

The Factors that Influenced Individuals to Commit Sexual Offences in Gauteng Province

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ABSTRACT

There is a high prevalence of sexual offences in South Africa and Gauteng province. Crime statistics released by the South African Police Service (SAPS) depicts that sexual offences in Gauteng province shows a steady increase over the past four years starting from 2015/16 to 2018/19. This article aims to present the factors that influenced individuals to commit sexual offences in Gauteng province. These factors were determined in the study to investigate the motives of sexual offences perpetrators in Gauteng province. The study was conducted by the Gauteng Department of Community Safety (GDSCS). The Department realised that there was a need for the study to be conducted in which perpetrators of sexual offences were interviewed to obtain information as to what prompted them to commit such crimes. The study discovered various factors that motivated the perpetrators to do so. A qualitative research **method** was used for collecting data through semi-structured interviews. The sample size for the qualitative research was 34 respondents who were serving sentences at different correctional facilities in the province. As part of the **findings**, the respondents mentioned consensual sex, anger, raping of minors, taking advantage of women walking alone, housebreaking and robbery as well as taking advantage of drunk women as the factors which influenced them to commit sexual offences.

KEYWORDS: Correctional Facilities, Sexual Offences, Rape, Perpetrators

Date of Submission: 05-09-2021

Date of Acceptance: 18-09-2021

I. INTRODUCTION

South Africa has one of the highest levels of reported sexual offences (more specifically rape) in the world (Basdeo, 2018:112). Sexual violence poses a daunting challenge for the police and the criminal justice system holistically (Basdeo, 2018:112). The sexual offences subcategories are defined according to the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 2007 (Act 22 of 2007) (SAPS, 2018:74). The act defines more than 70 subcategories of sexual assault such as rape, sexual assault, trafficking in persons for sexual purposes, abduction, other indecent, immoral or sexual offences not elsewhere specified (SAPS, 2018:74). The sexual offences are grouped into five daily summaries of serious crime (DSSC) codes namely rape, sexual assault, contact sexual offences, attempted sexual offences and sexual offences detected because of police action (SAPS, 2018:74).

Sexual offences are among the crimes that raise the most public concern (Davids, Londt & Wilson 2015:42). Sex Offenders are defined as individuals who have been convicted of a sexual offence in a criminal court concern (Davids, Londt & Wilson 2015:42). Sexual violence is a profound human rights violation and public health concern (Dartnall & Jewkes 2013:4). Perpetrators of sexual offences are most commonly men known to the victims and often an intimate partner or in the case of a child, is a trusted family or community member (Dartnall & Jewkes 2013:4). The perpetrators of sexual violence may also be women and children (Dartnall & Jewkes 2013:4). Sexual violence is diverse and encompass a range of different victim-perpetrator relationships, a range of different sexual acts, a series of forms of coercion and contexts of vulnerability and it occurs in a variety of settings (Dartnall & Jewkes 2013:4). It is indisputable that sexual offences are prevalent in South Africa based on the recent national crime statistics that depict a total of 52,420 sexual offences occurred in 2019 which is an increase of 4.6% since 2018 (SAPS, 2019:16).

Crime statistics released by the SAPS depicts that sexual offences in Gauteng province increased by 0,6% from 9,510 cases reported in 2015/16 to 9,566 cases in 2016/17 (SAPS 2017:47). Sexual offences increased by 6,3% from 10,116 cases in 2017/18 to 10,752 cases in 2018/19 (SAPS, 2018:106). The sexual offences trend provincially shows a steady increase in sexual offences cases over the past four years starting

from 2015/16 to 2018/19. There was a need for the study to be conducted to interview the perpetrators of sexual offences to obtain information as to what prompted them to commit sexual offences. The study was conducted with the view that it may help in informing the strategies that are formulated and operations law enforcement agencies implement to reduce sexual offences in the province. The factors that influenced perpetrators to commit sexual offences will be discussed in this article.

1.1 Aims of the Article

This article aims to present the findings of the study to investigate the factors that influenced perpetrators to commit sexual offences.

1.2 Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following objectives:

- To establish the reasons why the perpetrators committed sexual offences
- To determine the factors that influenced the perpetrators to commit sexual offences
- To determine the modus operandi used by the perpetrators, and
- To suggest strategies that can be implemented to prevent the occurrence of sexual offences in the province.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was extrapolated from various sources that were drawn from the internet such as journals and newspaper articles. For this article, the literature review extracted focused more on what influences the perpetrators to commit sexual offences.

