

Wanting case information

All the participants expressed the need to receive information about the status of their cases and a desire to continue with their cases. Three survivors reported knowing who the investigating officer was in their cases, and 13 did not know and had not received any further correspondence since reporting the rape. If women did know who the investigating officer in their case was, it was difficult to get into contact with the officer and even more difficult to get any information. The need to be kept updated with case information by the police was expressed particularly in the 12 cases where the perpetrator had not been arrested. It appeared that not knowing the status of one's case made participants feel powerless and frustrated.

Receiving incorrect information

According to what the survivors reported in the research interviews, individual officers misinformed three women when they contacted the police with questions and the information they were given was simply untrue. Kate, a 30-year-old complainant who was raped in a car by an unknown man, was told that the police had released the perpetrator in her case, once he was charged and arrested, because they could only hold the man for 45 hours. He had not paid bail. Lisa, a resident of one Cape Flats township, was told by a female officer that people from the her area could not use the police station located in the adjacent township as it was not the correct police station to report at. Finally, Linda (21), raped by two unknown perpetrators, described feeling shocked and powerless when the police told her that she could not lay a charge of rape because she did not know the perpetrators.

Although five women reported that they felt believed and treated with empathy by the police, four women did not know their case numbers, and in 13 cases did not know who their investigating officers were, or how to contact the investigating officer. In only four cases were the perpetrators arrested, and of those, only one perpetrator had been sentenced and incarcerated at the time of the interviews.

General attitude towards the reporting

Unsatisfactory service

In ten cases the participants' attitudes towards the service they received from the police were overtly negative. The women who openly complained about the police did so only towards the second half of the interviews, although this may be a result of the structure of the interview schedule. Those who felt that they had received all they could from the police seemed to have low expectations to begin with. When asked if she would advise other women to report rape to the police, Andrea (22), who was raped by an unknown perpetrator and shot in the rear, stated that reporting her rape was treated with the same concern by the police as reporting a stolen phone. Naomi (17) felt that the police were simply not doing their jobs at the police station where she reported her rape. In the following quote she describes the bad service that she experienced:

I don't think they are doing their job because um you can go there and lay a charge and for me it's almost like they are going to tell you that your docket is lost or something, because people are sitting there for hours and they are doing nothing, because they walking in and out, going to their friends, talking, and having lunchtime before it is their lunchtime and stuff like that...

Bernice (32) was raped in 2003 by her boyfriend at the time and he had evaded incarceration for over three years. She described how her perception of the police changed from thinking she

would receive help and support to believing that the police simply do not care about people, based on her experiences at the police station. Lisa, a 25-year-old nurse, summarised the attitude that it is most likely that the police would not take action and, if they did, the perpetrators would be back in the community, as they probably would not get convicted. Lisa stated:

Most of the people they advise me to not to go to the police if I can find information, not to go to the police because there is nothing they are going to do. Yes they are going to do something but after a month those guys are gonna come and kill me so it's a risk.

What this means for the survivor is that, when reporting rape to the police, there is a risk that the perpetrator will seek her out if he is not convicted or is let out on bail.

The data provided by the participants illustrate the unpleasant experience of reporting a rape to the police. The trauma was still relatively fresh for 15 of the 16 participants at the time when the interviews were conducted and survivors were only at the beginning of the process of trying to make meaning out of what had happened to them. The lack of prompt medical attention and long waiting periods in crowded waiting rooms did not serve to make the process physically or emotionally comfortable. At least 10 survivors reportedly experienced judgmental attitudes from the police, and overall the police were unable to provide survivors with case information and follow-up or, in three cases, to protect them from intimidation after the rape.

DISCUSSION

Relationship to the perpetrator

The issue of the relationship to the perpetrator is a complex one. Previous research suggests that women are less likely to report the rape if the perpetrator is known to the survivor as they may fear retaliation and threats to their safety if the charges are pursued (Madigan & Gamble, 1991; Pino & Meier, 1999). Similarly, it has been found that women are twice as likely to report the rape if the perpetrator is a stranger and that police are then more likely to respond sympathetically (Jordan, 2001). Seven of the participants knew the perpetrators, while nine women did not. Two women made reference to the fact that the perpetrators were not their boyfriends and being in a relationship with someone seemed to somehow lessen the seriousness of the rape. Two other women believed that not knowing the perpetrator meant that the police would not investigate the case. In one case the police told a participant that she could not lay a charge because she did not know the perpetrators. Another woman had such little faith in the police that she explained that, if she knew who her rapist was, she would not have reported the case as she would rather have taken justice into her own hands. The influence of the victim-perpetrator relationship on reporting, then, mostly contradicts what has been found in past studies (Gartner & MacMillan, 1995; Madigan & Gamble, 1991; Williams, 1984). The participants who knew their perpetrators described the rape in a way that sought to lessen the seriousness of the offence if the participant was in an intimate relationship with the perpetrator. At least three survivors made reference to the perpetrator not being their partner or boyfriend as part of their narrative about being raped, confirming the seriousness of the rape to the interviewer. By doing so, they indicated their acceptance of the assumptions of the traditional heterosexual relationship. Seen from another perspective, the "male sexual drive discourse" described by Holloway (1984, cited in Gavey, 2005) holds that the uncontrollable need to have sex is part of the make-up of normal, healthy men. The participants thus demonstrated the internalisation of the cultural truth that, if they were in a relationship with a man, he is entitled to sexual intercourse from his partner because he has no control over his sexual needs.

