Insights from research on how to break cycle of violence against women

October 11 2019, by Marichen Van Der Westhuizen

In response to a wave of protests following a spate of brutal attacks on women, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has again committed himself to addressing this problem urgently.

In a recent speech he emphasised the need for harsher sentences for the perpetrators of gender-based violence and femicide. He also announced an "emergency action plan" to combat the problem.

The plan, to be implemented within the next six months, includes:

- Additional funding for a host of new interventions, as well as for sexual offences courts,
- The need to address patriarchal attitudes and practices that encourage domination and violence,
- Emphasis on interventions that include men, youth at risk and offenders inside of prisons,
- Making sure that women's rights and gender/power relationships form part of the education system,
- Gender sensitivity training for the police, prosecutors, magistrates and policy makers,
- Amending laws to ensure harsher punishment for perpetrators.

The president's plan is commendable. But, previous efforts to address the problem have failed. Research on gender-based violence has shown that services for victims and perpetrators are often not available, or aren't accessible to people who need them.
Also, where these are available, interventions are for periods that are too short to be effective. And there is lack of sensitivity from service providers, leading to secondary trauma for the victims. Finally, there has been poor alignment of the available resources.

These mistakes can be avoided if the president, and his team, draw from research that's been done by academics on the issue of violence against women. We believe that research has a distinctive role to play because it gives pointers on what is needed to create long-term change.

**What do we know**

Findings from some research conducted in recent years provide a number of useful insights.

**Family interventions.** Often, child victims know their perpetrators. And in terms of the family history, a majority of sex offenders have a history of exposure to domestic violence and abuse of alcohol in the family, as well as their own history of substance abuse. Various studies have indicated how violence in the family repeats itself over generations, becoming a vicious cycle.

**Perpetrators:** Research shows that there is often a history of poor relationships between parents and the child. This leads to the offender objectifying people, emphasising power and control over them, and not having compassion for others.

**Intimate partner violence:** Research shows that boy children who are exposed to family violence or childhood victimisation are more likely to direct violence at an intimate partner. And men who show aggression to their partners are at risk of falling victim to violence in the future. It's important not to ignore attitudes towards this kind of violence. This is because there is a common thread across socio-political, religious,
cultural and personal attitudes that support or condone spousal assault. These implicitly or explicitly encourage patriarchy, misogyny and the use of violence to resolve conflicts.

Solutions

In families affected by domestic violence, services for the whole family are needed, including the perpetrators.

Services for children exposed to domestic violence require accessible social services that are long-term and integrated. To break the cycle of violence, children need services that focus on problem-solving and conflict management skills, healthy self-esteem and self-worthiness.

Positive peer groups and social support are also needed. Victims of gender-based violence reported that preventative services should consider contributing factors such as substance abuse, poverty and financial stress, youth development and empowerment, as well as communication patterns, problem solving and conflict management within families.

Research also shows that community awareness programmes should address the causal factors of gender-based violence, as well as empower victims and children exposed to violence. Such programmes should focus on:

- child awareness of rights and responsibilities,
- child and victim awareness of support systems available and how to access them, and
- community awareness of how to respond to acts of violence and to support victims of violence within a community context.

Next steps
For the national action plan to work, and to be based on a bottom-up approach, the planning and implementation should be rooted in research findings.

There needs to be a multi-disciplinary approach to the work. This requires all role-players to be gender sensitive as they work towards services that inform prevention, treatment and community well-being.

Secondly, preventative and proactive services can't be once-off, or short-term. The focus should be on giving people life skills. This requires children and youth who are at risk to have spaces where they can integrate the skills into behavioural patterns.

Thirdly, there needs to be a focus on what causes gender-based violence. This will ensure that young people at risk are empowered with new understandings and behaviour to break the cycle.

Fourthly, service providers have a role to play too. They can protect women and children using risk assessment management tools. Men can be linked into the programmes to help them take responsibility and become rehabilitated.

Fifthly, when it comes to intimate partner violence, legislation on its own won't be enough. Respect for women's rights and dignity should form part of the education system, and be integrated into services for young people at risk of gender violence, including perpetrators. Cultural practices should also be addressed.

And when it comes to gender-based violence and femicide substance abuse and dependency must be addressed.

Lastly, antisocial behaviour must be addressed when treating or rehabilitating sexual offenders and recidivist sexual offenders. This
should focus on substance abuse treatment in conjunction with the treatment of other problems like deviant sexual interest and preoccupation. This would help reduce the incidence of sexual recidivism among sex offenders.

None of these interventions will work unless government and civil society work together. Non-governmental organisations should be supported to develop their services further. Above all else, the government needs to make sure that the South African Police Service, court system, correctional services, social development, health and education are reformed.

This article is republished from The Conversation under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article.

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Insights from research on how to break cycle of violence against women (2019, October 11) retrieved 14 October 2023 from https://phys.org/news/2019-10-insights-violence-women.html

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.