



SURPRISE 'SOCIAL STATUS' FINDING IN RAPE STUDY



Professor Rachel Jewkes of the MRC's Gender and Health Research Unit.

One in every six young men in the deep rural, low-income districts around Mthatha in the Eastern Cape had already either raped a non-partner or taken part in a form of gang-rape – and was far more likely to be of higher social status.

Fascinating new research led by Professor Rachel Jewkes of the Gender and Health Research Unit of the Medical Research Council (MRC) over a four-year period, has for the first time linked maternal education to rape.

While adversity in childhood and alcohol abuse were among the more predictable factors associated with partner and non-partner rape, having a mother who had either a high school education or beyond initially confounded Jewkes and her team.

'It was a strange finding so we took it to our community advisory board, chaired by the local chief who was also a teacher. The board, consisting of local stakeholders drawn from health, social services, people living with HIV/AIDS and educators, said it was to do with social status,' Jewkes told *Izindaba*.

She said advisory board members agreed that having a more educated mother was a sign of higher social status in a society that had relatively few older men because of premature death and migrant labour.

This led to these young men having a more powerful position in society, something consistent with other findings in the study; that non-partner rape was more common among wealthier and relatively more socially advantaged men.

A first in rape data

MRC President, Professor Anthony Mbewu, described the research paper as 'of substantial international importance' because it is the first of its kind outside North America.

It is also the first to have a single set of data on the rape of intimate and non-intimate partners.

Most researchers believe it will contribute significantly to an understanding of why rape in South Africa is at least three times higher than in the USA, for example.

Among young men who had a mother with 'high school or greater education', 14% more had committed rape than those who had not.

Jewkes's team interviewed 1 370 men between the ages of 15 and 26 from 64 rural villages around Mthatha, six of which were actually larger 'locations', about sexual violence towards women.

The questions were asked as part of data collection for a cluster randomised controlled trial to evaluate an HIV prevention behavioural intervention, known as 'Stepping Stones'.

Since Stepping Stones sought to prevent HIV infections through enhancing gender equity and building

relationship and communication skills, as well as changing knowledge and attitudes, it was necessary to measure a range of indicators of gendered sexual practices during the research.

Advisory board members agreed that having a more educated mother was a sign of higher social status in a society that had relatively few older men because of premature death and migrant labour.

This provided the researchers with an ideal opportunity to explore aspects of rape perpetration quantitatively.

Among young men who had a mother with 'high school or greater education', 14% more had committed rape than those who had not.

Jewkes said they had done a regression analysis to eliminate the possibility that the association between maternal education and rape could have been explained by other confounding factors.

'Highly plausible'

'It's really interesting. We never thought having a mother who was educated would influence rape behaviour, but there it was. The explanation of the community advisory board is highly plausible,' she said.

'I'd hate for anyone to interpret this as suggesting that educating women could be a bad thing – it's actually about social status, power and entitlement,' she added.

About 8% of all respondents reported having been sexually violent towards their intimate partner, while 16.3% reported raping a non-partner or participating in some form of gang rape.

The mean age at which respondents first raped a woman was 17.



There has been very little research conducted in South Africa on men as rapists beyond a 2004 Cape Town study that found 15.3% of respondents reported sexually coercing a female partner of the previous decade.

Previous research by Jewkes in the Eastern Cape described processes through which rape was used as part of an overall strategy of asserting dominance over and control of women. This also pointed to rape as a vehicle for self-communication by men about their 'powerfulness'.

She found that control of women was a key aspect of 'successful' masculinity among many young men.

Aberrant 'streamlining'

One of the more disturbing findings in the latest research is the practice of 'streamlining', a form of gang rape

perpetrated against the girlfriend of one of the men. Perpetrated by two or more men, it is 'often a punishment, yet at the same time it is an act that is often regarded by its perpetrators as rooted in a sense of entitlement or legitimacy'.

A woman may be 'streamlined' to punish her for having another partner, behaving outside the gender norms (e.g. when deeply intoxicated), for being successful, or for imagining she could be superior.

A woman may be 'streamlined' to punish her for having another partner, behaving outside the gender norms (e.g. when deeply intoxicated), for being successful, or for imagining she could be superior.

'Streamlining' was sometimes an act of male bonding, a 'favour' to the boyfriends' friends.

In instances where a boyfriend organised for his girlfriend to be streamlined, it would terminate the relationship and was 'not open to any reinterpretation' as an act of passion.

The MRC team found that non-partner rapes were also associated with greater susceptibility to peer pressure to have sex, membership of a gang, using drugs, violence towards an intimate partner and sexual risk taking.

Remarked Mbewu while presenting a recent overview of the MRC's 2005/6 research, 'in terms of HIV, men especially, are part of the problem. We have to teach boys and men to respect their sexual health and women'.

Chris Bateman



ADVANCED PAEDIATRIC LIFE SUPPORT COURSE

(Administered by the UK-based Advanced Life Support Group)

This intensive course is held over 3 days and is aimed at all emergency medicine specialists including those in training and especially at paediatricians and anaesthetists.

The pre-paid course fee of R3 000 covers the cost of the 4th edition of the APLS manual (presently retailing at approximately (R650) teas, lunches and a course function at the end of the first day. A maximum of 32 candidates can attend each course, with a faculty of at least 8 instructors. The course is fully accredited for a minimum of 38 CPD points.

NAT06
EC03
CT12
JB11
EC04
CT13

The 2007 programme is:
Pietermaritzburg
Eastern Cape (Umtata)
Cape Town
Johannesburg
Port Elizabeth
Cape Town

February 15-17
March 8-10
May 3-5
June 7-9
September 20-22
October 18-20

Additional courses can be arranged to meet demand

If you are interested in attending a course, please contact June Blackwell
021-761 1483 • 082 902 2353 • blackwel@iafrica.com

