

Discover Healthier podcast Episode 10: Gender-based Violence: Interview with Mara Glenie and Raffaella Ruttell.
August 2020

	Speaker	Dialogue	
00:00	Azania	Well I'm now joined by Mara Glenie and Raffaella Ruttell. Many years ago, Mara experienced gender-based violence first-hand. She was astonished at the lack of support she experienced when she tried to report these events that she founded Tears which is an organisation that provides a support network for survivors of rape and abuse, underpinned by technology that is available to all of us. And we also have Service Executive at Discovery, Raffaella Ruttell and she's here to tell us about the #discoveryourvoice initiative, which encourages Discovery Health Medical Scheme members who experience gender-based violence to reach out for help and to access immediate and confidential trauma support and scheme benefits. Hello Mara. Thank you for being with us.	00:46
00:47	Mara	Hello. And I'm pleased to be here so we can help as many people as possible. Thank you for the opportunity.	00:54
00:54	Azania	And Raffaella, thank you for lending your voice as well on this conversation on gender-based violence. Hi.	00:59
00:59	Raffaella	It's a pleasure, hi. I'm so excited to be with you guys.	01:02
01:02	Azania	Mara, let me start with you. I gave a brief synopsis of what you went through, but you experienced gender-based violence yourself. You went to the police; you weren't able to access help and this actually led you to a life that is dedicated to giving others the help that you couldn't get when you needed it. Just tell us how you came to start Tears foundation.	01:24
01:25	Mara	Well, I was extremely distressed after not getting the assistance that I needed at the police station. And obviously as a survivor of intimate partner violence, I was fearful, and I was ashamed. So I sort of pulled within myself for a while and then when I got better, I got angry and when I got angry, I asked myself the question: what would I have expected to happen? What would I have liked to happen? And once I answered that question, I said to myself, I would have liked them to be able to tell me where to go. I could understand that they were perhaps not at that time able to assist me, but I felt they needed to be able to refer me to go somewhere, so that's what our service started with.	02:12

02:13	Azania	Wow, I want to talk about the details of that service, but I also want to lay the foundation and to frame our discussion on gender-based violence. You know sometimes, I remember an occasion where someone said: but what does it mean? What kind of acts are we really talking about? Can you tell us about the different forms or let's just broadly define what gender-based violence entails?	02:35
02:35	Mara	Gender-based violence could take many, many forms. It could take the way of your partner shouting at you, belittling you, withholding money from you, taking your phone from you, checking who called you, who you speak to, dismissing your friends, telling your friends that they can't come in. And it could also take on the physical form of hitting, slapping or abusing. So it is a very, very wide spectrum. From bullying, belittling, to physical.	03:04
03:05	Azania	And are there signs that we can look for in others? You know signs that can tell us that they might be experiencing GBV?	03:11
03:12	Mara	Well, I do tend to think that people hide it and all the statistics in South Africa and internationally tell us that it takes a woman who's been in an abusive relationship approximately 7 times of wanting to leave, before she leaves on the 7 th time. It's very hard to leave because women are naturally nurturers and we hope that our intimate partner or husband or wife would change and so we keep hoping and imagining that it will get better. So it's very, very hard so people don't disclose, but there are things that you can look. If the person you're speaking to has bruises, obviously, you need to speak up. The other thing would be if the person is very scared of her partner and then there are things like a very over-possessive partner, keeps taking their cell phone from them and checking where they are. SO I think one has to look at tell-tale signs, rather than the person speaking out.	04:14
04:15	Azania	So be quite alert, and quite observant around other people so that we can pick these things up. But we are in this COVID pandemic. Have you seen a significant increase or a kind of increase in people reaching out since the pandemic has hit South Africa? And if at all, what are the reasons for this?	04:34
04:34	Mara	Well, we did see, the type of calls we received in the first 2 months of lockdown were different to our regular calls. The calls that we were receiving were mostly people who actually recalled abuse from the past. Whether it's from a few years ago or whether it's abuse that happened to them as a child. So in the lockup when they had a lot of time to think about things and quite often blame themselves for	05:40

