



# RESEARCH REPORT

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## SAFFI RESPONDING TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA: DOCUMENTING THE HISTORY, THEORY, METHODS AND TRAINING MODEL (2008-2017)

Gender-based violence (GBV) against women and girls and domestic violence (DV) remain among the most pervasive human rights violations of our time, and one of the biggest problems in South Africa where 90% of the population affiliates / ascribe to religious faith and practice. While it is essential to talk about 'rights' in a democracy, it does not solve the problem in a society where religion is embedded in a patriarchal culture. A significant gap exists in literature which speaks to the experiences of NGOs, practitioners and religious leaders (RLs) who try to address these problems at grassroots level. Under the guidance of the *Department of Religion and Theology* of the University of the Western Cape, and with technical and financial support from the *Joint Gender Fund*, the South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI) undertook a research project to document our response to addressing this gap which reflects our work with religious leaders and faith communities. This report briefly documents the history, theory and methods of SAFFI from 2008 until 2017. The report highlights the critical role faith and religion play in discourses on gender justice and violence against women and while it is a narrative institutional memory, it has the potential to inform other GBV interventions in South African contexts.<sup>1</sup>

### SAFFI: A short history

The South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI) was founded in 2008 in response to challenges experienced by religious leaders in dealing with domestic violence in the South African context. The founder, Elizabeth Petersen confirmed the need for clergy to be educated to understand and address the faith dimensions, root causes and effects of domestic and gender-based violence after conducting extensive international and local research including her research for her Master's degree<sup>2</sup>. At the time, no organisations existed in the country that worked specifically with religious leaders and faith communities around the faith dimensions and root causes of domestic violence and intimate partner abuse. Today, SAFFI works within faith-specific and multi-faith contexts, gender specific groups and across different gender identities, including LGBTI+ communities, to foster a whole-community response to GBV interventions. An inter-sectoral board supports and guides our work. SAFFI uses the terms gender-based violence, domestic violence, intimate partner abuse, and violence against women interchangeably, even though the context may vary.



### For the common good: SAFFI's leadership approach

SAFFI's work is shaped and guided by values of faith and family, respect and human dignity, compassion and Ubuntu, collaboration and partnership, conversation and dialogue, and listening and learning.

Gender-based violence is a multifaceted phenomenon that requires a multidimensional approach. SAFFI champions whole-community responses to gender-based violence, including holistic and culturally competent intervention strategies. From the start, SAFFI was to be an institution that would embody and promote leadership for change. The more people are permitted to express and to explore, the sooner they will discover their common values and common vision. Therefore, SAFFI pursued holistic, coordinated, culturally informed response to GBV and DV from the onset. Scholars characterise this leadership approach as requiring revolutionary thinking and dramatic changes in social, political, economic, or technological systems<sup>3</sup>. To foster this change in thinking and working, SAFFI recruited influential leaders

## SAFFI RESPONDS TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN BY:

- Being a resource to religious leaders, institutions and faith communities as they hold offenders accountable and ensure the safety and empowerment of victims/survivors by offering them an opportunity to tell the truth and to heal as individuals and families;
- Challenging, from a theological perspective, patriarchal traditions and other root causes of intimate partner abuse and violence, which destroy the dignity of women, children and men; and
- Encouraging the promotion of scriptural and theological teachings that foster supportive intimate relationships.

from the domestic violence sector, the judiciary, academia, government, correctional services and the religious sector to serve on the SAFFI board and to critically engage SAFFI's mission. Further SAFFI also used the insights on *leadership for the common good* of Crosby and Bryson to seek change through being conscious of the research and work which has been done in the sector and by partnering with others. SAFFI is intentional about engaging in self-reflective learning processes for all its participants including religious and other leaders as well as its staff.

