



# RESEARCH REPORT

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## SAFFI's GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES: DOCUMENTING THE EXPERIENCES OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND FAITH COMMUNITIES IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

The research programme we feature in this report explores how religious leaders and their congregations have experienced various phases of the South African Faith and Family Institute's (SAFFI) Domestic Violence Pastoral/Spiritual Care Training and Capacity Strengthening Model (SAFFI training model).

### The SAFFI training model

We present the SAFFI training model in five phases, consisting of the Sensitizer Workshop for religious leaders, a five-day domestic violence pastoral care training programme, a 10-week resource series, support services, and monthly or quarterly meetings with religious leaders and faith communities.

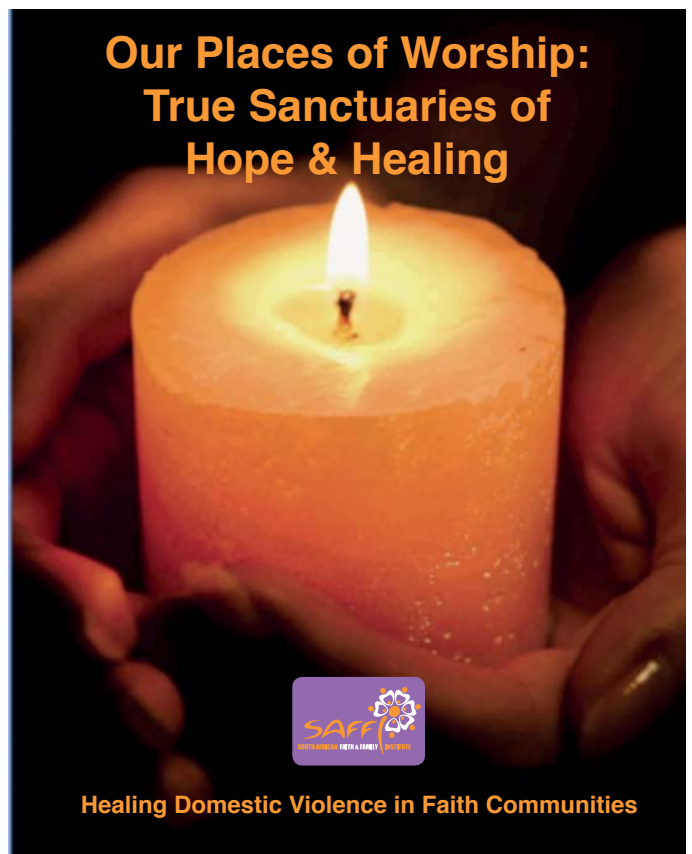
#### Phase 1: Sensitizer Workshop

The Sensitizer Workshop is an initial four-hour training session designed to create awareness among religious leaders about the faith dimensions of domestic violence, and their responsibility in providing help to families experiencing such violence. It introduces leaders to SAFFI and explains SAFFI's aims, theories, methodologies and approaches. The Sensitizer serves as a stimulus for religious leaders to confront the manner in which faith communities address gender-based and domestic violence. It is a training space that also provides an opportunity for religious leaders to be debriefed and reflect on their own theological questions and challenges.

#### Phase 2: Five-day training

This phase builds on the work done in the Sensitizer. The training focuses on the dynamics of domestic violence, the root causes and contributing factors of gender and domestic violence, while unpacking faith dimensions, the Domestic Violence Act and how to make use of it, and healthy boundaries during pastoral care interventions with victims and perpetrators. It helps religious leaders understand the prevalence and impact of domestic violence in their communities and how to foster a culture that discourages it.

### Our Places of Worship: True Sanctuaries of Hope & Healing



Healing Domestic Violence in Faith Communities

# 10 THEMES

## THEME 1

Our places of worship: True sanctuaries of hope and healing. This was an introduction to gender-based and domestic violence and the 10-week series)

## THEME 2

Uncovering the root causes of racism and violence against women

## THEME 3

The Church as being salt (healing) and light (hope) in addressing VAW / Domestic Violence in the Home and Society

## THEME 4

My Body is the temple of the Holy Spirit – Who am I and whose am I?

