

# Investigating **femicide** in South Africa

A collaboration between Media Hack Collective  
and Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism

**Laura Grant, GJJC, September 2023**

# The story

## #SayHerName: The faces of SA's femicide epidemic

- Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism received
- Canon Collins Trust 2020 Sylvester Stein Fellowship
- Media Hack Collective brought on to do the data journalism component
- Bhekisisa did the narrative component

[bhekisisa.org/article/2021-04-14-sayhername-the-faces-of-south-africas-femicide-epidemic/](https://bhekisisa.org/article/2021-04-14-sayhername-the-faces-of-south-africas-femicide-epidemic/)



The screenshot shows the top portion of a web article. At the top right, there are social media icons for Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube. Below them is the Bhekisisa logo, which includes a stylized 'B' icon and the text 'BHEKISISA CENTRE FOR HEALTH JOURNALISM'. A dark navigation bar contains links for 'ABOUT US', 'MULTIMEDIA', 'EVENTS', 'RESOURCES', 'ARTICLES', 'SPECIAL REPORTS', 'BHEKISISA TV', 'OUR NEWSLETTER', and 'FAQS'. The breadcrumb trail reads 'Home > Articles > #SayHerName: The faces of South Africa's femicide epidemic'. The article title is '#SayHerName: The faces of South Africa's femicide epidemic', with a sub-headline 'Articles Features' and byline 'By Media Hack and Bhekisisa Team - April 14, 2021'. The main image shows several pairs of red high-heeled shoes scattered on a grey pavement. The hashtag '#SayHerName' is overlaid in large red text. Below the image is a list of bullet points: '• We searched English online media outlets for stories of women who were murdered in South Africa between 2018 and 2020 — only 4% of the official cases showed up.', '• One in four female homicides reported in the media was a woman killed by her partner at the time.', and '• Many other murdered women remain nameless with their stories untold.' The article begins with a large 'T' and the text: 'his is an ode to the women whose names made it into news outlets between 2018 and 2020. It's also a tribute to those who didn't — the faceless, nameless women whose stories will remain untold. This project is a collaboration among Bhekisisa, Media Hack and the Canon Collins Trust, which awarded Bhekisisa the 2020 Sylvester Stein Fellowship.'

