

## **The social fabric of South Africa is riddled with the pain and trauma of womxn**

**By Nazley Sharif MP – DA Shadow Deputy Minister of Women, Youth, and Persons with Disabilities**

It sometimes feels like we live in a society that hates womxn. You may disagree, and that's alright, but in the absence of kindness and empathy, all we are left with is hate. It will take more than a global pandemic to redesign the social fabric and dismantle the systems of oppression we currently find ourselves in.

This social fabric is riddled with pain, trauma and violence that has been built with a conscious decision of deliberately leaving womxn out. We must rip up this invisible social contract, we all seemed to have signed unknowingly, that tells womxn and especially the girl child that her life is expendable and that her value is determined by the sexualisation of her body.

I was caught off guard but not entirely shocked when a young womxn, who matriculated last year, told me how her teacher in High School called her a slut for wearing a skirt that was just a little shorter than what HE deemed "acceptable". No one, not even schools should be dictating what girls wear! Schools sexualise girls from a young age.

This practice is not only damaging to girls and boys, but it has also set destructive precedents and a toxic relationship between a girl and her own body. Where boys learn from a young age that wearing a short skirt is an invitation for abuse on a girl's body. Immediately after she said this, like a flood, memories of my own experiences in school came rushing back. Not only memories of how the schools code of conduct from primary school, sexualised my body but also the sexual harassment I experienced from male peers.

Womxn learn the fact that from a very young age, it is our responsibility to ensure we don't get raped or sexually harassed, it is the girl child's responsibility to take all precautions to keep herself as safe as possible. Putting this immeasurable burden and pressure on her for the rest of her life for the simple fact that she was born a girl. We must instead teach our young boys not to sexualise her body. Respect for autonomy must be far-reaching, understanding consent and basic equality must be prioritised in schools, at home, at the work place and any other space occupied by womxn.

The fact of the matter is, a womxn grows up knowing her body is sexualised from a schooling level, whether she wants it to be or not, and this has lifelong consequences. From being told at a young age what she should wear and how she should carry herself to even the most natural process of learning or trying to access information on how her body works, how to keep herself healthy, what choices she has over her body and what is normal or abnormal is seen as explicit content. Explicit content without an age restriction.

Just last week, I was called out to a police station in Joburg South where the police refused to open a rape case because the survivor reported it a week after it happened, Minister Cele, the

police refused to open a case for a rape survivor because she reported it a week after it happened

The South African Police Service cannot continue to remain complacent in the violence towards womxn. Why must it only be that when I as an MP intervened that the survivor was only then assisted. I am telling you this because this is the reality womxn in this country that is hated by society face every single day, too often. To make matters worse, the same survivor is now being attacked on social media because the rapists happens to be a well- known name in the club scene because it's easier to tarnish the survivors' character and reputation than to hold your peers and yourself accountable. Spreading disgusting rumours about the survivor to challenge her character happens too often.

When it comes to the high amounts of rape and gender-based violence in this country, I am personally unapologetic to always believing the survivor first and fore-most. No more will we allow perpetrators to remain comfortable in secrecy, no more will we allow survivors to be silenced and tarnished.

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