## THEME 5

Marriage is sacred and divorce is hateful. Why?

## THEME 6

Tamar is raped by her brother. Amnon – the family's response. Guidance in dealing with victims/survivors

## THEME 7

Amnon rapes his sister, Tamar – the family's response. Guidance in dealing with perpetrators

## THEME 8

The healing process – is there no balm in Gilead? (Is there no balm/ointment in our faith community?)

## THEME 9

Mourning the loss of the relationship and moving on

## THEME 10

Repentance, forgiveness and the pledge of re-commitment to being a place of hope (light) and healing (salt)

## Phase 3: Ten-week support series

SAFFI, in collaboration with religious leaders, designed and implemented the 10-week support series titled, 'Our Places of Worship: True Sanctuaries of Hope and Healing'. The aim was to establish guidelines on how gender-based and domestic violence could be spoken about and addressed in faith communities. This was piloted with two Christian faith communities each in Atlantis and Oudtshoorn, and one in Khayelitsha, all in South Africa's Western Cape. The objective was to create, in partnership with religious leaders, ideas and guidelines on how domestic violence could be spoken about and addressed in faith communities. Religious leaders mostly incorporated these themes in their Sunday church services, but three of the communities (two in Atlantis and one in Oudtshoorn) used the youth resource developed by SAFFI to guide their youth ministries through the same themes.

Developing and implementing the series was a perfect example of participatory action research (see Methodology below), and religious leaders were an integral part of the process. Once they got buy-in from the leadership of their churches, they began to implement the series. We provided guidelines for scriptures to be used, questions to ask and points to make. They also assigned observers to make notes during their sermons, and conducted youth group and women's group sessions.

## Phase 4: Support

This phase offers support services and continues in-service training, mentoring, supervision, and monitoring and evaluating. We guide religious leaders and faith communities to establish support services and intervention strategies to disrupt violence against women. How this is done depends on the circumstances and needs of religious leaders (and faith community) who have completed at least Phases 1 and 2. In-service training includes the prevention-in-action training module, which offers practical tools for context-appropriate action. We also offer training on family preservation and premarital counselling.

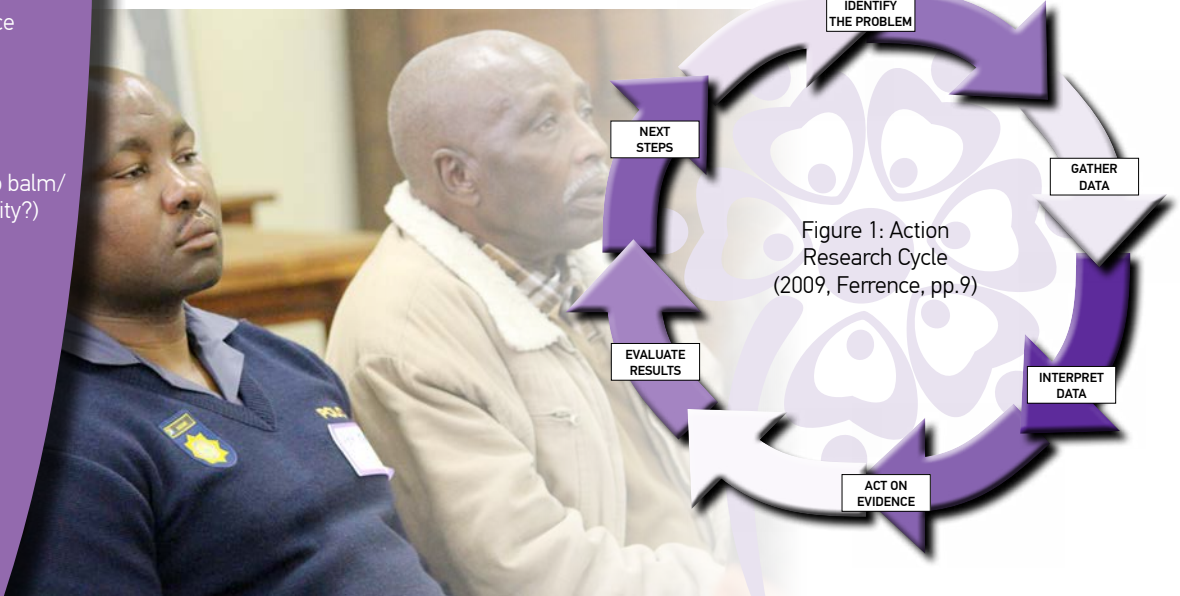
## Phase 5: Religious Leaders Forum on Gender-based Violence Meetings

