

What are Thuthuzela Care Centres (TCCs)?

Thuthuzela Care Centres (TCC) are one-stop facilities aimed at supporting survivors of sexual violence. They are part of South Africa's anti-rape strategy led by the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA).⁷

TCCs embody a survivor-centred approach, aligning with the broader goals of the National Strategic Plan (NSP) and ERAP. They represent a tangible commitment to justice, healing, and empowerment.

The word Thuthuzela means "to comfort" in isiZulu, reflecting the centre's mission to provide compassionate, coordinated, and dignified care to survivors of sexual violence.

Services Provided by TCCs:

1. Crisis counselling upon arrival
2. Medical examination and forensic evidence collection
3. HIV and STI testing, including PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis)
4. Emergency contraception
5. Police statement and case registration
6. Court preparation and legal support
7. Referral to shelters or places of safety
8. Long-term counselling and follow-up care

TCCs aim to reduce secondary victimisation⁸, improve conviction rates, and restore dignity to survivors.

⁷ National Prosecuting Authority (NPA). Thuthuzela Care Centres Overview. [Justice.gov.za](https://justice.gov.za)

⁸ Secondary victimisation refers to the negative social or institutional responses that victims experience following the initial trauma of gender-based violence.

How Do TCCs Empower Survivors and Restore Dignity?

TCCs are built on the principles of respect, comfort, and justice. They empower survivors by:

1. Reducing secondary trauma through a coordinated, non-judgmental approach.⁹
2. Helping survivors feel in charge again by allowing survivors to make informed choices about medical and legal steps.
3. Providing holistic care that addresses physical, emotional, and legal needs.
4. Ensuring justice by improving evidence collection and court readiness.
5. Creating safe spaces where survivors are believed, supported, and treated with dignity.¹⁰

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⁹ Department of Justice and Constitutional Development. Phuthaditjhaba TCC Launch Statement. justice.gov.za
¹⁰ Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust. Thuthuzela Care Centres Programme. rapecrisis.org.za



Commission
for Gender
Equality

Thuthuzela Care Centres

Empowering Survivors, Restoring Dignity through the Gender Lens of Thuthuzela Care Centres

(Insights from 2020 CGE Research Report on Accounting for Work in Progress)¹

Brief Background on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in South Africa

Over the years, South Africa has experienced high levels of gender-based violence and femicide² (GBVF) accompanied by frequent media reports of brutal murders of women. This persistent media coverage also served to keep the issue of violence against women on the public agenda, generating repeated public outcries and demands for effective action by the state.

¹ accounting-for-work-in-progress-2020 (1)

² Femicide refers to the murder of women based on their gender.

Femicide rates are five times higher than the global average, with women and girls subjected to intimate partner violence, rape, sexual assault, and domestic abuse.³ Children and LGBTQIA+ individuals are also at high risk. Toxic masculinity and deeply rooted gender inequalities fuel this crisis. Despite existing policies and laws, the United Nations CEDAW Committee has expressed concern over the persistent prevalence of GBV and the inadequacy of support services⁴.

The Country's Response to GBV- Legislative and Policy Frameworks

National Frameworks

Since the start of democracy, South Africa has introduced various policies and laws to protect citizens' rights, especially gender equality, dignity, and freedom from violence. Below are some of the national frameworks:

1. **The SA Constitution:** Provisions contained in the Bill of Rights (chapter 2) uphold the right of every person to equality (including gender equality), freedom and security, and imposes a duty on the government (including the police) to take appropriate steps to ensure that the human rights of persons are respected.
2. **The Domestic Violence Act (DVA):** The DVA is largely in line with international obligations in terms of the conventions such as CEDAW and the DEVAW, as well as the obligations imposed by chapter 2 of the Constitution. The aim of the Act is to reduce the

³ Statistics SA (2018). 'Crime Against Women in South Africa, An In-Depth Analysis of The Victims of Crime Survey Data', Crime Statistics Series Volume V (<https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-40-05/Report-03-40-05June2018.pdf>)

⁴ UN CEDAW Committee (2011), 'Concluding Observations of The Committee on The Elimination of Discrimination Against Women', (CEDAW/C/ZAF/CO/4), 5 April 2011, par. 24.

- high number of incidents of domestic violence in society and uphold the rights of all persons.
3. **Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007:** The Act defines a sexual offence to include grabbing, touching someone's genitals, sexually assaulting or raping someone. Among others, it aims to include all sexual crimes in one law, define all sexual crimes, make all forms of sexual abuse or exploitation a crime; improve the way the criminal justice system (the courts and police) works; make the age when both men and women can give permission (consent) to have sex, make sure that rape survivors get post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to reduce their chances of contracting HIV; allow rape survivors to find out if the person who raped them has HIV; and establish a national register (a list of names) for sex offenders. The Act also makes provision for the establishment of the national inter- sectoral committee on sexual offences. This Act gave rise to the roll-out of the sexual offences courts throughout the country by the Department of Justice.
 4. **The Criminal Law (Forensic Procedures) Act, Section 36A:** The Section provides for the taking of specified bodily samples from certain categories of persons for the purposes of forensic DNA. It also provides for the protection of the rights of women and children in taking of DNA samples.

International/Regional Frameworks

Below are some of the key instruments the country has signed up to in its efforts to deal with GBV in general but also Violence against Women in particular:

1. **Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW) of 1993:** Violence against women is defined as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary

- deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."
2. **Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW):** Among others, recognises violence as a violation of human rights.
 3. **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPA):** Underlines violence against women as both a violation of women's human rights and an impediment to the full enjoyment by women of all human rights. It demands state accountability for action to prevent and eliminate violence against women.
 4. **African Union Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, on the Rights of Women in Africa:** It sets out rights of women in the public and private spheres and calls for the protection of women against violence in public and private life.
 5. **Due diligence standard for violence against women:** States are urged to "exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the state or by private persons."

The Emergency Response Action Plan (ERAP)

The ERAP was implemented with the aim to fight violence against women and children through coordinated government and civil society efforts⁵

The areas of priority under the ERAP were identified as:

- a) access to justice for victims and survivors,
- b) to change norms and behaviour through high-level prevention efforts,
- c) urgently respond to victims and survivors, and institutional arrangement.⁶

⁵ The South African Government News Agency. R1.6bn allocated for GBV Emergency Action Plan. September 2019. Available at <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/r16bn-allocated-gbv-emergency-action-plan>.

⁶ South African Government (18/9/2019), Emergency Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide.