Dispatch Online

Saturday, October 10, 1998

Survey: one rapist convicted for 400 Jhb victims in '97

JOHANNESBURG -- Statistics revealed that only one rapist was convicted last year for every 400 women raped, head of a sexual violence prevention survey, Professor Neil Andersson, said in Johannesburg yesterday.

The survey was a collaboration by the non-governmental organisation CIETafrica, Johannesburg's Southern Metropolitan Local Council (SMLC), police and community organisations.

It was instigated after community feedback to the council which identified public safety as a primary concern.

Following interviews with 4000 women, the survey found that for every 400 women raped, 272 reported the crime to police. Of these reports, 17 cases were to be investigated, one of the dockets was lost, police referred five to the court and only one rapist was convicted.

Referring to the police's role in sexual violence prevention in southern Johannesburg, Prof Andersson said the statistics highlighted a need for the judiciary and police to increase the number of rape cases making it through the legal system.

SMLC spokesman Dr Shan Naidoo said: "The audit highlights the need for a decisive policy to increase the risks to the perpetrators, and to stimulate increased reporting, referral and conviction.

Prof Andersson said there was a filtration process between the arrival of a rape victim at a police station and what, perhaps minutes later, was referred to as a case.

This was a point of non-accountability that needed urgent attention, he said.

He said standardised tracking mechanisms were needed to identify bottlenecks in the recognition and processing of cases and reduce corruption leading to the "leakage" of cases out of the system.

The judiciary also needed to be fine-tuned in its dealing with cases of sexual violence, resulting in more convictions and harsher penalties, he said.

Prosecutors and police said the low conviction rate was also because about 50 percent of rape victims withdrew their cases from court. Reasons for this included that women were often poorly prepared to deal with the court system.

Another major finding was that most sexual violence in southern Johannesburg happened at home, with 60 percent of rapists known to the victim and one in four rapists being a family member.

This meant that traditional policing methods and increased police presence on the streets would not alleviate the problem.

The survey advocated a two-pronged approach to the prevention of sexual violence: identifying what makes some men not prone to sexual violence and encouraging this attitude as well as increasing the odds of conviction and harsher penalties.

Police said the raising of awareness at school level was an important exercise which they had already begun to implement. -- Sapa