We hold monthly or quarterly meetings with religious leaders and faith communities. These community-based forums provide not only support and guidance, but also an opportunity to debrief religious leaders who have dealt with pastoral care cases. These forums also offer group psychosocial support and guidance. The goal is for the faith sector to become fully integrated into other community-based, gender-based and domestic violence forums, campaigns and services.

## Methodology

This research focused on how religious leaders and faith communities experienced the SAFFI model. We employed a participatory action research (PAR) methodology in order to understand religious leaders' and faith communities' experiences. Action research typically cycles through the following phases: targeting an area of collective interest; collecting, organizing, analysing, and interpreting data; and taking action based on this information. One of the most important features of a participatory action research approach lies in the relationship between those conducting the research and those "being researched". That is, the "subjects" become partners in the research process, and share responsibility for identifying specific problems and applying local, action-oriented strategies. We thematically tracked the challenges and successes experienced by religious leaders and faith communities.

The research comprised analysing organisational records and conducting individual interviews with religious leaders and focus groups with their faith communities. The report underlines the critical place of faith and religion in conversations about gender justice and violence against women. It highlights the practicalities and challenges when trying to address this work at grassroots level, while providing the basis for a conversation that can focus SAFFI's work and gender justice in general.



## Group analysis

After concluding the interviews and focus groups and extracting the themes from the data, we conducted a collective group analysis at a retreat. All SAFFI staff, the religious leaders and some lay leaders who had participated in the research process attended the retreat. We presented the preliminary themes to the group, and we then broke into smaller groups to discuss the following questions:

- What surprised us about the data?
- What was missing from the data?
- What new questions this data lead to?
- What lessons can we learn from the data?

Doing analysis collectively served to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions in the research. It was a creative process during which participants brought fresh insights and reasoning to the table.

## Findings

### The role of religious leaders

#### Question 1

What effect has the SAFFI model had on religious leaders' understanding of their role in perpetuating and/or interrupting violence against women in intimate relationships and family life in what they teach, preach and offer during pastoral care? And, is this reflected in their actions and behaviour?

The research findings show that most religious leaders understand their role as serving the community and addressing a myriad of problems that affect their communities. What SAFFI was able to do was tap into personal and religious motivations that encouraged them to take domestic and gender-based violence seriously. We were also able to contribute to these leaders' knowledge and skills, while providing spaces where they could network with other religious leaders and experts, and exchange knowledge and ideas. Many of the leaders who attended training sessions seemed to have become more cognisant of how they addressed gender-based and domestic violence in their everyday activities. Some actively developed programmes or campaigns with the specific aim of preventing and combating such violence.

It is clear that SAFFI was able to create a spark that inspired changes in action and behaviour. However, some of the deeply held beliefs and attitudes that prop up patriarchy remain firmly ensconced. To advance this work, we would need to open up spaces where beliefs and attitudes around gender, race and related topics can be discussed. Disrupting gender binary systems while being sensitive to cultural and contextual nuances would need to become central to SAFFI's work—indeed, any work on gender in South Africa, if we truly want to deal with the root causes of gender-based and domestic violence.

### Recommendations

We propose that local knowledge, context and belief systems should be applied, in tandem with various understandings of gender and identity, to co-construct ways to deal with domestic violence. This should always take into account local realities about the oppressive power systems that shape them. It would further require customary law, traditions and knowledge to be brought into useful communion with current contexts to devise new ways of thinking about humanity and behaviour.

### The SAFFI model and faith communities

#### Question 2

What effect has the SAFFI model had on faith communities whose religious leaders have participated in the SAFFI model?

