

Cloud-based platform for survivors of gender-based violence

During the 16 Days of Activism, the Johannesburg-based Transform Education about Rape and Sexual Abuse (TEARS) Foundation created awareness of their free innovative USSD-based platform, called Help at Your Fingertips. This platform is a nationally-accessible assistance and support network for those who have experienced rape, abuse, and domestic violence.



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The cell phone platform gives access to 3500 service providers who respond directly to rape and abuse across the nine provinces. A victim/survivor of any kind of sexual or gender-based violence can dial *134*7355# - the TEARS helpline number - whereupon they can input their location, and search for the specific care centres nearest to them.

Leveraging mobile

Mara Glennie founder and director of TEARS, says: "We are leveraging the rapid growth of mobile phone networks in the country to roll out this service. As mobile phones are becoming more available in even the most remote locations, they can offer support, information, and even protection to survivors of sexual violence. The Help at Your Fingertips platform means that anyone in the country who has experienced such violence can immediately access information on expert, safe and genuine assistance nearby to their location."

Anonymity and safety

Stigma and fear of reprisal often constrains survivors of sexual and gender-based violence from reporting it. Therefore, emerging information and communication technologies (ICTs) are paving the way for innovative approaches to addressing violence against women. Platforms such as Help at Your Fingertips address this issue through allowing those who experience such violence to report it in anonymity and safety, and to receive assistance they need. The Tears Foundation has access to sensitive information that is gathered through the USSD number, and although the USSD interaction does not provide personal information, the information is handled sensitively and confidentiality.

Speaking on the security of the information, Dirk Meerkotter, the platform's Microsoft partner says: "Using the cloud, we are now able to assist victims of GBV to access and use a cloud facility to store information using a free email address provided by TEARS that only they can access, unless they choose to provide TEARS with access to this information. The result is that a victim can store information outside of where they live or work; as this can be the place where their abuse is taking place."

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