

How Many Femicides Will it Take? A Champion Boxer, A First-Year Student, 3 000 Others

TRIGGER WARNING: Here are the horrifying stats and stories.



Mia Arderne



Femicides have been dominating headlines for the last few weeks. One victim was Leighandre “Baby Lee” Jegels, (<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-08-31-sa-world-champion-fighter-shot-dead-by-her-police-officer-boyfriend/>) a champion boxer on the cusp of an international career, killed by her ex-boyfriend. Another was Uyinene Mrwetyana (<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-09-02-breaking-missing-uct-student-was-bludgeoned-with-a-scale-in-post-office/>), a UCT film student, in her first year, raped and bludgeoned at a post office. And those are just some that have made mainstream headlines.

Related: [How to Safely Leave an Abuser, Step-by-Step, Written by a Survivor](https://www.cosmopolitan.co.za/politics/safely-leave-an-abuser/) (<https://www.cosmopolitan.co.za/politics/safely-leave-an-abuser/>)

Femicide is a Frequent Headline Now

A hundred trigger warnings could not have prepared us for this. For the reality of femicide becoming a frequent, almost daily, headline. So, before I get into this, remember to switch off the internet and protect your mind when you feel it getting too much. I mean this for women and survivors in particular.

This is how gender-based violence looks in South Africa: Meghan Cremer (<https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/murdered-cape-town-horse-rider-meghan-cremer-found-tied-up-had-restraint-around-her-neck-20190808/>)’s body was found tied up, Lynette Volschenk (<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-08-26-man-in-court-after-neighbours-body-found-chopped-up-in-refuse-bags/>) was found in pieces in black bags, Jesse Hess (<https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/19-year-old-woman-and-grandfather-found-dead-in-parow-flat-31704966>) was murdered in her home, Leighandre “Baby Lee” Jegels was shot by her cop ex, Uyinene Mrwetyana was attacked with a scale at a post office.

It’s scary AF. It’s spurred the movement #AmINext. Because “Am I next?” is a real question for women in South Africa. A woman is murdered by men every four hours (<http://www.marieclaire.co.za/hot-topics/south-africa-femicide-stats-2018>) in this country. With 3 000 (https://www.change.org/p/south-african-parliament-needs-to-declare-gender-based-violence-in-south-africa-a-state-of-emergency?recruiter=972148812&utm_source=share_petition&utm_campaign=psf_combo_share_abi&utm_medium=whatsapp&recruited_by_id=6981b930-8f47-11e9-8d3c-a1d2dd66b860&share_bandit_exp=abi-17627817-en-GB&share_bandit_var=v1&utm_content=washarecopy_17627817_en-GB%3Av3) annual femicides, our femicide rate is five times (<http://www.marieclaire.co.za/hot-topics/south-africa-femicide-stats-2018>) more than the global rate. How many more?

It's Simply Not Safe to be a Woman in South Africa

And it hasn't been safe for a long time. This isn't new. Men have been killing women in SA. We all remember the high profile femicides of Reeva Steenkamp (<https://www.cosmopolitan.co.za/politics/reeva-steenkamp-documentary/>) and Jayde Panayiotou. (<https://www.cosmopolitan.co.za/celebrity-news/justiceforjayde-panayiotou-guilty-murder/>) Both were killed by the men in their lives. The media covered them extensively. But most femicides (the other 2000+ SA women, who are less famous) don't make the headlines quite like the high profile ones.

You might also remember the femicides of Amanda Tweyi (<https://www.news24.com/Archives/City-Press/Love-triangle-turns-deadly-at-Rhodes-University-20150429>) (murdered in a Rhodes res by an ex), Karabo Mokoena (<https://www.marieclaire.co.za/hot-topics/karabo-mokoena-trial-verdict/>) (also killed by her ex) and Zolile Khumalo (<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2018-05-04-security-being-assessed-at-the-res-where-zolile-khumalo-was-murdered/>) (shot at 21 by her boyfriend). All three of these femicides happened, again, by the hand of intimate partners.