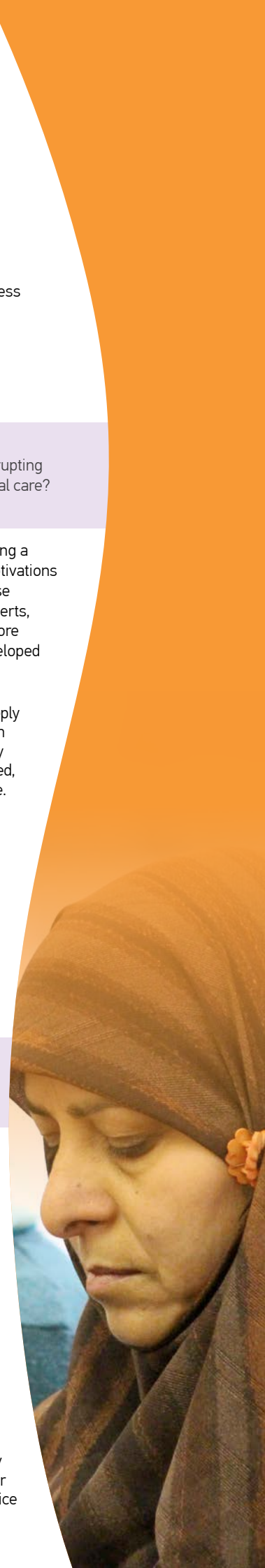
The findings demonstrate that the faith communities who were privy to the 10-week support programme began to think of their religious leaders as a source of support and healing. Spaces and topics of conversation were opened up that made the faith communities feel their faith was relevant to the realities of their everyday lives. Many reported a sense of relief and healing.

However, it is important to note that these faith communities were not homogeneous—within them were victims and perpetrators, women and men, young and old people alike. Our programme and the religious leaders who received training were skewed largely towards a focus on victims, and often on more mature women.

### Recommendations

It is critical that religious leaders, their faith communities and SAFFI co-construct what safe spaces really mean, and that new spaces be co-created to enable all abused women and men, as well as perpetrators of gender-based and domestic violence to seek help and assistance.

Creative methods of instruction need to be developed in participation with communities and their leaders so that they can be used in ways that will encourage all people to think critically and change attitudes and behaviours that hamper gender justice. In the same way, attitudes and behaviours that foster positive social change and promote gender justice at a local level should be tapped into and supported.



# Conclusion: A whole-community response

## Question 3

How can the experiences of religious leaders and their faith communities who have participated in the SAFFI training model contribute to advancing a whole-community response to reducing and eradicating gender-based and domestic violence against women and girls?

The reported experiences of faith communities demonstrate that connecting gender justice with people's own experiences, when combined with deep-seated religious beliefs, can be a strong motivator for them to become change agents. This applies not only to religious leaders, but also to other members of the community across the board. The results also show that to create sustainable and long-term impact, it is important to include meaningful participation and networks within local communities. The relevance of any intervention should be informed by structural and personal realities. External stakeholders should also participate, even if they have no direct involvement. Such an approach would make a whole-community response possible.

## Questions for further enquiry

Our work with religious leaders and faith communities has prompted some important questions to be considered.

- How can more meaningful participation be achieved in various approaches and methodologies?
- How can we connect with participants' personal experiences and religious beliefs in ways that add further momentum and value to the work?
- How can we work respectfully with different cultural ideas and traditions while disrupting the patriarchal and oppressive systems inherent in different cultures and contexts?
- How do we begin to disrupt binary notions of gender in ways that broaden thinking around masculinity, femininity and other gender experiences, but still take into account religious understandings?



SAFFI wants to acknowledge the participation and hard work of the religious leaders and faith communities involved in this project. Specifically we acknowledge those pictured above namely, Pastor Patrick Pickering, Mavis Pickering, Pastor Elizabeth Isaacs, Pastor Doreen van Rooyen, Bishop Mncedisi Michael Mpande, Pastor Swartbooi Dyantyi (not pictured above), Bishop Dyantyi, Pastor Zato Albert Hanse, and Pastor Lizzie Mpongoshe.

### Endnotes/References

1. For the full report see, 'SAFFI's Gender-based Violence Intervention Programmes: Documenting the Experiences of Religious Leaders and Faith Communities in a South African Context'.
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