REPORT

Attitudes towards rape of Black and White adolescents in South Africa

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Running head: Rape attitudes

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Summary: This study investigated the attitudes towards rape of Black and White adolescents in South Africa. The sample included 254 secondary school pupils in Grade 11, in the age range of 17 to 24 years with a mean age of 19.3 years (SD=2.6). The Blacks were 48 boys and 23 girls and the Whites 54 boys and 55 girls. The first questionnaire included a biographical section of 14 items and the second one (survey instrument) included 24 items on attitudes toward rape. A t-test indicated that Black students scored significantly higher on conservative attitudes towards rape than the White student. No gender difference was found in relation to rape attitudes towards and beliefs about sexuality and rape.
In South Africa approximately 38,600 rapes occur annually, estimates in 1996 placed the prevalence of rape at 34 per 1,000 women (Fischbach & Herbert, 1997). The Cape Town-based Rape Crisis noted that most of the women Rape Crisis sees are adolescents. Jonker (1975) indicates that rape has increased in South Africa in relation to crime and group rapes are becoming more frequent especially among the youth. In the Northern Province of South Africa (total population 5.2 million) 1,244 female rape cases (of which 40% are below 18 years) are reported to the police every year (South African Police Service, 1997).

Williams (1984) is of the view that both the definition of rape and responses to victims are “capricious products of public attitudes” that may become an integral part of victimization. Rape as complex social phenomenon (Kadalie, 1997) involves man’s wish to dominate, this may be expressed through rape which is not instinctual. Controlling as well as domineering behaviour is learnt from family modes of relating, the media, sexual institutions and activities, and society’s glorification of ‘strong-armed’ masculinity and docile femininity. Since the cause of rape is social, strategies such as changing social structures and ideologies are required (Vogelman, 1990: 128). Such an ideology or most popular belief and myth about rape is that it is a sexual act, committed for sexual gratification by men, who in the face of women’s sexual provocation, have lost their normal self-control (ibid.: 105). A very significant problem in society is adolescent rape victimization (Kershner, 1996).

The aim of the study is to determine the attitudes of adolescents towards rape in two diverse cultures.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Sample

The sample included secondary school pupils in Grade 11 chosen at random from two urban secondary schools in Pietersburg. The pupils (254) were 83 (41%) male, and 149

(iii) Strong men do not cry [Blacks: M=3.2 (SD=1.7) and Whites: 2.0 (SD=1.2)]; (iv) Girls should not ask boys out on dates [Blacks: M=3.3 (SD=1.3) and Whites: M= 2.1 (SD=1.3)] and general rape myth items: (i) Some girls encourage rape just by the way they dress [Blacks: M=3.7 (SD=1.5); and Whites M=2.8 (SD=1.4)]; (ii) Most women fantasize about being raped by a man [Blacks: M=2.7 (SD=1.6) and Whites: M=1.8 (SD=1.2)] (iii); In most cases the rape victim shares some of the responsibility for the attack [Blacks: M=3.0 (SD=1.5) and Whites: M=2.3 (SD=1.3)]; (iv) Some women provoke men into raping them [Blacks: M=3.1 (SD=1.5) and Whites: M=2.6 (SD=1.3)].

**DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study indicated on the rape attitudes a lower conservative score among South African (M=71.1 SD=9.5) as compared to American adolescents (M=82.8, SD=10.6) (Kershner, 1996).

Considering that the social construction (attitude, beliefs and ideology) of rape contributes to the incidence of rape in a community, as pointed out by Kadalie (1997), Vogelman (1990) and Williams (1984), the high conservatism score in this sample may contribute to the high rate of 34:1000 reported rape cases in this Province. This reflects a subject’s psychological response to rape based on the internalization of cultural attitudes regarding women’s culpability in situations involving coercive sex (Lefley et al., 1993).
In addition, there was surprisingly no gender difference found in relation to rape attitudes towards and beliefs about sexuality and rape. This may underline further a social context for increased rape. Similar findings reported by Magwaza (1997) is that African culture is highly patriarchal with most power, control and authority in the hands of male figures. This type of ideology calls for unquestionable female obedience to male domination. In post-pubescent Black South African girls this has been expressed in pseudoconsensual sexual relationships dominated by subtle sexual coercion and overt violence.

(59%) female, in the age range of 17 to 24 yr. (mean age 19.3 yr., SD=2.6). The Black pupils were 48 boys and 23 girls and the Whites 54 boys and 55 girls.

Instruments

The questionnaire included 10 items on socio-economic background: age, sex, religion, ethnicity, occupation, education and income of parents, and 4 items on family background: parental status, family size, birth order. The survey instrument included 24 items on attitudes towards rape (Kershner, 1996). Responses to the questionnaire items ranged from one to five with a higher score indicating higher conservative attitudes towards rape. Split-half correlation was found to be .75 with a coefficient alpha of .78.

Procedure

The questionnaires were administered by teachers trained in the administration of questionnaires. Permission for the study was obtained from the Superintendent general of the Provincial department of education, and Principals of the two schools. Further, consent was obtained from the pupils. No time limit was given, but on an average, pupils took less than 15 minutes to answer all the questions.

RESULTS

The mean rape score of 3.20 (SD=.82) for 71 Blacks was higher than that of 2.80 (SD=.48) for 112 Whites and Levene’s test for equality of variances (t-test for equality of means) confirmed the difference statistically significant (F=10.15, p=.002). This means that Black students scored significantly higher on conservative attitudes towards rape than White students. However, there was no gender difference in the rape scores. Mean score collectively was 74.7 (SD=9.7) for Black and 67.4 (SD=9.1) for White students. Black students were particularly more conservative than White students on the following gender role items: (i)The main role of a wife is to take care of her husband [Blacks: M=3.6 (SD=1.4) and Whites: M= 2.4 (SD=1.3)]; (ii)The best relationships are those in which the man is in control [Blacks: M=3.4 (SD=1.5) and Whites: M=2.4 (SD=1.4)];

References


