

GBV remains a thorn in society

Despite inroads being made with the representation of women in various sectors of society and industry, discrimination and violence remains a thorn on the side of many. The film industry, like most industries has not been immune to the scourge of gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa.



Source: [Pexels](#)

A 2017 Sisters Working in the Film and Television (Swift) anonymous qualitative survey made several findings on GBV in the industry. The Sexual Harassment and Discrimination survey found that almost 78% of women working in film and television felt discriminated against because of their gender.

“It gathered a huge number of accounts of sexual harassment, discrimination and even rape on film sets. Its contents pull back the veil of magic around the world of cinema to reveal that women both on camera and behind the camera face often insurmountable obstacles to succeeding,” says Swift chairperson Zanele Mthembu in an interview with *SAnews*.

Of the women polled by the non-profit organisation, 23.7% indicated that they had been unwillingly touched while working in the industry; 65% indicated that they had witnessed sexual harassment by a perpetrator in a higher position (plus 30% in an equal position and 5% in a lower position).

Of the 54.8% of respondents who intervened to stop the harassment, 27% say that they risked their job to do so. Also 41.3% of respondents felt they had experienced discrimination based on their body image related to their body size or “look”.



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A remaining 55.5% indicated that they had felt discriminated against based on factors such as sexual orientation, religion, family life and income bracket. Of the women polled, 68.1% believed that they had to work twice as hard and be twice as good as their male counterparts in the industry.

“We believe this is only the tip of the iceberg as many women remain silent from fear of victimisation, isolation, being labelled [as] troublemakers and therefore denied job opportunities,” says Mthembu.

This as the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children campaign draws to an end. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the annual global campaign, which began on 25 November and concludes today.

Minister in the Presidency for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane says the country-- especially men – need to take accountability for the gender-based violence and femicide plaguing the country.

“Gender-based violence and femicide remains the second pandemic of our country and most of our communities have witnessed the devastating impacts of this pandemic. Our country, our women, our children are not safe, [they] don’t feel safe,” she says.

Economic emancipation

The minister also emphasises that economic emancipation is also imperative to fighting the financial abuse of women. She says a government is making strides in ensuring that women are given the opportunity to find this economic freedom.

This year, the government launched the Women’s Economic Assembly which is a platform to mobilise the private sector to partner with the government to enable women owned enterprises to participate in procurement opportunities within industry and supply chains. For most women entry into the film industry remains difficult.

“It remains challenging for women to make it in the industry. The fact that today we still have mention that a director is a woman goes to show just how challenging it still is for women to make it in what to all extent and purposes is still a white male dominated industry,” says Mthembu.

Mthembu also notes that a 2018 study conducted by the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) in partnership with Swift, revealed that black women filmmakers constitute 66.54% followed by whites at 23.79% and Indians at 2.13% and coloured women constituted 7.54%.

The NFVF is an agency of the Department of Arts and Culture that was created to ensure the equitable growth of South Africa's film and video industry. It provides funding for the development, production, marketing and distribution of films and also the training and development of filmmakers.



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Additionally the study showed that discrimination seems to occur more in the film sector as opposed to television and commercials with the majority of respondents being of the view that major decisions like funding, are based on the sexual orientation of the applicant.

“There have been a lot of instances where women have had to perform sexual favours before being considered for a job or funding,” she says, adding that key decision makers do not respect the thoughts of women as equal to their own even when the woman is more experienced.

Asked about whether enough is being done by government to address the scourge of GBV, she says that policy and laws are in place to address issues of GBV and gender discrimination but that implementation is a challenge. “What we also need is the development of a gender equality monitoring system for the audio-visual sector so that we can gauge the effectiveness of these policies,” she says.

Other steps that can be taken include continuing to raise awareness and education about sexual harassment as well as increasing psycho-social, legal, and other support for survivors of GBV and sexual harassment among others, she says.

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