media release

Ending violence through research, evidence and action

Profiling Prof Rachel Jewkes during 16 Days of Activism against GenderBased Violence (GBV)

Violence against women and children remains one of the most widespread human rights violations worldwide. It affects the health, safety, and wellbeing of millions of women and girls, limiting their opportunities and full participation in society. As the world marks the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children from 25 November to 10 December 2026, attention turns to the urgent need to prevent gender-based violence (GBV), support survivors and promote gender equality. It gives the National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF) an opportunity to profile the work of an award-winning researcher in South Africa (SA) whose work advances understanding of violence against women and informs evidence-based solutions.

The NSTF is proud to honour **Prof Rachel Jewkes** during this important campaign, a recipient of the prestigious Lifetime Award at the 2026 NSTF-South32 Awards, known as the 'Science Oscars' of SA. She is an Executive Scientist at the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) and an Honorary Professor in the School of Public Health at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). Her research focuses on preventing GBV and advancing the health and rights of women and girls.

"We want to better understand how to support women and children affected by GBV. The fifth national femicide study will help us understand whether SA is making progress in preventing violence against women," says Prof Jewkes.



About Prof Rachel Jewkes: She is a medical doctor and specialist in public health medicine. For more than 30 years, she has been leading research on GBV through the SAMRC Gender and Health Research Unit. Her work improves understanding of the scale, causes and impact of violence against women in SA and around the world. It also advances knowledge on femicide, rape perpetration and the factors that place women at risk of violence. Her research contributes to studies across Africa, Asia and the Pacific, helping to strengthen global understanding of GBV.

Her research includes issues such as sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and gender inequality. She also investigates the relationship between GBV and major health challenges, including Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) transmission. Her work shows that GBV is a key driver of the HIV epidemic among women. The evidence generated by her research helps inform policies, programmes and interventions aimed at preventing violence and improving the lives of women and girls.

A major contribution of Prof Jewkes' is her role in establishing and leading the SAMRC Gender and Health Research Unit. Through this work, she and her team document the prevalence, context and risk factors associated with GBV and femicide. They also evaluate responses to GBV within the health, police and justice sectors. Their findings help government, healthcare professionals and community organisations strengthen efforts to prevent violence and support survivors.

Prof Jewkes also develops and evaluates programmes that aim to prevent violence before it occurs. One of the most influential is the Stepping Stones programme. This community-based intervention promotes healthy relationships, challenges harmful gender norms and encourages respectful behaviour. The programme demonstrates that evidence-based interventions can reduce violence and create positive social change. Its success influences prevention programmes in SA and other countries.

Throughout her career, Prof Jewkes has remained committed to ensuring that research leads to meaningful change. She works closely with governments, international organisations and civil society partners to translate scientific evidence into action. Her research contributes to major international investments that address both gender-based violence and the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Through this work, she helps strengthen prevention programmes, improve survivor support and advance gender equality globally.

"Be hungry for knowledge, keep your inner drive alive, and work hard. The reward is a career you love and the opportunity to make a difference."

Currently, Prof Jewkes leads a major research project that examines the impact of GBV on women and their children. The study seeks to deepen understanding of what benefits women and how children affected by violence can be better supported. This work makes an important contribution to the field. Globally, far less research focuses on supporting survivors than on preventing violence. Her research helps address this gap and provides evidence needed to strengthen services and interventions for women and children affected by abuse.

Looking ahead, Prof Jewkes also continues to strengthen the evidence base on violence against women through ongoing national research. This includes the fifth national femicide study, which forms part of SA's long-term femicide surveillance efforts. The study will provide important insights into whether the country is making progress in preventing GBV. Such evidence is essential for measuring impact, identifying challenges and ensuring that prevention strategies remain effective. Through this work, Prof Jewkes continues to demonstrate the vital role of research in advancing the objectives of both the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children.

"I would like to see serious investment in GBV response and prevention across SA and globally. Every community should have access to a funded women's non-governmental organisation and strong prevention programmes. This has been promised in the National Strategic Plan on GBV and Femicide," says Prof Jewkes.