We Are Unsafe When We Leave Our Homes & We Are Unsafe Inside Our Homes

Why are these cases so disturbing? It points to the reality that if you are to be murdered, there's a good chance it will be by your boyfriend or your ex.

But there is also a long list (including Siam Lee, (<https://www.thesouthafrican.com/missing-siam-lee-body-found/>) Anene Booysen (<http://ewn.co.za/2013/10/31/The-Anene-Booyesen-Story>), and most recently Uyinene Mrwetyana) who have lost their lives to men they do not know. It's simply not safe to be a woman and in South Africa.

We are at risk of rape and murder just by leaving our homes. We are *also* at risk of rape and murder inside our very own homes. So where are we safe? At 3000 femicides a year, the answer is *nowhere*. And this needs to be addressed.

Boxing Champ, Leighandre "Baby Lee" Jegels (25)

She had a black belt. Unbeaten 9-0 with 7 knockouts. WBA Pan African Junior Bantamweight Champion. She was training to return to the ring. She was in a GTI with her mother, on her way to the gym when it happened (<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-08-31-sa-world-champion-fighter-shot-dead-by-her-police-officer-boyfriend/>). Her name was Leighandre "Baby Lee" Jegels.

The boxing champion was killed (allegedly) by her ex-boyfriend, a policeman. He shot her in East London. He fired several shots and she reportedly (<https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/sa-boxing-champs-cop-boyfriend-arrested-following-her-shooting-20190831>) died instantly on the scene. Leighandre was 25-years-old when she was killed.

She had a PROTECTION ORDER against him. It didn't help.

Leighandre had a protection order against this man. She had reported (<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-08-31-sa-world-champion-fighter-shot-dead-by-her-police-officer-boyfriend/>) prior domestic abuse. *TimesLive* (<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-08-31-sa-world-champion-fighter-shot-dead-by-her-police-officer-boyfriend/>) reports he shot her three times. He also shot and injured her mother – who is currently in hospital. Her father (<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-08-31-sa-world-champion-fighter-shot-dead-by-her-police-officer-boyfriend/>) was too distraught to speak to the media.

Her killer then fled. The police chased him down and arrested him in PE. As the alleged killer is a policeman, *EWN* (<https://ewn.co.za/2019/08/31/ipid-to-investigate-murder-of-sa-boxing-champion-leighandre-jegels>) reports there's an IPID (Independent Police Investigative Directorate) investigation of this murder. IPID investigates crimes committed by police.

The murder of this champion boxer is both tragic and representative of many female homicide cases in SA. Intimate partner murders make up a big percentage (more than half) of femicide cases.

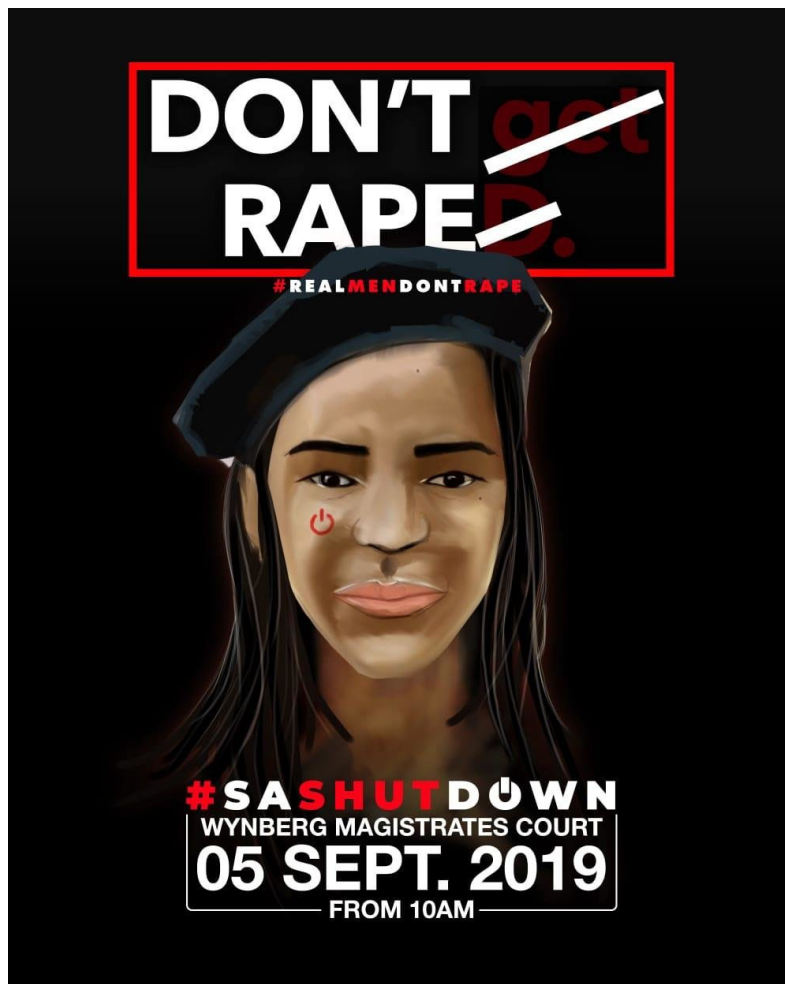
UCT Film Student, Uyinene Mrwetyana (19)

