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Sexual Violence in South Africa: A Review of the Literature

Maria Lowry

Sexual and nonsexual violence are perpetrated in South Africa at an alarming rate. While the precise rates of these phenomena are unknown, several attempts have been made to estimate these as well as factors that contribute to violence in South Africa, specifically sexual violence. Within the literature there are three probable factors that drive sexual violence in South Africa: gender norms, economic adversity, and age hierarchies. Other factors that may contribute to sexual violence, such as religion, cultural norms, social myths, misconceptions about HIV/AIDS, and a violent national history, may be a result of or contribute to the gender, economic, and age factors that will be discussed in this review. Using sex as a means of projecting power is an overarching theme in the literature and in each of these three phenomena. This review will give future research a foundation upon which to build studies and theories surrounding this power struggle.

Violence in South Africa is consistently reported to have higher rates than most regions of the world (Abrahams, 2005; Boonzaier, 2003). A combination of poverty, drug and alcohol consumption, and other sociohistorical constructs create an environment in which domestic and public violence can flourish. According to the World Health Organization (2002) almost half of South Africa's injury-based deaths are caused by interpersonal violence (2002, Seedat, Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla, & Ratele, 2009). This rate is more than four times the international rate. One type of violence that has recently receive local and international attention is sexual violence.

Until recently, rape in South Africa was legally defined as "the imposition of unwanted vaginal sex by an adult man upon an adult woman" (Posel, 2005, p. 242). This definition excluded intramarital rape, homosexual rape, sodomy, and emerging incidents of baby rape. While recent legal definitions have broadened to include these phenomena, social definitions are slower to change. It is now illegal to have coerced sex with another person, but the social attitudes toward coerced sex are still permissive. This protracted change has been the subject of both quantitative and qualitative evaluation, the

vast majority of which are qualitative. Abrahams and Jewkes (2002) noted in their epidemiological study that reliable quantitative data is difficult to gather given the unreliability of official sources and the underreporting typically found in surveys. Because there are inconsistent quantitative data, it is difficult to find a strong statistical relationship between any one factor and sexual violence. However, in combination, several studies have shed considerable light on the issue. Researchers need to know the depth and breadth of reliable data in order to continue investigating this subject. A review of the available qualitative data can provide a foundation that can guide empirical investigations of sexual violence. This review will explore how the combination of socially constructed gender norms, economic hardship, and age hierarchies seem to contribute to the sexual violence that permeates South Africa.

Gender Norms

In South Africa, adult men dominate the social infrastructure. Men in this position demand respect from subordinates, such as women and children and competition from other adult men. Sexual violence is often used as a tool to assert dominance over both groups. This assertion is done in a number of ways, namely using sexual abuse as a means of projecting power over women (Seedat, Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla, & Ratele, 2009), a punishment (Petersen, Bhana, and McKay, 2005; Wood, 2005), and a means of expressing sexual entitlement (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003).

According to a review of violence and injuries in South Africa by Seedat, Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla, and Ratele, (2009), "[t]he dominant ideals of masculinity... are predicated on a striking gender hierarchy" (p. 1015). This hierarchy is primarily based on men dominating women. Boonzaier and de la Rey (2003) conducted a

qualitative interview study of 15 female residents in Mitchell's Plain, South Africa female residents who had suffered abuse from an intimate partner. These women were interviewed in order to gain a better understanding of their conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Many of these women echoed the idea that Seedat et al. (2009) presented. They felt that their abuse stemmed from a need for their abusers to gain power over them. According to Seedat et al., the sexual abuse of these women was based on their abusers' need to assert power.

Jewkes, Penn-Kekana, and Rose-Junius (2005) conducted another qualitative interview study with 77 South African and Namibian participants. These participants included children (abuse survivors and others), parents, community members, and public informants such as police and social workers. The study observed a key phenomenon in South African gender relations: respect. "In South Africa...social relations between people of hierarchically different levels are governed by a notion of 'respect', which dictates appropriate practices in speech and action" (Jewkes, Penn-Kekana, & Rose-Junius, 2005, p. 1813). Wood (2005) elaborated on this phenomenon in her review of group rape in South Africa. According to Wood (2005), women who demonstrated assertiveness in the face of unwanted propositions from peers could be readily interpreted as an unhealthy arrogance, which signaled 'disrespect', and were sometimes punished through rape (p. 308).