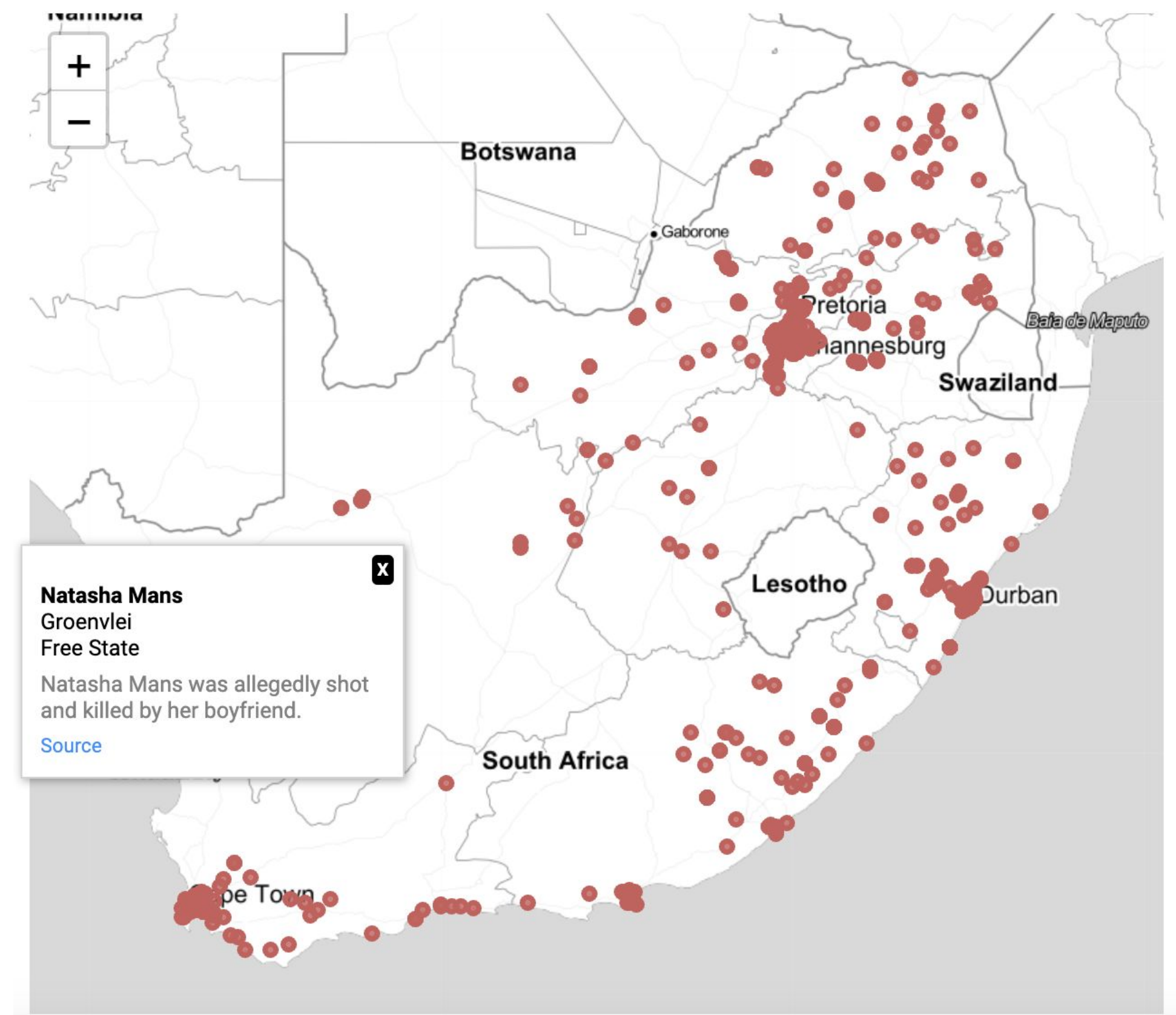
# Database of 482 murdered women

## Interactive map and filterable cards with the story

Filter ▼

<p><b>Abigail Eland</b> Age: 37 Area: Cape Town Media Report: 2020-01-14</p> <p>Single mother Abigail Eland was shot by gang members during a gunfight.</p> <p>SOURCE: <a href="#">DAILY VOICE</a></p>	<p><b>Akhona Gumede</b> Age: Area: Mthwalume Media Report: 2020-08-15</p> <p>Akhona Gumede was killed and her body was found in bushes near Mthwalume, KZN. She was one of five women who went missing between March and August whose bodies were found in the area.</p> <p>SOURCE: <a href="#">ENCA</a></p>	<p><b>Angelique Harmse</b> Age: 29 Area: Media Report: 2019-02-13</p> <p>The mutilated body of Angelique Harmse was found floating in the Vaal River.</p> <p>SOURCE: <a href="#">IOL</a></p>	<p><b>Anna Herbst</b> Age: 66 Area: Bloemfontein Media Report: 2020-06-30</p> <p>Anna Herbst affectionately known as "pannekoektannie" because of the pancakes she sold at the local butchery, died after she was tied up and her house set on fire during a robbery. A 19-year-old man was sentenced to 25 years in jail.</p> <p>SOURCE: <a href="#">NEWS 24</a></p>
<p><b>Akhona Mncube</b> Age: 19 Area: Pietermaritzburg Media Report: 2020-07-21</p> <p>Akhona Mncube was allegedly assaulted by a man she allegedly knew and died a day later from her injuries. She had a one-year-old son.</p> <p>SOURCE: <a href="#">TIMES LIVE</a></p>	<p><b>Allisandre Floors</b> Age: 16 Area: Media Report: 2019-12-23</p> <p>Allisandre Floors, 16, was allegedly murdered by her 41-year-old uncle.</p> <p>SOURCE: <a href="#">EWN</a></p>	<p><b>Anneline Hesebeck</b> Age: 57 Area: Paardeberg Media Report: 2020-08-20</p> <p>Anneline Hesebeck was allegedly shot and killed by her winemaker husband whom she was in the process of divorcing. He then shot himself.</p> <p>SOURCE: <a href="#">NEWS 24</a></p>	<p><b>Annette Kennealy</b> Age: 51 Area: Makhado Media Report: 2019-05-22</p> <p>Farm attack activist Annette Kennealy was stabbed to death on her farm in Limpopo allegedly by a farm worker.</p> <p>SOURCE: <a href="#">NEWS 24</a></p>
<p><b>Allison Plaatjies</b> Age: 26 Area: Media Report: 2019-11-01</p> <p>Allison Plaatjies, a primary school teacher, was stabbed to death in her flat. Police arrested her boyfriend for her murder.</p> <p>SOURCE: <a href="#">TIMES LIVE</a></p>	<p><b>Altecia Kortjie</b> Age: 27 Area: Cape Town Media Report: 2020-07-15</p> <p>Altecia Kortjie was allegedly murdered with her seven-year-old daughter, Rayneia, allegedly by her boyfriend. Altecia had reportedly tried and failed to obtain a restraining order.</p> <p>SOURCE: <a href="#">EWN</a></p>	<p><b>Annie Aylward</b> Age: 18 Area: Muldersdrift Media Report: 2018-11-30</p> <p>Annie Aylward, 18, was shot dead allegedly by her 62-year-old boyfriend who then shot himself.</p> <p>SOURCE: <a href="#">THE CITIZEN</a></p>	<p><b>Ansia Kheha</b> Age: 3 Area: Johannesburg Media Report: 2020-06-19</p> <p>Three-year-old Ansia Kheha was raped and stabbed. Her body was found stuffed into a bin.</p> <p>SOURCE: <a href="#">TIMES LIVE</a></p>
<p><b>Amahle Quku</b> Age: 17 Area: Browns Farm Media Report: 2020-06-22</p> <p>Amahle Quku was raped and beaten to death. Her family found out about her murder when pictures of her body were circulated on social media. A 25-year-old man was arrested.</p> <p>SOURCE: <a href="#">IOL</a></p>	<p><b>Amanda Mthembu</b> Age: 11 Area: Durban Media Report: 2020-06-25</p> <p>Eleven-year-old Amanda Mthembu was raped and strangled to death. A 17-year-old male was arrested.</p> <p>SOURCE: <a href="#">NEWS 24</a></p>	<p><b>Anthea Thopps</b> Age: 30 Area: Media Report: 2019-09-13</p> <p>Anthea Thopps was raped and strangled during a robbery by a man who worked as a handyman and reportedly knew Anthea and her family well. He was given a 25 year sentence.</p> <p>SOURCE: <a href="#">IOL</a></p>	<p><b>Aqhama Tom</b> Age: 9 Area: Hankey Media Report: 2020-09-22</p> <p>Nine-year-old Aqhama Tom was sent on an errand to the shop and never returned. Her body was found by police. A 40-year-old neighbour was arrested for her murder.</p> <p>SOURCE: <a href="#">TIMES LIVE</a></p>

