that, in the South African context, the spate of gender-based violence seems to be spiralling out of control, especially around the highly celebrated months of November and December. Ntlama (2020) further highlights that women are subject to inhumanity, which the law itself cannot describe. Sexual assault coupled with rape, murder including mutilation, and the burning of women’s bodies, as well as burial in shallow graves, questions the centrality of the language of human rights laws in the promotion of women’s rights in South Africa (Ntlama, 2020; Nwosu & Oyenubi, 2021). In his study titled “Gender-based violence ignites the re-emergence of public opinion on the exercise of judicial authority”, Ntlama (2020) mentions that the shocking wave of violence has also infiltrated even in the institutions of higher learning. These institutions are required to produce socially oriented knowledge in addressing the ills experienced by societies (Ntlama, 2020). Linking this discussion with Social Development theory, it is concluded that the human rights of women, including education, are not valued and this challenges the concept of social development. In this regard, the implied message is that gender-based violence does have the potential to hold back women from economic, educational, and social opportunities, as well as from moving to higher paid jobs. This argument is confirmed by Fraser, Viswanath, and MacLean (2017); Chepkoech, Fedha and Oino (2021) including Okpara and Anugwa (2022) that gender-based violence undermines economic growth. At the same time, gender-based violence includes both direct violence - human trafficking, domestic violence, early and forced marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM) - and indirect violence - institutionalized norms, attitudes, and stereotypes that perpetuate unequal power dynamic between genders (Richardson & Speedy, 2019; Poli, 2023). Gender-based violence transcends nation, culture, community, race, sexual orientation, or religion. The observation in this regard is that patriarchy is used as a transport to accelerate this social ill (gender-based violence), and it is turned into something normal through institutionalised norms in communities. The socialisation is then questioned because it normalises gender-based violence, and one wonders if the country will ever achieve social development considering this situation. It is further argued that a culture of discrimination, exploitation, and violence against women is not only being practiced at home but also translated to workplace and institutions of higher learning. Poli (2023) is of the view that at workplace, gender-based violence is closely related to a wider societal culture where patriarchy and unequal power relations are anchored in discriminatory gender stereotypes. The interpretation of the abovementioned statement is that women’s work is not valued. This means that gender stereotyping about women’s place in society, primarily as a caregiver within the home, contributes to women around the world being responsible for more than 75% of all unpaid care work (Poli, 2023).

Though this work is crucial for society and the economy, it remains unrecognised, unseen, and undervalued (Poli, 2023). The undervaluation of women's labour contradicts social development theory because women are excluded almost everywhere in societies simply because they are women.

Recommendations

Based on the abovementioned facts, it is recommended that:

- ❖ Social, educational, and economic issues be addressed concurrently to empower women (Pillars two and five of NSP for GBVF: 2020-2030).
- ❖ Social issues should include and address the impact of harmful practices and cultural norms which deny women and girls the right to education.
- ❖ Ongoing educational programmes - 365 Days, Programme of Action - should be implemented in communities to ensure comprehensive prevention programmes.
- ❖ Women should also be considered for higher-paying positions to encourage financial self-reliance.
- ❖ Government should prioritise this programme and fund it accordingly for it to yield the good results.
- ❖ A national evaluation of the 16 Days of Activism programme should be conducted.
- ❖ This study's reliance on institutional documents may overlook grassroots perspectives. Future research should incorporate interviews with GBV survivors and community organizers to triangulate findings.

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