Medical attention and access issues

The fact that five survivors sought out medical attention following the rape mirrors the finding that the odds of reporting are increased if any injuries were sustained or if the survivor required medical attention (Pino & Meier, 1999). The centre provides women with medication to prevent the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, and also provides anti-retroviral medication to prevent the transmission of HIV. It was found that in the five cases when police came to collect participants, they were fairly timely, but one woman phoned the police only to receive no answer and therefore had to walk to the police station herself. Access to the police station was an issue of concern for the participants. In 10 cases survivors made their own way to the police station either because of lack of transport money or access to a telephone. Five participants were collected by the police and in one case; the participant was driven to the police station by her family. The remaining 10 survivors made their way to the police station by public transport or on foot. Access to police stations has been found to be a barrier to reporting rape in rural areas (Artz, 1999). It is arguable that for this sample of women access to a police station was less of a barrier because the women live in an urban setting; however, 10 women still encountered problems in making contact with the police because of lack of transport (their own or the police's) and lack of access to telephones, resulting in 10 women having to find their own way to the nearest police station.

The role of the police

A decision by police to take statements before ensuring that the survivors received medical attention was reported by three participants, one of whom had a gunshot wound and the other a stab wound. This is a worrying finding and suggests that the police's focus on their own procedures may indeed obscure their appreciation of how these procedures may impact upon the victim (Jordan, 2001). In one case a participant was left at the hospital and told to make her own way to the police station because the officer on duty's shift had ended. While such treatment indicates negligence and is similar to the findings of the study on the WSOC conducted by Stanton *et al.* (1997), it also has to do with the nature of police work and organisational problems that arise while doing shift work (Rasool, Vermaak, Pharoah, Louw & Stavrou, 2003).

Long waiting periods were a concern reported by 10 women in the current study. No women were giving copies of their statements and none seemed to be informed of their rights to have a support person present. In terms of what is promised on the SAPS website, the police performed poorly. Judgmental or repetitive questioning by the police experienced by one third of the sample supports the findings of the Department of Health survey cited above. Although these questions may be argued to be relevant, they were experienced as distressing by the survivors.

The three women who stated that they had been drinking or drugging at the time of the rape did so as if they perceived that this cast great doubt on their story. Police attitudes to this kind of behaviour reportedly included knowing looks, lectures and even refusing to investigate the case in one situation. The greater likelihood of the police to attribute blame to survivors if they had been drinking or drugging is in agreement with the findings of Ward (1995).

The low level of arrests in this sample, and therefore arguably potential convictions, found in the participant's rape cases is not surprising and in keeping with the literature documenting low conviction rates in rape cases (Smythe, 2004; Temkin, 1999; Vetton, 1999). Questioning and disbelieving attitudes and lack of arrests by the police could lead to the internalisation or

confirmation of rape myths and a decreased sense of self-worth for the survivors. Not only can this lead to an increase of distrust in the police, but also a sense that nobody cares and recognises the seriousness of the experience of rape.

Case progress

In terms of case progress, the findings of the present study mirror those of Combrinck and Skepu (2003). Examples include lack of interest in investigating the case; recommending victims drop the case; and failing to obtain information from the victim. Participants' needs to have access to information and to be kept informed about their case's progress were not met. Participants had heard from their investigating officer in three cases, and 13 did not know who the relevant officer was. Participants consistently expressed the desire to be kept informed about the developments of their case, but were almost never informed when the perpetrator was let out on bail or could not be found. The desire to be kept informed of case progress and the inability of the police to provide consistent updates was similarly reported by Stanton *et al.* (1997). The responsibility of obtaining information about the case then became solely the participants', and even so, their efforts were mostly futile.

The rape myth that women deserve or ask for rape and that rape only happens to certain kinds of women has been described by feminist scholars such as Koss, Heise and Russo (1994) and Burt (1980). The prevalence of, and adherence to, rape myths became apparent within both male and female police officer's treatment and questioning of rape survivors. In this way the impact of the rape was minimised and undermined. In terms of female police officers, it has been suggested that minimising the impact of rape and adopting a judgmental attitude towards participants serves as a method of distancing them from the survivors (Brems & Wagner, 1994). For this reason unsympathetic and ostracising treatment of rape survivors by female officers is not an uncommon occurrence (Brems & Wagner, 1994). Stephanus (2006) found that police officials hold negative views about women, which impacts on their perceptions of rape victims. Stephanus therefore questions whether female police officers are indeed more suitable to deal with rape victims, or whether males and females are equally able to deal with sexual offences (2006).