		<p>mishaps in the past, they started to suffer a very traumatised things, they were triggers. And so a lot of the cases we had was to deal with past trauma. But in the first few weeks of the second phase of lockdown, we had a number of calls. The difficulty at that time was and remains that the courts were not open for protection orders. So while we are all covering our mouths in amazement that gender-based violence has soared, let's ask the question: "What has the legal system done to protect these women?"</p>	
05:40	Azania	<p>Well we are going to be speaking to an attorney in this space and an activist as well in this space lending legal help for women who find themselves in this unfortunate position. So, I think we'll dig a little bit deeper into that point, Mara, thank you for raising it. I mentioned earlier as well that your organisation allows women to get access to help using technology, you also mentioned calls from survivors. Just help me understand the sort of services that the Tears foundation provides.</p>	06:10
06:10	Mara	<p>We basically, as I started off by saying, give the service I would have loved to received. So we walk with them through the circumstances. If they wish to leave an abusive relationship, we have a checklist that we have prepared for them and we talk them through the steps because we don't recommend someone leave the relationship, unless their life is in danger. SO we recommend that they prepare first before leaving. In other words, to make sure you've got your marriage certificate or a copy of the lease or whatever. We will help a person get a protection order; we will help them lay a charge at the police. Quite often we have to follow up the case with the investigating officer. So, it's very diverse and it's all aspects of supporting the victim on an uncharted journey which is extremely fearful.</p>	07:05
07:05	Azania	<p>Wow. And it sounds quite comprehensive as well, that you've thought of the various aspects that one might need at this time.</p>	07:12
07:13	Mara	<p>So, we would also do things like, someone would call us and say ow do I know, I think that my daughter has been fiddled with, how do I find out? Then we will work with the teddy bear clinic to organise that the child gets tested, so I's actually literally making sure that people have had their ARVs or anti pregnancy pills if they've been raped so it's all the aspects of support which you would want your sister to do for you. So, in a way, we come alongside people and give them the much-needed support.</p>	07:47

07:47	Azania	Hm, and I know that not all facilities issue J88 forms which are very important as part of these cases. Do you also look into that?	07:56
07:57	Mara	J88 forms are absolutely vital in winning a case in court and they can only be issued by very specified people, but what we do do is ensure that if someone calls us and they've just recently been raped, we ensure that they go to the nearest facility that will help them for free and will be able to issue the J88. I also work with facilities who I know will call the police.	08:23
08:23	Azania	Mara, I'll be with you in a moment, but I want to hear from Raffaella now. Now that we've laid a solid foundation for the work that the Tears foundation does but Rafaella, tell us more about #discoveryourvoice. This initiative that Adrian Gore has also lent his voice to. What is this platform and what does it provide for victims of gender-based violence?	08:46
08:46	Raffaella	So, Discovery's put several things in place with the aim of being able to help our members as holistically as possible. I think that Mara's already described that quite well where you can actually people with a diverse, whatever they need from a diverse point of view. So, we've got a dedicated 24/7 line where our scheme members can get emergency medical assistance, after hours or during the day, so that we can get them to a hospital for example, or else, they're just wanting some practical guidance on what to do next. For example getting them to the nearest rape care centre for the appropriate assistance. And then we also offer the longer-term assistance which we call navigation of care which is again what Mara referred to as the diverse assistance and it includes things like support group information, we can help them find a place of safety if that's what they need and then there's also the Discovery benefit related guidance and facilitation which includes things like GP visits, social worker support as well as psychotherapy sessions. And then alongside or behind the assistance team are a well-trained service specialists who have [9:53] compassion and empathy and obviously in terms of what the client needs at the time. We call them, I suppose you could think of them as a personal banker and they work closely with our partner Netcare911 for emergency response type services, you know should an ambulance be needed or for urgent counselling. And then, besides that, Discovery has an employee assistance company called Healthy Company and within that, we've developed a gender-based violence workshop which enables us to educate our corporate clients, from the leaders to the staff on what GBV actually is. You know, the shapes and forms that it takes, how it presents	10:58