She was a first-year student at UCT ([https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-09-03-uct-src-holds-night-vigil-for-uyinene-mrwetyana/?tl_inbound=1&tl_groups\[0\]=80895&tl_period_type=3&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=First%20Thing%20Tuesday%203%20September%202019%20Future%20Space&utm_content=First%20Thing%20Tuesday%203%20September%202019%20Future%20Space+CID_257d64bfd9f7ffa08c4b127bae369ca0&utm_source=TouchBasePro&utm_term=UCT%20SRC%20holds%20night%20vigil%20for%20Uyine%20Mrwetyana](https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-09-03-uct-src-holds-night-vigil-for-uyinene-mrwetyana/?tl_inbound=1&tl_groups[0]=80895&tl_period_type=3&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=First%20Thing%20Tuesday%203%20September%202019%20Future%20Space&utm_content=First%20Thing%20Tuesday%203%20September%202019%20Future%20Space+CID_257d64bfd9f7ffa08c4b127bae369ca0&utm_source=TouchBasePro&utm_term=UCT%20SRC%20holds%20night%20vigil%20for%20Uyine%20Mrwetyana)), studying film and media. Her name was Uyinene Mrwetyana. She went to the post office for a parcel. And there, a man sexually assaulted her. She fought back. He then bludgeoned her with a scale. The post office is the last place she was seen alive, before going missing.

Police discovered an unidentified body in Khayelitsha, *Timeslive* (<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-09-02-breaking-missing-uct-student-was-bludgeoned-with-a-scale-in-post-office/>) reports. They did DNA tests to confirm the identity. They found blood inside the post office, in the suspect's car and on his shoe.

Uyinene Mrwetyana was 19-years-old when she was killed. Her alleged killer (post office employee) has been arrested, reports *News24* (<https://m.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/breaking-man-arrested-for-uyinene-mrwetyanas-disappearance-charged-with-murder-rape-20190902>), and he's confessed. He is charged with both rape and murder. But the court ordered that his name not be released. In an act of cathartic mob justice, a crowd burnt down (<https://ewn.co.za/2019/09/03/mob-torches-house-thought-to-belong-to-uyinene-mrwetyana-murder-accused>) his house, and prevented fireman from fighting the blaze.

The rape and murder of this young student are both tragic and representative of gender-based violence in SA. No place or space is safe for women. Public or private. Day or night.



Here's What Her Friends Had to Say:

Her friends describe her as a reliable, fun person with big dreams. *SowetanLive* (<https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-09-02-she-wanted-to-see-the-world-friends-reeling-over-death-of-uct-student-uyinene-mrwetyana/>) reports:

"She was a really holistic person, very focused," said Katlego, "She had a lot of things planned for her future...."

"I remember struggling before assignments were due, she would always come and check up on us. You could count on her. She was a genuinely fun and funny person."

