



Violence Against Women in South Africa Fact Sheet

As far as possible, policies should be evidence-based and depend on sound research and information for their formulation. For this reason, while all manner of figures are tossed around in relation to rape and domestic violence, we have chosen to highlight only those supported by sound research methods and whose source can be verified.

1) How widespread is violence against women in South Africa?

- Approximately half of all South African women murdered in 1999 were killed by intimate partners. This translated into a prevalence rate of 8.8 per 100 000 women 14 years and older, or a woman killed every six hours – the highest rate yet reported by research anywhere in the world (Mathews et al, 2004).
- The same study found that rape homicides were suspected in 16.3% of these female homicides. This gave a rape homicide rate of 3.65 per 100 000 women 14 years and older – a prevalence rate than that of all female homicides in the United States (Abrahams et al., 2008).
- Community-based prevalence studies find that domestic violence, in one form or another, affects as many as one in two women in some parts of South Africa. A 1997 study conducted in three of South Africa's nine provinces found that 27% of women in the Eastern Cape, 28% of women in Mpumalanga and 19% of women in the Northern Province had been physically abused in their lifetimes by a current or ex-partner (Jewkes et al, 1999). The same study also investigated the prevalence of emotional and financial abuse experienced by women in the year prior to the study. This was found to have affected 51% of women in the Eastern Cape, 50% in Mpumalanga and 40% in Northern Province (*ibid*).
- A study of 1 394 men working for three Cape Town municipalities found that approximately 44% of these men were willing to admit to the researchers that they abused their female partners (Abrahams, Jewkes and Laubsher, 1999). Approximately 15.3% of these men reported perpetrating sexual violence against their partners in the last 10 years (Abrahams et al. 2004).
- The SAPS report for the period 1 April 2007 – 31 March 2008, reports that 182 588 violent crimes were committed against women. These included 91 534 crimes of common assault, 62 368 crimes of grievous bodily harm and 2 606 acts of indecent assault (from April – December 2007). Although the relationship to the perpetrator is not specified, it is more than likely that most of these attacks were perpetrated by intimate partners (SAPS, 2008).
- Police figures for rape in the post-1994 period show an upward trend. In 1994/1995 44 571 rapes were reported to the police. This figure rose to 52 617 women for 2006/7. For 2007/08 figures are only available for the nine months between April – December 2007. A total of 36 190 rapes was reported in this period.
- Rape is extensively under-reported in South Africa. One study found that only one in nine women who had been raped and also had physical force used against them, had subsequently reported the attack to the police (Jewkes and Abrahams, 2002). Of those women identified by the 1998 South African Demographic and Health Survey (SADHS) as having been forced to have sex when they did not want to do so, only 15% (or approximately 1 in 7) women reported being raped to the police (Department of Health, 1999).

- 18% of rapes reported in Gauteng by adult women were alleged to have been committed by current or ex-intimate partners (Vetten et al., 2008).

2) What are the health consequences of violence against women?

- Between 5 - 9% of women surveyed in the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and Limpopo had been physically abused during their pregnancy (Jewkes et al. 1999).
- In a Medical Research Council study of 544 adolescents in Cape Town, 191 of whom were pregnant, it was found that 32% of those that were pregnant and 18% of those that were not, experienced their first sexual encounter as forced. Those whose first sexual encounter was forced were 14 times more likely to have a teenage pregnancy (Jewkes et al., 2001).
- Women with violent or controlling male partners are at increased risk of contracting HIV. A survey among 1,366 South African women showed that women who were beaten by their partners were 48 percent more likely to be infected with HIV than those who were not (Dunkle, et al., 2004).
- While all victims of crime experience some form and degree of distress as a consequence of their experiences, this distress is particularly marked amongst survivors of sexual offences. Drawing on nationally-representative data, the South African Stress and Health (SASH) study found domestic violence to be associated with the greatest number of lifetime post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) cases amongst women. Rape was found to be the most pathogenic form of violence with regard to PTSD (Kaminer et al, 2008).
- An experience of childhood sexual coercion and violence is particularly pernicious. One South African study, consisting of interviews with 1 395 women, found child sexual assault to be associated with an increased risk of being subjected to physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner. Forced first intercourse was also associated with increased risk of physical and/or sexual partner violence (Dunkle et al, 2004).

3) What is the response of the criminal justice system to violence against women?

- A random, representative study of 2 068 rape cases reported in Gauteng in 2003 found that half of reports led to arrests (50.5%) but only 42.8% of suspects appearing in court. Trials commenced in less than one in five cases (17.3%) and a conviction or any crime resulted in just over 1 in 20 (6.2%) cases. However, some of these convictions were for lesser charges so overall only 4.1% of cases reported as rape resulted in convictions for rape (Vetten et al., 2008).
- In this study 15.6% of rape convictions received less than the mandated 10 years minimum sentence. The other prescribed sentence for rape, life imprisonment, was very rarely observed. Thirty-four (or 41%) of men convicted of rape were eligible for life imprisonment. This was handed down in only three cases.
- This research found that one in three (36.4%) rape suspects arrested were granted bail which, on average, was set at R2000 (Vetten et al. 2008).
- Research conducted at ten magistrates courts in the provinces of Mpumalanga, Gauteng and the Western Cape found that between 12% - 79% of protection orders in terms of the Domestic Violence Act were made final. However, at seven out of ten courts, fewer than 50% of protection orders were made final (Vetten et al., 2009).
- In 2004 some 157 000 applications for protection orders in terms of the Domestic Violence Act were made at 70% of courts around the country (Vetten, 2005).

Sources

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