		<p>itself, who it happens to and how best you can help someone who you think or know that is a victim. So through these workshops, our aim is to educate and equip and empower both the victim and their families because obviously they're the people who need to understand what that person is going through because they might need to reach out to the victim, because, as Mara said, often the victim is fearful themselves to reach out, or ashamed to reach out for help.</p>	
10:58	Azania	<p>You know, listening to what Discovery provides, what Tears foundation provides of course is looking at the services in response to what the survivor goes through but what are the challenges of people who've been through GBV, what are the challenges that they face? Raffaella?</p>	11:12
11:12	Raffaella	<p>I think that what we find that our members are needing are a few things. It's practical advice, you know. So, now, it's happened to me, what do I do now? How do I get a protection order if I need one and how does that protection order protect me? And where do I need to go if I need to find shelter if I have to escape my abuser? Often, they need emotional support in the form of counselling or therapy. There are several challenges related to this as people often don't open up because of the stigma, as Mara said and they don't have confidence anymore, their abuser has made sure that they've knocked the confidence out of them completely. And the last one is actually the affordability of therapy, so if they do need to go for help or counselling, you know, can they afford it? And that is part of our basket of care that we offer these members is several free sessions so that they can at least get going with the help that they need.</p>	12:00
12:01	Azania	<p>And Mara, what have you witnessed to be the challenges that people go through?</p>	12:04
12:05	Mara	<p>I think that when you start off at the very beginning, the first thing that people are filled with is disbelief. They don't believe you, so it affects your credibility. You're suddenly coming out and saying this person has abused me. And people find that quite shocking because to embrace the fact that someone you've known in a very social circumstance where they've been jovial is maybe almost unconscionable. So I think the biggest problem is people suffer from very bad rejection, and part of building up a relationship where you come alongside them and help the members to then recover, that you will get better, you will get through this and one day you'll be able to look back and smile and say I survived it and I'm okay.</p>	12:56

12:56	Azania	Rafaella, now why does Discovery feel that it's important to focus on members, or members of our society, not just of Discovery Health who have experienced gender-based violence?	13:08
13:08	Raf	I'm sure that everybody knows that Discovery's core purpose has always been to keep people healthy and enhance and protect their lives. And victims of gender-based violence, more than any people need that protection over their lives and as a company, we're committed to helping them. We can help to alleviate some of the burden on those who are experiencing GBV be it through informing them on available benefits, facilitating their access to these benefits or through practical advice and on where to seek help outside of Discovery. We all know that GBV occurs n every social sphere and when it happens to those amongst us, we want to be there to assist them when they need us.	13:45
13:45	Azania	You know, a point struck me earlier on, Raffaella when you mentioned the workplace, conscientizing employers, manager and so on and how to respond to this with compassion and sensitivity. And something that we also don't necessarily focus on much is the experience of survivors when it comes to how it affects their ability to be productive at work, and I wondered what COVID-19 and the constraints around our work is presenting as far as victims and their experience and the demands of the workplace are concerned right now.	14:21
14:22	Raf	Yes, we've had quite a number of people contacting us because now they're sitting with their partner 24/7 because they're working from home. In the past they could at least get away from their partner, at least during the working day. SO it is a difficult one when the victim is living with their partner now 24/7. It's a tough one to crack as so much relies on the motivation of the abused to take the necessary steps and break away from that circle of violence that they're in, which we know is not easy to do. The abused often can't find the courage to leave. They can't even find the courage to send us a message or call us when they're in the same house as their abuser. But what we do is when we take a member on board, we place them into what we call an observation pool, if you can call it that, where we remain in constant contact with them as long as it takes to get them out of their predicament and we're available for them, whenever they call for any kind of assistance. Having said that, we've got a lovely story to share that one of clients who was experiencing a lot of gender-based violence abuse from their husband and particularly in this time, and she became very brave and contacted us and through Healthy Company, he actually agreed to have sessions with our Health	16:20