Murders in the media: January 2018 to October 2020



# No 'ordinary' murders

- **1 in 3 women were killed by their current or former intimate partner**
- Almost half knew their killer
- 1 in 3 of the victims are **unnamed** in the reports
- In 1 in 4 cases there was little information about how the woman died

# Backstory

## From gender-based violence to femicide


- Initially, we wanted to look at gender-based violence, but we couldn't find reliable data
- We decided to focus on femicide – female homicide – because murder is the most reliable crime statistic available
- But SA's official crime statistics - made available quarterly and annually in Excel workbooks - don't break down murder numbers by the gender of the victims

# Finding data

## Slide decks

- A slide in a presentation deck contained an overview of crimes against women and children
- 13,815 women murdered in a five-year period. (2015-2020)
- Average of 7 women a day

**OVERVIEW CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN:  
CONTACT CRIME CATEGORIES COMPARISON**



Crime category	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	Count diff	% change
<b>Contact crimes ( crimes against women)</b>							
Murder	2 780	2 639	2 930	2 771	2 695	-76	-2,7%
Sexual offences	39 580	37 392	36 731	36 597	31 100	-5 497	-15,0%
Attempted murder	3 325	3 328	3 554	3 445	3 214	-231	-6,7%
Assault GBH	56 969	51 956	53 263	54 142	50 859	-3 283	-6,1%
Common assault	84 091	78 090	81 142	82 728	83 202	474	0,6%
<b>*Total contact crimes</b>	<b>186 745</b>	<b>173 405</b>	<b>177 620</b>	<b>179 683</b>	<b>171 070</b>	<b>-8 613</b>	<b>-4,8%</b>
<b>Sexual offences</b>							
Rape	33 467	31 370	30 981	30 626	25 801	-4 825	-15,8%
Sexual assault	3 373	3 671	3 621	3 771	3 481	-290	-7,7%
Attempted rape	2 090	1 643	1 614	1 712	1 382	-330	-19,3%
Contact sexual offences	650	708	515	488	436	-52	-10,7%
<b>Total Sexual Offences</b>	<b>39 580</b>	<b>37 392</b>	<b>36 731</b>	<b>36 597</b>	<b>31 100</b>	<b>-5 501</b>	<b>-15,0%</b>

