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Summary Report
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South Africa

1997-2000 surveys on sexual violence

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Beyond Victims and Villains: South Johannesburg, 1997-2000

Views on sexual violence tend to range between extremes, from the idea that rape is "genetically determined" (men just can't help themselves) to the belief that women will always be victims of male villains. Both positions underestimate men and women, and ignore the continuous – if not always positive – adjustments that make up relationships between them.

This project began with the idea that a preventive strategy must rest on at least two pillars of support:

1. The official cost of sexual violence to the perpetrator must increase – and be seen to increase – to provide at least one powerful deterrent to rapists. Effective police action contributes to the message that the right to safety from sexual violence has value.
2. Since not all men rape, it might be possible to build on and make the most of the resilience of men who do not rape. "Resilience" is defined here as those factors that distinguish men who do not rape from those who do.

The more complicated research task was to understand that resilience and find ways to integrate it into a preventive strategy. As the research itself evolved – through self-administered questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and forum theatre sessions – a more complex picture emerged. A striking aspect of this picture was the extent to which the men, women and youth who took part had internalised what we have come to call the culture of sexual violence. In regarding sexual violence as an undesirable but inescapable fact of life, the vulnerable have developed a host of adaptive behaviours that allow them to see themselves as survivors rather than victims.

1. Methods

The Southern Metropolitan Local Council (SMLC) area of Johannesburg stretches from Soweto in the west to City Deep in the east, and from the central business district in the north down to Orange Farm in the south. It is a diverse and heavily populated area in which 41% of Johannesburg's population live.

Beginning in 1998, three cycles of fact-finding and feedback covered the full spectrum of communities in the area, with a cross-design method to get different types of evidence through different channels.

1998

38 sentinel communities were selected as a two-stage stratified, last-stage random sample, proportionate to SMLC population estimates. In each sentinel community, several instruments were administered:

- a house-to-house survey which identified the women's views
- a questionnaire administered to men in the streets, focussing on the resilience factors that make

some men non-violent

- youth in the schools nearest each sentinel community filled in questionnaires
- adults took part in gender-stratified focus groups to explore the perceptions of sexual violence among men and women in each sentinel site
- members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) from 14 police stations serving the area responded to interviews, to document their view of the problem
- magistrates, prosecutors and service workers (district surgeons, nurses, women's organisations and social workers) all gave similar interviews.

1999

Fieldworkers took the results of the baseline survey back to the participating schools in a form of participatory drama. Before beginning this in each school, 9,555 youth filled in a self-administered questionnaire.

2000

CIET repeated the school-based survey in the schools that had participated in 1999, and extended it to several others to provide a fuller and representative view of the youth of the region. This time 16,338 youth participated, and 42 female and 21 male focus groups discussed the concepts and language underlying the culture of sexual violence.

As in 1998, data were obtained from the South African Police Crime Information Management System (SAPCIMS). In addition, the research team went to each of the 38 sentinel communities to document the existence and histories of community-based initiatives (CBIs) that had started since the 1998 baseline survey.

2. The men's views

Field workers interviewed a total of 2059 men aged between 13 and 83 years – 89% of them on the street, 7% at a shop, and 2% at a hostel. Some 70% of the sample were between the ages of 20 and 34 years. Roughly in proportion to the population in the SMLC areas, 43% were interviewed in Soweto, 23% in the informal settlements, and 11% in the commercial and business district. Of all the men interviewed, 1936 gave information about their level of education.

The following were responses in some of the interview categories:

Violence against women

Some 31% of men said they thought they could become violent towards a woman. The proportion of men who thought this increased with age, peaking in the 40 to 49-year age group. Surprisingly given common wisdom about the pernicious social effects of unemployment, there was no significant difference in responses between employed and unemployed men.

Do women mean "yes" when they say "no"?

One in four men (481/1878) said that a woman means "yes" when she says "no". Men aged 20 to 39 and 60 to 69 were more likely to hold this belief. There was no significant difference in responses between men with different employment status.

Punishing one's wife

Some 40% of men said they thought it was okay for a man to punish his wife in some form (by talking to her, beating her up, imposing financial punishment, or through verbal abuse). Of the 2007 men who responded to this question, one in 13 thought it was okay to punish his wife by beating her up or by sexually abusing her. At the same time, 98% of men also thought that both the man and the woman should sit down and talk about their disagreements.

Sex with a woman without her consent

Overall, one out of five men said they had had sex with a woman without her consent. Although this figure was higher in the early 20s age group than among teens, there was no significant difference in responses from the age of 20 to 59 years. There was also no significant difference in responses between employed and unemployed men.

Who causes sexual violence?

Almost two thirds of men believed that women are partly responsible for sexual violence. The results reveal that more men who consider themselves violent blame the woman.