2.1 Vulnerable Victims

There is a reluctance in the sexual offending literature to look closely at adult victim characteristics, perhaps out of concern that this might be seen as victim-blaming or shifting of the responsibility from the perpetrator (Seto, 2017). There seems to be less resistance to looking at child vulnerabilities, perhaps because children are less likely to be viewed as culpable agents (Seto, 2017). Vulnerable child victim characteristics include father absence or living in a blended family because children are relatively at greater risk from step-father figures than from genetic fathers; lower-income households or other family stressors; and loneliness, social isolation, or rejection by peers (Finkelhor, 1980; Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005; Holmes & Slap, 1998; Snyder, 2000 cited in Seto, 2017). Vulnerable adult victim characteristics include being female, having a history of childhood or adolescent sexual abuse, and being under the influence of alcohol or drugs (Barnes, Noll, Putnam, & Trickett, 2009; Senn et al., 2015; Testa, Livingston, Vanzile-Tamsen, & Frone, 2003 cited in Seto, 2017). These vulnerabilities represent both historical or trait factors (e.g., being female) and state factors (e.g., being under the influence of alcohol or drugs cited in Seto, 2017).

2.2 Influence of Others

The study conducted by Da Silva, Woodhams & Harkins (2017) revealed that a total of 48% of participants mentioned the influence of others as the reason for committing sexual offences (Da Silva, Woodhams & Harkins, 2017:449). This influence was either direct, where the participants had been ordered, told, or invited to participate in the offence by a co-offender, or indirect, where they were not directly ordered to participate but did so because the others were present or actively involved (Da Silva, Woodhams & Harkins, 2017:449). Directly telling or ordering a co-offender to participate was only evident in a few cases (Da Silva, Woodhams & Harkins, 2017:449). In some of these cases, it took the form of a direct order (the quotes below correspond to what was in the court accounts in the offenders' case files) (Da Silva, Woodhams & Harkins, 2017:449). When participants referred to the indirect influence of others, they stated that the co-offenders had not told them to participate, but that they chose to do so themselves (Da Silva, Woodhams & Harkins, 2017:449). This happened in some cases simply because they were seeing the others participate and either felt aroused or decided that they also wanted to be involved (Da Silva, Woodhams & Harkins, 2017:449).

2.3 Anger and Punishment

Raping out of anger or as a punishment was a motivation for more than half of the rapes of girlfriends, and also a common motive for rape of strangers/acquaintances and gang rapes (Jewkes et al, 2010:27). It was much less commonly seen as driving rapes of children under the age of 15, although some men disclosed having raped the girl to punish a third party, such as her mother (Jewkes et al, 2010:27). Related to this is the motivation of anger and punishment in rape perpetration, which forms part of a common idea that punishment of women is not only legitimate but that this may be appropriately expressed through sex (Jewkes et al 2010: 29).

The degree to which boys' socialisation conveys norms and values of sexual entitlement may vary by social class and between other social groups in South Africa, and this may explain some of the patterns in rape perpetration prevalence between groups, as well as providing evidence that this would be amenable to change through social engineering (Jewkes et al 2010: 29).

2.4 Rape Culture

Rape culture is a major reason why sexual violence continues to occur at such high rates (Blackburn Center, 2021). Rape culture is a society where violence against women is both prevalent and normalized (Blackburn Center, 2021). Many things contribute to rape culture like victim-blaming, violence against women in the TV shows that we watch or even judges deciding that a person who committed rape should get a light sentence because they have a promising future (Blackburn Center, 2021). One example of rape culture is how often sexual violence against women is a plot point in books (Blackburn Center, 2021). All too often, sexual assault is used as a story arch for male and female protagonists alike perhaps the male lead saves a woman from being raped, turning him into a hero, or the female lead uses the trauma of rape to fuel her search for revenge (Blackburn Center, 2021). When sexual assault is so prominent in all of the pop cultures that we consume, it is little wonder that so many people have become desensitized to it (Blackburn Center, 2021).