Crime Category	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	Count Diff	% Change
<b>CONTACT CRIMES ( crimes against children)</b>							
Murder	1 019	839	985	1 014	943	-71	-7,0%
Sexual Offences	26 514	24 677	23 488	24 387	22 070	-2 317	-9,5%
Attempted murder	1 061	936	1 059	1 184	1 137	-47	-4,0%
Assault GBH	8 772	7 589	7 562	7 815	7 506	-309	-4,0%
Common assault	10 686	10 211	10 446	10 829	10 692	-137	-1,3%
<b>Total Contact Crimes</b>	<b>48 052</b>	<b>44 252</b>	<b>43 540</b>	<b>45 229</b>	<b>42 348</b>	<b>-2 881</b>	<b>-6,4%</b>
<b>Sexual Offences</b>							
Rape	21 121	19 079	18 336	18 586	17 118	-1 468	-7,9%
Sexual Assault	3 509	3 986	3 706	4 451	3 727	-724	-16,3%
Attempted rape	716	590	662	562	586	24	4,3%
Contact sexual offences	1 168	1 022	784	788	639	-149	-18,9%
<b>Total Sexual Offences</b>	<b>26 514</b>	<b>24 677</b>	<b>23 488</b>	<b>24 387</b>	<b>22 070</b>	<b>-2 317</b>	<b>-9,5%</b>

**NB: Figures of crimes against women and children in the table are inclusive of unfounded counts. This figures should be regarded as preliminary as the verification through physical docket were not finalised due to Covid 19.**

# Is that high?

## International comparisons

- In SA **woman victims are ~13% of the total murder victims**
- Global female homicide rate **2.3 per 100,000** women (2017)
- South Africa's female homicide rate **9.5 per 100,000** women (2018)
- One of the 5 highest countries for which stats are available

*-UN Office on Drugs and Crime Global Homicide Report 2019*

# Finding more data

## Public access to information requests

- We asked for more police statistics on murdered women
- At which police stations were the murders reported?
- Are there 'hotspots'?
- Request was unsuccessful

# What happened to the murdered women?

## Official police statistics

- Femicide is not mentioned in the official crime stats presentations
- Causative factors listed for murder that could perhaps relate more to women than men are:
  - domestic related
  - rape related
  - witchcraft related

**CAUSATIVE OF MURDER : PER PROVINCE 2019/2020**

<i>Causative factors</i>	EC	FS	GP	KZN	LP	MP	NC	NW	V
<i>Arguments/ Misunderstanding (not related to domestic)</i>	643	211	1 099	645	73	151	148	66	4
<i>Domestic related</i>	163	127	190	185	74	391	61	93	1
<i>Vigilantism / Mob justice</i>	152	18	303	312	96	100	5	41	1
<i>Robbery (house/ Business/ Street)</i>	65	47	353	229	50	28	5	58	2
<i>Gang-related</i>	116	8	38	35	0	1	0	4	8
<i>Retaliation / Revenge</i>	286	4	19	336	1	3	1	0	1
<i>Taxi-related</i>	26	1	105	80	2	4	0	1	1
<i>Rape-related</i>	14	8	19	12	6	0	2	11	1
<i>Illicit mining</i>	0	14	61	0	3	0	0	2	1
<i>Self defence</i>	8	16	8	14	3	1	1	2	1
<i>Factional Fighting</i>	5	1	13	22	0	2	0	0	1
<i>Labour Related</i>	0	0	1	34	0	0	0	0	1
<i>Politically Motivated</i>	0	0	4	13	2	2	0	0	1
<i>Bullying at School</i>	0	0	4	0	2	0	0	3	1
<i>Public / Service Delivery Protest</i>	0	0	6	0	1	0	0	1	1
<i>Witch Craft Related</i>	0	0	0	8	0	1	0	0	1
<i>Antagonism towards Foreigners</i>	0	0	5	3	0	0	0	0	1
<i>Prison Fight</i>	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1
<i>Muti Related</i>	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1


