

# Provincial Report

Gauteng



**COMMISSION ON GENDER EQUALITY**

Gender Equality Ensures a Better Life for All

## **PREFACE**

The CGE's widowhood survey was a nationwide survey of public- and private-sector responses to the plight of widows in the different provinces of South Africa. In order to understand the experiences of widows and widowers, the key issue is to understand the concept of widowhood, as this is influenced by different cultures in different geographical areas and language groups. The study also examined the concepts of human rights in the cultural and religious mourning practices and how these practices impact on both men and women. It is also important to note how participants think they can be helped in trying to address the challenges facing widowhood in the respective provinces.

The research in Gauteng Province was coordinated by *Javu Baloyi*.

### **Contact Details of The Gauteng Provincial office of The Commission on Gender Equality.**

Gauteng Province  
Absa Building 4th Floor, 407 Hilda Street,  
Hatfield, Pretoria, South Africa  
Tel: +27 12 362 6971  
Fax: +27 12 362-4201

## GAUTENG

### Background of the province

The name Gauteng is derived from the SeSotho phrase meaning 'place of gold', which in turn was taken from the Afrikaans word 'goud'. Geographically, Gauteng is the smallest province in South Africa. However, it is fast becoming one of the most densely populated province, housing 20,1% of the country's people. This percentage is only surpassed by that of KwaZulu-Natal, which is 21,9%. According to Statistics South Africa's estimates for the period March 2001 to March 2006, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS stands at 34%. Nevertheless, Gauteng is the economic hub of South Africa. It was once part of the former Transvaal, later also referred to as the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) region.

### Research methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies were applied during the collection of data to enable conclusive results and to ensure that both the introvert and extrovert participants' voices were heard. The geographical classification of Gauteng makes it difficult to declare certain areas non-urban, especially in the case of informal settlements. In certain of these areas visited by field-workers, the inhabitants were adamant that their areas be recognised by the various municipalities. It would, therefore, be incorrect to refer to them as informal settlers, as they fall under the urban area demarcation boundaries.

### Sampling

Sampling was done and the specific target group objectives were met. Some of the areas in which focus group interviews took place include Lenasia (Indian), Eldorado Park (coloured), Eersterust (coloured), Danville (white), Pretoria Central (black), Atteridgeville x2 (black), Sonnheim (Arcadia) (white), the regional offices of the Department of Social Development (black and coloured) and the West Rand (black).



The following stakeholders participated in the stakeholder questionnaires:

- Department of Home Affairs
- Department of Social Development (local municipality)
- Department of Social Development (national department)
- Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (Magistrates' Court)
- Department of Health
- South African Social Security Agency (SASSA)
- Department of Social Development (provincial department)
- Church

## Findings

### Focus group interviews

The willingness of widows/widowers to have their issues discussed in this manner must be commended. Field-workers came to realise that widows/widowers experience similar problems, irrespective of the areas in which they live. Another interesting aspect is the public lack of awareness about the issues that concern widows/widowers.

Collectively, widows/widowers feel that they are being marginalised. This marginalisation takes on different forms. It starts in their homes, with relatives sometimes accusing widows of killing their spouses. Lack of personal resources such as finances seems to be one of the root causes. Sudden appearances of relatives who did not play a proactive role while the deceased was alive, contribute tremendously to tension in these households. Of late, widowers are also accused of infecting their spouses with HIV/AIDS. Lack of cooperation from public servants in relieving the plight of widows/widowers is another contentious issue. They appear to think that they are doing widows/widowers a big favour by helping them.

One of the first participants to address the gathering relayed how his in-laws wanted custody of his children after his wife had died. He stated that he wasn't aware of her assets and that his in-laws claimed these as well. He fought for custody of his children and proved that he was fit to take care of them. This goes to show that the availability of information concerning widowhood would go a long way in assisting widows/widowers in approaching the correct department when they needed to do so.

The courts should increase awareness of the importance of individuals having a will available at the regional offices of the Department of Social Development in the various areas. This would eliminate custody battles. Interestingly, the respondents appealed to the government to extend social



grants to them. In discussions with officials of the provincial office of the Department of Social Development in Gauteng, it appears that they are ready to come to the aid of widows/widowers, but cannot initiate the process of calling for the enactment of legislation or policy to that effect.

There are many examples of unfair treatment of widows/widowers in society, even in the church. For instance, in some churches a widow is not allowed to lead the choir or to play the role of an elder in the church. In many churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission, it is believed that couples, rather than individuals, should be elders. Another issue is the forceful removal of widows from the houses they shared with their husbands. In these cases, it is the children who are the most vulnerable, as they have to live with this stigma for the rest of their lives.

### **Stakeholder interviews**

The departments that were consulted are those that provide a service or deal with issues affecting widows/widowers. These are the Department of Home Affairs, the Department of Health, the Department of Social Development (national, provincial, local and regional), the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (courts and magistrates) and the church.

As much as the stakeholder respondents provided their responses in the most humane manner, one cannot help noticing large gaps that still need to be tackled by almost all the interviewed departments. Basically, most do not have a policy on issues effecting widows/widowers. The regional Department of Social Development, for example, does not have a specific grant that targets widows/widowers, as there is no legislation to this effect.

Worth noting was how gender equality and equity were addressed in the discussions with the stakeholders. These two issues were brought up to determine if departments understand the concepts and to test whether they categorised widows/widowers as vulnerable people who deserved to be mentioned in the same breath as pensioners, orphans and other related groups. It provided this study with guidance as to which way to follow this critical issue.

