

## Vodacom steps up to fight against GBV

Vodacom launched a campaign called 'Be the light' to call everyone's attention to the scourge of gender-based violence and appeals to South African men to become change agents and play an active role in ridding our society of gender violence.



President Cyril Ramaphosa recently appealed to SA's corporate sector, civic bodies and churches in society to partner with the government as it steps up its fight against gender-based violence. The campaign is launched at a time when the country is gripped by a spate of senseless violence against women and children.

Gender-based violence in South Africa is unprecedented. According to the latest Gender Based Violence research, one in four women will experience violence by men and are five times more likely to be killed. A woman is murdered every three hours in South Africa. The issue is a social ill of our time that has started reversing the strides made in gender equality since the dawning of our democracy 25 years ago.

Takalani Netshitenzhe, Chief Officer: Corporate Affairs, at Vodacom said: "The truth of the matter is that, in recent times, we have seen more and more cases of women dying in the hands of men in the country, so it is about time we shifted the conversation on gender violence to men, so they can be part of the solution. In this context, Be the light campaign is focused on South African men, appealing to them to be change agents and play an active role in the elimination of gender violence from our society."

“In my view, gender-based violence requires men to stand up, call out, and address the violent and aggressive behaviour that we see many women face every day. For this to happen, men need to be the champions in the fight against women abuse and femicide, while shining a light on those perpetrators who continue to abuse women and children without fear or consequence.”



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Evan-Lee Courie 19 Aug 2019



As a long-standing partner of government and civil society organisations that champion the rights of women and children, Vodacom and the Department of Social Development Department worked together to launch the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Command Centre in 2014. Vodacom contributed R4m into this partnership for the creation of a call centre that is managed by trained government-employed social workers. In December 2016, a Skype capability was launched at the call centre to give access to the victims of gender-based violence from the deaf community.

The call centre receives an alarming average of 22,000 calls per month. These calls result in tele-counselling at the centre and some calls, based on the severity of the case, are referred to the community-based social workers and the South African Police Service.

For the 2020 calendar year-to-date (January to 30 June), the command centre has received a staggering 48,583, of which 2,079 are GBV-related, compared to 87,092 for the full year (2019), of which 1,846 were GBV-related. In the two months after the lockdown was announced, the command centre received 33,715 calls, of these 1,427 were GBV-related, up from 133 GVB-related cases for the period 1-26 March 2020. Although we are aware of under-reporting on GBV cases, these recorded GBV-related numbers paint a bleak picture of a society that has a deep-seated problem of GBV.

### Speak out, Seek help

The centre can be reached as follows:

- By dialling 0800 428 428 or via USSD on \*120\*7867#
- A Skype line 'HelpMeGBV' for members of the deaf community
- An SMS-based line '31531

Vodacom is currently developing a mobile-based app, which will serve as a risk assessment tool for the app users to determine if they are in an abusive relationship so that they could seek help.

Vodacom plans to launch this app in the 2020 calendar year. In March 2019, Vodacom stepped up its efforts to support its employees by implementing an HR policy specifically for victims of domestic violence and abuse. The support provided by this policy includes an allocation of 10 days fully-paid leave and makes available resources such as free access to the company's Employee Assistance programme which provides counselling and life management tools – as well as the 24-hour victim support and counselling call centre, the Gender-Based Violence.

“We are hoping that this campaign will challenge local men to reflect on this question of gender violence and lead them to initiate serious conversations among their circles on what they can do to prevent abuse of this type from occurring in the first place,” concluded Netshitenzhe.

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