Violating this gender hierarchy by disrespecting a male adult is grounds for immediate punishment, ranging from slapping to sexual abuse. Using sexual abuse as a punishment was one arena of sexual abuse that Wood (2005) explored. Both within and outside of the home, women who show disrespect toward men are deemed "arrogant" and are sometimes punished through rape. Seedat et al. (2009) elaborates on the principle of sexual abuse as punishment: "Physical violence is used to manufacture gender hierarchy (i.e., teach women their place) and to enforce this hierarchy through punishment of transgression" (p. 1015). Wood (2005) concluded that rape is one way that men, and sometimes boys, assert their dominance over the women they raped.

Petersen, Bhana, and McKay (2005) conducted interviews that led to a similar conclusion. In this case study, 10 group and 10 individual interviews were conducted from a volunteer convenience sample of boys and girls from ages 12-17. In the course of one of the girls' group interviews, a girl, commenting on rape in general, said that "it's a way to show the girl that she is still under their control. Boys like to punish girls" (Petersen, Bhana,

& McKay, 2005, p. 1238). She continued that a brother would punish a sister by raping her if she is behaving better than he is. Rape is a tool to both bolster the status of the man and diminish that of the woman.

Boonzaier and de la Rey (2003) noted a pattern of male sexual entitlement in their interviews with abuse victims. One interviewee, Kathryn, said that "[b]ecause a man doesn't think what they do to a woman can actually make them cold where sex is concerned" (2003, p. 1016). In other words, a man can do what he wants to a woman because she cannot deny him sex (as a function of her lower status). Petersen et al. (2005), in their interview study, discussed this notion of sexual entitlement. In one of the girls' smaller group discussions, one girl said that "boys grow up thinking that he should get whatever he wants from a girl. She is supposed to respect him without any refusal. If he wants sex...a woman has to agree" (Petersen et al., 2005, p. 1237). The cultural notion that men have the right to have sex whenever and with whomever perpetuates gender norms in South Africa.

The socialization of women to be compliant in the face of any command from a man is engrained in children, male and female, early on. Young boys learn from the men around them how to treat women; girls learn from the women around them how to respect men. In the interviews conducted by Boonzaier and de la Rey (2003), several women described the necessity of complying with the needs and abuse of their partners, despite knowing that what their partners did was wrong. The authors noted that "[w]omen were frequently advised to reconcile with their husbands [after abuse]. Standards of femininity as nurturing, caring, and reconciliatory were thereby reinforced" (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003, p. 1014). A common thread in the participants' interviews was that it was their duty to comply with their partners' wishes. This compliance is evidence that gender norms are not only perpetuated by men, the most frequent perpetrators of sexual violence, but also by women, the most frequent victims (Jewkes et al., 2005).

There is a clear hierarchical relationship between the men, women, and children of South African society, a relationship in which men reside at the top. While there are other major contributions to sexual violence in South Africa, the unequal status of men and women must be recognized and addressed in future research.

This increases the likelihood of abuse.

In addition to physical and sexual threats while they are home, working women also face the risk of leaving their children unsupervised or supervised by equally vulnerable younger relatives. Jewkes et al. (2005) noted that children are at increased risk of being abused by older male relatives especially in the absence of their mothers. Motapanyane (2009) and Petersen et al. (2005) supported this claim. Motapanyane (2009) thoroughly examined the history of employed women in South Africa in her doctoral dissertation, and found that working mothers leaving their children for extended periods of time left those children susceptible to abuse from both young and adult men. Petersen et al. (2005) saw the problem of unsupervised children differently, but with just as much affiliation with sexual violence. In one boys group interview, they said that "in the olden days...boys were treated like children...They knew they had to be home at a certain time. Nowadays they go until late...and no one ever knows if they have raped...maybe they are with a girl to whom they are proposing and may rape her" (p. 1241). Absent parents may create both a physical and socio-structural danger for potential perpetrators and victims.

