



RAPCAN
protecting children's rights

Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

Press Release

Report on SAPS FCS services released

Assessing the impact of restructuring on access to and quality of services to women and children in South Africa

SAPS announced their plans to restructure Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offence (FCS) units in 2006. The main objective was to increase accessibility through disbanding existing specialised Child Protection and FCS units and devolving the service to local police stations. Members of civil society supported the intention of increasing access to services, but expressed grave concerns that devolving these sensitive investigations to station-level would result in undermining the quality of services.

To assess the impact of the restructuring, RAPCAN undertook a national study to review FCS services in the nine provinces. The study also sought to review South Africa's policy direction in the light of international trends in comparable countries. Samantha Waterhouse, Advocacy Manager for RAPCAN notes: *"FCS matters are extremely serious and require high levels of skill and sensitivity, these complainants are vulnerable to high rates of secondary trauma. There is general failure to fully comprehend and respond to the needs and vulnerabilities of victims across the criminal justice system and efforts to improve services are thus essential."*

The report on the study, **"Raising the Bar – A review of the restructuring of the SAPS Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offence Units"** was released today.

Findings and conclusions

The review found a reversal of the previous trajectory towards providing specialised services which were premised on dedicated resourcing, specialised training and specialised management. These three areas have been undermined by the restructuring with only plans regarding training being addressed by SAPS, no plans to ensure resources or specialised management have been articulated. Cheryl Frank, outgoing Executive Director at RAPCAN points out that *"efforts to increase access to services are important, however little attention was paid to the question of ensuring quality services in the restructuring process"*.

The lack of specialist expertise of detective management at stations has undermined the quality investigations and in some stations resulted in experienced, trained FCS detectives being assigned to general detective cases as well as FCS cases and resources being reallocated away from the FCS service. *"It is essential that FCS detectives be supervised by managers who have expertise in the area to ensure that fundamental aspects of the specialised service are maintained and protected"* said Waterhouse.

"Interpretation of restructuring differed across provinces and significant discrepancies exist within provinces. Access was improved in certain areas, particularly some rural areas, however in many areas this was dependent on the removal of services from other areas. In addition many areas remain without dedicated service as before the restructuring. In some places where experienced detectives now deliver services within a smaller geographical area, the quality of investigation is improved." said Waterhouse.

In some provinces the restructuring involved the appointment of additional detectives to investigate FCS matters. However efforts to increase capacity were undermined by a failure to properly select, screen and train new detectives, and no mentoring mechanisms seem to be in place to support new detectives. Thus more detectives were dedicated to the service but they were unable to provide a specialised service. *"Participants in the provinces emphasised that where a dedicated individual who has no training or experience is in place, there is effectively no service. Thus, the placement of dedicated staff alone cannot translate into a the extension of a specialised service"* says Frank.

Recommendations

RAPCAN and other NGOs are calling on government to provide political and strategic leadership in its prioritisation of and response to crimes against women and children. *"SAPS should review its current structure for delivering these services by ensuring a continued increase in access to services with a concomitant focus on ensuring quality"* explained Frank. *"This must include dedicated budgets and resources; screening and training of specialist detectives; and locating services as locally as possible while ensuring specialist management"*, she said.

The report calls on SAPS to develop a national plan for the delivery of FCS services. This plan should reflect the SAPS prioritisation of crimes against women and children; engage civil society and the public in the development of the plan; provide strategy and budget to incrementally increase access to quality services; establish standards for resources for FCS services; set out a monitoring strategy; and include a plans for reporting to the public on the achievement of objectives.

The full report will be available at www.rapcan.org.za from 12:00 on Thursday 5 March 2009.

Ends

Contact:	Samantha Waterhouse, Advocacy Manager, RAPCAN	084 522 9646
	Cheryl Frank, Executive Director (outgoing), RAPCAN	083 325 4424
	Dr Richard Griggs, Independent Consultant,	072 624 8687
	Joan Van Niekerk, National Coordinator, Childline South Africa,	083 303 8322
	Dr Johan Burger, Senior Researcher, Institute of Security Studies	082 822 0962