



## Gender Desk and DIMAMO PHRC take a stand against Gender-Based Violence in Makotopong

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December 2025



Rev Dr Ngwako Rapakwana, Director of UL's Gender Desk addressing the attendees

Through its Gender Desk and the DIMAMO Population Health Research Centre (PHRC), University of Limpopo collaborated with Makotopong Traditional Leaders to host an informative gender-based violence (GBV) and femicide Community Outreach Programme aimed at breaking cycles of silence, fear, and pain. The outreach event took place on 22 August.

In a society still haunted by the scars of gender-based violence (GBV) and femicide, the University of Limpopo (UL) has reaffirmed its commitment to combating this issue

Under the theme “Breaking the Cycle, Building Safety, Our Responsibility: Know Your Rights, Support Survivors, and Challenge Harmful Norms”, the event united traditional leaders, the South African Police Service (SAPS), faith-based organisations, traditional health practitioners, survivors, and community members.

Opening the programme, Rev Dr Ngwako Rapakwana, Director of UL's Gender Desk, emphasised the critical importance of such initiatives. She said, “This programme is about empowering survivors to speak out, equipping families with knowledge, and strengthening the support systems that can save lives. Together, we must end the culture of silence and empower our communities to heal.”



Dr Rev Rapakwana noted that this collaboration aligns with UL's broader mission to foster community development, health awareness, and social well-being because safe communities are essential for progress.

Representatives from local support centres highlighted the importance of safe spaces. Kedibone Chauke, from the Limpopo Victim Empowerment Centre, made a heartfelt appeal. She said, "This centre was established to restore dignity. It is a place where victims and survivors can heal, rebuild, and reclaim their futures. Please, do not suffer in silence; our doors are open."

The event also provided a platform for survivors to share their stories. Mapula Mashimbi moved the audience to tears as she recounted years of abuse at the hands of her husband. Her voice trembled but remained strong as she urged others not to stay silent: She said, "For a long time, I believed my pain was my burden to bear. But today, I stand here to say that abuse is not love, and silence is not strength. If you are suffering, speak out. You are not alone."

Her words served as a poignant reminder that behind the statistics are real people – women, children, and families, whose lives can be transformed through awareness and action.

Traditional health practitioner Seswantsho Malemela cautioned against harmful practices, urging women to protect their health and wellbeing:

In her keynote address, Refilwe Motloutsi, a social worker from the Victim Empowerment Centre at Mankweng SAPS, guided the audience through the Domestic Violence Act and the legal protections available. She explained the various forms of abuse such as physical, sexual, psychological, financial, and harassment, underscoring that all are equally damaging.

"The law is on your side," she urged. "If you are in danger, use protection orders, and seek help from traditional leaders, pastors, neighbours, or healthcare workers. There is no shame in asking for help, your safety and dignity matter above all else," she stressed.

*This article first appeared in the Inside UL Newsletter and is available online at [ISSUE - 12 SEP 2025.cdr](#)*