## SAFFI's understanding of the root causes of VAW and the vision for a restorative justice response

The multi-dimensional nature of oppression and violence against women (VAW) inherent in patriarchal religions and cultural practices must be considered to more fully understand the complex dynamics involved in exploring possible solutions. Whilst feminism has recognised patriarchy as a central source of oppression of women, SAFFI also works with the understanding that racial oppression and white supremacy shape the nature of the oppression for South Africans. The large majority of women of colour and black families in South Africa continue to live in dire socio-economic deprivation which is deeply rooted in the colonial and apartheid legacies<sup>4</sup>. Dismantling the "Siamese Twins" of oppression namely white supremacy and patriarchy therefore become key aspects which SAFFI addresses in its work. Black people and women continue to be at the receiving end of oppression; and many are coopted and lured into sustaining these systems by receiving special privileges and a false sense of power from those who benefit from keeping oppression sustained. White and male privilege continues to use intimate relationships, families, religion, schools, business, politics, and the law to perpetuate dehumanizing practices.

In a context where 90% of the population ascribes to a religious tradition and where religious texts are sometimes used to sanctify, justify and render invisible GBV<sup>5</sup>, SAFFI believes that religious leaders must play a central leadership role in demystifying easily misinterpreted religious scriptures and teachings. Religious leaders also hold a sacred responsibility together with government and civil society to be rapid, intentional and decisive in addressing the root causes of the problem in the quest to advance a society that is free from violence, discrimination and oppression. Faith must be a resource and religious leadership must be sources of hope and healing to victims/survivors and perpetrators of GBV. SAFFI thus seeks to ignite and support the desire of others (specifically faith and cultural leaders) to further gender justice work in South Africa<sup>6</sup>.

SAFFI works with religious leaders, faith communities and institutions (government and gender-based violence service providers) that offer services and interventions to abused women, perpetrators, and their families. Our programmes seek to deepen religious leaders' understanding of the phenomenon, provide safety and support services to women, and hold abusive men accountable. We engage with communities in the traditional African religion, Baha'i, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhism, Christian, Hindu, Islam, and Judaism faiths. We also facilitate dialogues between LGBTI+ communities and faith sectors in the quest to eradicate sexual violence and same-sex discrimination.

## Theory of change and Ubuntu

SAFFI's work locates itself in theoretical frameworks such as, the African philosophy of Ubuntu, Conflict Transformation and the theory of Family Resilience and Ecology of Human Development. Ubuntu correctly suggests that we are truly human only in community with other people<sup>7</sup>. Through cultivating Ubuntu, we are able to address the complex faith dimensions of violence in intimate relationships and families. The term family resilience is applied within the theory of Family Resilience and Ecology of Human Development on the basis that the healthy family is a myth: conflict and change are therefore normal issues and expected. Aspects of family resilience that lead to successful adaptation and the ability to deal with a significant stressor or adversity include: family cohesion, belief systems, coping strategies and communication<sup>8</sup>.

As an intervening strategy, Conflict Transformation as espoused by Lederach<sup>9</sup> is helpful in framing an understanding that transformation works to promote constructive processes with a range of change-oriented goals, namely the personal change goal, the relational goal, the structural change goal, and the cultural change goal. Lederach reminds that in conflicts where there has been a long history of patterns and episodes that were not constructively addressed – like with VAW in post-apartheid South Africa – people feel overwhelmed by the complexity of it all. However, he suggests that one of the advantages of complexity is that it provides endless possibilities and that change is not tied to one thing, one action or one option. If stakeholders pay careful attention to the various options, insights and wisdoms that each bring to the complex situation, new ways of looking at old patterns can emerge.

## SAFFI's Hypothesis

Drawing from these theoretical understandings, SAFFI posits that, if religious leaders are transformed in their thinking and/or knowledge about gender power relations, from hierarchical to relational, their teaching, preaching and pastoral care intervention will transform the way women and men relate to one another in intimate relationships, family life and broader society. The practice of *Ubuntu* can serve as a catalyst for such transformation.



# How does it all play out in reality?

Our activities are varied. We highlight a few below.

