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Anti-gun lobby group uses murder stories to stop more murders

Gunfree SA hopes MPs will tackle killing of women scourge

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A review of 21 cases done by Gunfree SA has shown that women and girls are shot in a range of circumstances, including intimate partner and family violence.

Image: 123RF/Roger Lamkin

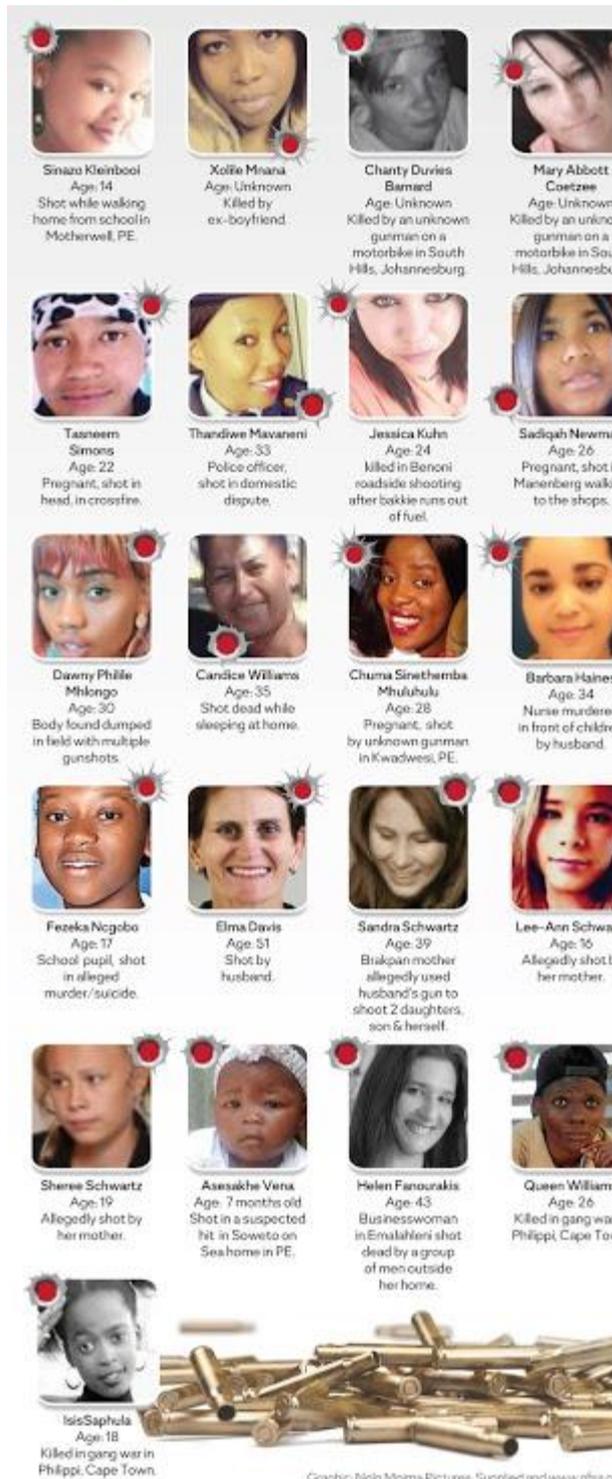
SA's femicide statistics are harrowing: 21 females shot dead every week - almost five times the global average, says the World Health Organisation.

Lobby group Gunfree SA (GFSA) is taking the stories behind this statistic to the

people in power. In a campaign next week targeting MPs, the group will electronically distribute a poster that puts faces to some of those women killed by guns.

GFSA reviewed 21 gun-related femicides this year "to represent the number of

women shot and killed every week", said director Adele Kirsten.



A poster put together by Gunfree SA which puts faces to some of those women killed by guns.

Image: Nolo Moima

One story is that of Jessica Kuhn. Three months ago she was shot dead with her boyfriend after their bakkie ran out of petrol near Benoni. Her family is shattered by the senselessness of her murder.

Kuhn's uncle, pastor Frikkie Kuhn, told the Sunday Times this week: "We still don't understand it. Why would these men walk past two strangers and brutally shoot them?"

"Jessica's father is my youngest brother. I have seen how he and Jessica's mother can't process this. Jessica's mom has never been an outgoing person, but now she is even more quiet."

Another case is that of 14-year-old Sinazo Kleinbooi, shot in the back of the head for her smartphone while she was on her way home from school in Motherwell in the Eastern Cape.

"The review shows that women and girls are shot in a range of circumstances, including intimate partner and family violence, predatory crime and gang-related violence," Kirsten said.

In 2016 the UN Human Rights Commission described violence against women and girls in SA as "widespread, at a high level and normalised".

The GFSa researcher "stopped halfway before she could carry on because she found it too overwhelming, and that in itself makes the point", said Kirsten.

"Crunching numbers and data is important, but we sometimes lose sight of the impact of one life taken by a gun."

Kirsten said the poster and a policy briefing would be sent to the MPs in the portfolio committee on policing and that GFSa would ask for it to be tabled.

It would also be used to inform policy on other items already tabled, like the Domestic Violence Act and firearm amnesty.

Recommendations being made to the MPs include:

- Immediately removing firearms in incidents of intimate partner violence;
- Making sure that a gun owner who is declared unfit surrenders all licences, firearms and ammunition;
- Ensuring all gun owners comply with "fit and proper" provisions in the law;
- Establishing and linking an electronic database and register; and
- Ensuring police officers dealing with firearm-related issues are empowered with knowledge, skills and resources.

Kirsten hopes the MPs will read the stories and ask: "Could this happen to me or someone in my family? The victims are familiar, they are just like us."

While the murders happen in different contexts, the most common scourge - around 57% according to the Medical Research Council - is women killed by an intimate partner.

"A history of prior violence is the biggest indicator of a risk of fatal violence by a man against his partner," Kirsten said.

"When arguing, he will look at the safe where the gun is, or he may shoot the family dog to exhibit his power to kill her.

"The research shows that women are most vulnerable to being shot dead when they have already reported abuse. There are protection orders, but how effective are they? There is the Firearms Control Act, which includes gun removal from an owner, but it doesn't go far enough."

Other mechanisms are in place to make sure men with a history of violence do not have access to guns, or have their guns removed. However, Kirsten said that in practice these mechanisms were not functioning and this was what GFSA hoped the stories would help change.