2.5 Male entitlement as a reason for sexual offences

The Kwazulu-Natal (KZN) Department of Community Safety and Liaison indicated that sexual violence in South Africa is believed to be linked to the country's violent past where men of colour were emasculated through the laws and actions of the apartheid regime (KZN Department of Safety and Liaison, 2010: 9). The KZN Department of Safety and Liaison stated that the endemic of violence has become sexualised because men express their fear through violence when they are faced with the fear of culturally constructed maleness (KZN Department of Safety and Liaison, 2010:9). This is because men whose masculine identity and sense of self is predicated on exerting dominance and control over others express these characteristics even in their sexual interactions (KZN Department of Safety and Liaison, 2010:9). In addition, boys are socialised into patterns of gender inequality as a way of dominating and controlling women (KZN Department of Safety and Liaison, 2010:9). Likewise, poverty and unemployment significantly affect men's traditional identities which lead to increased chances of abusive and risky behaviour (KZN Department of Safety and Liaison, 2010:9). The KZN Department of Safety and Liaison mentioned that masculinity and violence have been yoked together in South African history (KZN Department of Safety and Liaison, 2010:9). There is a culture of male entitlement to women's bodies which is linked to the perpetration of sexual violence (KZN Department of Safety and Liaison, 2010:9). In addition, the study conducted by The New Humanitarian (2013) discovered that the most common motivation perpetrators gave for rape was a sense of sexual entitlement - the belief that men have a right to sex with women regardless of consent (73 percent of respondents) (The New Humanitarian, 2013).

2.6 Alcohol and drug abuse

The IOL News of 6 January 2019 revealed that SAPS is concerned about the role played by alcohol and drug abuse in many sexual offences cases in Gauteng province. This occurred despite efforts by police in Gauteng to intensify operations over the festive season from December 2018 to January 2019 to deal with liquor-related offences (IOL, 2019). The operation resulted in the closure of more than 30 illegal liquor outlets for contraventions of the Liquor Act (IOL, 2019). Twenty-five suspects were also arrested for sexually related offences during festive season operations (IOL, 2019). The IOL news also highlighted that some of the sexual offences are committed by family members, relatives and friends of the victims who are under the influence of drugs and alcohol (IOL, 2019).

III. METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a qualitative approach to collect information and to achieve the purpose of the research. The researcher used in-depth interviews to source information from the respondents. Purposive sampling was used to select 34 participants who were serving sentences in prison for sexual offences. The study was conducted in the seven correctional facilities in the province¹.

Data collection

The interviews entailed asking each of the participants what motivated them to commit the sexual offences. Probing and follow-up questions were also used to clarify issues and to acquire more information from them. Probing was also used to encourage participants to talk more about their views. Some notes were taken by the first author during and immediately after each interview. Each interview lasted an average of 80 minutes.

¹The correctional facilities names were not mentioned due to confidentiality

Data analysis

Thematic analysis and categorisation was applied for the analysis of data. After the categorisation of data, thematic analysis was done. This is the process of grouping evidence and labelling ideas so that they gradually show a broader viewpoint. Finally, data was presented in a discussion.

IV. FINDINGS

The theme was identified according to the objectives of the study and it is the factors that influenced individuals to commit sexual offences. In addition, sub-themes were developed from the main theme.

The majority of respondents were between the ages of 30 to 40 years old. Of the 34 respondents interviewed, 29 were blacks, followed by coloureds (2), whites (2) and Portuguese (1). All the participants in the study were males. Most of the respondents stated that they were single (30), whilst others (2) indicated that they were married and some mentioned that they were divorced (2). In terms of education, the majority of respondents had grade eleven (11) as the highest qualification they have attained. The majority of respondents highlighted that they were permanently employed before they got arrested. Those who indicated that they were working, revealed different occupations such as construction workers, engineers, gardeners, security guards, soldiers, teachers, taxi drivers, mechanics, merchandisers, paramedics, panel beaters and police officers among others. In addition to occupations, some respondents mentioned that they were self-employed as street vendors, owning car washes and tuckshops. Although there were respondents who were working before the arrest, some stated that they have never worked in their lives as they were criminals who used to commit crimes such as shoplifting and robbery to obtain money. Other respondents cited that they were disability grant recipients.

In terms of how the respondents were raised some respondents interviewed mentioned that there was domestic violence happening in their families between their parents. The respondents indicated that these incidents (the abuse that their mothers suffered/experienced) affected them emotionally. It was revealed that some respondents learned that their fathers were also molesting their sisters sexually. These respondents stated that they ended up committing rape because they believe they have learned the behaviour from their fathers. The majority of respondents indicated that they were raised by single mothers because their fathers passed away and others were separated while they were toddlers. The respondents also stated that their single unemployed mothers were sole breadwinners to the respondents and their siblings. There are respondents who revealed that they were raised by single fathers who got married to different stepmothers. Consequently, the upbringing at their homes was not good which led to the respondents running away from home while they were still teenagers.

5.1 The factors that influenced individuals to commit sexual offences

5.1.1 Consensual sex

There are six respondents who highlighted that they had consensual sex with the victims and denied that they raped them. The respondents also indicated that they had no intention of raping the victims. They mentioned that they met their victims at the taverns, the victims followed them to their places of residence and they spent the night together. The respondents further added that some women invited them over to their places of residence and they had sex. The respondents added that they were surprised to see the police arriving at their places of residence to arrest them for rape.

