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Youth abortion rates double in BCM

Underage drinking crisis, sexual violence driving surge in unwanted pregnancies

MKHUSELI SIZANI and LUKE CHARTER

The Eastern Cape health department has released shocking statistics on a surge in the number of underage girls from East London seeking abortions at its clinics and hospitals.

Provincial health spokesperson Yonela Dekeda told the Dispatch the number of youth abortions in the Buffalo City Metro during the 2022/23 year was almost double that of the previous year.

The number of underage girls having babies had also increased.

"Abortions and underage pregnancy are always a result of an act of violence against a child," Dr Lesley-Ann Foster, executive director of Masi-manyane Women's Rights International, told the Dispatch.

"Many are not even teenagers. They are being raped and it can never be called consensual sex — they are children."

"There is a level of violence people do not comprehend because young girls have little value to male predators who rape them to assert their power and control," said Foster.

"A girl's life is interrupted in the most violent and horrible way and their bodies, minds and educations are affected in ways that they are not yet ready to deal with."

"The stigma and the shame often mean these crimes go unreported and children don't open up about what is being done to them and end up having abortions."

"That process is scary and often the decision is taken out of their hands. "Nurses have told me how some girls from impoverished homes come to hospitals and don't even have things like basic toiletries at home."

"The nurses often donate these things to them, but the girls are trapped in a cycle of poverty which becomes worse because of how pregnancies in-

terrupt their lives and stop them from attending school.

"Though there are also many pregnant girls from affluent homes, poverty amplifies the risk of violence and the aftermath."

"Girls have to carry that shame and blame as well as the tremendous fear and physical and psychological impact," she said.

Foster said there were few support mechanisms to assist young girls if they had babies.

One woman who had an abortion told the Dispatch "teenage pregnancy and abortion are kept as a secret in our communities because parents are scared of the shame."

"Abortion has a stigma. Churches make you feel guilty of murder and the community judges you."

"So many young girls go for illegal abortions," she said. She said her living conditions had forced her to abort her baby.

"I had to abort my child after my boyfriend refused to take responsibility... I could not raise the baby in the poverty I live in. But abortion won't stop as long as we put a stigma on it."

"We need to have open discussions with our children about the dangers of unprotected sex," she said.

An illegal abortionist, whose posters are plastered on the city streets, said dozens more women were using his services.

"This year alone I have helped about 100 women, many of whom are teenagers, to abort."

Dekeda said in the 2021/22 financial year 225 abortions had been carried out at BCM's "choice of termination pregnancy" sites involving girls aged between 10 and 19.

But in the 2022/23 the figure had almost doubled to 422.

Dekeda said there had been 1,634 deliveries of babies to girls aged between 10 and 19 in the same time period.

Dr Mike Serwne, of Dr Mike Women's Clinic in East London, said many of the girls who had abortions at the clinic said they had been under the influence of alcohol when they had sex.

"Last year I helped a 16-year-

Motor Madness



The 16th Ronnies Motors Wizard on Wheels Car Show was held on the Stirling Primary School field over the weekend. Vaughn Smith, chair of the Border Street Rod Classic and V8 Club, which organised the event, said there were more than a thousand attendees and around 200 vehicles on display this year. Smith is seen above with a 1963 DKW Auto Union during the event. Picture: ALAN EASON

old girl with an abortion.

"She was accompanied by her parents.

"Some girls go out and drink with friends and then have sex," he said, adding that they say that is when they are raped and fall pregnant as a result.

Foster said she was disappointed by the statistics and sexual abuse of children.

"I am shocked to see the spike in teenage pregnancy-related abortions. As a society, we are failing our children.

"Young girls are called by older men to drink with them.

"Then these girls also want to be seen as big girls.

"They get manipulated, drunk and sometimes get raped.

"While children are not being properly educated, that doesn't stop them from being raped, repeatedly, and falling pregnant."

But Foster said alcohol should not be seen as the only cause. "Some of these girls are raped

by their relatives and are threatened into keeping quiet.

"Men get away with this, which is why they do it over and over. They escape being linked to teenage pregnancies while young girls suffer the shame and blame."

The metro has five "choice of termination of pregnancy" sites: Frere Hospital, Cecilia Makiwane Hospital, Bhishe Hospital, Empilweni Community Healthcare and Duncan Village Day Hospital.

Dekeda said: "Any woman with childbearing potential has a choice to terminate her pregnancy [provided] the woman is under 15 weeks pregnant."

"If she is between 15 and 20 weeks pregnant, the pregnancy may only be terminated under specific medical conditions."

The department has intervention programmes to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

"The department is implementing interventions aimed at providing comprehensive sex-

ual reproductive health services, integrated with key clinical programmes like HIV/Aids and TB, chronic and non-communicable diseases.

"We provide comprehensive integrated school health services and link schools with partner NGOs. Both in and out of school, the girl and boy child are beneficiaries of our programmes," Dekeda said.

Children's rights activist Petros Majola, of Khula Community Development, said instead

of being shocked by the statistics, people should question their parenting skills.

"We must not be shocked by the pregnancy and abortion statistics. We should question our family values."

"Children become sexually active at a young age."

"It is the parent's responsibility to have discussions with their children about the dangers of having sex. The government must remove illegal abortion adverts," he said.