**NB: Figures in the table are counts of cases where causative factors could be determined during analysis. The unknown circumstances of the crime are not included.**

# Who murdered them?

## What the police statistics say

- Doesn't cover all the murders
- No gender of the victims

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED CRIMES: CONTACT CRIME: TOP 10 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERPETRATOR AND VICTIM :APRIL TO JUNE 2020\_2021**



Relationship Perpetrator	Murder	Rape	Attempted Murder	Common Robbery	Robbery Aggravating	Total
Boyfriend	22	129	50	13	3	217
Ex-boyfriend	3	88	30	20	10	151
Husband	19	22	18	1	0	60
Brother	5	11	16	8	1	41
Son	5	2	11	15	3	36
Girlfriend	12	0	16	3	0	31
Uncle	0	13	4	0	0	17
Father	7	8	2	0	0	17
Cousin	1	12	8	0	0	21
Stepfather	0	11	1	0	0	12

Relationship	Assault GBH
Boyfriend	1 100
Brother	397
Husband	356
Ex-boyfriend	333
Son	217
Girlfriend	131
Uncle	74
Wife	61
Cousin	59
Sister	55

Relationship	Common Assault
Boyfriend	2 570
Husband	1 153
Ex-boyfriend	773
Brother	749
Son	583
Uncle	148
Father	117
Girlfriend	116
Wife	95
Cousin	83

Relationship	Contempt of court
Son	824
Husband	608
Ex-boyfriend	466
Boyfriend	420
Brother	295
Grandson	84
Ex-husband	82
Daughter	74
Wife	58
Ex-girlfriend	45

# Turning to the media

## For info about the women behind the murder stats

- Searched mostly English-language online media reports
- Set time period of 1 January 2018 and 31 October 2020.
- Found reports on 482 murders.
- 233 of them women 18 years or older (which the crime stats covers).
- **Reports for 4% of the 5,466 total murder**

Mother of three, **Nazreen Cajee**, 40, was allegedly stabbed to death by her husband Shaheed Cajee at their Emmarentia home in the early hours of **December 6, 2022**.

*Image: Supplied*

A 37-year-old man says he has no recollection of **stabbing** his wife to death with a screwdriver in their **Emmarentia** home last week as he had been on a five-day alcohol and drug binge.

**Shaheed Cajee** appeared in the **Johannesburg magistrate's court** on Wednesday, a week after he allegedly killed his wife, 40-year-old Nazreen Cajee (formerly Fakier), while their 13-year-old daughter was in the house.

Police spokesperson Capt Mavela Masondo said previously officers received a call from a neighbour in the early hours of December 6.

“Upon arrival at the scene, police found a woman with **stab wounds** on the upper body. She was certified dead by paramedics at the scene. Preliminary investigation led to the **arrest of the husband** who was later charged with murder.”



# The Spreadsheet

## How we collect our homicide data

date_of_media_report	date_of_incident	year_of_incident	date_body_found	details	type of incident	current_intimate_partner	former_intimate_partner	family_member_of_victim	known_to_victim	place	area	province	name	age
2018-01-05	2018-01-01	2018		Noxolo Xakeka was stabbed to death in a shebeen after being harrassed for her sexual orientation. A man is serving time in prison in connection with her murder.	Stabbed				Unknown	Blaau Street	Lwandle	Western Cape	Noxolo Xakeka	

- We collect all the information we can find about each murder
- **25 variables that describe the victim and the incident** - also was someone arrested, were they convicted, what was the sentence?
- Plus a number of columns for sources and links to sources

# Searching online media reports

## Google searches

- For the story, we had to search retrospectively for media reports
- We limited the time period to 2 years and 10 months
- We started with search terms like woman, female, murdered and killed
- Looked for multiple reports: If we found a murder where a name was mentioned we searched for the victim's name or another detail of the crime for other reports on that murder to verify the information
- Followed leads, such as social media pages set up to focus on victims of gender-based violence

# Still searching

- 3 people did the searching over a period of about 3 months
- Did extra searches on murders in the dataset from time to time to look for more information
- Regularly cleaned the dataset to remove duplicates