Jewkes et al. (2005) and Boonzaier and de la Rey (2003) identified perhaps the strongest relationship between economic hardship and sexual abuse: the woman's financial inability to leave the abuser. In many cases, women who face the prospects of greater poverty and losing the home, overlook rape as a means of survival (Jewkes et al., 2005, p. 1817). In other cases, "women described how their partners' economic control forced them to overlook their personal needs and sometimes even their basic survival needs" (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003, p. 1020). The issue of a mother's economic dependence on her abusive male partner is recurring. This intense economic sanction can easily perpetuate the acceptability of intimate partner violence.

Overall, economic adversity creates another power struggle in which men can, and often do, punish women. These punishments include sexual violence. In her editorial on Africa's sexual health and rights, Wasserman (2006) summarized that it is nearly impossible to negotiate when women are economically disempowered (p. 392). Thus, while an employed woman is more likely to be a threat to her partner, and thus abused, abused unemployed women are less likely to be able to leave the abuser.

Economic Hierarchy

Poverty in South Africa is another factor that is closely tied to sexual violence. Several studies have postulated notable, but weak, correlations between economic adversity and gender violence (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Motapanyane, 2009; Shisana, Rice, Zungu, & Zuma, 2010; Wood, 2005; Seedat et al., 2009; Bryant & Vidal-Ortiz, 2008; Jewkes et al. 2005; Petersen et al., 2005). While a definitive relationship between economic status and sexual violence is yet to be identified, postulated correlations deserve recognition if only to invite future study and data collection.

Both Wood (2005) and Seedat et al. (2009) discussed the problem of unemployed men and their proclivity to resorting to violent means of entertainment and power. These men have time to spare and no legal means of income. Wood (2005) used the South African term *tsotsi*, a common label, to refer to a "disaffected, unemployed young man who survives on his wits, lives through criminal means and often uses fear and coercion to maintain personal power" (p. 306). Several studies conducted outside of South Africa indicate that "unemployment, in particular male youth unemployment...is the most consistent correlate of homicides and major assaults" (Seedat et al., 2009). Physical assault rates often indicate an underlying gender hierarchy that can promote sexual assault. Despite the currently tenuous correlation between these three variables (male unemployment, physical assault, and sexual assault), they warrant further exploration.

While unemployed men may contribute to many of the problems surrounding sexual violence and therefore require further research, employed women also necessitate further research. Women who stay home face the threat of sexual abuse, but employed women in South Africa face three unique threats: criticism, punishment and assault in the home, and the necessity of leaving children at home and vulnerable. Boonzaier and de la Rey (2003) noted that women who earned more than or equal to their partners were at increased risk of being abused (p. 1019). One employed woman recalled her husband saying, "If I hit you down now, then I will get you at the level that I want you" (p. 1019), implying that when the economic control of a household is in the hands of a woman, her male partner is likely to feel that his power is threatened.

Age Hierarchy

The final social construct that contributes to sexual violence in South Africa is the pervading age hierarchy in which the old have more power than the young. One interviewee in the study by Jewkes et al. (2005) summarized this concept: “[c]hildren have no status and if you are a girl you have less status” (p. 1813). The South African notion of respect and status are applicable beyond gender relations. Baby and child rape function within this archetype and has been the focus of several studies and reviews (Posel, 2005; Jewkes et al., 2005; Richter, 2003; Seedat et al., 2009). Sex as a means of control, as has been demonstrated throughout this review and in the literature, continues to be evident in exercising power of the older over the younger.

Both Seedat et al. (2009) and Sikweyiya and Jewkes (2009) make note of young boys taking advantage of younger boys. Sikweyiya and Jewkes (2009) conducted in-depth interviews of 31 young men aged 18-25. Many of their accounts recalled incidents of older boys sexually abusing them. Several participants recounted that perpetrators lure would-be victims by using material goods, such as toys or cigarettes. After these “gifts” were given, perpetrators would use their status as an older man and as a provider to coerce victims into sex. Most of these incidents occurred when there was no adult supervision present. Many of these cases are examples of obligatory, rather than forced rape. One boy recounted, “after that we got into the forest, this man said to me, ‘Hey what I want is just for us to have sex, after that I will give you money’...and he drew up a knife and raped me” (Sikweyiya & Jewkes, 2009, p. 533). This particular interview is an example of rape.

