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Understanding and preventing rape: perceptions of police officers in inner city Johannesburg.

Mabasa, Thandi Beatrice

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Thandi B. Mabasa hereby declare that this thesis is my own work. It has not been submitted for any degree at any other university. It is submitted for the degree Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

……

Ms. T.B. Mabasa

…… day of ……, 2009

DEDICATION

To my son, Wanga with hope that your generation will bring a safer environment for all the women around the world. I pray that God will protect you from all forms of violence and abuse.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Ms. Tanya Swart. Through your patience, guidance and support I have fulfilled my dreams. Thank you.

- To my participants from all the stations. Thank you for your role in my research, thank you for your time and commitment.

- I would like to thank the police station heads (of the Hillbrow and Johannesburg Central Police Services) for approving and allowing me to conduct my study at your stations.

- To my parents who have made me what I am through their unconditional love and support. To the rest of my family (my sisters, brother and cousins) who have been my strength, motivator and support all the time. Ephraim Bila thank you so much for your help.

- To my husband who stood by me through the tough times, thank you my love.

- To all my friends who supported me through this challenging time. Thank you my friends!!!

ABSTRACT

Rape is a major concern in South Africa and is described to be reaching endemic proportions. There have been a number of studies conducted on rape, which have focussed on different populations. Research exploring the perceptions of police officers, who are at the forefront in the handling of rape victims and rape perpetrators, is scarce. The current study therefore aimed at gathering information about the experiences, understandings and knowledge of these police personnel. It was hoped that through their contribution prevention strategies may be formulated.

To attain these aims, seven police personnel from two major police stations in inner city Johannesburg (namely the Hillbrow and Johannesburg Central police stations) were interviewed using the semi structured interview method. The police personnel interviewed were required to have at least two years experience in working with rape cases. These individual interviews were audio taped and transcribed. The transcripts were then explored for themes using thematic content analysis. These themes were categorised and discussed under five main topics. These main themes explored the police personnel's perceptions of the prevalence of rape, perceptions of the causes of rape and the perpetrators likely to commit rape, the most common rape cases dealt with, vulnerability factors contributing to rape, and concludes with current and recommended rape prevention strategies.

The participants had conflicting views about the seriousness of the issue of rape in South Africa. They did however agree on the perception that the Johannesburg area has a particularly high prevalence rate. This was largely attributed to high levels of false rape reporting among sex workers. Acquaintance rape, the rape of sex workers, child rape and male rape were viewed as the most common cases that are reported. The perceived causes of rape appear to involve a number of factors. The participants perceived the causes of adult cases and child cases of rape to be different. For adult women the causes included

substance use by the victim, men's negative attitudes towards women and unemployment. The child rape causes included myths related to curing HIV, poverty, perpetrators' disturbed mental states, as well as their abusive or neglectful childhood backgrounds. The profile of rape perpetrators according to the causes of rape ranged from mentally disturbed individuals for children, to men who simply objectify women in adult cases.

A number of factors were perceived to render some women more vulnerable to being raped than others. These factors also differed between child and adult rape cases. Children were perceived to be most vulnerable if they lived in poor conditions with poor parental supervision. Adults on the other hand were perceived to be most vulnerable if they used substances, were unemployed or were sex workers. An exploration of the prevention strategies concluded the study. The participants had conflicting views on whether there are current strategies or efforts to prevent rape. The participants however recommended training of relevant personnel to deal with rape cases, improvements in the prosecution of perpetrators and increasing awareness about rape among men and in communities.

LIST OF ABREVIATIONS

CEDAW	International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CIAC	Crime Information Analysis Centre
FCS	Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Unit
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency virus
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NPA	National Prosecuting Authority
PEP	Post Exposure Prophylaxis
POWA	People Opposing Women Abuse
SAPS	South African Police Services
SOCA	Sexual Offences and Community Affairs
WHO	World Health Organisation

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