5.1.2 Anger

There are two respondents who mentioned that they committed rape due to anger because they were cheated on by their partners and felt betrayed. These respondents indicated that the victims were their stepchildren (daughters) who were toddlers. There is one respondent who averred that he was angry for being arrested for a crime he did not commit. He vowed that he would commit rape until he gets arrested. The respondent then targeted women who were walking alone in open spaces, threatened them with a knife and raped them. There are four respondents who mentioned that they were raped because of the pain that was inflicted by their single mothers who used to abuse them physically whilst growing up. The respondents cited that they assumed that their mothers were abusing them because their fathers were abusive towards their mothers and eventually the parents divorced. These respondents revealed that they raped more than once in their life. This resulted in the respondents developing anger and hatred towards women. Their revenge was raping women.

5.1.3 Raping of minors

There are two respondents who revealed that they chose to rape children because they were minors. Some respondents stated that they raped the girls of their neighbours. The respondents mentioned that rape happened at their neighbours' houses because they were invited there to drink alcohol. There are four respondents who stated that they had agreed to have sex with teenage girls. When the women realised that they were pregnant they told their families that they were raped. As a result, their parents opened cases of rape against the respondents. Some respondents indicated that they were not aware that the women they were in relationships with were minors which is why they were arrested and charged for rape.

5.1.4 Taking advantage of women walking alone

There are six respondents who stated that they targeted women who were walking alone from work and to the shops. The respondents revealed that they committed rape with a group of friends and raped strangers. The incidents took place when they were walking from taverns to their homes where they went to drink alcohol with a group of friends. These victims/women were targeted when they were walking alone at night and raped. The rape occurred at parks and in bushes. It was also revealed that the respondents also used to take the personal items of women such as handbags before raping them. The respondents averred that they used weapons such as pangas and firearms to threaten the women.

5.1.5 Housebreaking and robbery

There are eight respondents who mentioned that they committed rape at the scenes where they intended to commit housebreaking and robbery. The weapons used in these incidences were knives, pangas and guns. They targeted the houses of their friends with the co-accused because they knew that there were valuable items that they could steal and sell. The respondents revealed that they realised upon their arrival that there are people in the houses who knew them. They raped strangers and targeted houses where women were staying alone since they considered them to be vulnerable. Where the occupants of the houses were women, those women were raped and shot with firearms. The intention of shooting with firearms was to kill them so that the women would not report the perpetrators to the police. The respondents added that they targeted the houses where the lights were on late at night because they knew the occupants of the house were women who lived alone. However, in some instances, the effort to kill the victims failed as some victims did not die but ended up in hospital where they recovered after a few days. The surviving victims informed the police who raped and shot them, thereafter, the accused were arrested and convicted for committing rape and attempted murder. The respondents further added that they committed the crime with a group of friends. The respondents added that they committed rape three to five times before. The use of toy guns to threaten the victims was mentioned by some respondents.

5.1.6 Taking advantage of drunk women

There are few respondents (2) who revealed that they had sexual intercourse once with women because they took advantage of the fact that they were drunk. The incidents happened at the residential places of the victims where they were invited to a party by the victims. The respondents mentioned that they did not have the intention to rape the victim, but the influence of alcohol caused them to commit rape. The respondents indicated that they were also under the impression that everyone at the victims' residence was asleep, that no one would notice when they raped the victims.

When asked about the opinion as to why other people commit rape, the respondents mentioned that other people rape because women's dress code seduces them. Not being in a relationship was indicated as the cause of rape by most of the respondents in this study. It was also indicated that other people commit rape when they are under the influence of alcohol and drugs. Some respondents added that it is difficult for them to give the reasons why other people commit rape because they do not know what their motivates were. Other people raped because they had anger and trauma which was not addressed.

There are respondents who also added that other people rape because it is a personal choice and they commit a crime to prove to their peers they do not have an inferiority complex. The respondents also indicated that some people enjoy committing rape like the individuals who commit a crime such as theft to obtain money. Other people rape because of the background under which they grew up where the father physically abused a mother. Furthermore, the respondents added that perhaps some people rape because they cannot get girlfriends and others who maybe sex addicts. The respondents also averred some people rape because traditional healers tell them lies such as being cured of HIV if they have sex with virgins.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Community involvement in policing and securing open spaces

The community should be involved in ensuring that the open spaces in the townships are secure. The police cannot be visible at such places all the time due to limited resources and manpower. It is believed that

the utilisation of unemployed community members as patrollers to assist in accompanying people when walking to and from work as well as schools might help to stop the criminals from taking advantage of women walking alone. The community can decide how a member can contribute towards the payment of the people who will be patrolling the open spaces. The process of obtaining sponsored containers can be initiated by community members with the assistance of SAPS and the Department of Community Safety. These containers can be stationed in the open spaces and be manned by unemployed people and people who are willing to partake in the patrolling programme. This effort will not only keep society safe but will be an opportunity for some unemployed people in the community to earn a living. Concerted efforts between government, law enforcement agencies and the community are crucial to prevent rape from occurring.