Jack-rolling / magintsa / gang rape

The majority of men interviewed about jack-rolling (recreational gang-rape) said it was bad and they hated it; 4% said it was good and they liked it; and 2% said it was a game.

Remembering an incident of sexual violence

Almost everyone who lives in Johannesburg knows someone who has been raped. Asked whether they remember someone who was raped, 85% of men said they did. Those who knew of a woman who had been raped were asked whether they thought the woman had enjoyed the incident or hated it. Seven percent thought the woman enjoyed it; 16% thought that the woman "asked for it".

Male resilience to sexual violence

"Resilience", in the context of rape, is the refusal of most men to be sexually violent despite pressures around them. A man with certain characteristics is less likely to become sexually violent:

- one who does not think that he could become violent towards a woman
- one who believes that when a woman says no, she means no
- one who says men or both men and women cause sexual violence
- one who does not believe a woman should be slapped when she argues with a man
- one who does not have sexually violent friends
- one who does not think women who are raped "ask for it", and
- one who believes a rape victim doesn't enjoy the incident

3. The women's views

A house-to-house survey in each sentinel community identified the women's views. The research

team interviewed 3,967 women in 1998, and 3,845 women at the same sites in 2000 (not necessarily the same women).

- Some 59% of women said a sexually violent man is a more powerful man, and 9% said they were more attracted to a sexually violent man.
 - Seventy-eight percent of adult women said that men are the sole cause of sexual violence; 22% said that women are the cause of sexual violence, on their own or together with men.
 - Although nearly all women said they had a right to avoid sexual violence, 60% said economic adversity might force a woman to accept abuse.
- Almost one half of women said economic adversity might cause a woman to allow the abuse of her daughter.

4. Youth views

Fieldworkers interviewed 1,471 youth in 1998, 9,555 in 1999, and 16,338 in 2000. In addition to the individual questionnaires, focus groups were conducted in 1998 and 2000, and a participatory theatre exercise in 1999. The results below reflect mostly the 2000 follow-up survey.

The levels of sexual violence that emerged in the youth enquiry were higher than expected.

In 2000, of the 16,175 youths who responded to the question "Have you ever been sexually abused?", 10% said they had been. Although female youth were only marginally more likely than male youth to report a history of sexual violence, the rate of sexual abuse increased more rapidly with age for females than for males. By 18 years of age, 20% of females and 13% of males report a history of sexual abuse.

A surprisingly large number of male youth were protagonists of sexual violence

- Some 25% said women always mean "yes" when they say "no".
- Among those who knew someone who had been raped, 7% thought the victims enjoyed it, and 24% thought that women rape victims always or often "ask for it".
- As many as 32% said that forcing sex with someone you know is never sexual violence.
- By the age of 18 years, one out of every four male youths had forced sex with someone.

The opinions of female youth were almost as extreme as those of their male counterparts

- Some 10% said women always mean "yes" when they say "no".
- Some 10% said they do not have the right to be protected from sexual abuse.
- As many as 27% of female youth said forcing sex with someone you know is never sexual violence.
- Two out of three said sexual violence is at least in part the woman's own fault.

Giving voice to youth

In a context where violence is endemic and highly sexualised, youth have had to buy into the culture of sexual violence in certain ways – much focus group content hinged on how they were "caught up in the way things are".

The questionnaire, focus groups, theatre exercises and accompanying informal discussions all enabled youth to give voice to their perceptions about the violence in their lives. As soon as they talked about it, they realised that others were in the same predicament, and perhaps equally unhappy about it. Many spoke of their collective experience, and the need to stand together in declaring sexual violence unacceptable. These discussions suggest that change might happen only when youth as a collective recognise that sexual violence is not acceptable, and develop their own lexicon about the situation.

5. The role of the police

One half of the rapes in the SMLC area happen in the home. Improved policing, in the traditional sense, can do little to stop these. And with 60% of rapists known to the victim, there is little that increased police presence on the streets will do to prevent these rapes.

Whatever is done to redirect the pressures that lead to sexual violence, the police and judiciary must improve their performance in favour of children and women (see Table 1, below). Even if other options are open to them, there are few disincentives to sexually violent men:

- registration of sexual violence cases is low
- rates of referral to court are low
- conviction rates are even lower

i. Registrations filter

While the general impression is that there are already too many cases of sexual violence in the system, it is also true that far too many remain outside of it. Combining the house-to-house survey evidence and the official Crime Management Information System (CMIS) reveals a "leak" in the system: a rape victim who goes to a police station and tells the police on duty what happened to her will not necessarily enter the CMIS as a case of sexual violence.

The greater proportion of sexual violence cases are filtered out at the point of registration at the police station.

