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The levels, types and determinants of post-assault behaviours among sexually assaulted women in South Africa, 2011-2012.

Dean, Genevieve N.

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Abstract

Background: South Africa faces an unprecedented problem of rape and violence against women and girls – amongst the highest in the world. While the health and social consequences of sexual assault are detrimental, it is not clear how victims of sexual assault respond to these acts. This study therefore examines the levels of reported sexual assault in South Africa in order to establish the extent of the problem.

Methods: This study is a secondary data analysis of the 2011 and 2012 Victims of Crime Survey (VOCS) that was conducted by Statistics South Africa. The outcome variable of this study is post-assault behaviour namely, reporting to the police, other reporting to traditional leaders and Chiefs' as well as seeking medical attention. This variable is then re-categorised into: no-behaviour, one or more behaviours. Descriptive statistics of the study population, the Goodman Lambda test of predictability that provided a predictive association in terms of percentages between the outcome variable and the selected predictor variables, and multivariate analysis using the Multinomial Logistic Regression producing odds ratios to examine whether an association was present or not were used.

Results: According to the current study, the rate of sexual assault for 2011 was 11 women per 1000 women aged 15 years and older compared to 5 women per 1000 women aged 15 years and older in 2012. Associations were found between location of a sexual assault and relationship to perpetrator with whether or not a victim engaged in any post-assault behaviour. Interestingly, race, age, income and province were not found to be significantly associated with whether a victim engaged in any post-assault behaviour. The study found that there is an association

between the location of an assault as well as the province the victim originates from and the likelihood that a victim will choose to engage in post-assault services at their disposal. Both province and location of an assault were found to be significantly associated with post-assault behaviours at a multivariate level.

Conclusion: The current study has found that the majority of victims (64.96%) did not engage in any post-assault behaviour. Other research has examined why this may be the case and found that the fear of being re-victimized by healthcare workers and the criminal justice system, as well as discriminated against by their communities may be important factors associated with reporting a sexual assault. It is therefore recommended that policy makers re-evaluate how to best promote the reporting of a sexual assault through educating women about the health benefits associated with the services, such as treatment for sexually transmitted illnesses including HIV/AIDS as well as provide medical services to treat victims' possible post-traumatic disorders, stress and anxiety. Educating and training both police officials as well as healthcare workers on how to treat victims of sexual assault may indeed go a long way in promoting victims to report and seek assistance after an incident.