## Conversations, dialogues and workshops

The objective of all our conversations, dialogues and workshops is to mobilise religious leaders and secular professionals to address the faith dimensions of gender-based violence and to encourage them to build intra-faith, interfaith and multi-sectoral networks. We offer the Ubuntu philosophy present in all faiths as a safety net when confronting the white supremacy and patriarchy at play in the systematic and systemic destruction of women, men, children and families.

Examples include initiatives such as the Sacred Conversations and Walks of Witness held in 2011 and 2012 around the issue of hate crimes and the killing of lesbians in and around Cape Town. Religious leaders had the opportunity to support each other as a collective, while those affected individuals and families could talk with them about same sex relationships, faith and violence against women.

## Pilgrimages

In 2012 SAFFI, in partnership with the St George's Cathedral Justice and Reconciliation Group organised two pilgrimages to Robben Island—one for women and another for men. These pilgrimages were a means to address the scars left, not only by gender-based violence, but also by apartheid. Participants came away with greater empathy for what men and women went through during apartheid, and a renewed dedication to work towards interrupting oppressive systems and restore dignity in individual and community life.

## Advocacy and campaigns

Our advocacy work takes the form of creating public awareness on radio and television talk shows, presenting at and hosting conferences, and participating in national campaigns such as the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children. We are involved in several initiatives that comprise localised, international and technological activities.



## Research

SAFFI provides qualitative evidence that supports the need for interventions in a space that straddles gender and faith, and advances the agenda of those seeking to curb gender-based violence through faith. In 2016, we began a process of reporting on and analysing the body of knowledge around gender reconciliation, gender-based violence, and the nexus between gender and faith. The research that forms the basis for this newsletter is part of that body of knowledge.

## Partnerships and collaborations

Over the years, we have formed numerous partnerships and collaborations with organisations that share the vision of a society free from gender-based violence. We have greatly benefited from the partnership with the USA-based FaithTrust Institute, and our longstanding relationship with the University of the Western Cape (UWC), particularly the Department of Religion and Theology, has ensured that our work is underwritten by rigorous academic research guidance. Other partners include the Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation (DLTLF) and the Western Cape Religious Leaders Forum (WCRLF).

## TACGBV

In 2014, we established the Theological Advisory Council on Gender-based Violence (TACGBV) to gain prominence for the multi-faith aspect of our work. The TACGBV brings together theologians, scholars and religious leaders from diverse religions and denominations to address easily misinterpreted scriptures, religious teachings and practices as it pertains to gender-based violence in intimate relationships, homes and communities.

## Training and capacity strengthening for religious leaders and faith communities (The SAFFI Model)

One of our key activities is training religious leaders on their role in combating and preventing domestic violence and intimate partner abuse, and equipping them with the tools to do so. We have worked with nearly 1,500 religious leaders, lay leaders and members of the faith sector. We have trained religious leaders in Atlantis, Khayelitsha, Edgemead, Bonteheuwel, Hanover Park, Oudtshoorn, Phillipi, Bishop Lavis, Strand, Lavender Hill, Bredasdorp, and Ceres in the Western Cape of South Africa.



## Endnotes/References

- 1 For the full report see, 'SAFFI Responding to Gender-Based Violence in a South African Context: Documenting the History, Theory, Methods and Training Model (2008 – 2017)'.
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- 4 Motlafi, N 2015, *Why black women in South Africa don't fully embrace the feminist discourse*, *Male & Guardian*, available at: <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-08-07-why-black-women-in-south-africa-dont-fully-emb-race-the-feminist-discourse>, site accessed 29 September 2016.
- 5 Pillay, M 2013, *The Anglican Church and feminism: Challenging 'the patriarchy of faith'*, *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa*, vol. 19, no.2, pp. 64.
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The overall objective of the SAFFI Model is aimed at strengthening the pastoral care capacity of RLs and faith communities and other government and civil society organisations working to contribute towards the reduction and eradication of GBV and DV. Through this training model SAFFI, together with the RLs, critique the faith sectors current understandings of gender and GBV and find new reactive and proactive strategies which can be used in future. This aims to empower and mobilise RLs, lay counsellors and faith communities to more adequately engage with work in relation to gender relations, DV and IPA. Support networks between SAFFI, the RLs and the community are created in these trainings so that the work becomes sustainable and long-term. This model follows a 5 phase approach of 1) Recruitment and Sensitizer, 2) 5-Day Domestic Violence Pastoral/Spiritual Care Training, 3) 10-week resource series: Our places of Worship: True Sanctuaries of Hope & Healing, 4) Support Services, and 5) Establishing and supporting local religious leaders forums on GBV.