"She wanted to travel everywhere, she had big dreams," said Tumelo, "She should have been able to go to the post office, she should have been able to go wherever the f**k she wants."

The F*cked Up Parallel

These two women, like many other victims, were just starting their lives. They were both on the cusps of their careers. They were both murdered by men. And brutally so. Both women were victims of gender-based violence. They are us. They are South African women.

Both women were going about their day (gym, post office). Doing ordinary, relatable things we all do. Things that appear to have no danger-factor (proving that short skirts, late nights and alcohol are NOT what make men rape and kill, just FYI).

Both women had immense talent and potential. A teenage student and a star fighter. Both of them were loved. They both had more to give.

We need to remember their names. We need to mourn these women. But the parallel between these two women is no coincidence. These deaths represent a bigger problem that cannot be ignored anymore. Violence against women is off the charts in SA.

Like Tumelo said, she "should have been able to go wherever the f**k she wants." This applies to both of them and ALL of us. We deserve to live and move in a country that is not a war zone.

You've seen at least these two (probably more than two) human stories like this. Now, have a look at the hard numbers.

Femicide (Female Homicide) and GBV Stats in SA

Rates of rape and female homicide in SA* rank among the highest *in the world*. Our violence statistics are similar to countries at war.

Every four hours (<http://www.marieclaire.co.za/hot-topics/south-africa-femicide-stats-2018>) a woman is murdered in SA

At least half (57.1% (<http://www.marieclaire.co.za/hot-topics/south-africa-femicide-stats-2018>)) of these murders are by an intimate partner

SA's femicide rate is five times (<http://www.marieclaire.co.za/hot-topics/south-africa-femicide-stats-2018>) higher than the global rate (https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/en/)

Every year, SA sees around 3000 ([https://www.change.org/p/south-african-parliament-parliament-needs-to-declare-gender-based-violence-in-south-africa-a-state-of-emergency?](https://www.change.org/p/south-african-parliament-parliament-needs-to-declare-gender-based-violence-in-south-africa-a-state-of-emergency?recruiter=972148812&utm_source=share_petition&utm_campaign=psf_combo_share_abi&utm_medium=whatsapp&recruited_by_id=6981b930-8f47-11e9-8d3c-a1d2dd66b860&share_bandit_exp=abi-17627817-en-GB&share_bandit_var=v1&utm_content=washarecopy_17627817_en-GB%3Av3)

[https://www.change.org/p/south-african-parliament-parliament-needs-to-declare-gender-based-violence-in-south-africa-a-state-of-emergency?](https://www.change.org/p/south-african-parliament-parliament-needs-to-declare-gender-based-violence-in-south-africa-a-state-of-emergency?recruiter=972148812&utm_source=share_petition&utm_campaign=psf_combo_share_abi&utm_medium=whatsapp&recruited_by_id=6981b930-8f47-11e9-8d3c-a1d2dd66b860&share_bandit_exp=abi-17627817-en-GB&share_bandit_var=v1&utm_content=washarecopy_17627817_en-GB%3Av3)

3Av3) women murdered and 50 000 ([https://www.change.org/p/south-african-parliament-parliament-needs-to-declare-gender-based-violence-in-south-africa-a-state-of-emergency?](https://www.change.org/p/south-african-parliament-parliament-needs-to-declare-gender-based-violence-in-south-africa-a-state-of-emergency?recruiter=972148812&utm_source=share_petition&utm_campaign=psf_combo_share_abi&utm_medium=whatsapp&recruited_by_id=6981b930-8f47-11e9-8d3c-a1d2dd66b860&share_bandit_exp=abi-17627817-en-GB&share_bandit_var=v1&utm_content=washarecopy_17627817_en-GB%3Av3)

[https://www.change.org/p/south-african-parliament-parliament-needs-to-declare-gender-based-violence-in-south-africa-a-state-of-emergency?](https://www.change.org/p/south-african-parliament-parliament-needs-to-declare-gender-based-violence-in-south-africa-a-state-of-emergency?recruiter=972148812&utm_source=share_petition&utm_campaign=psf_combo_share_abi&utm_medium=whatsapp&recruited_by_id=6981b930-8f47-11e9-8d3c-a1d2dd66b860&share_bandit_exp=abi-17627817-en-GB&share_bandit_var=v1&utm_content=washarecopy_17627817_en-GB%3Av3)

