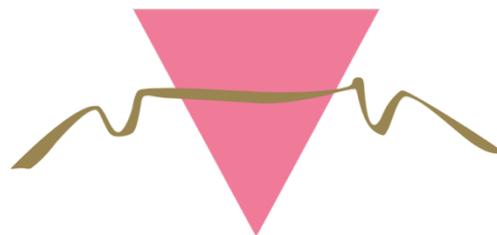


# Triangle Project Policy Brief No. 2016/03-1



## THUTHUZELA CARE CENTRES

March 2016<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

TCC are integrated one-stop shops for sensitive rape treatment, counselling and accessing related services like SAPS and NPA. The centres also provide access to important information (arrests, court dates, bail decisions, etc); assistance in court preparation; and referral to other services that address family violence, drug rehabilitation, and HIV support.

“Thuthuzela”, a Xhosa word meaning comfort, represents a radical approach to rape care management that is producing excellent results for South Africa in the communities across the country that are lucky enough to have one of them. “They are a critical part of South Africa’s anti-rape strategy, aiming to reduce secondary trauma for the victim, improve perpetrator conviction rates and reduce the lead time for finalising cases,” says Advocate Thoko Majokweni, Director of the Sexual Offences and Community Affairs Unit at the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA). The Thuthuzela project is led by the NPA’s Sexual Offences and Community Affairs Unit (SOCA), in partnership with various departments and donors as a response to the urgent need for an integrated strategy for prevention, response and support for rape victims.

Thuthuzela Care Centers operate best in public hospitals close to communities where the incidence of rape is particularly high. They are also linked to the specialised Sexual Offences Courts, staffed by a committed cadre of prosecutors, social workers, investigating officers, magistrates, health professionals and police, and located in close proximity to the Thuthuzelas. To ensure that the Thuthuzela integrated strategy for prevention, reaction and support for rape victims is effective, responsibility falls with the Sexual Offences and Community Affairs (SOCA) Unit established in 1999 with the NPA. Since its establishment, the SOCA Unit has been working to develop best practices and policies that seek to eradicate victimisation of women and children, while improving prosecution, particularly in the areas of sexual offences, maintenance, child justice and domestic violence. The centres are managed by a top level inter-departmental team comprising Justice, Health, Education, Treasury, Correctional Services, Safety and Security, Local Government and Home Affairs, Social Development and designated civil society organizations

Thuthuzela’s integrated approach to rape care is one of respect, comfort, restoring dignity and ensuring justice for children, women and men who are victims of sexual violence. When reporting, the rape victim is removed from crowds and intimidating environments, such as at the police station, to a more victim-friendly environment before being transported by police or an ambulance to the Thuthuzela care centre at the hospital. Enroute, they receive comfort and crisis counselling from a trained ambulance volunteer and once at the centre, are ushered to a quiet, private space, welcomed by the site-coordinator and a doctor is immediately summoned to conduct a medical examination. Information on the procedures to be performed is then provided and the patient signs a consent form for medical examination and blood specimens. If the medical examination happens within 72 hours of the rape, DNA and PEP is conducted, after which they are offered the

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<sup>1</sup> Compiled by Emma Jones-Phillipson, Policy Intern, and Matthew Clayton, Research, Advocacy & Policy Manager

opportunity to take a bath or shower and to change into soft, clean clothes to help cushion bruised feelings from the incident. After that, the investigating officer on call at the centre takes the victim's statement. Thereafter, the victim receives appropriate medication and is given a follow-up date for further medical treatment, before being transported home. "This process ensures that service providers are available to a rape survivor in one location, rather than her being shuttled around throughout the criminal justice system", says Advocate Thoko Majokweni, Head of the SOCA unit.

Doctors at Thuthuzela Care Centers have reported seeing increased numbers of child victims. Sadly, some of them are as young as three months. Accordingly, the need for specially trained child-friendly nurses or care-givers to receive and comfort children before they are taken for examination is critical. Various donors have also contributed to making the model child-friendly, through offering technical expertise for the installation and availability of special equipment and furniture. These include two way-mirrors, posters, CCTV, drawings, and anatomically correct dolls comprising five family members, to help prepare children to appear in court, should that become necessary.

The Thuthuzela model has already improved the process of reporting and prosecuting rape and other sexual offences, and reducing secondary trauma to survivors as the entire process takes place in a dignified and friendly environment. According to Advocate Majokweni, "At the heart of the success of the Thuthuzela approach is the professional medical and legal interface and a high degree of cooperation between victim and service providers from reporting through investigation and prosecution of the crime, leading up to conviction of the offender. This has led to an increase in conviction rates. Higher levels of awareness have resulted in an increased numbers of cases reported at police stations and taken immediately to a Thuthuzela Care Centre... In addition, there has been a dramatic drop in the time spent to investigate, prosecute and convict perpetrators – formerly from approximately 3-5 years, to less than 6 months today". So important are the Thuthuzelas to the country's fight against HIV and AIDS that the Government of South Africa, in a move to strengthen implementation of its Domestic Violence Act and Sexual Offences Bill, continues to establish more centres.

Although much progress has been made, challenges still remain in the fight against gender based violence. There are limited numbers of trained prosecutors, police, or social workers to cover the case load. There is no overarching policy to hold stakeholders accountable to their commitment. But most importantly, there is a limited budget from the government to sustain the model into the future.

### Sources

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