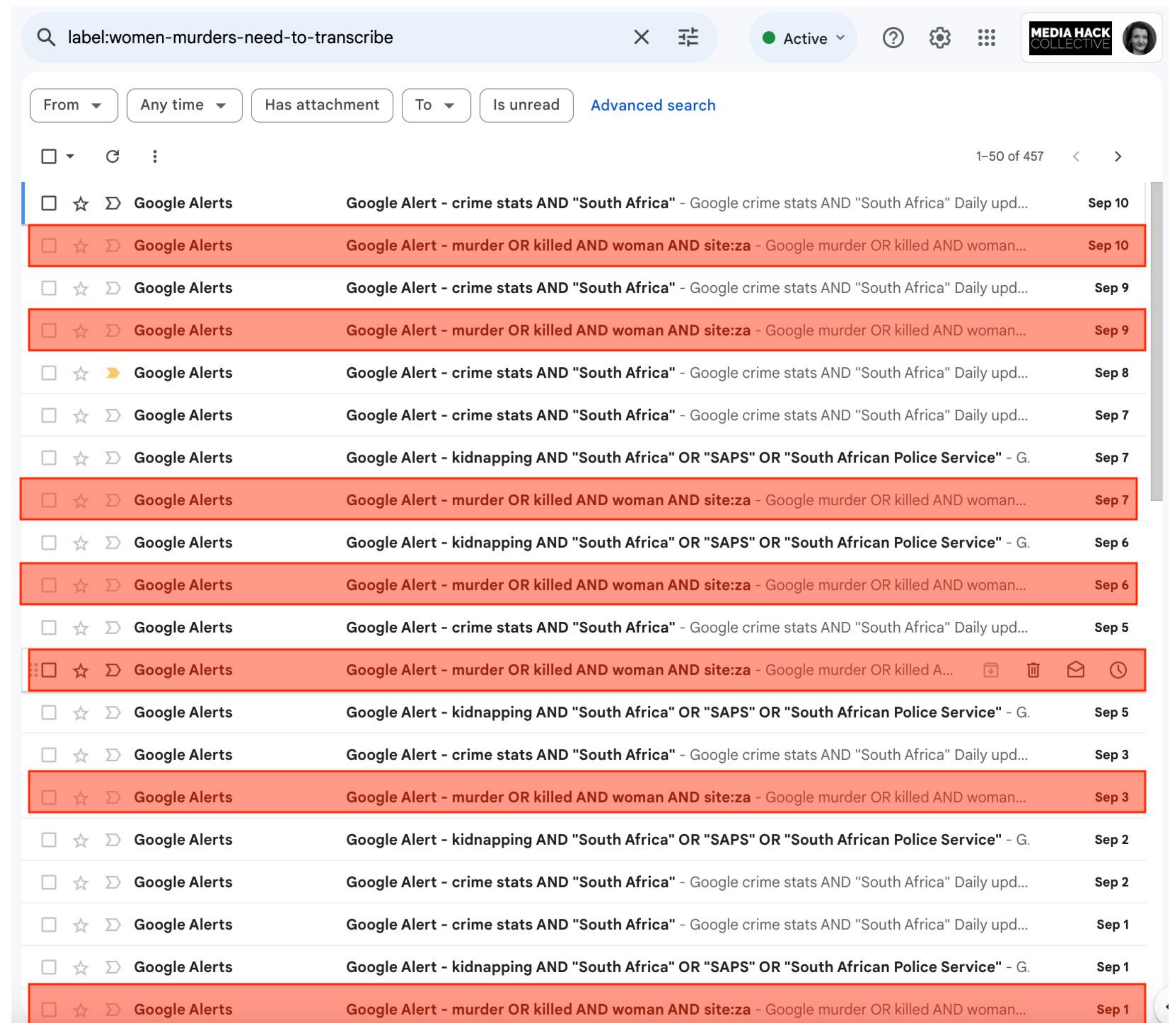
# Difficulties collecting the data

- Duplications - police didn't name the victim or different spellings of same name
- Lack of detail about how or where the murder occurred
- Date of murder is not included in article
- No information on the age of the victim
- Cases reported on if they get to court