By best estimates in 1997, for every 394 women raped, 272 go to the police, only 17 become "cases", of which five get referred to court by police, with only one perpetrator being convicted. This means that the average rapist has one chance in 400 of paying for his crime. It also means that the majority of sexual violence cases remain outside the system, contributing to a culture where they become part of "normal" life.

ii. Performance Review

Evidence from the SAPS Crime Information Analysis Centre (CIAC) formed the basis of a performance comparison for the 14 police stations in the SMLC area. Data on reporting, court referrals and convictions were turned into performance indicators. These were compared from

1996 through 1999:

- The stations in Soweto showed consistently higher performance than other stations in dealing with the cases of sexual violence they registered.
- Between 1996 and 1999 (the last year for which data were available), there was improvement in referral and conviction rates across most stations.
- There was also a reduction in the number of cases registered – meaning, in effect, a lower case load.

iii. Corruption

Corruption is a concern both to women and police authorities:

In 1998, of the women who said they took their cases to the police, 5% (13% of those who gave a reason to be dissatisfied) said the "docket was lost". By 2000, this complaint dropped to 2.9% (7% of those who gave a reason to be dissatisfied (see Table 1 below).

All prosecutors and magistrates interviewed, as well as three quarters of all police respondents, agreed that there were opportunities for corruption in dealing with rape cases. When asked specifically if any of their cases had been mishandled due to corruption, one in three police said yes.

iv. In the eyes of the community

The public image of the police improved between 1998 and 2000. Although fewer women were taking their cases of sexual violence to the police at the time the survey drew to a close, more recognised that the police have this role. The proportion that said women should work with the police increased from 10% in 1998 to 17% in 2000. The proportion that said they should take the law into their own hands increased from 8% to 11% over the same period.

Improvements required in police handling of sexual violence cases

The broad strategy of the police should be to improve the processing of existing cases, and to use the successes of this improvement to demand more resources to extend the coverage of the system. In addition:

1. Standardisation of registration and tracking of cases – which started after the release / publication of the 1998 CIET-SMLC report – must continue.
2. External community-based benchmarks should complement those produced by the institutional Crime Management Information System. These can be produced on an annual basis by inexpensive community surveys, and offer a wide range of indicators that will change with the different approaches taken by the stations.
3. The personnel style in police stations needs updating for sexual violence cases. Police must be more service-orientated, and must receive more specific training to meet the needs of clients who are victims of sexual violence. Regular counselling and support for police officers – who pay a psychological toll in the course of their work – should be mandatory. The impact of this can be

monitored in client satisfaction.

4. There should be continued scrutiny to identify "at risk" officers, and to remove from duty those who commit abuses. This could include a suggestions/complaints box, a toll-free telephone number, and more systematic interaction with support groups who are closer to victims.
5. A specific strategy with youth is needed throughout the schools.

6. Spin-offs of the project in the SMLC

Possibly the most spoken about change has been the introduction of hard evidence into networks of NGOs, CBOs, religious organisations, the media, and police. Several new partnerships have developed, with the Council playing a co-ordinating role in many of them.

Through its fact-finding, CIET has made the case stronger for partnerships that would activate a force to mobilise towards change. There have been some concrete local effects:

- One NGO, NISAA, put up a display of sexual violence posters in several health clinics run by the Council. This raised the issue of nurses training for frontline counselling of rape victims.
- The issue of sexual violence acquired certain political capital. For example, the Lenasia ANC office committed itself to working on this issue with schools in the area. They also presented the data at several community forums.
- The evidence has provided a substrate for interaction with other local councils in Johannesburg, as well as elsewhere in Gauteng and in Cape Town.
- The Directorate of medico-legal services modified data collection procedures of district surgeons, based on the 1998 findings of poor use of the J88 form.

On the negative side, several organisations that receive funding for providing helpline and counselling services were all but invisible to the communities they were supposed to serve. Those that did have some community recognition were easily identified.

7. A way forward: some community-based initiatives already underway

There is no silver bullet solution to the problem of sexual violence. The search for solutions should be a deliberate and well-informed mosaic of local, civil society and government initiatives. More than that, this search must itself be an evolving culture opposing the culture of sexual violence – a flexible and adaptable mix of evidence-based actions, each of which has local traction. The ingredients for this exist in most communities.

As a direct consequence of the SMLC-CIET project, many formal or semi-formal community-based initiatives that started tentatively have blossomed. They include school principals who make extra efforts to get counsellors into their schools; school youth groups who increase awareness through drama and telecentre info-shops, and who work with the "skeems" – youth gangs, many of which are deeply involved in sexual violence.

Community-based initiatives (CBIs) are founded on a sense of sustainability arising from the communities where they will eventually take hold. Yet the same sensitivity and local rootedness that makes them work locally also prevents their application across communities. One role CIET can continue to play in the future is to provide a shared information-communication platform that focuses on the coverage and impact of different initiatives. This "glue" could turn fragmented CBIs into an effective mosaic of action.

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