

System fails our children

The crime statistics released yesterday have painted a grim picture of violence against children in the country. According to the stats, the murder rate against children increased from 985 last year to 1014 this year. The cases of sexual offences against children rose from 23488 to 24387, while rape increased from 18336 to 18586.

Tony Lawrence of the Child Protection Collaborative, said they were horrified by the increase. In the province, the amount of crimes against children is 9366. The country has been gripped by a number of child killings. Lawrence said it showed that the entire criminal justice system was not winning in protecting children. "In fact, they are losing the battle to curb the violence against children and this will have a severely detrimental effect on our future adults who will inevitably, be suffering from severe mental illnesses due to perpetual stresses and trauma," he said.

Child rights group Molo Songololo's director Patric Solomons said: "We are alarmed and very upset that the stats show that more and more children are being killed, raped and assaulted; and that our child protection services responses are failing our children. "The stats are also a testimony of the lack of responses by the government and political leaders who fail to speak out and act to prevent and combat murder and rape," he said.

Senior researcher at the UCT Children's Institute, Lucy Jamieson said they were appalled but not surprised by the latest crime statistics. "The damage caused by abuse of children has a long-term impact so we must try harder to stop it. This is not just a policing problem, it is a societal issue, that requires a response from health, social development and education," Jamieson said.

President Cyril Ramaphosa announced last Thursday that he intended to motivate Parliament to make public the national register for sex offenders.

The statistics also showed that children were increasingly becoming perpetrators, with 736 of the 21022 murders recorded by the police committed by children. Save the Children SA advocacy manager Litlhare Radebe said: "It is worrying that children are becoming perpetrators, this reflects the nature of the violent society we live in.

"If we don't act now to correct this, then the circle of violence will continue for generations to come. We need to deal with the issue of violence in our society holistically from the home setting to the school setting."