The continual appeal to the CGE to come on board to help train the various departments on gender issues cannot go unnoticed either. It is a matter that needs to be treated urgently. The research team was impressed by the Department of Social Development's call for the enactment of legislation or a policy around this issue. Some departments called for gender training among their staff as they felt that their gender desks were not doing enough regarding this issue.





Basically, the CGE was commended for taking up this very sensitive issue and for its willingness to assist in ensuring that the plight of widows/widowers was addressed. The CGE should, therefore, make the necessary recommendations and work with the interested parties to ensure that there is legislation or a policy that governs issues pertaining to widows/widowers. Guiding principles in the draft paper can only be realised after analysing the responses from the stakeholders and carrying out the duties of protecting and evaluating all forms of gender inequalities in all spheres of government, as set out in the Commission on Gender Equality Act.

This does not mean that whites still receive preferential treatment at government offices. It does, however, highlight the fact that their level of education and knowledge of how the system works places them in an advantageous position. Blacks, Indians and coloureds didn't seem to know who initiates the principles that govern them as far as their culture is concerned. There is a definite need for serious consultation on the issue of widowhood by the interested stakeholders, such as cultural groups, widowhood groups, government, the Department of Arts and Culture and the CGE to chart a way forward.

Widows/widowers need the help of everyone to remove the stereotypes that society associates with them. These include not being able to marry when they want to, not being able to visit other families while in mourning (particular in the black culture) and widowers in the Indian community losing their possessions and custody of their children. Among Indians and blacks, culture also has to be blamed for widows/widowers being expected to behave in a certain manner and upholding certain norms and values in order to be considered part of that patriarchal society.

It is essential to have a will and this message should be conveyed to all couples. It is also advisable for couples to regularly check their marital status with the Department of Home Affairs. A national policy on widowhood is essential. Public education on the rights of widows/widowers needs to be disseminated to the people to help eradicate some of the ills and mistreatment of widows/widowers.

### **Interpretation of findings**

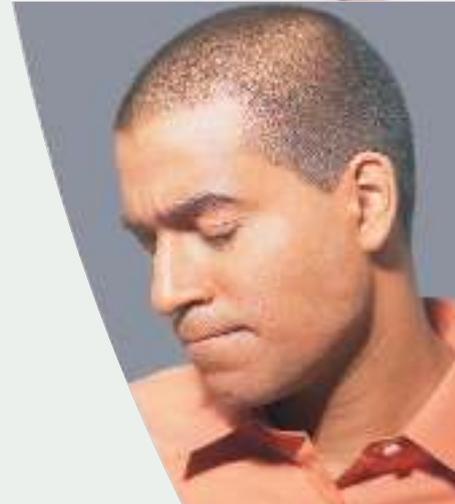
As much as the focus group interviews were emotional and unsettling, they were essential as they unearthed the plight of widows/widowers across all racial groups. They are all vulnerable and need protection. They also need assurances from the policy-makers and government that their interests are being taken care of or will be looked at. The stereotypes that these people have to contend with in their everyday lives are a burden too large to carry. The sooner the problems of widows/widowers are addressed, the better.

Widows/widowers are also calling for the findings of this project to be made public to help those suffering in silence to come forth and be helped. The ill treatment of vulnerable groups in the name of cultural beliefs is another issue that affects mostly Indians and blacks and needs to be addressed. The plight of widows/widowers in most ethnic groups cannot go unnoticed or unchallenged. The CGE has been tasked with seeing to it that justice is done and ensuring that the cries for help do not fall in deaf ears.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations emanated from the research:

- All cultural dimensions that seem to be a hindrance to widowhood should be scrutinised.
- A policy should be formulated or enacted to prevent harassment and the pointing of fingers when a woman loses her husband.
- A vigorous campaign should be conducted; firstly among public servants about their ill treatment of widows/widowers, secondly among traditional leaders to accept changes to primitive customs regarding widow/widowerhood and lastly among the general public.
- Public education should be conducted among couples, especially in black communities, about the significance of having a written will to help settle unforeseen disputes.
- Widows/widowers who seem to find it difficult to cope should be given free counselling by social workers and psychologists from the Department of Social Development.
- Grants should be made available to those who are unemployable and who have not yet reached pensionable age.
- A desk should be established at the Department of Social Development that deals with issues pertaining to widows/widowers to ensure that their plights are addressed.
- Disciplinary action should be taken against public servants who refuse to help widows/widowers in mourning.
- A widow/widowers' forum should be established to ensure a national platform.
- The CGE needs to play a proactive role in ensuring that government departments understand the issue of widowhood by educating them on stereotypes and the stigmatisation perpetuated by those that are supposed to be protecting these vulnerable people from the ills of society (public officials and policy-makers).
- A cluster needs to be formed by various government departments – including the Department of Provincial and Local Government and the Department of Housing – to educate their officials and to sensitise them on issues that affect widows/widowers. A policy that specifically deals with issues concerning widows/widowers needs to be enacted urgently.





- The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, the Department of Safety and Security and the Department of Housing need to ensure maximum protection to the vulnerable to ensure that they are not left out on the street. Their property should be protected.
- The Department of Social Development needs to have a special grant to provide for those who have not yet reached pensionable age. Children of widows/widowers need to be exempt from school fees, and the CGE should undertake public education campaigns countrywide on the issues of widows/widowers. The courts and magistrates must deal with delays in the process to ensure that widows' needs are catered for before and after the burial.
- The Department of Social Development and the Department of Home Affairs should work together to help fast-track the pace of helping widows/widowers to obtain grants, identity documents, death certificates, etc.
- The CGE needs to take its watchdog stance on this issue more seriously and call on those who feel that they are being hard done by due to their status as widows/widowers to come forward and report their cases. The seriousness of the CGE on the issue will force government departments to work as a unit to help widows/widowers.