6.2 Education of young men on the dangers of rape

Young boys should be taught at an early age about the danger of contracting Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) through rape because the assumption is that most rapists do not use protection. This would not only affect the rapists but also the potential victims of rape.

6.3 Workshops on the dangers of going out at night

There should be workshops/awareness conducted to educate and warn women about the dangers of going out alone at night. Women should be discouraged from going to taverns alone and mingling with males unknown to them.

6.4 Education programmes to promote healthy forms of sexual relationships

The media should be used to promote a better understanding of the issues involving rape. This can entail raising awareness for men to refrain from taking advantage of girls and women. In addition, government departments should use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube as youth are actively involved in socialising on these sites. It is believed that awareness raised in this manner can help to spread messages more rapidly. Through television and radio, ex-convicts can also be used to warn people about the danger and consequences of committing rape.

6.5 Greater attention should be given to the primary prevention of rape

Priority should be given to the primary prevention of rape through poverty alleviation programmes in communities and education programmes in schools. There should be programmes that address some of the underlying socio-economic causes of sexual violence including poverty and lack of education by providing employment opportunities for youth.

6.6 The current ways to reduce Gender-Based Violence in the province

The Department of Community Safety opened Ikhaya Lethemba (IKLT) which is the province's largest and most comprehensive one-stop centre for victims of gender-based violence (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014:22). The centre offers multidisciplinary services such as therapy, spiritual support and psycho-social services (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2014:22). In addition, the department has also adopted a 365 days programme for no violence against women and children to ensure continuing awareness and mass mobilisation of communities against acts and perpetrators of violence (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2020:13).

The department also works together with different institutions, civil organisations and communities to promote programmes geared towards creating a safe and secure province for women and children (Gauteng Department of Community Safety, 2020:13). Furthermore, Gauteng MEC for Community Safety launched the GBV brigades on the 31st of October 2020 as part of the province's response to violence against women and children (IOL, 2020). The GBV brigades are on the frontline in the fight against gender-based violence, work in their wards visiting households and create awareness of the impact of GBV (IOL, 2020).

There is an organisation called The Character Company in SA based in Krugersdorp in the West of Johannesburg (The Charactercompany, n.d). The organisation offers a MENTorship programme to young boys between the ages of 5 and 10 years with absent fathers to deal with the void left by an absent father which is often filled with anger, bitterness, guilt and a host of insecurities (The Charactercompany, n.d). The mentors at the organisation are committed to long-term MENTorship that is offering to be part of a boy's life for as long as it is needed (The Character Company, n.d.).

The mentors see the boys once or twice a week which creates a positive change in the lives of the boys that helps the boys to avoid negative behaviour and instead be the best that they can be (The Character Company, n.d.). They become someone who the boys can look up to and trust. The mentorship programme is focused on five values such as courage, kindness, honesty, respect and self-discipline (The Character Company, n.d.). The Department of Community Safety should mobilise for the establishment of organisations that offer such mentorship programmes in all the corridors in Gauteng province.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study revealed various factors that motivated the perpetrators to commit sexual offences. This is an indication that eradicating sexual offences requires a concerted effort from different stakeholders. All sexual offences incidents mentioned in this study were committed by males and it was only male offenders who were willing to participate in the study. The majority of the perpetrators interviewed indicated that they were permanently employed before being arrested which is an indication that anyone can commit rape regardless of their employment status. The findings of this study corroborate with the literature review on anger as the factor that influences individuals to commit sexual offences. Men rape children as a way of expressing anger and frustration towards women who have cheated or betrayed them. Literature also notes that vulnerable groups such as women under the influence and minors are at a higher risk of being victims of sexual offences. This also supports the findings of this study which found that some perpetrators committed rape because they were taking advantage of drunk women and women walking alone. This study also revealed that the perpetrators raped children because they were minors.

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Nozizwe Tshabalala. “The Factors that Influenced Individuals to Commit Sexual Offences in Gauteng Province.” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, vol. 10(09), 2021, pp 62-68. Journal DOI- 10.35629/7722