

Four children murdered per week in the Western Cape over the last five years

The statistics, released by the provincial government, for child murders in the Western Cape make for horrific reading with 989 children murdered in the last five years. According to an analysis of child murders in the province presented by the Department of Social Development, between April 1, 2013 and March 31 last year, more than 781 children between the ages of 13 and 17 were killed, as were 76 between the ages of six and 12 and 128 between the ages of 0 and five. According to the stats, the majority of the children murdered were boys (807) and 182 girls. Murders were specifically prevalent over weekends, mostly.

The stats also showed that the areas with the highest number of child murders reported was the Nyanga police cluster with 225, Mitchells Plain with 135, Khayelitsha cluster with 97, Blue Downs with 181 child murders and the Tygerberg cluster with 61.

On Tuesday, the standing committee on social development was briefed by several different NGOs about the plague of violence against children. Professor Shanaaz Mathews, director at the Children's Institute, said: "Child homicides are a low priority for police. There is a lack of co-ordination between health, police and social services and it compromised the outcome and management of child abuse deaths." Mathews said the high levels of sexual violence fuelled the burden of rape/murder among children, particularly girls, and needed to be addressed.

Social worker Salome McLeod of Molo Songololo urged the standing committee to ensure that government and other organisations working with children have up-to-date numbers of youngsters who have been killed, suffered from serious violent crimes and were victims of abuse and violence. "This committee must monitor whether government and other organisations have introduced the right services and programmes to prevent the killing of children, and abuse and violence against children. It must also ensure that the Western Cape commissioner gets finalised and implemented as soon as possible," McLeod said.

Trauma Centre director Valdi van Reenen-le Roux said: "We are saying that child safety is a collective responsibility. It is not the responsibility of government only, it's the responsibility of everyone in this country. There is no institutional structure in our society and there has been no commitment to fix this crisis." The organisation called for a commission of inquiry into child murders in the province in 2017 when 61 child murders rocked the Western Cape. "We have encountered a number of problems; social workers who are not trained in trauma counselling, police officers who are insensitive and do not know how to take statements, and issues with the courts. Children are even scared to go to the park because now there is gym equipment at some parks and there are more adults. The park used to be a child's safe place and now there is no safety," she said.

In February, the previous provincial legislature's committee on constitutional matters accepted the Commissioner for Children's Bill. The Western Cape's premier had indicated a provincial children's commissioner would be appointed before the end of the year. Chairperson of the standing committee Gillion Bosman said: "Following the referral to oversee the legislative requirements to appoint the Children's Commissioner from the Speaker last week, I am happy with the progress made to ensure that due process is followed as a matter of urgency. "Violence is increasingly becoming a norm in society which children are being forced to accept. I'm pleased that the committee agreed to collectively undertake to deconstruct this norm."

Department head Robert McDonald said it was doing what it can to combat child murders. "The reality is we don't have enough resources, we can't pretend that this issue does not exist. These are harsh realities."

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