Despite progress in many areas, violence against women remains a significant global challenge. Women and girls continue to experience physical, sexual, emotional and economic abuse in homes, workplaces and communities. Preventing violence requires not only stronger policies and services, but also a better understanding of the social and cultural factors that contribute to it. Research therefore plays a critical role in identifying effective solutions and informing evidence-based interventions.

Prof Jewkes and her team have also consolidated findings from more than 25 years of research on GBV prevention. Their work identifies the elements that contribute to successful interventions. The evidence shows that communication skills and healthy relationship development play an important role in reducing violence. These insights help guide policymakers, practitioners and community organisations towards approaches that are proven to be effective.

16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children campaign: The campaign, which begins on the *International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women* on 25 November, serves as a global call for action to end violence against women and girls. The campaign raises awareness of the impact of GBV and highlights the need for collective action to create safer communities. It reminds society that GBV remains a serious challenge and ending violence is everyone's responsibility. Women and girls continue to experience violence in homes, workplaces and communities. The effects can last a lifetime. A key message of the campaign is that violence can be prevented. Achieving this requires effective policies, strong support services and evidence-based interventions. It also requires a better understanding of the factors that contribute to violence and the actions that can reduce it. Research plays a critical role in providing this knowledge and guiding prevention efforts.

In 2026, the campaign is observed under the theme: *"Letsema: Men, Women, Boys and Girls Working Together to end GBV and Femicide."* The theme highlights the importance of collective action in addressing violence. It encourages men, women, boys and girls to work together to prevent violence, support survivors and build safer communities. It also promotes positive discussions about healthy and respectful relationships. The work of Prof Rachel Jewkes strongly supports the objectives of this annual campaign.

Read more: Mail & Guardian news supplement on the NSTF-South32 award winners and the article specific to Prof Jewkes.

Call to action: The NSTF encourages the government, policymakers, researchers, and civil society organisations to continue working together to prevent GBV and support survivors. We also call for greater investment in research, evidence-based interventions and support services that improve the lives of women and children affected by violence.

Young people: The NSTF also encourages young people to challenge harmful attitudes, promote respectful relationships and become active participants in building safer communities. We encourage learners, students and early-career professionals to explore careers in science, public health, social sciences and related fields, where research and innovation can contribute to addressing societal challenges and advancing gender equality.

About the NSTF and the NSTF-South32 Awards: NSTF is an independent non-profit stakeholder body and network – a civil-society forum of over 150 member organisations across six membership sectors, involved in science, engineering, technology (SET) and innovation in SA. The NSTF-South32 Awards is famously known as the 'Science Oscars' of SA that recognise excellence in SET and innovation across 16 categories. The gala dinners to announce this year's winners took place in two cities simultaneously (Cape Town and Johannesburg) on 16 July 2026.

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- TikTok: nstf_sa (listen to science career talks on this platform)

References

- 16 Days of Activism 2026 | South African Government
- Impacts of Stepping Stones
- International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women
- Priority Gender Equality | UNESCO
- Professor Rachel K Jewkes – SVRI
- What it is - Stepping Stones
- What works to prevent violence

About the NSTF

The National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF), established in 1995:

- is a broadly-representative stakeholder body for all science, engineering and technology (SET) and innovation organisations in South Africa
- gathers stakeholders around burning issues of national and global interest, across the public and private sectors, including matters of public policy
- includes a network of professional societies in SET and STEM education (STEM = science, technology, engineering and mathematics) - the *NSTF proSET* membership sector.
- recognises, awards and profiles the outstanding contributions of individuals and groups to SET and innovation through the prestigious NSTF Awards
- runs and supports collaborative projects and youth outreach, including recognition of top performance in mathematics and science, role modelling, bursary and STEM career information
- runs and supports the STEMulator.org which attracts youth and educators to Explore>Discover>Learn the world of STEM including careers. (Established by NSTF *proSET*)

For more information
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