

People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) South Africa

POWA was established in 1979 by a group of volunteers with only a pager and a referral book to assist women experiencing domestic violence in the Johannesburg area. Then, in 1984, POWA opened the first shelter in South Africa for women and their children. However, due to apartheid laws, it catered mainly to white women and at times, women of color, when possible. Since the new dispensation in South Africa in 1994 the client base and staff have changed and new branches were opened to reach out to other disadvantaged communities. Historically, POWA's core activity has been counseling (telephone and face-to-face) in Gauteng Province for women experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault, rape and childhood sexual abuse (mainly incest) and telephone counseling to women in the other 8 provinces.

POWA's work has expanded over the years to include lobbying, advocacy, legal advice, sector research and consultation with government on sector issues.

Objectives

1. To conduct public awareness campaigns on GBV from small community groups to legislative bodies.
2. Civil society involvement by providing volunteer training and programme development to encourage private citizens in mobilizing around the issue of domestic violence.
3. Collaborate with government bodies to improve policy and legislation in regards to GBV such as setting up police services, housing programmes, social welfare programmes (grants, etc.) accessible to women in need, and safety programmes that prioritizes women and their children in domestic violence situations.
4. Lobbying government on provision of health programmes for survivors of rape including provision of antiretrovirals (ARV's).
5. Provide sheltering and support programmes for women and children in need of safe environments.

Programme Description

POWA's engages in both primary and secondary prevention programmes.

Public awareness campaigns

Outreach activities are conducted on a monthly basis. This includes setting up stalls in various venues from malls to government buildings.

Poster campaigns are created with governments and with 'in kind' funders. An annual review of the messages and development specific posters and banners of awareness is done.

Media campaigns publicize the services POWA offers on a regular basis. Talk shows are also conducted on community radios in the Sebokeng area (mining township) on gender-based violence.

Victim Empowerment Programmes are strengthened as each POWA office targets the police stations within their area and creates a close relationship with the Chief Commander. The Victim Empowerment Programmes within the police stations provides quality services to women experiencing violence.

School outreach with at least six schools per year within the areas POWA provides services. The programmes involve the children in workshops on GBV and encouraging them to volunteer.

Training

- Conducting gender sensitivity training with volunteers for awareness programmes, this includes corporate bodies and government including police services, departments of social welfare and the judicial systems up to magistrates.
- Providing training to incarcerated perpetrators of gender-based violence in order to deepen their understanding of power and control and GBV.

Empowerment Programmes

- Economic empowerment for women to help enable them to become financially independent and avoid having to return to abusive situations.
- Peer group counseling sessions where women examine their situation and learn how to make safer life choices.

Legal Advice

- Providing court support and preparation to women to avoid re-victimization.
- Court campaigns to ensure fair convictions

Notable Innovation

Developing partnerships for public awareness campaign

POWA has been effective in garnering the support from the for-profit sector. Through creative and deliberate partnerships, POWA succeeds in getting its ideas out to a wider audience and defrays the cost of expensive media campaigns. Key lessons learned in creating partnerships are as follows.

- Reach out to the for-profit sector, appeal to their sense of civic duty and show how their support for the campaign will improve their social standing as well as contribute positively to the community.
- In partnerships, ensure your credibility is not compromised. If you accept money from government sources, they may want to edit your message. If you get corporate sponsorship, they too might want to slant your message to suit their corporate image. It is essential to work with them to develop the messages and images and make a formal agreement that your organization will approve and sign off on all materials before they are used.
- Be strategic about who you can persuade to pay for and promote the campaign. Think beyond traditional donors and grants by considering government or corporate sponsorship.
- Use local volunteers and events to publicize your campaign. A message promoted locally by community members has implicit credibility.
- It is important to speak to your environment. The language as well as the level of sophistication of the message has to be carefully calculated with the needs of the audience and limitations of the environment.
- Choose images carefully. Ensure that that your intended audience identifies with the image.
- Develop guiding principles that enable you to judge if your campaign is woman-centric and does not contribute to the problem. Be aware of the broader politics surrounding your message.
- Use statistics credibly. Carefully check the numbers you quote and if possible refer to the source. Do not invent numbers or exaggerate the problem to get attention.
- Create inclusive messages (i.e., reach both men and women) to avoid alienating men who can be part of the solution.