Variables such as being under the influence of alcohol and drugs at the time of the rape, relationship to the perpetrator and extent of physical injury were all issues that the police focused on in order to prove that rape survivors were in some way responsible for their own rape. Several rape myths, including that women lie or fabricate stories of rape, women ask for it, or that certain types of women deserve to be raped (Burt, 1980; Koss *et al.*, 1994; Ward, 1995) underlie the police's suspicious questioning of the participants around the above-mentioned circumstances surrounding the rape. The participants themselves may have been aware of these myths and believed that the myths informed the manner in which the police responded to their respective complaints of rape.

Seen from within patriarchal discourse, rape is an act of sexual objectification. Behaviours such as drinking or drugging, dressing seductively and being out late at night are understood as provoking rape. Being raped often lessens a women's value in both her own eyes and those of society, and she is perceived as damaged. The reactions of male relatives and partners to rape in the present study suggested the need to avenge the damage to their property because it had been dirtied and devalued. Within the act of rape and the avenging of rape, women are objects, belonging either to the perpetrators or the protectors. The trauma women experience as a result

of rape is informed by this stigmatisation and in order to be treated with sympathy, women either deny or minimise the impact of rape, or attempt to prove that they were innocent victims.

Feminist scholarship challenges the supposed natural discourses of sexuality and argues that gender identities should be viewed to be in a state of constant flux and lacking a fixed essence in order to combat the perpetuation of rape myths and stereotypical ideas about women in general (Kiguwa, 2004). The shared assumptions and ideas regarding gender and sexuality mentioned above are one channel through which systems of patriarchy maintain structures of male domination. The present study has highlighted the subtle yet widespread existence of stereotypical beliefs about women who have been raped that both perpetuate gender inequality and the existence of rape myths.

The high incidence of rape in South Africa and an understaffed, overworked and underpaid police service serve to increase the likelihood of secondary victimisation. Policemen and women are exposed to extreme violence and life-threatening circumstances on a day-to-day basis, particularly in areas where crime levels are high (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2005), such as the catchment area served by the TCC. The lack of vehicles, qualified officers and proper training makes them ill-equipped to deal with the staggering number of crimes of sexual assault that are reported to them (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2005; Rasool *et al.*, 2003). Moreover, police personnel seldom receive counselling or have access to support systems in order to adequately cope with the trauma-inducing nature of their jobs (Besdziek, 1999). The stressful nature of police work may contribute to difficulties in providing the best service possible to women reporting rape to the police.

Further research

It should be acknowledged that the findings of this study represent the subjective experiences of 16 women interviewed over the course of 2006. The small sample size and nature of the interview schedule allowed for the capturing and analysis of women's experiences, but limits the generalisability of the results. Future research may want to consider the experiences and subjective perceptions of police personnel in dealing with rape survivors in order to obtain a richer and textured understanding from the perspective of the SAPS.

Further research is also needed to follow women through the criminal justice system in a longitudinal study, focusing on relationships with investigating officers and prosecutors. A longitudinal study could reveal the incidence of self-blame and the internalisation of rape myths in women, and how the treatment of women throughout the court proceedings and the outcome of the case impacts upon the psychological recovery of rape survivors.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

At the time of the interviews, the role that the police had played in the participant's journey post rape was a negative one in 10 out of 16 cases. The police service, as an institution, is an organisation of social control and power. The women who took part in the present study are marginalised on the basis of gender, class, race and relationship status. They seldom had access to the resources that would enable them to protect themselves, such as safe housing and reliable and safe transport, which arguably made them more vulnerable to rape (Boonzaier, 2003). When their bodies were violated, they chose to turn to the police for protection and some form of retribution. In the current study 10 out of the 16 women felt that the police had failed to provide them with the protection they had hoped for from the police service.

Not only are attitudes towards rape related to occupational understandings and beliefs with regards to the police work, but they are also deeply embedded in gender relations within society. Police attitudes towards women who have been raped mirror the beliefs and attitudes of the wider society. "Social change can be achieved only when women are able to question the structures and institutions in their society that sustain oppression" (Kiguwa, 2004:291-292). In the light of the above quotation, perhaps the most important conclusion to emerge from the current study is that the findings echo those of Stanton *et al.* (1997) and Combrink and Skepu (2003). That is to say that 10 years on little seems to have changed on the ground with regards to the rape survivors' experience of reporting, despite a strong commitment evidenced by government to improve reporting services.

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