# After the story was published

## What happens to the data?

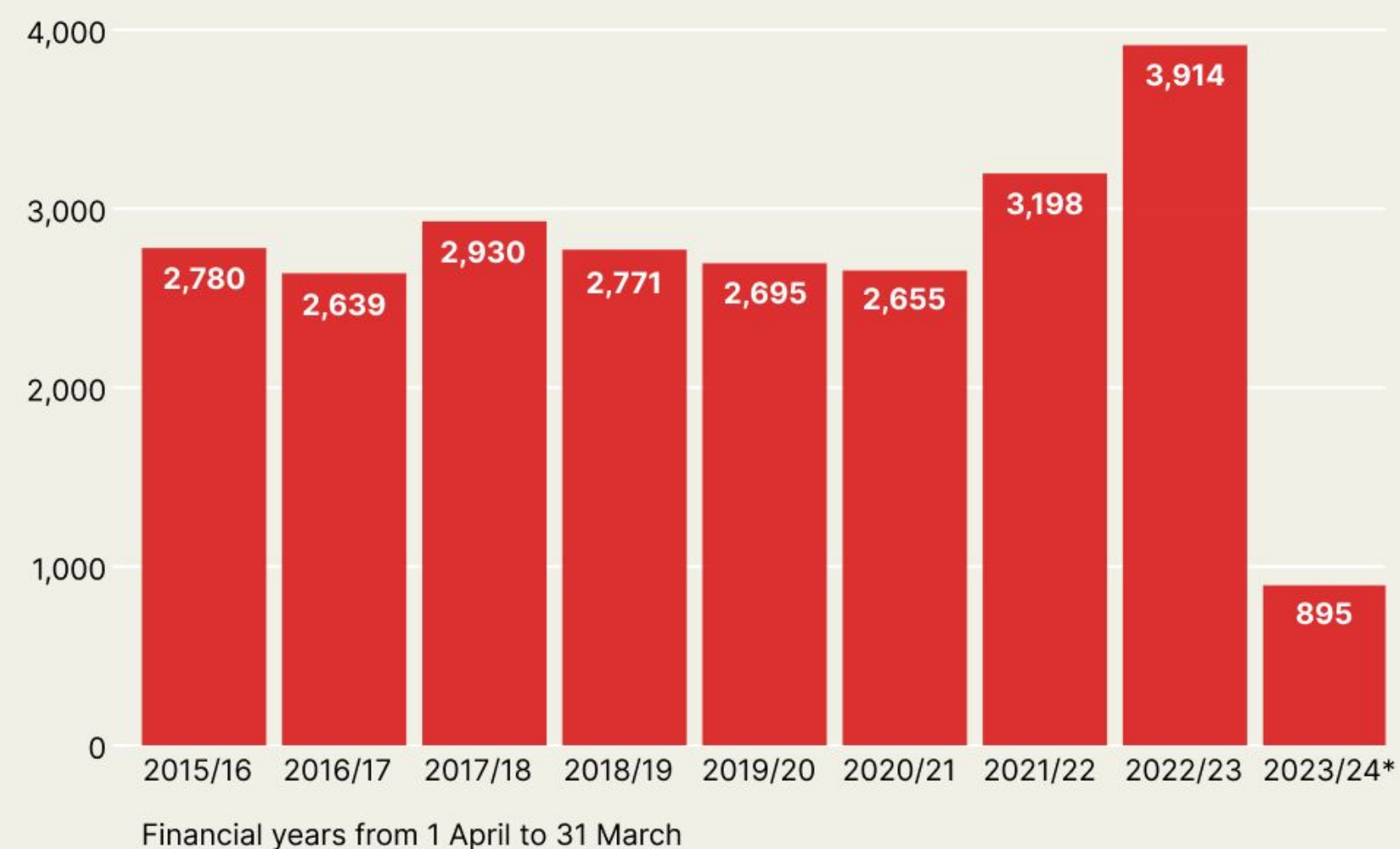
- We decided to keep updating the spreadsheet
- Initially we did Google searches once a month and added any new murders to the spreadsheet
- In 2022 we began using a Google news alert: **murder OR killed AND woman AND site:za**
- **7 alerts 1-10 September**



# Growing problem

## Murdered women

Crime stats show an average of 11 women a day were murdered in South Africa in the past year



Source: **South African Police Service**  
2023/24 data from 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023

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- Murder numbers on their own, with no human faces, with no stories, allow us to distance ourselves from this problem
- Without reliable data how do you understand the extent of the problem?
- Where to mobilise resources?
- Who is most in need of protection?

# Why are we doing this?

- Our dataset now contains 1,000 female murders
- It has limitations: we know it's only a small percentage of the total murders
- It's likely that certain types of murders will be reported in the media, eg, celebrities, young pretty women, gruesome or salacious
- The murders that are not reported have their own important stories – poor women, in rural areas whose stories are not heard.

**Thank you**

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