Community in shock at brutal murder of two women

SIVENATHI GOSA

Eastern Cape community leaders were horrified as it emerged at the weekend that two women who went missing in Ncera last week-end were almost certainly kidnapped and shot.

Tests are under way to link two dismembered and burnt bodies found in a nearby dam with Zoleka Gantana, 57, and Kholosa Mpunga, 27.

Three suspects have been arrested.

Gantana's daughter, Nobuntu Gantana, said on Saturday that the bodies were found near Peddie.

"Their bodies were burnt beyond recognition," Nobuntu said.

Gantana's missing Isuzu bakkie was found with false number plates.

Eastern Cape premier Oscar Mabuanye expressed his condolences.

"We are deeply saddened and shocked. Such incidents impact severely on families and they are bound to be affected psychologically when such tragedy happens," he said.

"We are grateful to those patriotic citizens of our province who shared information with the police leading to the discovery of the bodies and the arrest of the suspects."

"We noted the outpouring of love and prayers that people from all walks of life sent to these families."

"We will all keep them in our thoughts and prayers as they deal with this tragic loss."

Gantana, who was a Methodist Church lay minister, was last heard from on July 8 when she left her Tholomnqa homestead for her house and shop in Ncera.

The Methodist Church's Young Women's Manyano King Hints district head, Makhosazana Tomsana, said all the congregants sent condolences to the families of Gantana and Mpunga.

"As the executive of the Young Women's Manyano [YWM], we are deeply shocked by the tragic ordeal that happened to one of our own [Gantana] and Mpunga," Tomsana said.

"Zoleka Gantana was the

vice-president of YWM on her local circuit.

"We urge everyone to work together with the district office while we wait for the bishop's office to release a statement regarding the dates for both [memorial] services and funerals."

The district bishop, Reverend Nomphezelo Sibidla, said: "After a long search we received the news."

"This is another tragic moment in our district.

"As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, 4:8, 'We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair'."

"We pray for justice." Eastern Cape Men's Movement leader Reverend Xolamzi Sam sent condolences to the families and said he shared the pain.

"We are deeply hurt by this tragic news. This is the worst thing that could happen," he said.

"Zoleka Gantana was a community developer. She was a local preacher and a businesswoman."

"Not only the families are affected, but the communities at large. Mpunga's

family released their daughter to go to make living; they did not expect her to come back in a coffin."

"We are nearing August, in which we are supposed to be celebrating women, not killing them. We hope justice will be served."

The two women had lived together at Gantana's home in Ncera Village 7, near Kids Beach. Mpunga worked as a shopkeeper at Gantana's KwaMasithathi general dealer store.

Provincial police spokesperson Brig Tembinkosi Kinana said the suspects, aged between 44 and 50, were arrested near Peddie after an intensive search for the missing women.

They were arrested on Friday.

"Their arrests were preceded by the recovery of the stolen vehicle belonging to Gantana, which was found stuck in the mud without any person inside or nearby," Kinana said.

"Investigators received information that led them to a farm where the suspects were subsequently arrested. During the investigation,

the detectives discovered that both women had been shot dead. It is alleged that their bodies were chopped, burnt and subsequently dumped into a dam near the farm at Gcinisa village."

Kinana said police still had to establish whether the body parts found in the dam were those of the missing two women.

"The human remains have been taken to a nearby mortuary and will be sent to the forensic laboratory."

The suspects are expected to appear in the East London magistrate's court on Monday on charges of murder, kidnapping, possession of stolen property and business robbery.

Last Sunday morning Gantana's neighbours contacted the family, suspecting that something was amiss at her house.

Her daughter told the Dispatch last week that they had rushed to her home and found her mother and Mpunga both missing.

They found the gate was left open, the shop looted and her mother's Isuzu bakkie gone.

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"I dream of the realization of the unity of Africa, whereby its leaders combine in their efforts to solve the problems of this continent."

I dream of our vast deserts, of our forests, of all our great wildernesses"

Nelson Mandela

17 - 18 JULY **NELSON MANDELA INTERNATIONAL DAY**

DATE: 17TH JULY 2023 | PUBLIC MEMORIAL LECTURE | TIME: 15H00 TO 17H00

DATE: 18TH JULY 2023 | VENUE: NELSON MANDELA MUSEUM YOUTH & HERITAGE CENTRE, QUNU

PROGRAM: HANDING OVER OF A LIBRARY | TIME: 08H00

UNVEILING OF STATUE - NELSON MANDELA MUSEUM, MTHATHA, NELSON MANDELA MUSEUM YOUTH AND HERITAGE CENTRE | TIME: 10H00

VENUE: NELSON MANDELA MUSEUM YOUTH & HERITAGE CENTRE, QUNU

DATE: 29TH JULY 2023 | GOLF DAY | VENUE: MTHATHA COUNTRY CLUB

DATE: 23RD TO THE 30TH JULY 2023: 400km Icons Journey from Forthare University via Queenstown, Cofimvaba, Ngqobo, Clarkbury, Bityi, Mqhekezweni, Qunu, Vidgiesville, Qokolweni and Finish at the Nelson Mandela Museum.

DATE 30TH JULY 2023: 103 km from Clarkebury Bityi, Mqhekezweni, Quni, Vidgiesville, Qokolweni and finish at the Nelson Mandela Museum