One emerging phenomenon that pertains to the age hierarchy is baby rape. Richter (2003) offered an operational definition of child rape and its distinction from pedophilic obsession. On the one extreme, a pedophile chooses a child based on a preference of age or gender. On the other, a drunken stranger uses a child or infant as a prop to achieve a “quasi-masturbatory orgasm” (p. 396). She went on to report that 15% of rape victims in South Africa are under the age of 12, and that 10% of rape victims are under the age of 3 (p. 394-395). Jewkes et al. (2005) concurs with Richter’s (2003) differentiation. “[C]hild rape is not a fringe activity of a small number of

psychologically disturbed men or pedophiles” (p. 1810).

In contrast to other researchers, Sikweyiya and Jewkes (2009) explored the existence of the age hierarchy between older women and younger boys. While the scope of this kind of abuse is unknown, it is part of the age hierarchy in which abuse is tolerated. Interviewed male victims recalled feeling intimidated and uncomfortable, but not necessarily abused by the women who “seduced” them. However, according to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Program, 2007), intercourse with a person who is unable to decline because of intimidation or pressure constitutes sexual violence. According to the authors, “[t]he men recognized that they were interested in sex at the time they were seduced, but... there was a strong suggestion in the narratives that they had been taken advantage of by women who were much older” (Sikweyiya & Jewkes, 2009, p. 536). There was a consistent pattern of “seduction” as opposed to physical coercion. Older women tended to take advantage of the social necessity of the young obeying the old.

The most important element of the age hierarchy, from a research standpoint, is the cyclical nature of sexual violence. Seedat et al. (2005) argues that the previously discussed constructs of age, poverty, and gender lead to “intergenerational cycling of violence” (p. 1014). Girls who are exposed to sexual abuse early on are at increased risk of being raped as adults, while boys who are sexually abused are at increased risk of becoming sexual abusers (Seedat et al., 2009). Additionally, Abrahams and Jewkes (2005) conducted a study assessing the effects of sons witnessing the abuse of their mothers. Their results supported the cyclical nature of intimate partner violence by finding a significant correlation between male participants witnessing the abuse of their mothers and their tendency to abuse later in life. The correlation between early life events and later propensity to abuse warrants further study and recognition.

Conclusion

The discussed constructs feed off of each other, making identifying any singular cause nearly impossible. Their combination is what makes them so effective. If one hierarchy fails, then another can take its place. Any attempt to change attitudes and behavior surrounding sexual violence will have to attack all three hierarchies. These changes can only be made after much more research is conducted, awareness is raised, and laws enforced. By knowing exactly where the attitudes are coming from,

how they are perpetuated, and how they can be corrected, South Africa’s men and women start to change the way they think about and prosecute sexual violence.

The vast majority of studies conducted in South Africa pertaining to sexual abuse are qualitative. Abrahams and Jewkes (2002) noted in their epidemiological study on sexual violence that reliable quantitative data were difficult to gather given the unreliability of official sources (hospital and police records) and the underreporting typically found in surveys (embarrassment, taboo, negative stigma, etc.). “We conclude that the rape statistic for the country is currently elusive but levels of non-consensual and coerced sex are clearly very high” (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002, p. 1231). Many other studies and reviews agree with this projection (Abrahams et al., 2005; Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Ghanotakis, Mayhew, & Watts, 2009; Heaven, Connors, & Pretorius 1998; Petersen et al., 2005; Seedat et al., 2005; Wasserman, 2006).

Many other reports agree with that analysis and cite the difficulty of gathering accurate statistics. This difficulty lends justification to the high quantity of qualitative, small-scale studies. Interview studies of victims, their families and neighbors shed light on possible causes and contributing factors. However, Richter (2003) and many others insisted that no correlational data could pinpoint causes of sexual abuse. Boonzaier and de la Rey (2003) summarized that there are complex interrelated reasons why some individuals choose sexual violence (Hoff, 1995; O’Neill, 1998, p. 1020). While finding the rape statistic is problematic, future research should focus on finding out how widespread these attitudes about gender, money, and age are. The literature suggests that these attitudes are prevalent. The next step is to find out how prevalent they really are.