## Lessons Learnt from implementing SAFFI's work Recruitment and Training of Staff

In 2012 SAFFI recruited and trained facilitators to mobilise and recruit religious leaders and facilitate trainings. In staff trainings, staff shared from their personal experiences as victims, survivors or as counsellors. For staff, their training built capacity but also allowed them spaces to develop positive self-images, and to heal emotional and psychological wounds. Some challenges however were experienced in that, despite their experience in the field, few of the facilitators had had received formal training in dealing with GBV, none had ever dealt with the faith dimensions of GBV, many had difficulty juggling the work of SAFFI with other employment, and some had difficulty engaging with religious leaders as trainees. SAFFI's experience demonstrated that it is important to devote enough time and resources to recruitment and training processes of staff. It is also important to recognise that staff's journeys of change can become important measures of the organisation's ability to practice its values and conduct its work. Creating trust amongst and finding good working rhythms between staff has been an important part of SAFFI's successes, whilst the absence of this has created challenges for example in effective co-facilitation.

## Implementing the SAFFI Model

The most significant lesson learned from implementing the Domestic Violence Pastoral/Spiritual Care Training and Capacity Strengthening Model was that such a process takes time. The SAFFI Model was neither linear, nor predictable. As a result of fieldworkers dropping out, funding restrictions and challenges, the nature and availability of fieldworkers and religious leaders, and because of the complexity of navigating faith and gender-based violence and fostering trust between sectors, most phases took longer than originally expected. This has demonstrated that our work is not a once-off, quick fix to gender-based violence. It is, instead, a journey of ongoing learning, implementation and adaptation.

## Government Support & Funding

SAFFI's experience with donors and government points to the need for government and funders to tailor their reporting structures. It is important that donors recognise the plethora of theoretical and practical evidence which points to the need for the faith sector to be actively engaged and trained in providing solutions to not only GBV but a myriad of social justice and human rights issues. Donors need to develop funding models that are better equipped to support work in the faith sector and particularly projects that require lengthy trust-building processes, and long-term, in-depth work. Further, the benefits of supportive donors are invaluable to an organisation's work and more donors should look at ways of not only financially assisting organisations but providing other holistic support.

## Negotiating the notions of Faith and Family within the GBV sectors

For SAFFI to be meaningful and relevant to both the GBV and Faith sectors, they needed to be brought together in recognition that they could both be of more value to abused women when their expertise and connections were combined. SAFFI needed to be intentional about identifying the strong connection between GBV and religion and in pointing out the critical role faith could play in creating a positive shift. In this respect, credible, evidence-based research, as was conducted by Petersen, was invaluable. SAFFI also needed to establish trust and create credibility around the organisation, founder and staff which SAFFI did through its involvement on various influential platforms. SAFFI also needed to build trust around it being a multi-faith organisation by presenting itself as a learning organisation which provided the entire faith sector with shaping a new initiative in South Africa. This was also done by demonstrating the usefulness of multi-faith conversations at the official launch of SAFFI in 2010.

## Conclusion

This report serves as an invitation to leaders, activists and practitioners across society to consider seriously the role of faith in gender-based violence interventions. It appeals to people working for change to deal not only with the symptoms of our social ills, but to begin to address some of the overall power systems that cause and shape them.

Lastly, we urge organisations, practitioners, academics, theologians, and community members—indeed anyone working to end gender-based violence—to continue having conversations that foster holistic, sustainable, and meaningful action. The conversations and work to eradicate gender-based violence should continue to be opened up and made accessible to benefit those who are most marginalised in society and most affected by oppression.