

Reporting obstetric violence

According to our [#CountOurBirths survey](#), which explored the birth experiences of individuals in South Africa, an overwhelming majority of the 53% of survey respondents who indicated that they had experienced obstetric violence did not report it. While reporting methods may not be flawless, there are avenues available to report obstetric violence. If you've endured obstetric violence or any form of mistreatment while accessing health care during pregnancy, labour, childbirth, or postpartum, remember, you have the right to speak up and seek redress.



Here are some ways to report obstetric violence:

1. Reporting directly to the healthcare institution

- The Patients' Rights Charter clearly states that you have the right to complain. You have the right to have your complaints investigated and to receive a full response on the investigation.
- You have the right to complain about staff attitudes and patient care, access to medical records, facilities closing early, being turned away without treatment, lack of referrals, availability of medicines, cleanliness and hygiene, and any safety concerns etc.
- Complaints can be submitted to the healthcare facility's complaints manager or the hospital CEO's office. Patients (or their families) should be kept informed of the progress of the investigation, with clear communication about any delays.
- Information about how and where to complain should be clearly visible, with prominently displayed posters at all health establishments.
- Provincial health departments also have complaints hotlines. Google your provincial health department to find yours.

Example:

Gauteng Department of Health: Contact the Quality Assurance Directorate on **0800 203 886** (toll-free) or Email: **patientcomplaints.health@gauteng.gov.za** or SMS: **35025**

2. Health Ombudsman

The **Office of the Health Ombud** is located within the Office of Health Standards Compliance and is tasked with investigating complaints made by members of the public about the poor quality of healthcare received at public and private healthcare facilities. You can also file a complaint on behalf of a relative, a minor, or anyone in need of assistance. If you prefer, you can do so anonymously.

Submit A Complaint about:

- Inappropriate treatment or care
- Inappropriate behaviour by a healthcare facility
- Poor quality service offered by a healthcare establishment
- Unsatisfactory management of a complaint by a healthcare establishment

Call **080 911 6472** (toll-free)

Email **complaints@ohsc.org.za**



3. South African Nursing Council

The **South African Nursing Council** (SANC) is the regulator of the nursing profession. It also protects and advocates for the interests of patients. Lodge a complaint with the nursing council about the professional misconduct of a nurse or midwife or student.

You can file a complaint about:

- Failure/delay to give the required treatment to a patient
- Patient assault (physical, sexual, or verbal)
- Failure to prevent injury or accident to a patient
- Misuse of medication
- Forcing a patient to sign a consent form for a surgical procedure
- Failure to keep accurate and complete records of all nursing care provided to a patient
- Giving out confidential information about a patient to unauthorised persons

Call SANC: **012 420 1000**

Send an email to: **professionalconduct@sanc.co.za**

4. For complaints against doctors

The **Health Professions Council of South Africa** (HPCSA) protects the public by maintaining professional and ethical standards in healthcare professions and investigating complaints. You can lodge a complaint at any time, with no time limit. Download a complaint form online and email the completed form to **legalmed@hpcsa.co.za** or complete it electronically **<https://hpcsaonline.custhelp.com/>**

Your complaint should include:

- Name and surname of the practitioner
- Detailed complaint with dates, facts, and supporting documents. If you don't have your medical records, the Investigator can request them, with your consent.
- Attach a copy of your ID or passport.
- If the complainant is not the patient, submit a copy of the patient's ID or passport. Include a power of attorney/affidavit signed by the patient. Provide detailed information about the incidents you witnessed or have become aware of.



5. Legal action

- This may involve medical malpractice claims against individual clinicians or state hospitals.
- You can approach a lawyer to help you file a lawsuit for medical negligence or malpractice. While this process can be lengthy and costly, it may result in much-needed financial compensation and justice for people who have been affected by obstetric violence.
- It's important to note that in South Africa, medical malpractice claims typically must be pursued within three years from the occurrence of alleged medical negligence – this is known as prescription.

ABOUT EMBRACE

Embrace is a social movement for mothers that values and celebrates motherhood and mothers, and the critical role they have to play socially, economically and politically in South Africa. We advocate for the priorities of early motherhood, and are committed to raising awareness about the scourge of obstetric violence. Embrace is an incubated project of the DG Murray Trust.

To find out more about obstetric violence and Embrace's work, please visit: www.embrace.org.za

In 2024, Embrace would like to commission a nationally representative prevalence study. If you or your organisation would be interested in funding this research, please contact us.

Want to connect with us?

Email info@embrace.org.za

Instagram: [@embrace_za](https://www.instagram.com/embrace_za)

Facebook: [@EmbraceZA](https://www.facebook.com/EmbraceZA)

X (Twitter): [@EmbraceZA](https://twitter.com/EmbraceZA)

Tiktok: [@Embraceza](https://www.tiktok.com/@Embraceza)

FOR MEDIA ENQUIRIES

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