
TO: ALL MEDIA
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KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH TO HIGHLIGHT THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN VIOLENCE & ABUSE

The health effects of violence against women and children are more severe and detrimental to women and children's health outcomes of a country.

The United Nations defines violence against women as; *"any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life"*.

There are many forms of violence against women, including sexual, physical, or emotional abuse by an intimate partner; physical or sexual abuse by family members or others; sexual harassment and abuse by authority figures (such as teachers, police officers or employers); trafficking for forced labour or sex; and such traditional practices as forced or child marriages, dowry-related violence; and honour killings, when women are murdered in the name of family honour.

The Department of Health in KwaZulu-Natal wishes to make a call to all civil society organs to know that, as a department that is largely staffed by women; health care workers face a double jeopardy when it comes to violence against women and children. As health care workers; they are women (spouses, daughters and sisters) and parents too!

The consequences of violence and abuse result directly from violent acts or from the long-term effects of violence. The health consequences thereof are as follows;

- **Injuries:** Physical and sexual abuse by a partner is closely associated with injuries. Violence by an intimate partner is the leading cause of non-fatal injuries to women in our province.
- **Death:** Deaths from violence against women include honour killings (by families for cultural reasons); suicide; female infanticide (murder of infant girls); and maternal death from unsafe abortion.
- **Sexual and reproductive health:** Violence against women is associated with sexually transmitted infections such as HIV & AIDS, unintended pregnancies, gynaecological problems, induced abortions, and adverse pregnancy outcomes, including miscarriage, low birth weight and fetal death.

- **Risky behaviours:** Sexual abuse as a child is associated with higher rates of sexual risk-taking (such as first sex at an early age, multiple partners and unprotected sex), substance use, and additional victimization. Each of these behaviours increases risks of health problems.
- **Mental health:** Violence and abuse increase risk of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, sleep difficulties, eating disorders and emotional distress.
- **Physical health:** Abuse can result in many health problems, including headaches, back pain, abdominal pain, fibromyalgia, gastrointestinal disorders, limited mobility, and poor overall health.

“As a department of a caring government we support the continued commemoration of the 16 Days of Activism Against violence on Women and Children. It is our belief that it takes us one step forward towards the right direction. It also calls on the whole nation to focus on a social sickness that each and everyone of us can act against. We are called upon to care enough and not to look the other way.

*“In this regard; we shall be adding our efforts, in collaboration with various partners, to decrease the incidence of violence against women and children through initiatives that help to identify, quantify and respond to the problem, including: (i) **Highlighting evidence** on the scope and types of violence in different settings so that we could all understand the magnitude and nature of the problem, (ii) **Developing guidance** for health professionals to prevent violence and strengthen health sector responses to it, (iii) **Disseminating** information to all Districts and communities and **supporting** local efforts to advance women’s rights and prevent violence, and (iv) **Collaborating** with civil society organizations to deter violence against women. I say and commit to these ambitious goals because I am a woman and, I believe, I speak for the many women in the health department”* says the Head of the Department for Health; **Dr Sibongile Zungu** following the launch of the 16 Days of Activism.

ENDS

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