		<p>Company coaches and if I may just read her reply to us once we started with the sessions, may I do that? She says: "I started talking to counsellor from the beginning of this year and she's been doing an amazing job with us. We've had a number of sessions already and need a few more but in those previous sessions we have made immense progress. I think this COVID thing has been a blessing in disguise for us because we got to work on ourselves and our marriage. My husband was open and started thinking a lot about his actions and where they stem from so needless to say, the emotional growth individually and in our marriage has been amazing. We are closer than ever and using the tools we've been given to work out our kinks. I also realised that I had a lot of unresolved anger towards him for how he abused me, and I know that I need to work on that too so that I am able to fully forgive him. So, all in all, you guys saved my life, my marriage, and my family. For that I'll be eternally grateful.</p>	
16:21	Mara	Awesome. Awesome, well done. Very well done	16:26
16:26	Azania	Thank you for sharing that Rafaella.	16:28
16:28	Raf	Sometimes you think COVID is a bad sign for people who are going through GBV but in this situation, it's actually made them face the problem, really face the problem and work through it which has been an amazing story for us to work through.	16:39
16:39	Azania	Yes. With the right interventions and the right support if anything. And Mara, what have you witnessed as far as the impact on someone's employment, someone's ability to be productive? What has that impact of GBV been to survivors?	16:54
16:54	Mara	It definitely affects their ability. But from my point of view, I'm pretty tough, I've always run my only business. I'm fiercely independent. After I'd been abused, I had to learn how to drive again, I forgot how to park. When I [17:11] I forgot I had to park, I didn't have the skills of turning the car into that small space. I had become o paralyzed with fear. So, I see that in other people, I'm not saying they all present it in the same way that I do but I do understand that it affects every one of your skills that you took for granted, you lose your confidence. So, one of the difficulties with GBV and the lockdown situation is that you're hiding your fear from your partner, you're hiding your shortfalls in case it results in further abuse. So one of the things that happens is that when they go back to work, they've lost all their confidence. So it's about building up a person's confidence and giving them the courage to return to the work environment and of course sometimes people will	18:56

		<p>say a harmless thing like “sheesh, you look like you didn’t sleep last night” because people are insensitive and it’s learning to cope with rejection all over again so it’s a real minefield. To further expand is that sometimes the men will withhold the taxi fare and a very reliable worker for 8 or 6 years will suddenly start coming late and then we actually give her a scolding, whereas you need to ask if there’s a problem with the taxi, is there a problem with the taxi money, so I think we are also sometimes, we’re insensitive that abuse can take so many different forms. So, I think it’s my earlier point that we have to just become more and more aware of our surroundings that our palette of colours is not the same palette of colours the other person carries and that our different needs and requirements often get shown with anger or fear.</p>	
18:56	Azania	<p>You touched on the basket of services that you provide as Tears foundation earlier on, Mara, and one thing stuck in my mind and I wanted to get your thoughts on it because there’s also the added pressure that comes from acquiring an illness such as HIV or an STI after an episode of GBV and also just the stress of dealing with it, that it brings. What is the on-the-ground experience that you’ve witnessed?</p>	19:26
19:26	Mara	<p>So in the shutdown, lockdown, I had a young lady call us for help, she was absolutely desperate. She is 23, pregnant, living in one of the townships, her stepfather said I would like you please to leave the house because I don’t want to catch HIV from you meanwhile, we all know that, that’s not possible, he just didn’t want his pregnant stepdaughter there and I couldn’t find a place for her to go. Took me literally 4 weeks, literally to find her a place because she had to go into isolation for 2 weeks before they would accept her but to accept an HIV pregnant young lady is very difficult. Anyway, I’m pleased to tell you that on Saturday her beautiful baby girl was born in a safe place. SO my answer to your question is it’s very, very difficult to face this because obviously we know in this country that to have a non-HIV baby, you have to have a caesarean so it’s difficult, it changes your entire life and it’s difficult because I have 2 people in my office who are HIV and it affects your life because every few weeks you have to go get your pills and that person has more days off than the other person and obviously some of the side effects is that you become extremely thin so I think it’s very difficult. Then I’ve had the additional problem, is that in the townships, the survivors of COVID or I’ve had multiple calls from people who’ve been sent to go and get the test by their company who will actually go to another area. SO if they’re in Sandton, they’ll want to have test in Kempton Park because they don’t want anybody to know they were sent for testing because it’s carrying almost as much</p>	21:36

