

Profile: One of the Very Few Places in the Country without Abuse: The Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children, Cape Town

Irma Maharaj, Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women
and Children

Gender-based violence (GBV) against women remains extremely high in South Africa with research suggesting that a woman is killed every six hours by an intimate or ex-partner in South Africa (Mathews, et al., 2004). According to the South African Police Services statistics published in *The Crime Situation in South Africa for the period 1 April 2009-31 March 2010*, 250 000 violent crimes were perpetrated against women and children over the year-long period. This is an average of nearly 700 incidents per day. Sexual offences against women rose by nearly 20%. Child murder rose by 122 to 965 during the same period – an increase of nearly 15% since the previous period. Attempted murder of children rose by 331 cases to 1 113 cases – an increase of over 42%, while sexual offences against children rose by 36%. (SAPS 2010).

Research suggests that sexual assault is often under reported as evidenced in a study conducted by the Medical Research Council of South Africa in 2005, which revealed that only one in nine rape survivors reported the incident to SAPS. One can therefore assume that at least some of the categories of the aforementioned crime are under reported and that the actual rates are much higher. The extent of GBV against women and children is difficult to quantify because much of the abuse takes place behind closed doors. The sometimes lifelong physical and psychological effects of GBV on women and children are well documented.

Despite sound legislation such as the Domestic Violence Act and the Children's Act, there have been continued and arguably increased levels of heinous crimes being perpetrated against women and children based on gender. Government has failed in its attempts to address the scourge; it has

failed to effectively monitor and evaluate implementation of legislation and it has failed to develop strategies, with civil society, to transform notions of what is ‘acceptable’ behavior, especially for men.

The Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children (SBCWC) is a ‘one-stop’ centre that was established in 1999, in response to the high levels of violence against women. The Centre is situated in Manenberg, a township on the Cape Flats, where levels of violence, especially against women and children, are unacceptably high. The area also has very high levels of substance abuse, gang activity, and unemployment, while levels of education and employment skills are low. Although these are not reasons for violence, they are contributing factors to the high levels of crime, and violence perpetrated against women and children.

The SBCWC provides a range of services for women and children who have experienced GBV, as well as empowering programmes aimed at helping to increase agency of our clients. The Centre could be regarded as one of the pioneers of the “one-stop” centre partnership model, which brings together a range of relevant service providers under one roof. Having services available at a single venue helps to reduce secondary trauma as the survivor is not required to repeat her story to each service provider she engages with. It also reduces security risks by her not being required to travel to the various services. Further, it is economical as it cuts down on travelling costs.

The Centre has forged on-and off-site partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs); government departments; local, national and international universities; funding organizations; and corporate companies.

The closest to the ‘one-stop’ centre model that we are aware of are the Family Justice Centers (FJCs) in the United States of America (USA), the first of which was established in San Diego in 2002. Currently, there are over sixty FJC’s operating in the USA and similar centres in Mexico, Jordan, Canada and the United Kingdom. The FJC’s are coordinated either by community-based shelters, police departments or the District Attorney’s Offices. (Gwinn, C. et al. 2010). Government’s participation serves to significantly strengthen the USA centres and the services they deliver. These centres enjoy greater buy-in and cooperation from their government departments than their South African counterparts.

The vision of the Saartjie Baartman Centre is to work towards creating a safe and secure society and a human rights culture where women and children have agency to exercise their full rights. The Centre endeavours to achieve this

by remaining client-centered, offering services that are relevant, and being guided by feminist principles.

The majority of the women who access the Centre's services come from poverty-stricken backgrounds and have limited formal education and employment skills. Clients come from areas such as Manenberg, Mitchell's Plain, Heideveld, Delft, Hanover Park Gugulethu, Khayelitsha, Hazendal, Elsies River, among others. The Centre also assists women from surrounding rural area, other provinces and occasionally other countries. Assistance is offered to women who have been trafficked locally and internationally and extends its services when called upon to do so in cases of emergency. An example of this is when the Centre provided accommodation and basic provisions to foreign nationals who were rendered homeless as a result of the xenophobic violence in South Africa in 2008.

Over the past ten years, the Centre has grown from a partnership of two to ten on-site organisations and a staff component of six to twenty permanent employees. During this time, SBC has provided services to thousands of women, children and youth and in the past year 2 460 women and youth accessed our services (excluding partner clients) – an increase of nearly 15% since the previous year.

Services and activities include emergency and medium-term accommodation, counseling, life and job skills training, legal assistance, research, education and awareness-raising, and advocacy and lobbying. The Centre participates at various GBV-related forums, including trafficking, special needs housing, shelter focus groups, and groups making parliamentary submissions. The Centre is also regularly invited to attend local and international forums. The following is a brief outline of the Centre's projects and programmes.

Partnership and programme coordination

The project ensures the smooth-running of the Centre partnership. It assists with finding solutions to potential problem in the partnership and helps to identify gaps in services and source relevant service providers. It also coordinates strategic planning, and monitoring and evaluation of the partnership.

Further, the project coordinator supervises both local and international psychology interns from the University of the Western Cape (UWC), Bergen University, Norway and Chapel Hill University in North Carolina.

Shelter and second-stage housing

Saartjie Baartman Shelter

Twenty-four hour emergency and medium-term accommodation is offered to women survivors and their children. The shelter has the capacity to accommodate a maximum of twenty women and double the number of children, and houses an approximate average of 170 women and 205 children per annum. Women are able to stay in the shelter for up to four months, after which time, they may apply for medium-term accommodation for up to a year. The medium-term accommodation comprises ten self-contained “second-stage” units located on the premises. This option is available for women who feel they need additional time before being emotionally ready to reintegrate into their communities.

