

Rape of prostitutes: a tool of male power and control?

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abstract

Cases of gender-segregated rape abound across southern African countries. The media report horrendous cases of rape of mainly females of all ages, from tiny infants, to toddlers, young adolescents, teenagers, and adults by men of all ages and social and economic backgrounds. This *briefing* is based on research in Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe over a period of 11 years. This research indicates that rape dominates all prostitution-based gender violence.

keywords

prostitution, rape, gender based violence, patriarchy, human rights

Introduction

The first-ever Conference on Gender Based Violence (GBV) held in Windhoek, Namibia in July 2007 heard that, despite impressive progress in the legal systems in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the situation of women and young girls remained critically poor. The Head of the SADC Secretariat Gender Unit, Ms Magdeline Mathiba-Madibela, informed the 350 representatives of SADC states that without exception, member countries were recording escalating cases of violence against women and children. At least one in every five women was raped, coerced into sex, killed, beaten or trafficked for sexual exploitation, usually by intimate partners, family members or friends.¹

The Conference was convened against a backdrop of Namibia's most horrific and extreme acts of prostitute targeted gender-based violence ever witnessed. The body parts of a suspected prostitute had been discovered. She had been raped, killed, and her body dismembered and deep frozen before being dumped in separate locations along the City's highways. The cases of two other prostitutes who were raped and murdered in similar circumstances in October 2005 remain unsolved to date,² while the hunt for the rapist and killer of the latest victim whose body parts were recently discovered near Grootfontein General Hospital in the Country's North East continues.³

Addressing an event to mark International Women's Day in March 2007, the Minister of



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Home Affairs and Immigration, Hon. Rosalina Nghidinwa, said:

'women and girls in Namibia are under siege in their homes, at school, at work and on the streets – sexual assault, abuse, murder, domestic violence and harassment in Namibia has more than doubled in the past years. Not even infants and pensioners are safe ...⁴.

Sadly, the Minister's concerns were not without basis. The Legal Assistance Centre (2006:7) estimates that 60 females out every 100 000 are raped, with an average of three rapes cases per day. The *Namibian* labeled the week in which nine 23-54 year-old men were arrested and charged

for raping 12 9-16-year-old children and two 27-33-year old women 'a shameful week of sex attacks'.⁵

This scourge is not limited to Namibia. In 2006 the Zambia Police Victim Support Unit reported that rape, whose victims ranged from two-month old infants to 70-year-old grannies, had grown fivefold from 50 cases in 1998 to 260 in 1999, 966 in 2002, and 1 375 in 2005. This had led the then Zambia Police Service Inspector General of Police (IG) Siakalima, in January 2004, while launching a Sexual Crime Unit (SCU) to curb the scourge, to say 'the world is getting mad with cases of rape and defilement'.⁶ In April 2002 Lusaka City's street prostitutes made a public protest to the Minister of Community Development and Social

Services against night patrol police officers they accused of regularly rounding them up, robbing them of their cash, raping them and throwing them in cells if they had no cash.⁷

In 2006, rape of females aged from 0 to 90 years by men of all ages, professions and classes who ranged from a suspected serial killer charged for raping and murdering eight female prostitutes he lured with lifts at night; a 72-year-old grandfather who raped his five-month-old granddaughter; a 70-year-old grandfather who raped his 13-year-old granddaughter; three adult men who gang-raped and killed their 11-year-old girl victim; a 20-year-old man who raped a 90-year-old woman; a 22-year-old father who raped his four-year-old daughter; and a Church Pastor who raped a 13-year-old girl dominated Uganda's major crimes.⁸ The pinnacle of the region's rape crisis was South Africa where a 2006 Police Report on serious crimes was dominated by sexual crimes (rape had increased by 124.6 percent).⁹

Why is rape on such an uncontrollable upswing in these countries?

The question is why is rape especially of women and girls in socially and economically vulnerable situations on such an uncontrollable upswing in these countries, and what are its driving factors?

This *briefing* aims to establish and substantiate the prevalence of prostitution-based rape in southern Africa, its key motivations and consequences on its victims and society as a whole. It further attempts to position rape within sociological theoretical concepts and thought and is expected to add value to the wealth of knowledge within the Sub-Region's Women's Movement by stimulating public debate at national and regional levels and contribute towards policy and legislative reforms.

Methodology

The *briefing* is based on qualitative and quantitative data from six research reports the author authored/ co-authored on women and children in social and economic vulnerability since 1996, namely, *Prostitution in Five Countries: Violence and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (1998); *Invisible Girls: The Life Circumstances and Legal Situation of Street Girls in Lusaka, Zambia* (2001); *Children in Prostitution and Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation Purposes in Zambia* (2002); *Adolescent Mothers in Mtendere and Kalikiliki Shanty Compounds in Lusaka, Zambia* (2003); *Prostitution in Windhoek, Namibia: An Exploration of Poverty* (2007); and *A Situational Analysis of the Abuse and Trafficking of Children for Exploitation Purposes in Southern African countries of Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe* (2007). It further draws from media reports and research by organisations such as the International Organisation for Migration – IOM (2003) in Angola, Botswana, DR Congo, Lesotho, Mozambique, Malawi, South Africa, Malawi, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Zambia; ECPAT International in Madagascar (1999) and Botswana (2006); UNESCO (2005) in Lesotho; TDH of Germany (2004) and case studies to establish the prevalence of rape, analyse its causes, perpetrators, consequences and draw conclusions and recommendations. Although this method provided for a wider rape landscape, it is limited since, apart from the Zambian (2002) and Namibian (2007) research, the rest were primarily qualitative and had limited statistical data.

Definition of Rape

The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2002:965) defines rape as 'having sex with someone when they do not want to by threatening them or using violence'. Soanes and Angus (2004:1191) describe rape as 'a very traumatic crime of force and/or coercion, on which it is usually not possible to make a judgment as to what happened from the complainant's behaviour'. Namibia's Combating