3Av3) sexual offenses against women

2 930 (<https://www.cosmopolitan.co.za/politics/gender-based-violence-stats-national-plan/>) women murdered in 2017/2018

One in five women have experienced violence at the hands of a partner (<https://www.cosmopolitan.co.za/knowyourrights/consent-in-married/>)

110 (<https://www.cosmopolitan.co.za/politics/gender-based-violence-stats-national-plan/>) (reported) rapes a day

56 (<https://www.cosmopolitan.co.za/politics/gender-based-violence-stats-national-plan/>) murders a day

19.3% (<https://www.cosmopolitan.co.za/politics/gender-based-violence-stats-national-plan/>) of victims are women and children

80% (<https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-40-05/Report-03-40-05.June2018.pdf>) of reported sexual offences are rape

68.5% (<https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-40-05/Report-03-40-05.June2018.pdf>) of these sexual offence victims are women

Femicide, sexual assault and harassment have become normalised in SA. Sadly, *we are used to* seeing numbers and stats like these. We are *used to* seeing rape and femicide in the news.

These crimes should shake us to the core. But they are an every-other-day occurrence in SA. Another daily headline, a number, a percentage. In the last few weeks, we've been hit with an avalanche of femicide news. And *we should* be shaken by this.

Gender-Based Violence in SA is a STATE OF TURMOIL

The government needs to realise the severity of the situation and that we are no longer tolerating this. You can sign this petition (https://www.change.org/p/south-african-parliament-parliament-needs-to-declare-gender-based-violence-in-south-africa-a-state-of-emergency?recruiter=972148812&utm_source=share_petition&utm_campaign=psf_combo_share_abi&utm_medium=whatsapp&recruited_by_id=6981b930-8f47-11e9-8d3c-a1d2dd66b860&share_bandit_exp=abi-17627817-en-GB&share_bandit_var=v1&utm_content=washarecopy_17627817_en-GB%3Av3) to urge our government to recognise this for what it is. And to take action, *real* action, not bad tweets and summit promises.

Earlier today, our government tweeted and deleted this tone-deaf, victim-blamey response to the femicides:



Violence and abuse against women have no place in our society. Govt is calling on women to speak out, and not allow themselves to become victims by keeping quiet. Women who speak out are able to act, effect change and help others.

FFS.

Firstly, **No Woman Owes You The Story Of Her Trauma.** No survivor of sexual abuse is obligated to speak out. Ever. People deal with trauma in different ways. Placing the onus of action or change on survivors is unbelievably f*cked up. Don't tell us to speak up. Get men to stop raping.

Secondly, **No One Allows Themselves To Become A Victim.** This wild phrasing is harmful. It takes accountability for rape out of the equation. Rapists rape. Women do not allow themselves to be raped. It's men that need to be called out to change.

Our government needs to do better. South African women deserve better. We deserve better. How many femicides will it take until we see change?

Related: South Africa's Horrifying Gender-Based Violence Stats and the Latest Plan to Fix It (<https://www.cosmopolitan.co.za/politics/gender-based-violence-stats-national-plan/>)

South African Helplines

If you are experiencing abuse (physical, emotional or sexual), you are not alone. Call one of these helplines if you are being abused or if you know someone who is being abused:

POWA (<https://www.powa.co.za/POWA/get-help/>) (People Opposing Women Abuse): 011 6424 345

Gender-based Violence Command Centre (<http://gbv.org.za/command-centre/>): 0800 428 428 (emergency line) or *120*7867# (*please call me* facility)

Tears Foundation (<https://www.tears.co.za/>) helpline: *134*7355#

**Source: The South African Police Service, South African Medical Research Council's Gender and Health Research Unit & World Health Organization's Violence and Injury Prevention Programme*