Clients are encouraged to participate in as many programmes as they are able to in order to reap maximum benefit. The shelter has a fulltime social worker who conducts individual and group counseling sessions. The women have easy access to the Centre’s legal advisors, who assist with family-related legal matters.

The shelter has a childcare centre, which operates weekdays. It runs programmes for the little ones and provides aftercare for the school-going children. This frees the mothers to attend shelter programmes or to go out and work. Counselling services are provided for the children where needed, and the Child Guidance Clinic at University of Cape Town will be joining as a partner in 2011.

Eerste Begin Shelter

The Centre, in partnership with the Cape Winelands Municipality opened a second shelter in Worcester, a rural area in the Western Cape Province, where levels of domestic violence and substance abuse are extremely high. The shelter is able to accommodate eight women and their children for up to three months or longer if they are not emotionally ready to leave or if they are still seeking alternative accommodation. Twenty-five women and 28 children were housed in the past year. Most of the women come from Worcester and surrounding areas such as De Doorns, Robertson and Rawsonville.

Residents receive individual and group counseling from the shelter’s social workers and have access to Saartjie Baartman Centre’s legal advisors. They

are encouraged to participate in training workshops to gain as many skills as possible during their stay at the shelter. Skills development programmes include first aid, basic counseling, home management, beading, card-making and decoupage courses.

Recently, the shelter set up a vegetable garden, which they expect will provide the residents with nutritional vegetables as well as generate an income from the sale of excess produce.

Economic empowerment

Great emphasis is placed on economic empowerment of Centre and shelter clients with a range of life and job skills training programmes being run either by shelter staff or partner organisations. Unemployed women from the community are able to participate as it is felt that those who might be in abusive or potentially abusive relationships would benefit from the programme as a means of empowerment.

Programmes include, among others, parenting skills, HIV/AIDS awareness raising, first aid, home-based care, computer training, cashier/sales training, card-making and beading. Shelter residents are offered income-generating tasks such as canteen assistance, cleaning and car-washing. These serve to provide a modest income for the women during their stay at the shelter. The job skills manager assists the women with preparation of their curricula vitae and job placement opportunities.

Kitchen and catering project

This project runs a canteen that provides meals and snacks for Centre and partner staff members. Shelter residents have a cooked meal every day which is prepared by the kitchen staff. The kitchen offers a catering service to on- and off-site partners, which generates a substantial income that contributes to sustainability of the Centre.

Legal advice, assistance and research

The Legal Project was established at the Centre in 2004 in partnership with the Gender Project at the Community Law Centre, UWC. The Project has, however, been operating on its own since 2009 when the Community Law Centre left the partnership. The Centre's two paralegals offer legal advice and assistance to Centre and shelter clients, as well as training to relevant government departments, other NGOs and community members. The aim of

the project is to improve access to justice for women survivors of GBV. Clients are assisted with applications for protection orders, maintenance, divorce and other related matters. Other focus areas include legal rights awareness-raising workshops, and advocacy and lobbying. The project has an agreement with the Cape Law Society's pro bono services to provide services when needed.

Over the past year, the project has provided legal advice and assistance to 1 749 clients, an increase of 25% from the previous year. This includes 827 new clients and the rest being repeat clients seeking ongoing assistance.

Research project

The SBC research project, which was established in 2004, researches GBV-related topics relevant to the Centre, collects and analyses statistical data, conducts monitoring and evaluation, and facilitates a digital storytelling project, among others.

Projects include documenting the development of the Centre, compiling a manual of guidelines on how to establish a 'one-stop' centre and economic empowerment of women survivors of GBV. The digital storytelling project produced a DVD, *Women of Strength: I have a story to tell* and is currently (September 2010) conducting a digital diaries project. Main aims of the digital storytelling project are to strategically use information and technology to combat GBV against women, to help empower and increase the agency of often voiceless women, and to create a platform for sharing stories in order to raise awareness about GBV to a wide audience. Participants reported that the process of telling their stories have been cathartic and assisted with continued healing.

A process of monitoring and evaluation is being implemented to assess the impact the Centre's services are having on the lives of our clients in the longer-term. Results will help to inform what is working and where changes need to be made. It will also help to highlight potential problems in the various projects.

Counseling and awareness coordination

The Counseling and Awareness-raising Project, which does outreach work in communities and schools, aims to raise awareness among the general public about the prevalence and effects of GBV. Last year, the project ran a six-week pilot programme at Christell House, in which 249 learners were equipped with skills to identify domestic violence, increase their self-esteem and handle

situations of conflict. During the past year, 2 445 community members/schoolchildren and 220 nursing students benefitted from awareness-raising talks and workshops.

The project also coordinates the Centre's intake assessments. This is done by recruiting psychology and social work students to do their internship as intake workers at the Centre. The students are from the Departments of Psychology and Social Work at UWC, University of Cape Town, the University of South Africa and the South African College of Applied Psychology. The project provides ongoing supervision and emotional support for the interns, and assists with case work management.

When the SBWC is profiled in a piece such as this one, it is difficult to see behind the written paragraphs the living bodies and hear the voices of the hundreds of women and children who live in, and visit, the SBWC spaces, people and services, annually. The Centre however is an amazingly dynamic, energized, and exciting organization. Most importantly, it is one of the very few places in the country *without* abuse of the kind which destroys so many women and children's wellbeing in South Africa and explicitly committed to staying exactly that way.

References

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