		shame as HIV. SO we are a country that really judges so it's very difficult. And you need support from your employers, family, and friends.	
21:36	Azania	And Raffaella, your reaction to this? Because GBV is already very difficult to navigate, it's already complex and then added to that, the risk of acquiring a disease adds to the stress that a survivor has to live with.	21:50
21:50	Raf	Well not only about acquiring a disease but people who have a disease or have a condition, what we're finding is that people who already have a condition are not going for the help that they need because they're so petrified of the COVID virus, so they're not actually dealing with what else is happening. SO they stay in hiding, whether they've acquired a disease or whether they already have one, they're staying in hiding and that's not helping their recovery at all because they're just petrified of leaving the home as well.	22:18
22:18	Azania	Now, as we wrap ladies, I just want to touch on this point. Mara, you not only guide women on how to leave abusive relationships, but you also work with men. Can we talk a little bit about male victims? What is their context? What are some of the challenges and struggles they face?	22:36
22:36	Mara	Well, in a situation, male victims experience extreme shame because being raped is seen as unmanly. And a sad thing in our country is that there are very, very few places that you can send a male victim for counselling and whilst most of the rape facilities offer the counselling, it's not quite the same as going to a male counsellor or a male psychologist if you're a male because it is, for them, an extremely shameful thing that they feel like they didn't protect themselves properly and often they are wracked with fear that they got HIV. SO it is a very, very difficult situation for male people to come out and yet I didn't work with male's organisations where the people are able to face it but it's very difficult to be a male rape victim in this country because we literally hardly service that area.	23:35
23:35	Azania	And how do people access or reach Tears foundation, Mara?	23:40
23:40	Mara	Well we have a very active website which is www.tears.co.za . We also have a Facebook page which I post information on twice a day, so we have current chats and then we have our helpline number, which is free, which works nationwide. It's a USSD service. You follow the prompt to get the help you need. It's *134*7355# you follow the prompts and we are connected to an emergency service. So, it's a	24:50

		nationwide service. So if you need help in Pringle Bay, they'll call the police in Pringle Bay for you, so it's a very comprehensive service and we get a detailed report on that, twice a day because we give people the option of asking for help or speaking to someone so you can select "call me tomorrow" so in other words if they are in the room or in the house sharing with the survivor non verbally, they can request a call. IT's a free service. It works from any phone, anywhere in South Africa where there's a mobile phone link.	
24:50	Azania	And Raffaella, how can people access Discovery's support services?	24:54
24:54	Raf	So, we have the 24-hour line which is connected with Netcare911 and that number is 0860 999 911. We also have the Healthy Company line which is also a 24/7 line which is 0800 320 420. And we're in the process of updating our website and the app with our numbers that appear right at the front of the webpage do that people can go in there and find the number there.	25:24
24:24	Azania	Yes. Well Mara and Raffaella, I really want to thank you for this conversation. I think we need to keep having these conversations because there are so many people in need of this support and they need to hear that there is a network that they can belong to, that they can be a part of so that they can be out of this nightmare of a situation. Thank you for the work you do.	24:47
24:48	Raf	Thank you.	24:48
24:49	Azania	That was Mara Glenie from the Tears foundation, as well as Raffaella Ruttell, Service Executive at Discovery Health.	24:20