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By Sikhonzile Ndlovu

Abstract

Despite its pervasiveness, gender-based violence is one of the least talked about violations of women's rights as most of it takes place within the private domain and is never reported (Gender Links 2002). Gender-based violence is mostly common at family and community level and mostly affects women (Omarjee, 2006). Family attitudes and pressures ensure that this remains hidden from the outside world (IPS, 2009). People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA South Africa) estimates that only one in nine gender-based violence incidences are reported. Violence against women continues partly because women do not seem to acknowledge violence perpetrated against them and are unlikely to seek help when it occurs (Rasool, 2002).

The Noord taxi rank 'miniskirt' incident, as it came to be known, exposed the sad realities of gender-based violence in contemporary South Africa. In February 2008, a 25 year old woman was sexually harassed for wearing a miniskirt at the Noord Taxi Rank. This incident, described by Nyar (2008) as degrading and shocking, is part of the fabric of South African life.

The way that media represents gender-based violence has a significant role to play in curbing this social ill. Sadly, media often emphasise the need for women to be extra vigilant when moving around at night. This in essence is saying that women should take responsibility for the fact that they may be attacked at any time (Gqola, 1997). This scrutiny is also reflected in the way that media have also questioned the morals of victims of gender-based violence especially rape (Carter and Weaver, 2003).

This study analysed *Sowetan*'s daily media output for the months of January to March 2008 to establish patterns in coverage of gender-based violence, sourcing and representation of victims.

Key words

Gender, gender-based violence, victims, feminist theory, patriarchy, power, media, representation, sourcing