There are a plethora of additional reasons that individuals in South Africa may resort to sexual violence that are beyond the scope of this review. A few of these are religion, specifically Christianity and its perpetuation of patriarchy (Boonzaier, 2003), belief in rape myths (Jewkes et al., 2005), violent national history (Motapanyane, 2009), impunity (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002; Wood, 2005), the Virgin Cleansing myth (Petersen, 2005; Richter, 2003), and many others.

Whether for these reasons or those discussed within this review, sexual violence in South Africa warrants further study. With the limited qualitative data available, it is paramount that quantitative studies analyze the possible relationships between the social constructs here discussed of sexual violence. Both further quantitative and qualitative data can help improve government, non-

governmental organizations, familial and individual approaches to prevention (Ghanotakis et al., 2009) and correction of sexual violence in South Africa.

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Gender & Visiting Hours: Male and Female Adherence to the Visiting Hours as Stated by the BYU Honor Code

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The intent of this study is to examine how closely males and females attending Brigham Young University report to adhering to The University's Honor Code regarding visiting hours, which are from 9 a.m. until midnight. Three-hundred-nineteen single students participated in our survey. The survey asked a series of integrity-based questions related to whether or not the participant complied with The University's strict Honor Code. There was no significant statistical difference between male and female knowledge of the visiting hours as outlined in the Honor Code. However, males reported they were less likely than females to adhere to the visiting hours and females were more likely than males to report speaking up regarding group obedience to the Honor Code visiting hours. This could be because guys believe such actions make them seem more independent and masculine, whereas girls are hoping to give off an opposite impression.

Brigham Young University (BYU) is known for having a strict "honor code" to which all students must adhere. Unlike most universities, students at BYU consent to observe dress and grooming standards, abstain from alcohol, use clean language, and participate in church services. Students who sign the Honor Code agree that they will abide by the residential living standards, which includes honoring the university-approved visiting hours. These visiting hour guidelines state that students cannot be in an apartment belonging to a member of the opposite sex after midnight (or after 1:30 AM on Friday nights). By signing the Honor Code, students consent not only to adhere to these guidelines, but they also agree that they will "encourage others in their commitment to comply with the Honor Code" (Brigham Young University, 2010). But just because a student signs the Honor Code, does this mean that he or she will strictly adhere to it? Not necessarily.

At BYU, students are expected to uphold the Honor Code whether there is an authority figure present or not. Milgram (1963) found that people are prone to obey those that they perceive as authority figures; however, a review of the literature finds that there is a surprising

lack of research on whether or not people obey rules when their behavior is not strictly monitored. There is clearly a need for more studies focusing on obedience in self-monitored situations. Our study aims to add to the literature by discovering whether or not there are sex differences in obedience when no authority figures are present, specifically by looking at which sex is more likely to encourage others to adhere to the rules. Due to the lack of research done on the differences of obedience between the sexes, our study was designed to measure adherence to the Honor Code policy.

Blass (1999), in reviewing Milgram's studies, found that there were no significant differences in sex obedience. Nevertheless, researchers have found differences in male and female conformity, especially when studied in group settings (Eagly & Chvala, 1986). Eagly, Wood, and Fishbaugh (1981) found that females generally do not change their opinions when confronted with a group. In terms of obedience, this seems to suggest that even when faced with opposition, females will be likely to adhere to rules if they have previously decided to do so. However, they may not have an easy time influencing others to also comply with rules; while females can successfully exert influence over other females, males tend to resist influence by females, especially if the latter try to be direct in their approach (Carli, 2001).

On the other hand, researchers found that when males display dominance, it is more effective at encouraging influence than similar displays by females (Driskell, Olmstead, & Salas, 1993). In fact, in group interactions, people are more likely to overtly agree with and defer to the opinions of males than those of females (Wagner & Berger, 1997). In other words, males are more likely to have the power to influence a group than females are. This gives males a lot of influence over whether or not others decide to comply with guidelines such as the BYU Honor Code. But are males actually more likely to encourage obedience?